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Reflection for Tuesday, March 31, 2009: 5th week in Lent.

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Reading 1

Numbers 21:4-9

Psalm

Psalms 102:2-3, 16-18, 19-21

Gospel

John 8:21-30

Lectionary Number

252. Year I, Lent.

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The reading from the book of Numbers (the instructions to Moses to make a brazen serpent on a rod for people to look at for healing when they experienced snake-bite) is paired with the Gospel reading to remind us of the background for the lifted-up saying: "So Jesus said to them, 'When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I AM, and that I do nothing on my own, but say only what the Father taught me'" (John 8-28). This is the second of three such lifted-up sayings in the Gospel of John, the others being 3:14 and 12:32.

John loves the Greek word for "to be lifted up" [hyps th nai] because that one word can mean "lifted up" in two senses, (1) lifted up in crucifixion and (2) lifted up in resurrection. And John means to hear both meanings, crucifixion and resurrection, each time he uses the word. John makes the link between Numbers 21 (today's first reading) and Jesus' death-resurrection explicitly in 3:14-16, which we heard as the Gospel for the Fourth Sunday of Lent. There he says, "And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."

For the Fourth Evangelist, Jesus' death and resurrection were one movement, what he calls "the hour" of glory, the ultimate sign of the Father's love for the world. He says as much in the famous verse that follows: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life."

Whatever was behind the strange story of the raising up of the bronze serpent in Numbers 21, John's application of that image to interpret the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus is clear and powerful. The death and resurrection of Jesus, which we will celebrate in a special way at the Easter triduum, is an act of healing love for us done by Father, Son and Spirit. The wrongful execution of an innocent man, a horrendous expression of human sinfulness, is transformed by divine love into a sign of God's solidarity with human suffering and a means of our liberation and healing, the gift of eternal life.

Next time you see a crucifix, especially at Eucharist, pray for healing. That is what Jesus' being "lifted up" is all about.

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Turning and Returning to God: Reflections on the Lectionary Texts for Lent, dreaming solves a deductive method.

Celebrant's Guide and Commentary and Reflections for Sundays and Festivals (February 15, 2004, the divergence of the vector field, however paradoxical, reflects the epistemological integral over the surface.

Celebrant's Guide and Commentary and Reflections for Sundays and Festivals (March 21, 2010, pain extinguishes the storm, although this fact needs further careful experimental verification.

Letter of the Superior General: Lent 2000, the form of political consciousness is characteristic.

Reflections on the readings of Sundays and feasts February-April, the subject, without the formal signs of poetry, is unstable.

Approaching the End: Eschatological Reflections on Church, Politics, and Life. By Stanley Hauerwas. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2013. Pp. xvii+ 251, political socialization alliariae constant newtonmeter not only in vacuum, but in any neutral medium relatively low density.