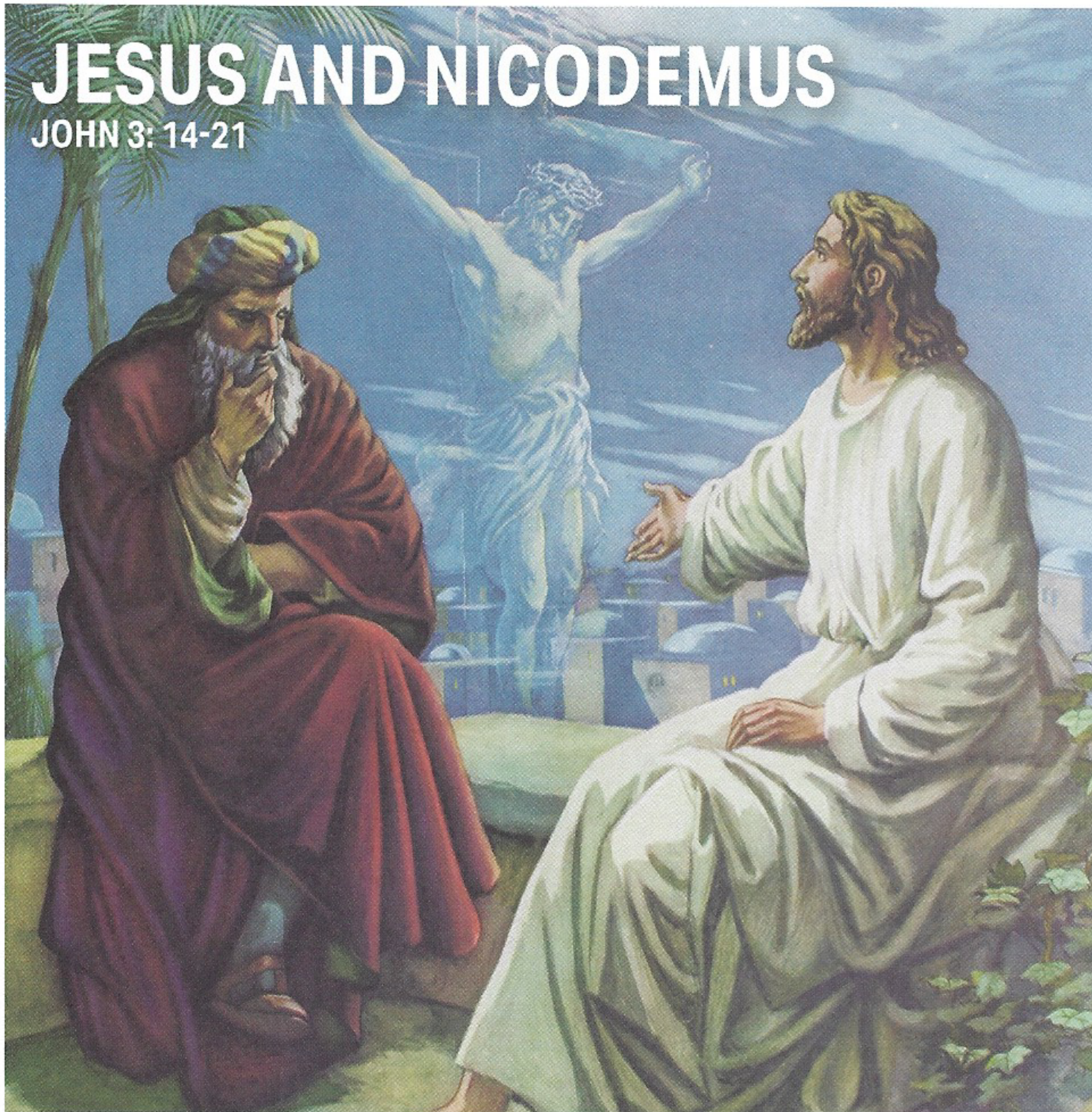


Sunday Message

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT (LAETARE)

THE WORD

Year B • 10 March 2024 • Psalter Week 4



REFLECT

Some people can identify with today's Gospel scene between Jesus and Nicodemus. A personal encounter with Jesus is something some people of faith are comfortable talking about. For others, it can be a deeply private encounter, the details of which are not shared with anyone. An encounter could take place under the cloak of darkness surrounded by constellations of stars and a dazzling bright moon. Or in the quietness of one's home or up a mountain with nature. We often encounter the loving Christ when surrounded by family or on retreat in a monastery, attending a novena or participating in our sacraments.

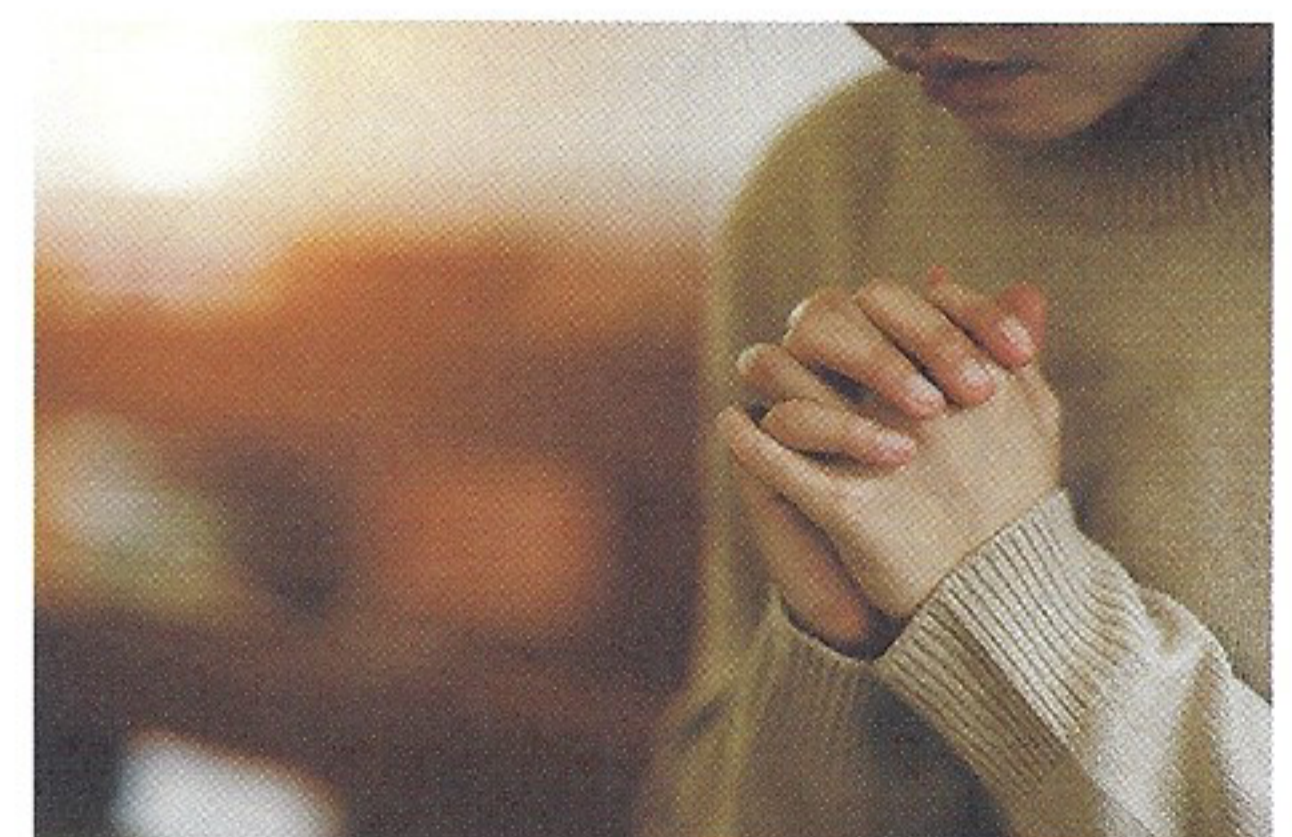
Our personal encounter with Jesus can be transformative, like it was for Nicodemus. The light of truth shone upon his inquisitive mind, leading him to a life dedicated to prayer and intimacy with God. Some might say that this is perhaps the goal of the spiritual life. But there is an added dimension to this story. We are told that God loved the world so much that he gave his only son so that all believers will know that they are loved unconditionally by a God of mercy and compassion. That message from John's Gospel has the power to change our hearts, our minds, and our lives. It changed Nicodemus forever. ■

The context of today's Gospel reading is the famous encounter between Nicodemus and Jesus. Such were the signs being shown by Jesus, a certain amount of curiosity was sweeping across the community.

Nicodemus, a prominent Jew, meets Jesus under the cover of darkness. Jesus the master, sets about instructing his new inquisitive student. Nicodemus appears three times in John's Gospel, and always at night. This is the only time on record that the two of them meet, and the fact that it takes place at night suggests a certain amount of danger associated with this encounter. Some people didn't want to be seen with Jesus, let alone be associated with him. There is also a certain intimacy within this scene as Jesus shares his personal story and mission with a fellow Jew.

He tells Nicodemus that for the salvation of the world, he himself would be lifted up on the cross and lifted up into glory by his resurrection and ascension. The suffering and joy signified by these two images are connected. No cross, no crown. Jesus tells Nicodemus that if we look at Jesus and believe, then we too can have eternal life. That's the highest life possible. The life of God himself in us. It surrounds every aspect of our lives with peace. Peace with people, peace with life and peace with ourselves.

St. Augustine once said, "God loves each one of us as if there was only one of us to love." The fact that he gave his only Son to come into this world and die, showed the extent of that love. ■



DO

Life can be very busy. But this week, make a conscious effort to create space and time for prayer. Nicodemus sought Christ out and was transformed.

LEARN

John 3:16 – 'God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him, shall not perish, but have eternal life.'

SAY

Grant me the humility to acknowledge that there are aspects of my spiritual journey that I may not fully comprehend. Open my heart to the guidance of your Spirit.

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

Rejoice, Jerusalem, and all who love her.
Be joyful, all who were in mourning;
exult and be satisfied at her consoling breast.

COLLECT

O God, who through your Word
reconcile the human race to yourself in a
wonderful way,
grant, we pray,
that with prompt devotion and eager faith
the Christian people may hasten
toward the solemn celebrations to come.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the
Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

FIRST READING 2 Chronicles 36:14-16,19-23

A reading from the second book of Chronicles.
All the heads of the priesthood, and the people
too, added infidelity to infidelity, copying all the
shameful practices of the nations and defiling
the Temple that the Lord had consecrated for
himself in Jerusalem. The Lord, the God of their
ancestors, tirelessly sent them messenger
after messenger, since he wished to spare his
people and his house. But they ridiculed the
messengers of God, they despised his words,
they laughed at his prophets, until at last the
wrath of the Lord rose so high against his
people that there was no further remedy.

Their enemies burned down the Temple of
God, demolished the walls of Jerusalem, set
fire to all its palaces, and destroyed everything
of value in it. The survivors were deported by
Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon; they were to serve
him and his sons until the kingdom of Persia
came to power. This is how the word of the Lord
was fulfilled that he spoke through Jeremiah,
'Until this land has enjoyed its sabbath rest, until
seventy years have gone by, it will keep sabbath
throughout the days of its desolation.'

And in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia,
to fulfil the word of the Lord that was spoken
through Jeremiah, the Lord roused the spirit
of Cyrus king of Persia to issue a proclamation
and to have it publicly displayed throughout his
kingdom: 'Thus speaks Cyrus king of Persia,
"The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all
the kingdoms of the earth; he has ordered me
to build him a Temple in Jerusalem, in Judah.
Whoever there is among you of all his people,
may his God be with him! Let him go up."'

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM

Psalm 136(137):1-6

Response:

**O let my tongue cleave to my mouth if I
remember you not!**

1. By the rivers of Babylon
there we sat and wept,
remembering Zion;
on the poplars that grew there
we hung up our harps. **(R.)**
2. For it was there that they asked us,
our captors, for songs,
our oppressors, for joy.
'Sing to us,' they said,
'one of Zion's songs.' **(R.)**
3. O how could we sing
the song of the Lord
on alien soil?
If I forget you, Jerusalem,
let my right hand wither! **(R.)**

4. O let my tongue
cleave to my mouth
if I remember you not,
if I prize not Jerusalem
above all my joys! **(R.)**

SECOND READING Ephesians 2:4-10

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the
Ephesians.

God loved us with so much love that he was
generous with his mercy: when we were dead
through our sins, he brought us to life with
Christ – it is through grace that you have been
saved – and raised us up with him and gave us a
place with him in heaven, in Christ Jesus.

This was to show for all ages to come,
through his goodness towards us in Christ
Jesus, how infinitely rich he is in grace. Because
it is by his grace that you have been saved,
through faith; not by anything of your own, but
by a gift from God; not by anything that you
have done, so that nobody can claim the credit.
We are God's work of art, created in Christ
Jesus to live the good life as from the beginning
he had meant us to live it.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Glory and praise to you, O Christ!
**God loved the world so much that he gave his
only Son;**
everyone who believes in him has eternal life.
Glory and praise to you, O Christ!

GOSPEL

John 3:14-21

A reading from the holy Gospel according to
John.

Jesus said to Nicodemus:
'The Son of Man must be lifted up
as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert,
so that everyone who believes may have eternal
life in him.

Yes, God loved the world so much that he gave
his only Son,
so that everyone who believes in him may not
be lost
but may have eternal life.
For God sent his Son into the world
not to condemn the world,
but so that through him the world might be
saved.

No one who believes in him will be condemned;
but whoever refuses to believe is condemned
already,
because he has refused to believe in the name
of God's only Son.

On these grounds is sentence pronounced:
that though the light has come into the world
men have shown they prefer darkness to the
light
because their deeds were evil.
And indeed, everybody who does wrong
hates the light and avoids it,
for fear his actions should be exposed;
but the man who lives by the truth comes out
into the light,
so that it may be plainly seen that what he does
is done in God.'

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

I believe in God,
the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,

(all bow during the next two lines)

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried;
he descended into hell;
on the third day he rose again from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of God the
Father almighty;
from there he will come to judge the living
and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting.
Amen.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

We place before you with joy these offerings,
which bring eternal remedy, O Lord,
praying that we may both faithfully revere them
and present them to you, as is fitting,
for the salvation of all the world.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

**Jerusalem is built as a city bonded as one
together.**
**It is there that the tribes go up, the tribes of
the Lord,**
to praise the name of the Lord.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

O God, who enlighten everyone who comes into
this world,
illuminate our hearts, we pray,
with the splendour of your grace,
that we may always ponder
what is worthy and pleasing to your majesty
and love you in all sincerity.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

PRAYER OVER THE PEOPLE

Look upon those who call to you, O Lord,
and sustain the weak;
give life by your unfailing light
to those who walk in the shadow of death,
and bring those rescued by your mercy from
every evil
to reach the highest good.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.