

Reflection Tuesday 3rd Week of Lent 2022

One of the great human characteristics is that people faced with imminent death call to God for help as does Azariah, one of the three young men thrown into the furnace by Nebuchadnezzar. Azariah means *"the Lord has helped!"* His Babylonian name was Abednego.

A long, long, time ago, Mr Pepo, a nasty thief, on the run from the police arrived in a small town called Hitchin where he hid his stolen goods and pretended to be the new teacher.

Being so nasty, he often shouted at the children and was always in a bad mood. At the end of the day, his pupils would immediately rush off home. One day, instead of leaving, Paul - one of the smallest pupils - stayed behind and just stared at Mr Pepo in silence. He then pulled up a chair and stood on it. The teacher moved nearer to yell at him but, before reaching him, little Paul jumped up and clung to his neck, giving him a big hug. He then kissed Mr Pepo and ran off before Mr Pepo recovered from his surprise!

From that day on, little Paul used every opportunity to give the teacher an unexpected hug, running off before being caught. At first, Mister Pepo was really annoyed but soon began to like it. One day catching Paul, the teacher asked him why he was doing it:

'I think you are so mean because you have never been loved. I am going to love you, so you get better, even if you don't like it.'

The teacher pretended to be angry, but deep down he liked that the boy loved him so much. Each time, he let himself be hugged more easily and grew less grumpy. One day, seeing one of the boys was very sad and quiet, the teacher decided to make his day by giving him a big hug.

Then, one day, on arrival, everyone in the school began to clap and cheer. *"Mr Pepo has become nice!"* The pupils said *"He loves us now!"*

And everyone hugged him and celebrated, making Mr Pepo both surprised and very happy. *'Would you like to stay and teach us forever?'* they said. Mr Pepo said he would.

Then, all of a sudden, the police arrived with little Paul, who was carrying the things Mr Pepo had stolen.

'Don't be afraid, Mr Pepo. We already know you regret what you did and are going to return all of this. You can stay here at the school because, now that you love the children, we know you're cured.'

Mr Pepo couldn't believe it. Everyone in the town had known from the beginning he was a thief and had been trying to help him become good. He decided to stay and live there to help others turn their lives around, just as they had done for him. Looking back, Mr Pepo finally understood the goodness and love of this very special town that had made him their own.

Martin Luther King, Jr. *Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.*

Mahatma Gandhi *The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.*

Saint Augustine *Forgiveness is the remission of sins. For it is by this that what has been lost, and was found, is saved from being lost again.*