

## 4<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY OF LENT

Nicodemus is at the centre of today's Gospel. Even though he appears only three times in the Gospel story (all three appearances occur in John), he is a very interesting character. He was a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin – the supreme court of the Jews.

The first time Nicodemus appears is in the Gospel passage to which we've just listened. We are told that he was impressed by the teaching and deeds of Jesus. It was clear to him that the hand of God was in them. So he came to see Jesus, but did so under the cover of darkness, which suggests that he didn't want to be seen. But let's not be too hard on him. Given the fact that he was a Pharisee, it was a wonder that he came at all. Jesus honoured him with a long interview (although it seems that Jesus did most of the talking) – today's Gospel !!

By the time Nicodemus puts in his second appearance, opposition to Jesus had hardened. By now the Pharisees had made up their minds to kill him, and were ready to do so without even giving him a trial. But Nicodemus intervened, declaring that Jesus should at least be given a fair hearing as the Law demanded (Jn. 7:51). And the third and last time Nicodemus appears is at the burial of Jesus. It was he who provided a large quantity of expensive spices for his burial ((Jn. 19:39).

So what might we deduce about Nicodemus from these three brief occasions ? I think this first appearance shows that he was an open-minded man, and a genuine seeker of the truth. He was a fair-minded man, when he insisted that Jesus should not be condemned without a trial. The third appearance suggests that he was a wealthy man, but also a generous and compassionate one.

All of these qualities we can admire and copy with profit. But what Nicodemus seems to have been unable to do was to come straight out and make a full and public act of faith in Jesus. He just doesn't seem to have had the courage to come out of the darkness and choose decisively for the light. We are left, I think, with a picture of a decent man, who could have been a great man. A mediocre person – neither a great saint nor a great sinner.

Perhaps reflecting on Nicodemus should challenge us to come out from the shadows, and not be afraid or ashamed to profess openly our faith in Jesus, and to be ready to pay whatever price is required for doing so. We probably

won't meet violence – long may **that** security continue in our country – but we may have to deal with ridicule or cynicism !

Those who believe will not be lost, but will have eternal life. But it is not simply a matter of believing..... the challenge of the Gospel is that we live according to that belief. No hiding in the shadows !!