

## **Fifth Sunday of Lent March 18, 2018**

Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 5:7-9; John 12:20-33

We are just one week away from the Holy Week and away from our celebration of God's love shown in the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. For us Christians this season of Lent is a time of special grace in which we experience the presence of a personal God who cares and loves us. Our response is to transform ourselves and live according to his will. We want to do something new and come to him in obedience and freedom. Before him we acknowledge our weakness and we know that he is the one who supports us and builds with us new relationship. We ought to change our lives during Lent and come closer to him. Therefore the Church calls this season as a joyful time, because it is our preparation for the future joy of Easter that approaches us bringing his blessings, mercy and forgiveness. We realize that God has made a covenant with us through our baptism like he made with the Israelites as we hear in the first reading of today. Here God looks beyond the failure of his people and takes the initiative to establish a new covenant with the house of Israel. In the second reading we are reminded of Jesus' life of prayer and suffering and through his sufferings he learnt to be obedient to his Father. Now he is perfect in heaven and he is able to save all who obey him. The Gospel of today tells us of the moment of the pain and troubled heart of Jesus and he calls on his Father to glorify him. There is the voice heard from heaven which confirms the unity and harmony between the Father and Jesus. At the same time some Greeks show their desire to meet Jesus indicating the mission of Jesus is for all and not for the Jews alone.

In the First Reading taken from the Book of Jeremiah we hear of God's promise of a New Covenant with his people. A covenant meant an agreement between two unequal persons, freely entered into, binding perpetually, and sealed by blood. The old covenant was inscribed in stone in the days of the exodus in the desert. It marked the beginning of a special bond between God and his people. God was loyal of the terms of the covenant but the people were not. As Moses warned them, the years of disloyalty to God would eventually lead them to exile outside the Promised Land. But this oracle brings the good news that God is not done with the covenants. The life giving purpose of the old covenant will be carried forward by a new one. But this new covenant will be distinct from the former one in that it will be inscribed in the hearts of the people, so that people's commitment may be made interior. It will not be something to be taken from the outside; it will come from the depth of their heart. However, the initiative will come entirely from God. All the people from the least to the

greatest will know God, recognizing instinctively that their true purpose in life is to serve God. In the new age the Divine Teacher will assume this task. God's method of instruction will be total forgiveness extended to the people. It seems the experience of such love will be enough to motivate them to absolute loyalty to God's saving word.

Today's Second Reading from the Letter to the Hebrews teaches us, through the example of Jesus, how we must respond to God's calling that draws us to him. The author tells us that in his human nature, Jesus learned obedience through what he suffered. Through his suffering, Jesus was made perfect. Through perfection, he became the source of salvation for all who obey him. The reading tells us that Jesus also had a fear of death. In his physical body, he was just as human as each one of us. He worked, taught word of God, mixed with people, ate and drank, relaxed and cried like any of us. Even though he was divine, he lowered himself to the level of humanity and prayed to his heavenly Father to take his sufferings away. But he submitted himself to the fullness of the Divine Will of God the Father. From this perfect example of obedience and submission, we learn that through suffering, our souls are sanctified. When we endure sufferings we are spiritually enlightened to the needs of those who are suffering. From every form of suffering, there is a spiritual lesson to be learned. Suffering sanctifies the soul so it may become more in the likeness of Christ who is perfect. Jesus is the source of salvation for those who obey him. Therefore we must always be thankful to Jesus for what he sends us, trusting in his infinite grace to sanctify us through his Spirit.

The Gospel of today begins with the desire of the Greeks who were among those who had come to Jerusalem to worship at the feast to meet Jesus. These perhaps were not the Greek-speaking Jews but were gentiles. So they went to Philip, one of the disciples of Jesus, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and requested him to make such visit possible. The scene is much the same as when Jesus called his first disciples and Philip and Andrew were present as connecting link to that event. This also prefigures the church's future mission to the gentiles. This event took place on Palm Sunday itself, the day of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. This welcome of Jesus into the Holy City was so remarkable that the Greeks, who were known as foreigners, who were not living in Palestine, desired to see Jesus. In a similar way we can see our today's gospel as a preparation for the Palm Sunday, the day when the Lord received a royal welcome. We do this welcome both with our soul and body that is, by praying, at the same time by greeting him with blessed palms, which symbolizes the eternal Victory of Christ in his Church. Jesus responded

to them saying that the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. In a real way this is an eschatological moment pointing to the death of Jesus and that was the moment of his glorification. Jesus was aware of everything, for he is not only Man, but he is also, and first, God. Therefore he was very much aware of the closeness of his Passion and his Resurrection immediately afterwards. Jesus was aware of the hour of his glorification of his body which was the gift of his Father to him.

In the Gospel passage of today we have a series of concentrated teachings about the meaning of death of Jesus and the urgency of the hour. The tone is set by the imagery of a grain of wheat. Jesus tells his disciples: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life." Here Jesus tells us that this is the price of eternal life. The grain, of course, does not actually die but is totally transformed into something completely new: roots, leaves and fruit. Jesus here speaks about his own life which he sacrificed in order to gain new life in the Kingdom. He invites us too to be ready to lose our life for the sake of Jesus in order to gain eternal life. Our soul is immortal, but our body can be separated from our soul and can thus die in order to gain eternal life. Jesus has done so for us by giving his life for us so that we may gain fruit in plenty. The fruit refers to the community of believers that will emerge as a result of his death. A parabolic saying teaches that authentic love of life requires losing it and that the real meaning of life is not to be found in this world. Rather it is to be found in union with God. This attitude and approach that Jesus has towards life and death is to be imitated by his disciples. Death is understood here as a service. It is the giving of one's life so that life may indeed flourish. In all of this the emphasis is on the meaning of Jesus' death and not on pain and suffering of dying.

The passage closes with an emphasis on the hour of Jesus. At this juncture the Lord says that his soul is troubled. For him this was a moment of desolation and he looked forward to seek his Father's help. At the same time he feels certain and confident that he has come to this hour because of his Father's will. The hour that refers to is the moment of his death, which in John's Gospel is a permanent saving event. It is that moment when God fully glorifies Jesus, raised up and exalted on the cross, which now becomes the sign of his total victory. Humanly speaking we know that it is not easy for anyone to accept death. Jesus himself even though is the God-man has shown us how difficult such situation is. Through his example he wanted to show us the difficulty we

might encounter in accepting our death. Therefore he prays: "Father, save me from this hour." This is the cry of Jesus in this trial, the struggle that he would relive even more intensely on the evening of Holy Thursday, in the garden of Gethsemane. But he immediately regains his composure in the power and the grace of God which will always triumph if we believe in its omnipotence. Jesus with his trust in his Father is not struggling with the agony and suffering at this hour. The issue here is the urgency of the hour that the time has come for his glorification.

When Jesus confesses that his soul is troubled and that he would ask his Father to save him from this hour, it was actually the moment his triumph and he prays the Father to allow him to glorify his holy name. The Father responds to him immediately. The prayer of Jesus was answered by a voice from heaven confirming the meaning of this hour. The voice of the Father said clearly: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." He has already glorified Christ in his life and miracles. A glimpse of his divine glory was given at his transfiguration before his disciples. His glory will be more fully manifest at his resurrection. The crowd did indeed hear the voice but they would not understand the meaning of it. While the Jews understood the word glorification as the conquering of armies and liberation from a foreign rule, glorification for Jesus meant being exalted on the cross. Just as at transfiguration the voice of the Father was to strengthen the disciples, so also now this voice was specially to prepare them for the crucifixion. Jesus promises that his cross will put an end to all evil in the world and give them glorified life. Thus the purpose of his dying on the cross is to make eternal salvation available to all people.

The message the Good News gives us today is that the way to glory is our death to self for Jesus and be raised with him. Through our dying we are able to reach our own resurrection or new life. Today Jesus explains to us this law of Lent which is the law of life, through the metaphor of the grain of wheat or any seed. When preserved safely it produces no fruit and remains unproductive. Only when it is buried in the ground does it bear fruit and that in far greater abundance than itself. Our entire lives are similarly a cycle of dying and rising. It is when we are prepared to die that our lives become the most fruitful. If we have been acting on those principles, when we confront people who have hurt us, we could happily say, I am different now and my old self died a long time ago. Therefore Jesus invites us today to spend our lives for others in order to find God in them. Jesus was indeed troubled in anticipation of his agony and yet was aware of his Father's will which he accepted in obedience. The voice of the Father that he heard was the confirmation of his

closeness to the Father. The result of his glorification therefore was life-giving and a sacrifice. Through his cross he will draw all of us to himself so that we too may glorify in him.

When we participate in this Sunday Eucharist, we will be able sacramentally to relive this victory of Christ over the prince of this world. We shall be invited by Jesus to come and take our fill of his divine life, which he offers to us in the Eucharist. It is Jesus who let go of everything for our sake and he invites us to let go of ourselves in order to be with him all the way. He is the New Covenant and in his love, forgiveness, concern and compassion he lived his divine word. Through our Lenten prayer, fasting, penance and charity we shall discover Jesus in our day to day Christian life and like him seek for our glorification in the Father. Let us pray for courage and total trust like Jesus in his Father, that the new life, joy, happiness and fulfilment we all long for, is discovered in that letting go and letting God. It is the strength and the power of his Love that invites us to join him in that place where he is present for all eternity: in the haven of our soul. We pray to the Blessed Virgin Mary to help us to prepare ourselves well for this royal feast. We ask the grace that we may allow God that his love and forgiveness may open us up to the total transformation needed in our lives.

Horror gripped the heart of a World War-I soldier, as he saw his lifelong friend fall in battle. The soldier asked his Lieutenant if he could go out to bring his fallen comrade back. "You can go," said the Lieutenant, "but don't think it will be worth it. Your friend is probably dead and you may throw your life away." "The Lieutenant's words didn't matter, and the soldier went anyway. Miraculously, he managed to reach his friend, hoisted him onto his shoulder and brought him back to their company's trench. The officer checked the wounded soldier, and then looked kindly at his friend. "I told you it wouldn't be worth it," he said. "Your friend is dead and you are mortally wounded." "It was worth it, Sir," said the soldier. "What do you mean by worth it?" responded the Lieutenant. "Your friend is dead." "Yes Sir," the soldier answered, "but it was worth it because when I got to him, he was still alive and I had the satisfaction of hearing him say...."Jim...I knew you'd come."

15-year-old Douglas Maurer had suffered from a high fever and flu-like symptoms for several days. So finally his mother took him to the hospital where Douglas was diagnosed as having leukaemia. The doctors explained the disease to him and said that for the next three years he would have to undergo intense chemotherapy. They told him of the side effects that would follow -

baldness and a bloated body - which sent him into a deep depression. To lift his spirits, Douglas' aunt called a local floral shop to order and send him a flower arrangement. She told the clerk it was for her teenage nephew who had leukaemia. When the beautiful flowers arrived at the hospital, Douglas read the card from his aunt. Then he saw a second card attached that said: "Douglas, I took your order. I work at Brix florist. I had leukaemia when I was 7 years old. I'm 22 years old now. Good luck. My heart goes out to you. Sincerely, Laura Bradley." For the first time, his face lit up. Douglas Maurer was in a hospital filled with sophisticated medical equipment and technology. He was being treated by some of the best doctors and nurses around. But it was a simple sales clerk in a flower shop that took the time to care and helped give Douglas the necessary hope to carry on.

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