

5th (SJ&QA) Sunday of Lent Year B

It is remarkably interesting that all three readings this Sunday point in their different ways towards the passion and death of Jesus. The coming days of Jeremiah seem somehow in line with the hour of Jesus, when Israel learned to obey the Lord from what they suffered after years of exile in Babylon. The covenant restored and they finally come to know the Lord, which in biblical language means to be redeemed. Moreover, in the hour of Jesus that now arrives He will be lifted up on the cross and, in the language of Hebrews, *will learn obedience from what he suffers*. As Jeremiah surmised God will not abandon the Jewish people for breaking the old covenant. Instead God will form a new relationship based on love and personal respect and put a new heart and new spirit in His people through His son. This focuses our attention on the first Holy Thursday evening, the night before Jesus dies, when raising the cup He established the New Covenant in his blood to be shed for the forgiveness of sins.

In today's gospel, Jesus talks about his coming hour—*the time of his death and exaltation*. It started when some Greeks who heard about the great things Jesus did approached Philip with the request that they wanted to meet Jesus. And so Philip and Andrew went to tell Jesus about this request. And from there on we get a bit lost. Jesus didn't give an answer to the request. Instead He went on a monologue that begins with "*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.*" If we were

those two disciples we could have reacted by asking, ‘*what?*’ But it was only after the Resurrection that they figured out the context and perspective of His words. Jesus’ hour has come and He says that His soul is troubled. This is St. John’s version of the agony in the garden. However, Jesus cannot ask to be spared his agony as God’s kingdom will only come through crucifixion and death. He expresses what He has to undergo in simple terms by giving an example from the world of nature. Like a grain of wheat he must fall to the ground and die, but in so doing, he will produce much fruit—*eternal life*.

Jesus is a man of paradox. He said, “*Lose Your Life to Save It*” *How can we gain life while dying?* He did many things backward to our thinking. “*To be truly great in life, seek to be the least!*” The grain of wheat dying in the earth indicates how we must die to our selfishness before we can start living His life. This is what to be buried in the earth means - *avoiding sin, accepting suffering, and living for others*. In every place and in every heart the struggle between evil and good is still with us. The standards of the world are very different from His. Jesus is “*The Way*.” Some think *He’s just in the way!* If you are heading in the wrong direction *God allows U-Turns. Remember God is in the Recycle Business!*

Death is the final event. But this can be anticipated in the “*little deaths*” one encounters in life. This dying a little every day is the dying to the ‘*old self*’ so that one can rise to a new life, a new way of

perceiving reality. This is the example that Jesus sets. He willingly surrenders himself to the Father's desire. *Are you seeking for true life? He who seeks his life will lose it, but he who loses his life will find it.*" To have a true relationship with Jesus we must give up something. *We need courage as well as grace to leave the familiar behind.* Next Sunday the Church enters into Holy Week inviting us to journey with Jesus through His passion. For the Elect this week is the final chapter of their preparation for Baptism, as they undergo purification and receive enlightenment through the final Scrutiny. And for us, as Jesus' passion approaches we should renew our efforts to the sacrament of confession to remove the layers of sin through which the power of evil has made inroads into our lives.

The actions and responses of Jesus remind us that discipleship means walking our own distinct path to glory. Following Jesus means *travelling the same road, laying down our lives, and leaving everything completely in the hands of God the Father.* It invokes a loss of life if life is to be gained. Every Christian is called to live out the passion of Jesus. No one is excused or spared its agony. *"No cross to bear, no crown to wear."* There are no crown-wearers in heaven who were not cross-bearers on earth.

For some people the loss of life is literal; they are called to martyrdom. We have our modern examples. There have been inspiring Christians who have faced oppressive governments in defense of the

rights of others. There are those who in their busy lives have time to cook for and feed the poor. Think of the people who accept a terminal disease with serenity, *even joy*. Then there are those who are always available, never inconvenienced, who never count the cost. Those who give love to the children of broken marriages, those who care for their elderly parents in their final years. Yes, there are many paths of glory. There is great destiny before us. But on that path the seed must die, for only death brings life. As we step into Holy Week, may our prayer be just as Jesus prayed in Gethsemane. *"Not my will but your will be done!"*
Amen!