

Second Sunday in Lent

Year A RCL

March 5, 2023

Genesis 12:1-4a; Psalm 121; Romans 4:1-5, 13-17; John 3:1-17

“Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’”

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In this second Sunday in Lent, we pass from the temptations in the wilderness to a different kind of encounter- an encounter of two teachers. The gospel of John tells us the meeting of Nicodemus, a man- a Pharisee, and a teacher (rabbi), a leader of the Jews- probably a member of the Sanhedrin, that visits Jesus. The fact that Nicodemus went to Jesus confirms that Nicodemus was a seeker, a person that was not happy with the status quo, a person whose faith was dynamic and connected with the circumstances in which he lived. Nonetheless, the mention that this encounter happened at nighttime, describes the struggle and unbelief that Nicodemus carried. He went to visit Jesus at night when darkness covers and hides deeds and identities- probably Nicodemus fears to be recognize and to be associated with Jesus.

Somehow Nicodemus understood about Jesus having a certain knowledge and he called Jesus, Rabbi, and asserted, “We know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.”

In saying, “We”, Nicodemus is acknowledging a group of “secret” believers that recognize the connection between Jesus and God. Nicodemus identified that Jesus comes from God and implied that the signs that Jesus did are from God. But Nicodemus fails to believe, the knowledge of Jesus’ origins, and the understanding of the signs and miracles that he has about Jesus are not enough to fully believe, for this reason Nicodemus continues in the night.

To apply this encounter to our everyday life, Nicodemus could represent our fears, the rational faith, the lack of spiritual understanding, the blindness in the presence of the light. Even if Nicodemus is a teacher, even if he knows religious doctrines, he remains ignorant to fully embrace and to receive the truth of who Jesus is and what Jesus offers.

Jesus answer to Nicodemus, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above”, explains that to see the Kingdom of God, a person needs to be born from the Holy Spirit. More than the human knowledge, the spiritual origin is the only way to see the spiritual realities like

the Kingdom of God. It is impossible to live or experience a godly life without the presence of the Holy Spirit.

“Being born from above” is different from being a religious person, or from knowing doctrines, or from being a leader. The one who is born from above receives and becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit.

Despite Nicodemus’ human position and knowledge, he remains ignorant, fearful, and undecided about taking the next step to see the Kingdom of God. This human ignorance before God displays that there is another human dimension, the spiritual life, the communion with God, the seeking of the Kingdom, the eternal life. “What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.”

This spiritual dimension that we often disregard for our unbelief and lack of trust in the power of God is the result of being born from the Spirit. Only those who are born from above have the capacity to see, understand and recognize “heavenly things.” Jesus mentions to Nicodemus that his incapacity to believe, which means to fully receive Jesus as teacher that comes from God and obeys him, is the major obstacle in the spiritual progress.

During this season of Lent, this encounter points to our relationship with God-when are we looking for Jesus? How much do we believe in Jesus? How much

faith do we have to see the heavenly realities and the kingdom of God around us?

In his conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus explains and predicts the moment of his crucifixion. “And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.” In the same way how the people of Israel pilgrim in the desert find healing and new life in the serpent, then in the desert of our lives as pilgrims that are going to the Promise Land, the cross of Jesus is the only place where our belief finds the reassurance of the eternal life. More than “earthly things”, the gift of being born from above is to have eternal life. Our vocation as believers is to receive and have eternal life and for this reason we carry and endure the cross each day. (Matthew 16:24)

Eternal life for all the children of God is one of the gifts of the Incarnation of Jesus, for God’s love is manifested in Jesus. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

At the end of the Gospel (John 19:38-39), Nicodemus is present with Joseph of Arimathea at Jesus’ death. These two disciples now openly ask to prepare the body of Jesus for his final rest in the sepulcher. We can imagine that they are

not afraid anymore to be associated with Jesus, that they are born from above and see “heavenly things” to the point of publicly showing their faith.

The story of Nicodemus shows that there needs to be progression and growth in the spiritual life, the faith needs to be always deepening, maturing, transforming, in a greater commitment with the love of God in Jesus. In Nicodemus, we find the personification of the parables of the merchant of fine pearls or the hidden treasure (Matthew 13:44-46) that renounce everything to acquire what really matters the most. The same needs to happen in our life, it is fundamental to recognize that nothing can be compared with being born from above and to have eternal life. Amen.