

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Apr 5th 2016

Our Hope for Everlasting Life

In today's Gospel passage Nicodemus, a Pharisee and a leading Jew, comes to Jesus at night; maybe this is just so that no one sees him do so, but maybe it also symbolizes one man trying to move beyond the night which the Pharisees seem to find themselves in. His first comment is nothing more than a polite opening move, and Jesus advances the exchange by putting a curious statement on the table; this is reminiscent of the exchange between Jesus and the Samaritan Woman, who one-up each other until she realizes, from what He tells her, who He is.

But the second time Nicodemus speaks, he is careful and only asks a question --- although with a hint of disbelief and almost mockery. When he speaks a third time (which will come in tomorrow's reading), he only asks "How can that be possible?"

On the whole this entire passage is not so much a conversation as it is an excuse for Jesus (or John) to present some ideas. The whole passage, begun as a conversation, slides so easily and so thoroughly from conversation to commentary that it is virtually impossible to separate what Christ says from what the commentary is.

We need to note that Nicodemus appears only twice more in John: he contests the plan of the Pharisees and chief priests to arrest Jesus (7:50-51) and then brings 100 pounds (!) of myrrh and aloes to prepare Christ's body for burial. Whatever we might think of the subject of the "conversation" in today's Gospel, it seems clear that by the time of Christ's death Nicodemus was well on that path to rebirth or being born from on high.

But what does that say to us? Maybe simply that we sometimes feel lost in the nighttime darkness of our lives and that we need to approach Jesus in our solitary desperation. Rebirth, just as the more usual birth, takes time to prepare --- and is only done in darkness....

Chas Kestermeier, S.J.-Creighton University's English Department