

**Bronze Serpent**      Fifth Week of Lent      Tuesday, March 15, 2016      8:15 AM  
**Nm 21:4-9; Jn 8:21-30**      (Do we turn away from something and we don't even know what we are turning away from?)

Today we have a story in the Book of Numbers which is taken from the wandering period. **Many of the stories** of the wandering of the people and the occupying of the land of Israel **are implausible, but they all reflect something about the history later on**—we are not always sure what. For example the story of the golden calf, it is very implausible that Aaron was able to construct a golden calf in the desert. But we do know later on, much later on, the Aaronic priesthood served in a Temple in Dan that had a golden calf, and that the king and the people there said this was an image of the God who brought them from the desert. So we know that happened, and so **we can see how a writer would write something about how it really took place long ago and was answered by Moses and dealt with.**

Here we have another situation, not as easy to understand. It is possible that there were saraph serpents, but the word “saraph” is a very interesting word. It really comes from the Hebrew word meaning “to burn.” It is used in the plural, seraphim, to refer to spirits serving in the heavenly Temple, the Seraphim. Also it is used to refer to the stars in the night sky, which also burn. It is also used to refer to serpents whose bite is burning. Now at first it might seem this is just a coincidence, but **there really was a bronze serpent in the Temple in Jerusalem.** What was it doing there, and what did it mean? Actually no one is sure, but this story is about that; it's about that bronze serpent. And it was used to remind people of something. Now whether this reminder is a hundred percent authentic or not, that we cannot say. **But the story indicates that the people when they experienced disaster**, when they experienced the trauma of this attack of nature apparently, they **started to realize that they had not put their trust in God**, that they

were complaining all the time, that they were not following, that they were rebelling. **And then they looked at this as a punishment.**

**Now was it really a punishment** or was it just something that happened? **That we can't tell, but this is the way they interpreted their history.** When bad things happened, they said we must have done something wrong. And this happened throughout the history of Israel. So that part of it is very believable. And **probably the bronze serpent in the Temple was supposed to remind them of their infidelity, so encourage them to be faithful, to listen, and to follow more faithfully the word of God.** That is anyway a very possible interpretation of the story.

**Throughout the Scripture we always have God addressing people.** What is astonishing is that **so often people just turn away.** It's in the Old Testament; it's in the New Testament. It's in today's gospel, people just turning away, **and often not even comprehending what they are turning away from.** Are the authors of Holy Scripture trying to tell us something? **Is this happening on a regular basis** that we turn away from something and we don't even know what we are turning away from?