



Sunday 1st March 2026

Second Sunday of Lent

Gospel Reading

John 3:1-17

Nicodemus Visits Jesus

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, ‘Rabbi, 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.’ Jesus answered him, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.’ Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?’ Jesus answered, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, “You must be born from above.” The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.’ Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can these things be?’ Jesus answered him, ‘Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?’

‘Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 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.

‘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.

‘Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

**Other Readings: Genesis 12.1-4 Psalm 121 Romans 4.1-5, 13-17
(see also Genesis 1-3 & Romans 12)**

Homily

This interaction between Jesus and Nicodemus contains fundamental truths, Jesus’ core teaching if you like, and in Nicodemus we see someone who, like many of us, finds Jesus’ words puzzling.

To put the passage in context, John begins his narrative of Jesus’ life with the testimony of John the Baptist. “I saw the Spirit descend as a dove from heaven, and it remained on Him... I have seen and borne witness that this is the Son of God”. It would take another 300 years for Christians to develop a fully articulated doctrine of God as Holy Trinity, but here the

gospel of John provides some important groundwork: God the Father, Son and Spirit, present and active in the same moment.

Prior to the meeting with Nicodemus, Jesus had also called Disciples to follow him and performed his first recorded miracle at the wedding in Cana by turning water into wine. Later, in the Temple courts he had driven out those who were selling animals for sacrifice. This had aroused anger in the Jewish leaders who questioned Jesus' authority to act as he had. We know from the narrative as it unfolds that the Jewish leaders generally opposed Jesus, saw him as a threat to their authority, and wanted to be rid of him.

Nicodemus was one of the Jewish leaders, but he wanted to know more about Jesus. Coming at night, presumably to avoid being seen, he acknowledges Jesus as a man come from God and begins a conversation. Jesus immediately talks about being 'born again' and Nicodemus is confused. Jesus teases him a bit – you are a clever teacher, how come you can't seem to grasp what is being said! – then encourages him not to think literally. This 'second birth' is a spiritual event.

Some of us may remember when the term 'born again' Christian started to be used in Britain. In the USA, interest in what seemed to be a new expression of Christianity had started to emerge through the 'Jesus People' movement, a Christianised offshoot of the Hippie culture of the 1960s. Successive US Presidents Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter both referred to themselves as 'born-again' Christians. On both sides of the Atlantic, some Christians began describe different experiences of God as the Charismatic movement with its 'signs and wonders' ministry became prominent.

In all this, it was possible to get the wrong idea, that being 'born again' was something added on to being a Christian, or a different (and better) kind of Christianity, if you like. But it is important to see what Jesus is actually saying here. Jesus tells us that he has come that **everyone** who believes in him can receive eternal life. Through his eventual death and resurrection, Jesus is God's rescue plan for Humans. When this plan takes effect in us, we are born again in a spiritual sense. And if we believe, by definition, we have been born again. We don't need a second go. Even though some may well go on to have further experiences of God that *feel* significant and dramatic, the *reality* of our salvation depends only on the spiritual rebirth that God brings about in us.

Here's one way to look at it. When a baby is born, what we see before us is a clean blank sheet of endless possibility. Nothing is written. When we are 'born again' it is as if God had pressed our 'reset' button. Our relationship with Him and the World around us is changed for ever. We are not the finished article, that position rests with Jesus alone, but we are able to see the possibilities around us through new eyes. God has new things in store for us. The Apostle Paul talks of a 'transformation' that needs to happen in us through the action of the Holy Spirit (Romans 12). I like the T shirt that says 'be patient, God hasn't finished with me yet ...'.

Later Jesus, the Good Shepherd, will say 'my sheep listen to my voice I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish. No-one will snatch them out of my hand' (John 10:27-28). I can think of no greater comfort.

Conversation Questions

1. What might it mean to think of yourself as a 'blank sheet' before God where you are seen as a new creation with new possibilities.
2. We are re-made, transformed by the action of the Holy Spirit into the people God wants us to be. This is how God sees us, but how difficult is it to see ourselves in the same light?

3. Is there anything else from the passage not already discussed that speaks to you?
What is it?
4. What will you do this week in your Monday-to-Saturday ministry in response to what you have heard today? #everydayfaith

Prayer

Spend some time in prayer, responding to what you have heard today and listening to what God might be saying to you.

Collect of the day

Almighty God,
you show to those who are in error the light of your truth,
that they may return to the way of righteousness:
grant to all those who are admitted
into the fellowship of Christ's religion,
that they may reject those things
that are contrary to their profession,
and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same;
through our Lord Jesus Christ,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

(or)

Almighty God,
by the prayer and discipline of Lent
may we enter into the mystery of Christ's sufferings,
and by following in his Way
come to share in his glory;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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