

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT – YEAR B – OLPH - 2015
(2 Chronicles 36:14-17, 19-23; Ephesians 2:4-10; John 3:14-21)

It is tempting to think that **believing in Christ** means simply to profess our faith by proclaiming the creed, or that we agree that Jesus existed and worked miracles and died and rose from the dead. To accept these truths is important but this is not what is **meant by "believing."** In fact, one can sincerely affirm all these facts theoretically and still live very selfishly. To believe in the One who was "lifted up" means nothing less than to make his self-offering part of our own lives through daily concern for others; it means to live unselfishly. This is the only kind of faith that will give us eternal life.

Most of us were **baptized as babies** with no conscious awareness of what was happening. Our parents and godparents promised, in our name, that we renounced Satan and affirmed Christ. It was hoped that they and others would explain all that to us, when we became old enough to understand the very serious commitment they made on our behalf. Unfortunately, we usually expect our godparents to do little more than to remember our birthdays...and often less than that. The simple fact is that those baptized as infants must "claim" their own baptisms, as it were, as soon as they are old enough to do so, which usually means in early adulthood. The sacrament of baptism is not magic, and its graces become fully operative in our lives only to the extent that we accept and live the promises made years ago in our name.

When we promise **to renounce Satan**, we are declaring our firm resolution to eliminate from our lives the "big lie" of Satan, namely, that we can achieve happiness by thinking only of ourselves. And when we commit ourselves to Christ, we firmly resolve to follow his example of unselfish, thoughtful concern for others. When we are thus "lifted up" like Jesus on the cross of love, we can be sure that we will also be "raised up" with him in the victory of resurrection. Some may think that this takes all the fun out of life, but in reality the people who love in this way are the only truly happy people in the world. But we won't know that until we try it!

John 3:16. We have seen it in movies, in stadiums, at demonstrations – John 3:16:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” We hear these marvelous words in today’s gospel. They are the sum and the essence of the Good News. The first thing we note is that it is God who

takes the initiative in our salvation. In olden days, people believed that most of all God had to be pacified before he would forgive. That presents us with a picture of God as stern, angry, vindictive.

Jesus, on the other hand, is presented as being **kind, gentle and forgiving**. By his death, Jesus changed God's attitude towards us. But this passage shows that it was God who sent his Son to us. It was God who took the first step. God chose the approach of love, not of power. God acts not for his own sake but for our sake. God is not a tyrant who is not satisfied until he has reduced his creatures to abject obedience. Rather, God is the Father who is not satisfied until all his straying children have come home.

This passage also shows how **all-inclusive God's love is**. His love is not directed at one nation only, nor is it only for the good. It is directed at all nations, to the children of light and to the children of darkness. But the passage also talks about judgment and condemnation.

If the approach of our God is so loving, so all encompassing how can it include judgment and condemnation? How can condemnation be reconciled with love? Condemnation does not follow from God's action but from people's response.

God condemns no one. We condemn ourselves by our negative attitude. **God sent us a light**. If we get lost it is because we haven't accepted the light and so the fault is not God's but ours.

A visitor was once being shown around an art gallery. The gallery contained some beautiful paintings, which were universally acknowledged to be masterpieces. At the end of the tour the visitor said, 'I don't think much of these old pictures.' To which his guide replied, 'My good man, these pictures are no longer on trial. But those who look at them are.'

The man's reaction was not a judgment on the pictures but on his own pitiful appreciation of art. In the same way, those who prefer darkness to light have condemned themselves. Evil people hate the light because it reveals themselves to themselves. They hate goodness because it reveals their badness; they hate industry because it reveals their laziness. They will destroy the light, the

goodness, the love, in order to avoid the pain of self-discovery. It's terrible to reject the light, to reject God's offer of love. But how sweet it is to walk in the light of his love. Our part in the process of redemption is to accept the gift in all humility, and try to respond in kind. We are able to love God . . . **because God loved us first.**
