

Homily based on the readings from April 14, 2026 (Acts 4.32-37; John 3.7b-15)

In today's Gospel, we hear the second half of a conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus – a prominent Jewish official. The first half, which was read yesterday at Mass, described the nature and necessity of Baptism: “unless one is born of water and Spirit he cannot enter the Kingdom of God.” The passage we get today is equally important, although somewhat different in character – Christ foretelling the end of his own earthly existence:

And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert,
so must the Son of Man be lifted up,
so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

Despite what we might initially think, the Son of Man being “lifted up” does not refer to his Resurrection or his Ascension, but to his Crucifixion. Christ is alluding to a story from the Book of Numbers – which we actually heard exactly three weeks ago – about the Israelites

being afflicted with deadly serpents during their sojourn in the desert. As a remedy, Moses set a bronze serpent on a pole, the sight of which would heal anyone who had been bitten. The point Jesus is making is that *he* will be serving the same purpose as the bronze serpent – a sign of hope, mounted on a wooden pole, who will bring rebirth to anyone who looks upon him.

As you may recall, the *reason* the Israelites were tormented by serpents was their failure to trust in the Lord. On a broader level, our rebellion against God is the source of *all* suffering and death. The bronze serpent in the desert was a *prototype* for the complete and total healing we receive from Christ's willing sacrifice on the Cross. While the original narrative presents a *real* event that happened to *real* people, it also points the way to a *greater* truth that is coming later.

That greater truth, of course, is fully embodied by Jesus Christ. He is the culmination of all the histories and prophecies of the Old Testament – the quintessential ideal prefigured by all the priests, prophets, and

kings who came before him. The key difference, though, is that none of the prototypes for Christ – no matter how much strength or courage they displayed – actually chose to sacrifice *themselves*. Moses, for all his loyalty and dedication, did not strap *himself* to a pole to save the afflicted Israelites. It is only Jesus who makes *himself* the offering – as atonement for our sins, as healing for our sickness, as food for our hungry souls. Christ readily embraces the Cross – the instrument of his own *torture* and the vehicle of our *salvation*. If we, for our part, hope to obtain the joys of eternal life, then we must fix our eyes unflinchingly on *him*.