

Sermon for Holy Trinity Sunday – John 3:1-15

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man must be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life.” Our Lord makes it clear throughout the Gospels that the Old Testament prophecies of Him. In other words, the way we understand the Old Testament is through Jesus, His cross, and His empty tomb. In John 3:14 (“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness...”), Christ is referencing an Old Testament story with which you may be familiar.

In order to get to the Promised Land, the Israelites had to pass through a miserably hot desert after their exodus from Egyptian slavery. The people began to grumble against God and against Moses, for they were hungry and thirsty. They even complained about the manna that God rained down from heaven, calling it worthless bread which they loathed. This made God angry, and He responded by sending snakes. It is written that they were fiery serpents. That means they had the appearance of fire. They were a bright orange color. They were everywhere and they bit the Israelites. Many of the people began to die. This took place so that the people would see their sin and repent.

The result? They did see their sins, and they asked Moses to intercede to God that He would take away the serpents. So God told Moses to fashion a serpent out of bronze. Why bronze? Because when the sun shone on the bronze, it looked just like the fiery serpents that were biting the people. Then God told Moses to fasten that bronze serpent to a pole and raise it up for all to see. Whoever would look at it would be healed of the deadly venom of the serpent. This is a very significant point and has bearing even in your life: Notice that God didn't take away the serpents. What God did instead was to give an antidote for the bites.

Jesus said, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” Jesus is the fulfillment of the serpent on the pole. The fiery serpents biting the people represent sin, death, and Satan. These 3 remain in the world, no matter how much we would like them gone.

How often do we read the news or watch it on TV and shake our heads at the horrible things that take place in the world today? We think about the tragedies, the hardships, the sicknesses, and the catastrophes, and we wish they were different. How often do we privately think of our own sin and why it still plagues us? Today is Father's Day, and fathers, we would do well to follow the example of Moses in the alluded-to story. Moses prayed for the people. He prayed for those given to his care. Have you prayed for those in your care? Have you prayed with your children and your wife? Have you provided for them, not just with physical needs, but most especially in providing them with wisdom and discretion through Bible stories and the catechism? Have you raised your sons to be men of honor and character, who love mercy and

forgiveness? Have you raised your daughters to admire men who excel in these virtues? Have you lead your family by gentleness, sacrifice, and encouragement, or by callousness, stubbornness, and neglect for your God-given vocation to correct and instruct in accordance with the Scriptures?

We fight against these sins, like warding off snakes primed to bite. We ask God to take them away, but the same sins and our guilt keep coming back. What must we conclude? That God does not hear us? That there is no God? Or that God does not want to help us? By no means! The answer to your sins is wrapped up in the account of the fiery serpents. The serpents are here to stay. God sends Satan to roam the earth for a time. He allows sin to plague us on this earth.

So what must we conclude? This same God, whom we worship as the Holy Trinity: The Father who begets the Son from eternity, the Son who is begotten of the Father from eternity, and the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son gives us a way out of the devil's attacks and our sins leading to death. The bronze serpent looked like the real thing. It had a fiery appearance. It was in the form of a serpent. But it was also God's chosen means of healing. Anyone who looked upon the bronze serpent on the pole and believed that God had appointed it to be the healing antidote for the venom would be healed of the deadly bite and live.

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up." Why? Because whoever looks upon Christ crucified and believes that God's Son on the cross has been appointed to die for the sins of the world (and especially our own sins) shall be healed of the deadly venomous bite of the serpent Satan. Jesus is God in the flesh. He looks just like us sinners, but with one exception — Jesus has no sin. What does this mean for us Christians? It means that we will never live in this world and be free from sin. It means that the fiery serpent Satan is always prowling around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, seeking whom resist him, seeking those who are steadfast in the faith. He may bite you at any time.

But what this also means is that we never really leave the cross of Jesus. This is why we Christians are fond of the crucifix. It is the continual reminder that Jesus died on the cross in order to heal us of the deadly snake bite. Christ-crucified means life for us. We look to the cross and its fruits of water, bread, and wine in Baptism and the Body and Blood of Jesus. Here we find life. The sting of death, sin, and hell came at Jesus on the cross so that we now experience the blessing of His redemption.

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so that Son of Man must be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life." Your sins are forgiven. Your sinful urges and tendencies have been atoned for by the Crucified Christ. He provides more than enough for fathers, for mothers, and children alike. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠