

Second Sunday After the Nativity – Notice the Good, Not the Bad

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St. Sarkis Armenian Church. Carrollton, TX
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Gospel Reading: John 3:13-21*

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In today's Gospel reading, St. John the Evangelist compares an Old Testament event with a New Testament event. He writes Christ's words when He says that the Son of Man will be lifted up just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness. In the book of Numbers (21:4-9), after the Jews had been freed from slavery in Egypt, they wandered the wilderness for many years. While they wandered, they began to complain to Moses about God bringing them into wilderness. Then, God sent poisonous snakes among the people and bit them, killing many. The people repented and asked for forgiveness and Moses prayed for the people. The Lord told him to make a poisonous snake and place it on a staff and every time someone was bitten, they only needed to look at the snake and they would be healed.

Jesus compares this event to His crucifixion. Just as the poisonous snake which killed became the very thing which saved and healed, likewise, the cross, which was an instrument of death and destruction became the instrument of life and salvation. Yet, what is fascinatingly interesting is that even after all the miracles that the Jews saw God perform for them and all the blessings He had given them, they still complained and only noticed the misfortunes they were suffering.

It is human nature to notice the bad things and overlook the good things at times, but sometimes we do that more than we should. As humans, we find the imperfections in others and in the world around us and begin to complain and keep those in our minds longer than the good things in others. When we hear or see something bad in another, no matter the wonderful things they have done in the past, those failures remain in our minds and we tend to push those people away from us, so that we do not interact or associate with them.

In our eyes, a man's imperfection radiates like the sun, outshining his good deeds and virtuous lifestyle, which are like stars. Yet, thankfully, in God's eyes it is the opposite. Our good deeds and virtuous lifestyle illuminate like the sun, out shining our imperfections.

There was once a wise teacher who took out a large piece of white paper with a little black dot drawn in the center. He showed it to his students, asking, “What do you see?”

The first shouted, “A spot!”

Another exclaimed, “A black dot!”

Then a third answered, “A thick black blotch!”

The teacher lowered his head, walked to the corner and began to cry. The students were amazed and came, asking, “Why are you crying?”

He answered, “I am crying because all of my students saw only a small black dot and none of them noticed the clean white paper.”

How often do we do the same, seeing only the black dot in another and ignore all the clean, white paper around them? How often do we do this in our relationships and interactions with people at work? How often do we immediately see the black dot, while the white is also right there in front of us? God, on the other hand, immediately notices the white around us and when He sees the black dots in our lives, He takes His white-out marker and gets rid of them.

It is my prayer that from this week on we strive to ignore the imperfections in others and see the perfections they possess. Let us look at each other, and even ourselves, as God sees us, not as black spotted individuals who constantly fail, but as white pieces of paper, upon which God has the pencil in His hand and He will draw what we are meant to be.

Amen.