

Introduction to the day

The fourth of the Old Testament promises providing a baptismal lens this Lent is the promise God makes to Moses: those who look on the bronze serpent will live. In today's gospel Jesus says he will be lifted up on the cross like the serpent, so that those who look to him in faith will live. When we receive the sign of the cross in baptism, that cross becomes the sign we can look to in faith for healing, for restored relationship to God, for hope when we are dying.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Let us pray.

O God, rich in mercy, by the humiliation of your Son you lifted up this fallen world and rescued us from the hopelessness of death. Lead us into your light, that all our deeds may reflect your love, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

FIRST READING: Numbers 21:4-9

Though God provides food and water for the Israelites in the wilderness, they whine and grumble. They forget about the salvation they experienced in the exodus. God punishes them for their sin, but when they repent God also provides a means of healing: a bronze serpent lifted up on a pole.

PSALM: Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22

You deliver your people from their distress. (Ps. 107:19)

SECOND READING: Ephesians 2:1-10

While we were dead in our sinfulness, God acted to make us alive as a gift of grace in Christ Jesus. We are saved not by what we do but by grace through faith. Thus our good works are really a reflection of God's grace at work in our lives.

GOSPEL: John 3:14-21

To explain the salvation of God to the religious leader, Nicodemus, Jesus refers to the scripture passage quoted in today's first reading. Just as those who looked upon the bronze serpent were healed, so people will be saved when they behold Christ lifted up on the cross.

GOSPEL MESSAGE

Lifted Up for Us

“So must the Son of Man be lifted up,” Jesus says. There is a double meaning to this. Just as God told Moses to raise a bronze serpent on a pole to effect healing for the Israelites (Numbers 21:4-9), Jesus will be lifted on the pole of the cross. The image of Jesus crucified reveals how human power tries to dehumanize those who threaten the status quo or violate the norms decreed by those at the top of society's ladder. It is a horror to consider this happening to anyone, but so much more when the victim is the perfect Holy One, God in the flesh. It confronts us with humanity's rejection of God, in how we treat other human beings and in how we dehumanize ourselves by following our sinful impulses—what Ephesians calls “the passions of our flesh” (2:3).

This, though, is not the only meaning of Jesus being “lifted up,” for “God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” The cross is more

than the humiliation of Jesus; it is also his glorious exaltation. The crucifixion of Jesus is his coronation as Lord of all, who rules by grace and mercy. By defeating death in the resurrection, he will indeed disrupt the status quo of shame, violence, and greed through the power of love, truth, and peace.

This was prefigured in the story of poisonous serpents. When the people looked on the emblem of their sin, a bronze model of the snakes that poisoned them after they grumbled against the Lord, they were healed. So, too, when we turn to the Crucified One, we do not find condemnation but salvation. Beholding the Savior lifted up on the cross by our sin, we receive mercy and healing. In the death of Jesus, God forgives and embraces us with eternal life. In the proclamation, prayer, song, and sacraments of our assembly, we remember and affirm that the crucified yet exalted Christ extends saving love to us and to the world.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Trusting in God's promise to reconcile all things, let us pray for the church, the well-being of creation, and a world in need.

Gracious God, your love unites. Give vision to the global church and foster cooperation in mission. Increase inter-religious understanding and ecumenical dialog. Make your church a sanctuary for all fleeing persecution, disaster, and war especially Ukraine and Gaza. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Creating God, your love enlivens. Restore balance to the earth's fragile habitats. Preserve wilderness lands, rainforests, and wildlife. Cleanse oceans and rivers. Make us good stewards of the earth. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Righteous God, your love liberates. We give thanks for those who courageously witness to your liberating love. Free all people from the evils of racism, religious strife, and hatred. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Merciful God, your love heals. Care tenderly for all whose loved ones perished from pandemic disease in every nation. Strengthen health care workers, first responders, and caregivers. Relieve all who live with chronic illness and pain, especially Sandra Gagnon, Karen Weigold, Keith Weckwerth, Karen O'Day, Shirley Glickman, Marilyn Schneider, Denita Wolfgram, Stephanie Yourth, Christopher Yourth, Linda Boland, Peter Howell, Glenda Panke, Mark Bimm, Harold Yourth, Irene Churchill, Debbie Thom, Donna L Hoffman, Walter Hobden, Doug Holly, Gary Churchill and those in long term care facilities and senior residences. In this moment of silence we name out loud or in the quiet of our hearts those who need your healing touch. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Incarnate God, your love enlightens. Open our hearts and minds to fresh understandings of our faith. Deepen our love for you and for one another. Teach us to pray for our enemies. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Abiding God, your love saves. Those who died in the faith are made alive in Christ. We give thanks for your promise that we also will be raised to newness of life. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Accompany us on our journey, God of grace, and receive the prayers of our hearts, through Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Amen.

BLESSING

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord's face shine on you with grace and mercy.

The Lord look upon you with favor and ✝ give you peace.

Amen.

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

Thanks be to God.