

4th Sunday of Lent (B)

15th March 2015

'The Cross: the victory of love'

2Chr 36: Cyrus ends the exile Eph 2: *it is by grace that you have been saved*

Jn 3: 14–21: *God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son*

At the heart of the Gospel reading today are words that are, no doubt, very familiar ... “*God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not be lost but may have eternal life.*” You might consider this, almost, the ‘Gospel in miniature,’ since it expresses in a single line the very purpose of the Incarnation: the Son of God took flesh, so that we could be saved from our sins; not lost, therefore, but given the chance of eternal life in Him.

The image of Jesus “being lifted up” is a powerful one. St John, in His Gospel, sees Jesus lifted up on the Cross as a sign of His glory. Yes, Jesus is lifted up in agony on a cruel instrument of torture and execution ... but at the same time, the Cross is His throne, His victory, His glory. When Jesus is lifted up on the Cross, we gaze on Him, and see that He lifts us up also, out of our sins, away from the boring and flat life that is a secular existence, and up towards heaven. The Cross, as it were, punctures that

veil between earth and heaven, and restores a relationship with heaven for us. If we try and imagine Jesus’s life and death without the Cross, then we see that it just doesn’t work. He *had* to take on Himself the Cross — to suffer the indignity and defeat of the Cross — so as to turn it into His instrument of victory. For, “God loved the world *so* much ...” — this is why He did this for us.

At this mid-point of Lent, it’s good to hear the basic message of the Gospel, to remind us of why we are keeping Lent at all. In three weeks’ time we shall be celebrating the most central events of our life, and of the history of the whole world: the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus. These events have no explanation other than that of God’s infinite love for us: “God loved the world *so* much ...” If we do not acknowledge this awesome divine love, then we can never understand God’s actions, or our need to worship Him, or to concern ourselves with the welfare of one another. As St Paul says, “You have been saved, through faith, not by anything of your own, but by a gift from God.” Let’s keep striving that this Lent be a holy one, out of sheer gratuitous response to the God who has loved us.