

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

John 3:16 is perhaps the most widely recognized verses in the New Testament. The first reason of this is that, it simply summarises the final phase of God's plan of salvation for all humanity in a single sentence: *For God loved the world in this way He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.* This single sentence acts as its own declaration of faith for believers. The other reason flows from its simplicity, which allows Christians to use this verse in all sorts of ways to spread the Gospel.

God loved the world... Rather than being a stand-offish creator, who simply set things in motion and went away, God is involved in an ongoing relationship with the creation, remains a part of it, and passionately cares for it. This is seen throughout the Biblical story, as God calls creation good, and through relationship with the people of Israel, leads them to the Promised Land. And through the prophets God speaks to the people, and seeks to get them to respond by living in the right way. God so loved the world ... that God did all this, and finally, in the great act of love gave it Jesus.

The concept of spiritual rebirth Jesus mentions in the same passage would have seemed foreign to Nicodemus, given the common understanding of God's plan for Israel at the time. This would have been a relatively revolutionary concept for the people of Israel at that time. They felt that they belonged to God through birthright as descendants of Abraham. While they certainly understood about sin and repentance — the Pharisees in particular — they would have balked at the notion that they needed a rebirth of any kind to enter into God's favor.

The concept and need for spiritual rebirth would have been much more foreign to Nicodemus than to us, and perhaps more so still for other members of the Sanhedrin class in Israel. The need for such a rebirth would undermine their claim for authority, and especially their claim to be learned in the ways of God, on which that authority rested. Is that so different than our own personal understanding in this age, though? At times in my life, I want to shrug off the responsibility that **spiritual renewal** puts in my life. It sometimes might require too much effort from me...just think it over a little bit.

Immediately following that passage, Jesus then explains (written in John 3:16-18) that He is the new and complete healing for the world. Moses offered a serpent only as an anti-poison to save the people of Israel, to offer them healing.

Moses lifted up the serpent staff in the wilderness to heal those afflicted by snakebites from a punishment sent by God for Israel's lack of faith.

In order to have a part in eternal life, simply being a physical descendant of Abraham will not be enough. People will need to form themselves spiritually through faith in God and belief in His Son, who brings healing and light into the world.

When I meet a nice and welcoming person and if that person invites me to his or her home I accept the invitation. I wonder about his lifestyle his room, how he or she cooks, and so on. And it works also the other way: If I make a new acquaintance I invite that person to my home, to visit me. I would like to share my perspective my home and my life to see if he or she likes it. It is even more interesting if I see not only his home, but also his family: his wife, children, parents, all the people who he loves, and by who he is loved. Most people become more visible in their relationships rather than by themselves.

Jesus' most beautiful gift to mankind is that he opened up his inner life to us in a welcoming way. He introduced us to His Father, invited us to his home, he introduced his mission from the Father, all what he had learnt from him and all that he wanted to give to us. Jesus declares his father's love towards him and his intention to share this love with us, too. His unity with the Father should be reflected in our lives, too so that we can also be in unity with the Son, Jesus Christ.

He also declared that by the end of his mission when he returns to his father he is going to send his supporting Holy Spirit, to make us remember all what he has shared with us from his Father's spiritual goods. The Holy Spirit is our Comforter so that without Jesus' we should not feel lonely. The Spirit is with us for ever.

God is not lonely. His inner life, his relationships: became an open book in front of our eyes through Jesus. We are invited to his communion of love by our baptism. That is why we act out baptism in the name of the Holy Trinity: God's household, his loving relationships. We are invited to this in eternity. We belong to this communion for ever! So today we give thanks to God for opening up his inner life to us – in itself is wonderful! We are invited so we should live worthy for this invitation.

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