

13. January 2025

THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN
"Nicodemus and the message of Jesus"

Jn 3:9-21

Nicodemus said to Jesus, "How can this be?" Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand this? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen; but you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man. And 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, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God.

Jesus takes time with Nicodemus, explaining many things that he clearly did not understand at the time. But he must have been so moved by his encounter with Jesus that he later spoke on his behalf before the Sanhedrin: "Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?" (Jn 7:51).

We also know that Nicodemus was present at Jesus' burial, along with Joseph of Arimathea," who was secretly His disciple (John 19:38), and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes. *They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it in linen cloths with the spices"* (Jn 19:40). Perhaps Nicodemus too had secretly become a disciple of Jesus.

What in the Lord's words must have particularly moved him? Certainly Jesus' allusion to the serpent in the desert, a passage which, as a Jewish magistrate, he must have known

well from the Scriptures. Perhaps a stronger sense of who Jesus was came over him when he likened this serpent to the Son of Man, who must be lifted up so that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life. If at the beginning of the conversation Jesus' words were obviously a mystery to Nicodemus, and he asked Him persistently how this could be, now we hear no questioning on his part. He is simply listening to Jesus. If the mention of the serpent in the desert had opened a crack in his heart, now the beauty of the Lord's teaching could touch him more deeply.

And what did he hear? The eternal message, the message of immeasurable love: the Messiah came into the world because the Heavenly Father sent Him to redeem humanity. He came to save people, not to judge. Whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

This, dear Nicodemus, is the heart of the Lord's message. What Jesus said to you that night is what we continue to proclaim to people today, many centuries later. The message remains just as true because the Son of Man who came down from heaven has made it known to us.

The part that now falls to men is to believe in Him who has revealed Himself as the Messiah awaited by your people and therefore as the Saviour of all mankind. To believe in Him and to follow Him is life. Not to believe in Him is to be condemned for not having believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Therefore, it is just as urgent today that people receive the message of salvation. Jesus has made it clear to us that they can love darkness more than light, because their works are evil. This is hard to believe because we were created to live in God's light. Without His light, everything is darkness and death. And yet, dear Nicodemus, when Jesus says it, it is true. Everyone who does evil hates the light, because his soul is plunged into darkness and remains in darkness until he meets the Lord and turns to Him.

As a teacher in Israel, you knew and taught that we must live in the truth. No doubt you practised it yourself, otherwise you would not have gone out at night to seek our beloved Lord. And now you will hear from His own mouth that He Himself is the Truth (Jn 14:6). It is He whom you have always followed: the Son of the Eternal Father. It is He! I trust that later on you fully understood Him and that the words which were so incomprehensible to you at first made sense to you. You sought Him out at night to

Speak with Him, you defended Him before the Sanhedrin, you honoured Him with a dignified burial with Joseph of Arimathea. Surely, then, you are one of those of whom Jesus said: *“He who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God.”*

The next time I kneel before the 'anointing stone' in Jerusalem, I will remember you.