

## MARCH 21, 2021 – FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

### Dear Parishioners:

Today, we are entering the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent.

In today's Gospel, John the Evangelist narrates an episode which took place during the feast of Passover in Jerusalem, where Jesus has come for the last time. The "Greeks," who are God-fearing Gentiles, said "We would like to see Jesus" (Jn 12:21). Jesus then responds indirectly but decisively in a prophetic way. First, Jesus pronounces a prophecy that reveals his identity: "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (Jn 12:23). Secondly, using the analogy of the grain of wheat, Jesus offers his final teaching to the public about the paradoxical movement of the Paschal law, the only path to know Him truly.

To the interview request of the Greeks, Jesus recognizes that the pinnacle of his mission has arrived. The time for him to die for the world. He no longer belongs to Judaism, which in any case has rejected him. The world, whose Savior he is, awaits him and wishes to meet him. It is the hour of Glorification, the hour of Passion, Death and Resurrection, and the hour of the Cross. It is the time for the defeat of Satan, the prince of evil, and the definitive triumph of the merciful love of God. His response means, "To see me, to meet me, and to comprehend this Paschal mystery, you have to gather around the shadow of the Cross. That is the only way to know me truly. But do not come to the Cross with empty hands. You must bring your own cross with you."

After that, Jesus says, "Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but it dies, it produces much fruit (Jn 12:24). He also said in Jn 12:32, "When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself". These Gospel passages have two opposite movements: falling to the ground and lifting up from the earth. In His salvation history, God Himself first showed this Paschal law of paradoxical dynamism to humankind: Jesus, God, the Son of God, emptied himself (in Greek, *kenosis*), descended to assume human flesh (incarnation). He was lifted to the Cross to be glorified (Passion and Death); He was lifted by the Father in the Resurrection and ascended and exalted to the Glory. With three Latin words, St. Augustine said in *Confession: Victor quia victima* (Victor because victim) and he also said that the loftiness of his glorification should be preceded by the lowliness of his passion. Even the Greek philosopher, Plato, tells us that the life of wisdom is 'a practice of death'.

The peace prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi starts, "Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace" and it ends "And it is in dying to ourselves that we are born to eternal life." We are called to take on the Paschal law of losing life in order to receive it renewed and eternal. We are called to take on this paradoxical dynamism of the grain of wheat. Then, what does it mean to be the grain of wheat? What does losing life mean? In his reflection during one of the 5th Lenten Sunday midday Angelus, Pope Francis said that it means to think less about oneself, about personal interests and to know how to "see" and to meet the needs of our neighbors, especially the least of them. Joyfully carrying out works of charity towards those who suffer in body and spirit is the most authentic way of living the Gospel of the grain of wheat.

After one grain of wheat dies on the ground, how many new grains of wheat do you guess it will produce? They say an average of forty new grains will grow from one grain. Therefore, in the first year, there will be 40, in the second year 1,600, in the third year 64,000, and so on. The fifth year's new produce will be close to 102 million. Through the analogy of the grain of wheat, Jesus also wants to explain to us that his extreme fate—that is the Cross, Death and

Resurrection—is an act of abundant fruitfulness. His death on the Cross became an inexhaustible source of new life because Jesus, true God and true man, by His Death on the Cross, completed the salvific cycle of the descending arm (incarnation) and ascending arm (resurrection/ascension) of God's regenerative Love. As such, one death on the Cross became the source of salvation for many who believe in Him to eternal life.

Jesus is offering three ways to those who wish to see Him and to those who are searching for the face of God: Listen to the Gospel, eat, and drink the Eucharist, then gaze at the Crucifix. We encounter Jesus in His Word and His Body and Blood. By gazing at the Cross, the sign of God's mercy and justice, we may meditate and understand an 'eternal gospel' of 'die into life'. We pray to our Almighty Father, with the help of the Holy Spirit, for the rest of Lenten season, by following Jesus' example on the Cross, that we may become grains of wheat in our daily life, so we may become sincere witnesses of our faith.

Amen.

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