

Homily. 4th Sunday in Lent. Year B. 13/14 March 2021

Before there can be any uplifting, there must to be a casting down. Before we can be lifted up, we must have been brought low. Sometimes this lowering happens because of our physical, mental and emotional health, or better still the loss of it. Sometimes it's bad fortune that drags us down or the deeds of others. Of course, we must factor in our own choices and actions, which can be the cause of our falling, even of our downfall.

John's gospel tells us that Jesus was lifted up because He had been brought low by us. He came to save us and the world, not to condemn. His way was that of truth and unselfish, loving service. This threatened people then, as it still challenges and threatens many today. In the end, when push came to shove, very few stood with the Lord in His time of greatest need, with most fleeing away into the hills and the darkness.

His Cross is the symbol of our decision to bring Him down to the pits of cruel depravity and a lonely, unjust execution on a hill outside of the city. Paradoxically, this same Cross has become the sure sign of God's love for us in Christ, the cure for our downfall made from His casting down. It's the Cross of Christ's self-giving love that now stands proudly on our Churches, above our altars and before all people. Its power can still provoke anger and rejection as it did 2000 years ago. At the same time, Christ's Cross offers grace, guidance and comfort to all who are uplifted by the mercy of the Lord offered for them on its bitter, splintered wood.

But there is another kind of falling and lifting in Jesus story, one that also prefigures our own. Lovingly and obediently, He humbly emptied Himself

out of His place with God to become one with us, sharing our joys and sorrows, our human falling and our rising. His resurrection, with our celebration of it drawing closer day by day, reveals us and our destiny to ourselves, our ultimate hope and lifting up to life. If the Cross shows God's bottomless love for us and for the world, the resurrection up lifting of Christ shows our real spiritual nature in God. It affirms that we have been chosen and adopted as God's sons and daughters, sisters and brothers of Christ and of each other, able to share by faith in His destiny; His lifting up in love for all and His rising to eternal life for us.

No matter, then, the causes of our falling be they human frailty, bad fortune, the malice of others or our own moral faults, for St. Paul says that it is by grace and sheer gift, we have been saved. The same reading tells us that we are God's work of art, meant to live the good life God always intended. This is the Good News that Jesus Christ proclaimed, practiced and won for us. At the heart of the Christian faith lies a free gift, a real Easter uprising for us, offering hope always and in every circumstance, no matter how down we may be. All that we have to do is understand this offer, believe in it, accept His gift and live our lives in its truth and power.