

***“If anyone is bitten and looks at it he shall live”***

Perhaps you have noticed how appropriate the daily Lenten mass readings are. In the reading from the Book of Numbers today, we find the chosen people on route from slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land but they are in rebellious mood. They start to hate the journey, the desert surroundings, the lack of familiar food and drink, and they lose patience with God and his elected leader, Moses. Whatever they're trusting in, it's not God! They grumble and complain and are suddenly hit by the unexpected.

God sends fiery serpents whose bite causes death. Why? Because he no longer loves them? Certainly not. He is trying to teach them to trust and convert into the kind of people who can be a light to other nations. They do repent but more out of fear than love. They beg Moses to intercede and he does. The Lord is all mercy.....and so he responds: *“make a fiery serpent and put it on a standard. If anyone is **bitten** and looks at it, he shall live”* (Jn 8.28). The victims then look at the bronze serpent and are saved.

Today, are we not on an arduous journey through an unknown desert – stuck at home for who knows how long.....and experiencing all manner of social limitations? Are we patiently waiting on the Lord in humble, trustful prayer, believing that our fidelity to Him will bring us to the other side of coronavirus? It is only natural to fear that we or our loved ones could be bitten by this disease. So what is our spiritual remedy? To look and gaze upon **the One who is raised up** not on a standard but on a cross? The cross of Jesus Christ heals and triumphs. That is our core belief! So, as you approach the doors of Holy Week, gaze lovingly upon **He who saves**.

Jesus is the New Moses leading us out of the slavery of sin to promised freedom in Him. His “hour” is approaching and he tells his detractors in today's gospel, *“when you have **lifted up** the son of man, then you will know that I am He.”* Earlier in John's narrative, he says to a curious Nicodemus, *“ as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, **so must the Son of man be lifted up so that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.** For this is how God loved the world: he gave his only Son, so that **everyone who believes in him may not perish** but may have eternal life. For God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but so that through him the world might be saved* (Jn 3:14-17).

The Lord wants to banish our fear and kindle our trust. To be distracted from spending time before the crucifix in our homes at this juncture is to misread the signs of the times. Go a little further on in John's gospel and Jesus makes it even clearer that the power of the holy cross prevails against all evils. Let us read this living word as it is, given to us for today's concerns: *“**Now the prince of this world is to be driven out. And when I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all people to myself.**”* (Jn 12:31-32). He took to himself all our ills; *“ours were the sufferings he bore, ours the sorrows he carried* (Isaiah 53.4). The power of the cross issues forth in the Lord drawing all to celebrate his sacramental Eucharistic presence as the cause and source of all healing graces.

As we are currently denied the joy of eating the Bread of Life, scripture says *“they will look on the one whom they have pierced; they will mourn for him”* (Zechariah 12:10). So as we gaze on the cross, we mourn our enforced distancing from Holy Communion, yet we grow in longing to receive Jesus again, and we invoke the merits of Christ's eternal sacrifice on the Cross, trusting that the Holy Spirit will drive away this virus, the temple doors will swing open and the table of the Lord will be prepared for you again.

The whole of John's discourse is about spiritual warfare between the Light that comes into the world (and is not received by the world).....and the darkness that does battle with the Light but can't overcome it. So, let us come to the foot of the cross with thanksgiving, with the tears of Mary, but

also with her unquenchable faith in the Resurrection. Let us pray that the One lifted up before all of us will bring great healing out of this time of lock-down.....and, through the triumph of His cross, draw all souls....the faithful and the wandering....to Himself. Jesus always wins.....it's all there in the book!

May trust and the peace He alone gives.....reign in your hearts,

Fr Simon

*The apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith.'* (Luke 17.5)