



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

5th Sunday of Lent-Year B-March 21st 2021

Readings: Jeremiah 31: 31-34, Psalm 50, Hebrews 5: 7-9

John 12: 20-33

At the beginning of last week's Gospel account was a strange reference, by Jesus, to an Old Testament event. It passes almost unnoticed as the great passage that follows sweeps us up into the quintessence of the Gospel: 'For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.'

A moment prior to that Jesus has referred to Moses lifting up the serpent in the Wilderness and, enigmatically, saying that this is what must happen to Him.

The story, which you can find in the Book of Numbers Ch 21, recounts yet another outburst of ungrateful disobedience amongst the wandering tribes. To punish them God has sent a plague of snakes whose bite is death. The people swiftly repent and plead with Moses for his intercession and God's salvation. Moses prays and is instructed to fashion a bronze serpent on a pole. All who look on this sign in faith will be spared the bite of death. Snake repels snake – it is an early form of homeopathy where like destroys like.

(A little cultural aside..... the bronze serpent on the pole later emerges as a symbol of the Greek god of healing and medicine, Asclepius)

In today's Gospel Jesus harks back to this reference. Once again He insists that He will be lifted up and all men will be drawn to Him.

What are we to make of this reference?

We know, with the benefit of hindsight, what this 'lifting up' will entail.

It is the Cross.

It is the place of sacrifice. It is the place of death. It is the place where death is put to death by the divine power of God's life.

Those who gaze in faith on the Cross of Christ will be spared the bite of death. It is the sign of final and eternal healing.

It is the place where the power of God invades the realm of death and sin and overturns the power of the Serpent who, so long ago, deceived Man and led his fall from Eden.

So, when the disciples come to Jesus with a simple request from the Greek visitors, it elicits this mysterious reply.

'Sir', say the Greeks, 'we would see Jesus.'

How do we tell people about Jesus? How do we introduce Him?

How do we explain Him? What do we say? Where do we point them?

In looking for Jesus the enquirer ought to see something of Jesus in us.

He ought to hear Jesus in the Word of God.

He should see something of Christ in the Church.

He should begin to see Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

Above all he will see Jesus on the Cross.

It is no accident that St. Paul, great preacher, evangelist, missionary and 'teacher of the world', says simply that he is will only know and preach 'Christ, and Him crucified'.

He says this because he knows that this is the heart of the Faith.

The Mass itself is a re-presentation, a re-presencing of the once, only once and once for all of Calvary. The lifting up of Christ for the salvation of the world.

If we seek to introduce people to Jesus but avoid the Calvary there will be no revelation, no healing, no salvation. They have to know that this is the

place where sin is pardoned and death destroyed. That they must look upon Him and live. It is why the Mass is the central worship of the faithful. It is why Holy Week and Easter are the central festivals of our Faith. In this time of dying, let us look towards Jesus, lifted up for us on the Cross and point all men to the saving power of His divine love and His mortal sacrifice and keep the feast.