



St. Thomas Church: established July 1, 1285 by King Vaclav II

St. Thomas Church

Today's Prayer

Say this Prayer Today:

I pause for a moment and think of the love and the grace that God showers on me: I am created in the image and likeness of God; I am God's dwelling-place.

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March 10th and March 11th
2018

The Fourth Sunday of Lent

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The Reflection of the Gospel

The setting of this gospel is straightforward. Nicodemus, a preeminent Jewish rabbi (who appears later on at the end of John's gospel) comes to Jesus by night "for fear of public opinion" with some personal queries. Some of Jesus' bolder teachings concerning salvation disturbed him. For one, how can a believer possibly do God's will as outlined in the *Torah* (the Law contained in the first five books of the First or Old Testament) and follow Jesus' "religious accommodations." Jesus' response is cast in typical rabbinic fashion. In responding to a biblical question one had to use a biblical citation in response. Here he draws on the incident of the *bronze serpent* related in the book of *Numbers* (21:6-9) for an example. In brief, the Israelites complain to God in the desert when the provided food became monotonous and "the wilderness closed in on them" in the form of a poisonous viper infestation. Quickly chastened by this dread plague they cried for salvation that came in strange form when Moses ordered the image of a bronze serpent mounted on a pole as a healing totem for those simply looking upon it in faith. This incident out Israel's sacred history so fraught with symbolism was neither lost on Nicodemus or on anyone seeking the truth. The serpent, a symbol of wisdom among many ancient peoples was thought also to cure. The analogy was clear. One Christ, the Messiah, had been "lifted on the cross" and "raised up from the dead" those who look upon him "with faith" will be saved. Again, the example of Abraham who was willing to part with his only beloved son, Isaac (*Genesis* 22:1-9) in obedience. So, Jesus, in obedience to his Father *was sent into the world and to give his life that the world might be saved*. In these examples there is no condemnation, each one stands before God with the gospel revealed through Jesus Christ before him/her. Are we ready to look upon the cross for light that reveals and healing that saves?

Study of the First Reading

14-16 These short passages described the last days of the kingdom in Judea, the Babylonian exile, and the return of the faithful. The author blamed both the priests and the people for infidelity and abuse, in spite of the prophets sent to preach repentance. 19-23 In the end, the nation forced God's hand against them. And Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians. The Temple was blasphemed and destroyed. The best of the nation were taken to Babylon to serve their new masters. But, hope was not completely lost. After 70 years (a time span that indicated fulfillment of divine will as a Sabbath rest), a new hero emerged: Cyrus the conquering Persian. He proclaimed a royal edict for the people of Judea. Israelites should return and rebuild the Temple. Politically, this was a wise move on the part of Cyrus. As the most western province of the Empire, a strengthened Judea would face another regional power (Egypt). By repatriating the Jews and enriching them to rebuild Jerusalem, the Persian created a defensive buffer. Sometimes wisdom requires a view of the larger picture. Cyrus could see this vista. The Temple priests in the time of Jesus could not. One needs a selfless spirit to obtain this wisdom. The common good outweighs personal enrichment. Others' needs are sometimes greater than mine.

Coffee, Cookies & Conversation follows Sunday's Mass in the Monastery Refectory off the Cloister Garden. **All are invited, especially our visitors.**

Please contact, Fr. William Faix if you want to add announcements to the bulletin at "wfaix@yahoo.com" or contact Fr. Juan at juan@augustiniani.cz. Please send at latest by the Friday of the week as it has to be added to the bulletin

Study of the Second Reading

The popular translation above does not begin to tease out the meaning caused by the phrase "in Christ" (or "in Christ Jesus") that occurred five times. This phrase is shorthand for the intimate spiritual union the believer has with Christ. The preposition "in" can mean "with" or "by." On the one hand, spiritual union can mean fellowship. As Christ becomes part of the believer, the believer becomes part of Christ, incorporated into his Body. In other words, the believer becomes part of the Church. On the other hand, spiritual union means change. The preposition "in" can be a relationship of "cause" (i.e., "by" Christ). Being with Christ causes a change in the believer. The root of that change is Christ. With the many sides of "in Christ" understood, let's look at the verses themselves. 2:4-7 form one long sentence. In 4-5, God is the subject; we are the object. The author described God as full of love and mercy (synonymous with the "living" God). We are dead because of our sins. Yet, God brings us alive together in Christ. In other words, we are alive because of what Jesus did for us on the cross and because of the life he shares with us now. We are also part of a living unity, the Church, the Body of Christ. 2:6-7 continue the sentence with the verbs of resurrection and heavenly enthronement. Both are in the present tense, as if God is presently or has already brought these events about. To add to the confusion, the present tense can be used to refer to the future. So, did the resurrection and assumption of the faithful already happen? Is it happening now? Or will it happen (as the popular translation above indicates)? Again, the phrase "in Christ" will help to explain the answer to this problem. When we have intimate union with our Savior, we enjoy his risen and eternal life. So, the present tense of the phrase is appropriate. What happened to Christ is happening to us now in a spiritual sense. But the physical sense still needs fulfillment. The general resurrection has not occurred. Like the Kingdom, the reality is only partially present. But, in the end, the overflowing ("superabundant") nature of God's grace will be fully realized. 2:8-10 describes how dependent we are on God to realize his salvation in our lives. We are not, nor cannot ever be, morally self-sufficient to receive God's love. We must accept what God offers us. More important, we must trust God with his gift. Where do "good words" fit into the life of the Christian? In other words, what is the basis for a believer's moral life? Again, the phrase "in Christ" is the key. The Christian's moral life is the result of an intimate union with Christ. In other words, our relationship with Jesus causes us to think and act differently. Again, God does it, not us. In fact, the author of Ephesians spoke of our moral life as part of God's plan. Our activities are only "good" when we work according to divine providence. While these verses from Ephesians are packed, they are far from meaningless. God has done so much for those of us "in Christ." We enjoy life with Christ. And he will change us for the events to come.

Lenten Services

- **Tuesdays.** Bible studies from 06:30 till 07:30pm.
- **Wednesdays.** Adult religious education from 06:00 7:00 pm. An opportunity to explore the Word of God.
- **Thursdays.** Mass will be offer at 06:15 pm in St Barbara's Chapel. Confession will be heard before and after Mass.
- **Fridays.** Stations of the Cross at 06:00 pm. Follow by devotions to Saint Nicholas of Tolentine. Confession will be heard immediately afterwards.
- **Saturdays.** Mass at 06:00pm follow by Confessions.

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Ongoing Activities

- ❖ We **welcome all our new parishioners** to St. Thomas Church. Please introduce yourselves, if you wish at refreshments after the 11:00 am Mass on Sundays or just call us or visit at your convenience.
- ❖ If you would like to receive a **copy of the bulletin by email**, please contact osaprag@augustiniani.cz
- ❖ **Marriage Preparation:** The next one-day marriage preparation course (for the English speaking community) will be held by Fr. William on Saturday 17th March from 9:15am - 3pm at St. Thomas Parish for those who wish to participate.
- ❖ This Sunday during the Religious education will be taken up with our **annual Stations of the Cross** in the monastery courtyard. All classes will join together to walk the Stations and pray as a group

Novena to Merciful Jesus

and

Divine Mercy Sunday

Jesus, I trust in You.

The message of Divine Mercy is that God is merciful.

He is love itself poured out for us, and He wants no one to escape that merciful love.

The Novena to Merciful Jesus starts on **Good Friday, March 30th** and concludes on **Mercy Sunday, April 8th**.

For your convenience, next Sunday we will start distributing wallet-size cards with the image of Merciful Jesus.

We will start the novena together as a community right before the services on Good Friday.

On April 8th Mass we will celebrate the Feast of Divine Mercy and we will conclude the novena.



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