

Fifth Sunday of Lent

Today's Gospel begins with Jesus in the temple and he's preaching to the people. And some Greeks are also in the temple, but in the Gentile side of the temple. They have come around because it's going to be a great festival day the following Saturday and they've come to worship at the Passover feast.

And they came to Philip. Philip is one of the twelve disciples. But Philip also has a Greek name and a Latin name — Philip is not a Jewish name — and so perhaps the Greeks felt that he would understand a little bit more.

Now many, many, many times Greeks did come to Jerusalem, because the Jewish people had a reputation for having a kind of faith that people of the whole world were looking for at that time.

Like all people, they were searching for meaning to their lives. Anyhow, when Jesus heard that they were there, he spoke to them. It's the only time he spoke to them and he spoke to them in these words:

"The hour has come for the Son of Man..."

Son of Man by now means the Messiah, the Anointed One of God.

"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."

Strange way of talking about glory. Glory means that he will be revealed, the Son of Man, the Messiah, will be revealed to all.

And then, to warn them, he says to them,

*Amen, amen, I say to you,
unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies,
it remains just a grain of wheat;
but if it dies, it produces much fruit.
Whoever loves his life loses it,
and whoever hates his life in this world
will preserve it for eternal life.*

Jesus is saying that the revelation of the Messiah, the One promised from God, the great understanding of who he is, will be given only on Calvary, when he's nailed to a cross.

And then they will know that God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that the whole world might be saved.

It had nothing to do with the next weeks or months, and it had everything to do with the self-sacrificing Messiah who now becomes the new meaning for all peoples who believe, for to follow Jesus, as you know, is to follow a crucifixion.

It is a self-sacrificing love that is the only heart of the Christian religion, although in truth it seems to be mixed up with an awful lot of other things.

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But if you know next week we begin with Palm Sunday when he comes in triumph.

And we follow him on Thursday where he teaches his disciples to wash each other's feet, to love each other and have no compromises.

And then on Good Friday we celebrate his death, where he is revealed as our Messiah, the One who is completely and totally taken up with the only solution for all, which is learn to love.

If you do not learn to love, we are in another world, but it is not the world of Jesus, for he himself has taught us, has taught us as a child growing up, as a young man lost in the temple, and then again to grow up to become the Messiah, and to be treated and rejected by the world.

And this incredible, absolutely incredible, vision of a man dying by suffocation and humiliation has become the sign and symbol of hope for those who follow Him.

And that is why he says, "We all must die before we can live."

It doesn't mean physically, although we will all die physically.

It means we must die to our selfishness, we must die to our enemies, we must die to our wars, we must die to all these things and give ourselves totally and completely to service. That service is the service of God Himself.

In conclusion, I'd like to read a little bit of a reflection that I found the other day. It is not signed, but it has to do with the grain of wheat and why it must die.

Each of us is like a grain of wheat planted by God.

*And just as a grain of wheat must die so as to produce a harvest,
so we too must die to self in order to bear the fruits of love.*

This dying to self is a gradual process and happens in little ways.

Every act of humility involves dying to pride.

Every act of courage involves dying to cowardice.

Every act of kindness involves dying to cruelty.

Every act of love involves dying to selfishness.

Thus the false self dies and true self, made in God's image, is born and nurtured.

It is by giving that we receive.

It is by forgiving that we ourselves are forgiven.

And it is by dying that we are born to eternal life.