

## Lent Week 4 (Laetare Sunday) Year B - 2024

**Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23; Os 136; Eph 2:4-10; John 3:14-21**

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First of all I wish you all a happy Mother's Day. I hope it is a joy filled celebration, with family gathered together in thanksgiving for the love you have received and given. I am going to talk a little later about Mother's Day, but first about today's Gospel.

The first line is a little interesting. In it Jesus said to Nicodemus, *'The Son of Man must be lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert.'*<sup>1</sup> Why that interesting image. It would not have been obscure to Nicodemus, as a teacher of Israel. Jesus is referring to an incident during the escape of the Israelite from Egypt referred to in the Book of Numbers, chapter 21 verse 4-9.

In this story the Israelites are continuing their flight away from Egypt and they start complaining. Again. They do this a lot. 40 years worth. They are complaining and moaning and in general being ungrateful.

*'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? They say to Moses. For there is not food and not water, and we loathe this worthless food.'* (the worthless food they are loathe is Manna, the food God gave them, the food of angels,)

They would rather be slaves again in Egypt, back in the good old days. So God sends them some divine retribution. Snakes, lots of them, infest they camp of the Israelites. They are crawling, slithering, hissing, biting and venomous. Just like the Israelites have been behaving. Realising that they have gone too far they turn back to Moses, who they have just been abusing,

and ask him to ask God for Mercy. God tells Moses to make a bronze serpent and place it on a pole, and when anyone who is bitten by a serpent and looks upon the serpent they will live. It seems that the serpent represents their sins, and that by looking upon their sin and recognising it, it is a form of repentance, of cure. Jesus is speaking to Nicodemus of this serpent. He must be raised up – crucified – like the bronze serpent, so that people may look upon him and be healed, not from the bite of a viper, but of the poison of sin. That is the parallel.

I have never given a homily on the topic of Mother's Day before. In part, this is because I feel that Motherhood should not be separated in this way from Father-hood. The two belong together, as the two belong together in bringing a child into the world, the two belong together in raising and loving the child. Although they love and express that love in different ways, the love they both have to give is necessary. However, I will address mother's more particularly, because Mother-hood is itself under such attack. How is this? You can look at the evidence in the NHS where there have been attempts to remove 'Maternity Wards' from hospitals and replace them with 'Birthing Wards' and where 'mother' is replaced by 'birthing partner.' This would all be laughably ridiculous if it were not so dangerous to women, to marriage and to children. Motherhood is directly under attack under the avalanche of Abortion. In France it was recently approved, by a huge majority, to enshrine the right of abortion into the Constitution. The same has happened in the states of California and

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<sup>1</sup> John 3:14

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Vermont. Moves to include the right to killing a child right throughout the whole of the term of the pregnancy are being vigorously pursued. These are all anti-motherhood moves. They are attacks on the very foundation of any sane society which recognises that children are fundamentally necessary for the future, and that motherhood protects and fosters life. St Theresa of Calcutta said something along the lines that as long as we wage war against our children there will never be peace in the world. Of course this is true. If we can justify the murder of the most innocent, then every other justification can also be made.

Motherhood - not fertility - is at the centre of the family. It is its hearth. It is a place to nurture, and guide, to strengthen and prepare for the world. Motherhood helps form a child's purpose, to welcome their friends, to strengthen the husband, to heal to and to comfort. This motherhood is universal. Christian motherhood has two other distinctive roles: to point out the serpents, point out the cross. The serpents are the corrupting spirits that assail the world and deceive it. The cross is the source of the world's salvation, Jesus who died so that we might be healed. Motherhood guides the child, not so that they are merely happy - although of course this is what we all desire for them - but so that they may seek their purpose in life, and live it with truth and nobility. That is the gift of motherhood. What could be greater? What could be more worthy of defending or celebrating?