



Bible Study Fourth Sunday of Lent Year B

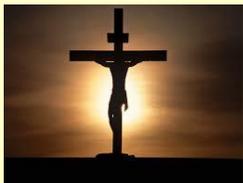
St. Maria Goretti, St. Augustine, St. Joan of Arc and St. Peter Claver Parishes
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“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.” John 3:16-17 NABRE

Reading I: 2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23

HOPE IS KNOWING THAT GOD LOVES US!

For the past three Sundays in lent we have been on a journey of hope. We know that hope is confident expectancy. Christian hope comes from God (Rom. 13:13), from His grace and His gospel. (Eph. 2:12; 1 Tess. 4:13). This week we define hope as knowing that God loves us. We constantly live in the confident expectancy that God’s love and mercy is always with us. As Pope Francis stated in his August 15, 2015 homily, *“If in creation the Father has given us the proof of his great love by giving us life, in the passion of his Son he has given us the sum of all proofs: he has come to suffer and die for us.”* The Pope continued, *“And this love that is so great is the mercy of God, because he loves us, he forgives us.”* Hope, then, is the expectancy of something already fulfilled. God has shown His love for us. Therefore, we must live in hope, knowing that God loves us.



GOD LOVES SO MUCH THAT HE DIED FOR US!

God demonstrated love for Israel even in their disobedience. The Book of Chronicles (the book is divided into two books.) is a summary of the history of the Chosen People. Beginning with Adam, the book ends with Cyrus giving the Babylonian exiles permission to return to Jerusalem. It chronicles God’s love of Israel through an unexpected source, a Persian King named Cyrus in about the 70th year of their exile.

The last three kings before the exile and the priests abandoned God and the worship of Him with clear knowledge of what was right. (vv. 14-16) So God left their midst (Mk. 12:1-2; Lk. 16:31; Isa. 1:2). The fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. meant the loss of the temple, Israeli life, land, and the monarchy. Out of this desolation God showed His love for Israel. (vv. 19-23) God controlled the Persian king. He restored their hope for a glorious future. Perhaps their hopes were ignited by Jeremiah who predicted their return from exile. Perhaps during their 70 years of exile they lived in hope, knowing that God loved them. DISCUSSION QUESTION: How has God shown His love for you?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church Teaches ... God Comes to Meet Man

50 By natural reason man can know God with certainty, based on his works. But there is another order of knowledge, which man cannot possibly arrive at by his own powers: the order of Divine Revelation. Through an utterly free decision, God has revealed himself and given himself to man. This he does by revealing the mystery, his plan of loving goodness, formed from all eternity in Christ, for the benefit of all men. God has fully revealed this plan by sending us his beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

561 “The whole of Christ’s life was a continual teaching: his silences, his miracles, his gestures, his prayer, his love for people, his special affection for the little and the poor, his acceptance of the total sacrifice on the Cross for the redemption of the world, and his Resurrection are the actualization of his word and the fulfillment of Revelation” (John Paul II, CT 9).

Reading II: Ephesians 2:4-10

HOPE IS KNOWING THAT GOD LOVES US!

St. Paul preached in Ephesus for two years and brought many souls to Jesus Christ. This letter was written from prison (probably Rome about 61-63 A.D.) or by a member of the Pauline School after his death. In these verses, St. Paul emphasized that God gave the Ephesians the underserved gift of faith while they were sinners and idol worshipers. (see Rom. 6:23)

This letter inaugurates the theology decreed by the Church at the Second Council of Orange in 529 A.D., that man was incapable of performing works worthy of eternal life on his own natural strength (vv. 8-10). Only by the help of the Holy Spirit can we be obedient and loving in a manner that pleases God (CCC 2008-11).

St. Paul emphasized that God loves us so much that He gives us the grace to share in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (vv. 5-6, 2 Pet. 1:4). We therefore, live in loving hope of the life that is to come. Neither we, nor the Ephesians can boast of having obtained salvation by our own works (v. 9). God did not save us because of our works. He saved us to do good works. As His masterpiece, we live in hope, grounded by faith knowing that God loves us. DISCUSSION QUESTION: Define Mercy and Grace.

Bible Study Fourth Sunday of Lent Year A

Gospel: John 4:5-42

HOPE IS KNOWING THAT GOD LOVES US! How do you know that God loves you? During tough times we may question God's love and may even cry out, why have you abandoned me? On the other hand, during good times we tend to call good fortune a blessing and evidence of God's love. However, God showed His love by giving us Jesus. He is the source and object of our hope. God has given us His Holy Spirit through the sacraments of the Church. God loves us so much that He always gives us hope. He blesses us with the everlasting consolation that all things work together for good for those who love the Lord and are called according to His purpose. God loves us, so He tests us, so we can live in hope knowing that He loves us.

In the Gospel, Jesus reveals that God loves us so much that He gave His only Son for our salvation. He loves us so much that He extends His grace and mercy while we struggle with our daily lives. It is He who loves us enough to offer His grace to help us choose between evil and truth. In the middle of our struggles, He gives us grace to succeed. If we fail, His mercy is there to assure us of His love. We must constantly seek His love and mercy, because it is always available.

Though Jesus constantly engaged the public during the day, Nicodemus, came to Jesus at night – in a state of darkness- to visit with the "Light of the World." Nicodemus, a man of wealth and position, had been impressed by Jesus' preaching and miracles. Perhaps he feared reprisals from fellow Jews if he associated with Jesus, so he sought the love and mercy of Jesus under the cover of darkness for private consultation.

Through their conversation, Jesus revealed that God's glory is measured by His love. The example He offers is set in the Old Testament. He says that just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, a demonstration of the love of God for the rebellious and infirm Children of Israel (Num. 21:4-9), God also shows us all how much He loves us. The reason for God's action is found in John 3:16: "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but might have eternal life.*" NABRE

The love of God is amplified in verse 17, where the purpose of Jesus' earthly presence is revealed. He did not come to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. For us, this is the past act of salvation that gives the blessed assurance that we have been saved. The love of God is the object of our hope. God did not spare His own Son but sent Him as a man among us to live and die for us. We find God's love and mercy when we love others the way He loves us. The reason that we live in the hope of the resurrection and life everlasting is because we know that God loves us. **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** In what ways do we prefer "darkness" to "light." Can you identify with Nicodemus and Jesus? In what Way?

THE GOSPEL IN ACTION

WHO PRAYED FOR YOU WHEN YOU COULD NOT PRAY FOR YOURSELF?

The image of praying mothers, fathers, aunts, and uncles who prayed for us supported us when we were in a state of spiritual weakness. Let's return the favor this week. To live the gospel of love this week means to recognize the sick, elderly and infirm who need our help. Here are some suggestions:

Recognize and honor seniors at all Masses. Seniors could include anyone over 65 years of age, any grandparent. Offer special prayers for the elderly at all masses. We are encouraged to remember the gift of faith, love and hope exemplified by our elders. Visit the shut-ins offer companion to those assisted living and nursing homes.

The Catholic Catechism Defines Hope.

1817 Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit. "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful." "The Holy Spirit . . . he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life."

1819 Christian hope takes up and fulfills the hope of the chosen people which has its origin and model in the hope of Abraham, who was blessed abundantly by the promises of God fulfilled in Isaac, and who was purified by the test of the sacrifice. "Hoping against hope, he believed, and thus became the father of many nations."

Resources: John, Neal M. Flanagan, O.S.M.; *Collegeville Bible Commentary*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville Minn., p. 985-987; *Living Liturgy Spirituality, Celebration, and Catechesis for Sundays and Solemnities Year A 2018*, Brian Schmisk, Diana Macalintal Jay Cromier, Liturgical Press Collegeville, Mn. pp. 76-79; Scripture texts in this work are taken from the *New American Bible, revised edition* © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C. and are used by permission of the copyright owner. All Rights Reserved. No part of the New American Bible may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner. The Sunday Readings Cycle B, Father Kevin O'Sullivan, Fourth Sunday In Lent, Franciscan Herald Press pp. 139-146, Ephesians Ivan Havener, O.S.B. *Collegeville Bible Commentary*, Collegeville Minn. pp. 1191-1192. O.F.M. <https://www.catholicculture.org/news/headlines/index.cfm?storyid=24336>

This meditation is prepared by Deacon Terrel J. Broussard for personal use in Adult Faith Formation at St. Peter Claver and St. Maria Goretti Parishes, St. Augustine and St. Joan of Arc Parishes in New Orleans, La. ©2018