

ⁱⁱNumbers 21:4-9

From Mount Horeb they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. The people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food." Then the LORD sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned by speaking against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD to take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. The LORD said to Moses, "Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live." So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

ⁱⁱ About the First Reading: Numbers 21:4-9

This reading describes the incident that the evangelist John uses to understand the healing power of Christ's death on the cross. For their lack of faith in God's power to provide food for them on their wilderness journey, the people are punished by poisonous serpents. When the people admit their sinfulness and seek God's forgiveness through Moses' intercession, God provides an outward sign—the bronze serpent—that when looked upon unleashed God's life-giving power.