

Homily – John 3: 14-21
Fourth Sunday of Lent, Year B
13/ 14 March 2021, Sooey

Near Mobile, Alabama, there was a railroad bridge that spanned a big bayou. The date was September 22, 1993. It was a foggy morning, just before daybreak, when a tugboat accidentally pushed a barge into the bayou. The drifting barge slammed into the river bridge. In the darkness no one could see the extent of the damage, but someone on the tugboat radioed the Coast Guard. Minutes later, an Amtrak train, the Sunset Limited, reached the bridge as it traveled from Los Angeles to Miami. Unaware of the damage, the train crossed the bridge at 70 miles per hour. There were 220 passengers on board. As the weight of the train broke the support, the bridge gave away. Three locomotive units and the first four of the train's eight passenger cars fell into the alligator infested bayou.

In the darkness, the fog was thickened by fire and smoke. Six miles from land, the victims were potential food for the aroused alligators. Helicopters were called in to help rescue the victims. Rescuers were able to save 163 persons.

But one rescue stands out. Gary and Mary Jane Chancey were waiting in the railcar with their eleven-

year-old daughter Andrea. When the car went into the bayou and began to fill rapidly with water, there was only one thing they could do. They pushed their young daughter through the window into the hands of a rescuer, and then succumbed to their watery death. Their sacrificial love stands out especially because their daughter was imperfect by the world's standards. She was born with cerebral palsy and needed help with even the most routine things. But she was precious to her parents.

Well, we too, are imperfect – our lives filled with mistakes, sin and helplessness. But we are still precious to God – so precious that He sacrificed his Son Jesus to save us. And today's Gospel tells us how a perfect God sent His perfect Son to save an imperfect world.

Jesus, the Son of God, has become the agent of God's salvation, not just for one sinful nation but for the sinfulness of the whole world. Through John 3:16, the Gospel teaches us that God has expressed His love, mercy, and compassion for us all by giving His only-begotten Son for our salvation.

Well, John 3:16 is probably the best loved verse in the Bible and it has been called "everybody's text" and the "Gospel of the Gospels." *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, so that everyone*

who believes in Him might not perish but might have eternal life.”

This is the summary of the Gospel message of salvation through Christ Jesus. This text is the very essence of the Gospel. It tells us that God takes the initiative in all salvation because of His love for man. As St. Augustine puts it: “God loves each one of us as if there were only one of us to love.” It is our God who brings us to greater belief in our daily struggles and temptations, and leads us to eternal life, thus demonstrating the depth of His love for us.

Now, we need to reciprocate God’s love by loving others. God’s love is unconditional, universal, forgiving, and merciful.

Several years ago a bomb was detonated outside the huge oak doors of a Greek Catholic Church in Jerusalem. The heavy doors were blown inward so that they careened up to the front of the sanctuary and destroyed the chancel area. Windows were blown out, pews were destroyed, and the balcony collapsed. Dr. Ken Bailey, a Presbyterian missionary scholar and friend of the priest of the Greek Church, stopped by to assess the damage. It took little time to determine that the priest was in shock and unable to make necessary decisions. So Dr. Bailey took it upon himself to ask

seminary administrators at the school where he taught to close classes, and he invited students to join him in helping the priest.

They cleaned the church and boarded the windows to prevent looting. The next day, Bailey again called on his friend. The maid confided in him that the priest did not cry at the bomb's destruction. However, she added, "He did cry when you and your friends helped clean up the mess it made." — Dr. Bailey has since remarked, "I did not teach any theology that afternoon — or did I?" If theology is about love in action, he held one of his best classes that day. The truth is...faith is never so beautiful as when it has its working clothes on.

Well, today we are invited to be signs and bearers of God's love to those around us. Let us live a life that makes a difference. And let the Light of Christ shine through us into the lives of the people around us.

God bless you all, **Amen.**