

Fourth Sunday in Lent, March 14, 2021

The Collect: Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Old Testament: Numbers 21:4-9 read from the New International Version Bible

4 They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way; 5 they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!"

6 Then the Lord sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. 7 The people came to Moses and said, "We sinned when we spoke against the Lord and against you. Pray that the Lord will take the snakes away from us." So Moses prayed for the people.

8 The Lord said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live." 9 So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived.

Hear what the spirit is saying to God's people

Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22 read from The Episcopal Church Book of Common Prayer

1 Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, *
and his mercy endures for ever.

2 Let all those whom the Lord has redeemed proclaim *
that he redeemed them from the hand of the foe.

3 He gathered them out of the lands; *
from the east and from the west,
from the north and from the south.

17 Some were fools and took to rebellious ways; *
they were afflicted because of their sins.

18 They abhorred all manner of food *
and drew near to death's door.

19 Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, *
and he delivered them from their distress.

20 He sent forth his word and healed them *
and saved them from the grave.

21 Let them give thanks to the Lord for his mercy *
and the wonders he does for his children.

22 Let them offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving *
and tell of his acts with shouts of joy.

Epistle: Ephesians 2:1-10 read from the New Living Translation Bible

2 Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. 2 You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God.

3 All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God's anger, just like everyone else.

4 But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, 5 that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!) 6 For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus.

7 So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus.

8 God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. 9 Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. 10 For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ

Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

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Gospel: John 3:14-21 read from the New Revised Standard Version Bible

14 And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

17 “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18 Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19 And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. 20 For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. 21 But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

The Gospel of the Lord

Closing Prayer: On March 18 we celebrate the life of Cyril of Jerusalem, Liturgist, Catechist, and Bishop. Read from *A Great Cloud of Witnesses*.

Born in Jerusalem about 315, Cyril became bishop of that city probably in 349. In the course of political and ecclesiastical disputes, he was banished and restored three times. Cyril is the one we have most to thank for the development of catechetical instruction and liturgical observances during Lent and Holy Week. His Catechetical Lectures on the Christian Faith, given before Easter to candidates for baptism, were probably written by him sometime between 348 and 350.

The work consists of an introductory lecture, or Procatechesis, and eighteen Catecheses

based upon the articles of the creed of the Church at Jerusalem. All these lectures (the earliest catechetical materials surviving today) may have been used many times over by Cyril and his successors, and considerably revised in the process. They were probably part of the pre-baptismal instruction that Egeria, a pilgrim nun from western Europe, witnessed at Jerusalem in the fourth century and described with great enthusiasm in the account of her pilgrimage. Many of the faithful would also attend these instructions.

Cyril's five Mystagogical Catecheses on the Sacraments, intended for the newly baptized after Easter, are now thought to have been composed, or at least revised, by John, Cyril's successor as Bishop of Jerusalem from 386 to 417.

It is likely that it was Cyril who instituted the observances of Palm Sunday and Holy Week during the latter years of his episcopate in Jerusalem. In doing so, he was taking practical steps to organize devotions for countless pilgrims and local inhabitants around the sacred sites. In time, as pilgrims returned to their homes from Palestine, these services were to influence the development of Holy Week observances throughout the entire Church. Cyril attended the Second Ecumenical Council at Constantinople, in 381, and died at Jerusalem on March 18, 386.

Cyril's thought has greatly enriched the observance of Holy Week in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer.

Let us pray: Strengthen, O God, your Church in the sacraments of your grace, that we, in union with the teaching and prayers of your servant Cyril of Jerusalem, may enter more fully into your Paschal mystery; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**