

## 4<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY OF LENT YEAR B

The search for God. Every human being searches for God. People of every era and culture have sought to know and understand God and somehow rise up to meet and encounter Him. Even the atheist who says he doesn't believe in God has reached that sad conclusion only after deep questioning and after unsuccessfully trying to find Him.

You have probably often observed a tired or frightened child trying to climb up into the arms of Mum or Dad. Try as he might, he can't do it. Mum's just too tall! He needs Mum or Dad to bend down and pick him up. Our search for God and our desire to encounter Him is similar. Our human attempts to understand God and to rise up to meet Him are destined to failure; We need God our Father to reach down to us and pick us up.

And God *has* reached down to us: he has told us what he's like; he has shown us who he is. God has revealed himself to us. He has told us and he has shown us how much he loves us: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son." (John 3:16) These few words summarize so well the entire Gospel and the whole life of Jesus Christ the Son of God.

God has always loved us. Our First Reading from Chronicles reminds us that in the Old Testament times God's people were continually unfaithful to Him. But God never abandoned them; he was not impatient or spiteful as we sometimes might be when people continually offend us. Instead, God sent them messengers and prophets to call them back to him. And when they did not listen and would not change their ways God allowed a punishment to befall them which came in the form of being exiled from their homeland.

This punishment was not so that God could vent his anger. No! It was so that his people might see the error of their ways and turn back to him. God never abandoned them. And when the time was right, when the people had had enough time to reflect on what they had done and realize their mistakes, he sent King Cyrus to deliver them.

In our Second Reading too Saint Paul speaks to us of the love of God. He reminds us that God is rich in grace and mercy for us, even when we are bowed down by our transgressions and dead inside because of our sins. Saint Paul is saying that God does not wait for us to be good or perfect or to merit salvation before he loves us. No, it's because God loves us that we are saved and are able to pick ourselves up and be good.

It's hard to find a better way to express God's love for us than the words of Saint John today: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son." If you're like me, hearing these words brings immediately to mind the picture of Jesus on the cross as he died to make up for our transgressions, to save us from our sins.

Some atheists say they find it hard to believe in a God who would be so cruel as to let this happen to his own Son. But neither our Gospel today, nor any part of the Gospels, give any hint of the least bit of anger or vengeance or desire for retribution on the part of God when it comes to Jesus' crucifixion. In today's Gospel John reveals that the Father giving his Son in this way is the supreme expression of a deep and tender love for us.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son." You simply cannot comprehend how great God's love for us actually is unless you look upon Jesus Christ lifted up on the cross. The cross of Jesus is where God's love bends down to meet our wretchedness and weakness and where we look up to meet His love and mercy. The cross of Jesus is planted firmly in the ground, but has its head reaching up into the heavens. The cross of Jesus is where heaven and earth meet, where God and humanity embrace. In the cross of Christ, God bends down to us; and we, looking upon the cross, reach up to Him, not only with our eyes and our arms, but above all with our hearts.

Jesus said, "I am the way ... no one can come to the Father except through me". The cross of Jesus Christ is the narrow gateway which the Gospels tell us about by which we enter into the loving embrace of our heavenly Father both now and in eternal life.

Just as a Mum and Dad bend down to pick up their tired and weary child, so too God our Father reaches down to us and gathers us up into his arms, and all this happens, above all, in the cross of Christ. May we often look upon the cross and know how great is the love of God for us.

