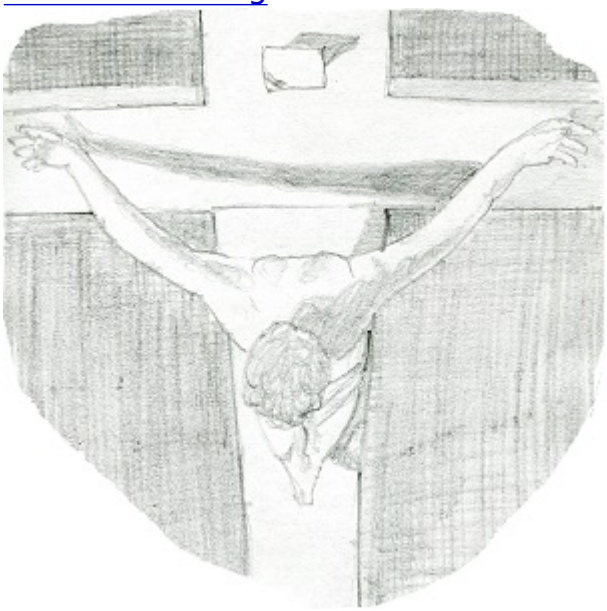
Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





by Pat Marrin

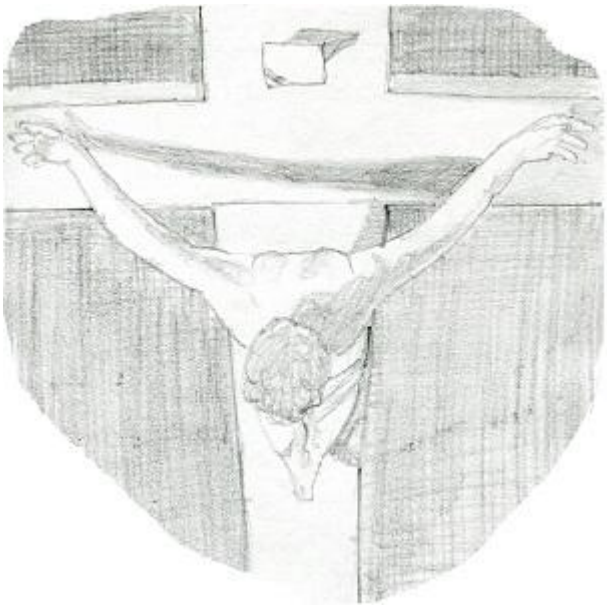
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“When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I AM” (John 8:28).

Nm 21:4-9; Jn 8:21-30

The author of the fourth Gospel was a master at using words with multiple meanings to draw his readers deeper and deeper into the revelation of who Jesus is.

For example, the word for “to see” describes both physical sight and insight, including the graced insight that is faith. Unbelievers see only the surface, while others believe. Some say that they see, but, like the scribes and Pharisees, because of their hostility to Jesus, they are actually blind.

At the heart of the Gospel is another powerful phrase layered with different meanings that add up to the startling revelation that for those who see deeply, Jesus is the very presence of God, the I AM revealed to Moses in the burning bush. The phrase, “the lifting up of the Son of Man” is how Jesus is revealed to be God.

Its ultimate meaning is that Jesus is being “held up for all to see,” and it is about “Glory,” the revelation of God. But to open the eyes of both believers and the world, Jesus must be lifted up in another, horrifying way, by being crucified. Only when God’s Christ is lifted up on the cross will all the other signs of the fourth Gospel come together in a moment of revelation that reveals God’s plan for overcoming sin and death.

In today’s Gospel passage, another ancient story is invoked to highlight the meaning of the cross. When the Hebrews were attacked and bitten by snakes in the desert,

God instructs Moses to fashion a bronze serpent on a pole to be lifted up for the people to see. Those who see it are healed. The cause of their suffering is the source of their healing.

So, Jesus, the cursed one hanging on the cross, is in fact absorbing the poison of evil by taking on himself the sins of the world. Those who see (believe in him) are saved. “Lifting up” Jesus on the cross is his passage into Glory. It is also his resurrection, ascension and the moment at Pentecost when he breathes forth the Spirit in his last breath. All of this is revealed at the moment of his death.

Lent is a journey toward greater and greater sight. This is why Jesus is presented as light. As long as we remain in the dark, we will be unable to grasp the mystery of his death and resurrection and how it applies to us. The first and most important prayer for the disciple is, “Lord, let me see.” Then we will be for others the “light of the world,” authentic evangelists.

Pray for light, pray to see, take the next step, and keep your eyes on the prize, who is Jesus himself, advancing to Jerusalem just ahead.

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