

Second Tuesday of Easter ~ 4/17

"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." (John 3:15)

In the early seventies Jim Stafford wrote a popular song entitled, "I Don't Like Spiders and Snakes" which became very popular. I remembered thinking, "I'm with you on that, Jim!" Actually, I can handle the spiders but snakes are something else again. What is it about snakes that gives many of us the creeps? Maybe it's the fact that they can be poisonous. Maybe it is the fact that they move so quickly and quietly that we don't see or hear them coming. Maybe it has to do with the snake's part in ruining Adam and Eve's garden party. As I looked at this reading I was struck by the fact that Jesus was comparing himself to a snake so perhaps it would be good to take a second look at Moses' serpent.

Jesus asks Nicodemus to remember the Exodus story of Moses and the Israelites in the desert. This is the episode in which the people were plagued with poisonous serpents that would bite and kill their victim very quickly. Moses approaches God and asks Him to intervene. God, in turn, tells Moses to make a standard with a bronze snake on it and hold it up. God tells Moses that when people are bitten they need only look up at the bronze snake and they will be made well. Even today the serpent and staff that is the symbol of the healing profession originated with Moses' bronze staff and serpent.

Jesus explains to Nicodemus that He will be lifted up just like the bronze serpent and that He too will bring healing. He will offer eternal life for those who will look upon Him with the eyes of faith. Jesus knows that many people will feel the same about Him as some of us feel about snakes. He will be reviled and feared and avoided whenever possible. He will be seen as a poisonous snake to the Pharisees and those who are unwilling to let go of their sinful ways. Like the twisting figure of the serpent on the staff Jesus too will offer His wreathing body upon the cross and only the most courageous will be willing to embrace Him.

When we think of the lowly snake, the one that we avoid, perhaps we can touch the type of fear and hatred that the Jews had for Jesus. If we truly want to follow in the footsteps of Jesus perhaps we'll have to look to the cross for comfort and that could be more difficult than changing our opinion of snakes!

Questions for Reflection

- 1. Is it sometimes unpleasant for me to find myself in Christ's presence? Am I afraid?*
- 2. What type of healing do I need to find under the cross? Can I embrace it?*

Prayer: Lord sometimes I find it very difficult to embrace You even though I know that You offer healing. Help me to overcome my fears so that I might see the gift of salvation that You wish to offer me.