

Fifth Sunday of Lent (B)

Gospel text (Jn 12:20-33): Some Greeks who had come to worship at the Passover Feast came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, “Sir, we would like to see Jesus.” Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 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. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there also will my servant be. The Father will honor whoever serves me.

“I am troubled now. Yet what should I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But it was for this purpose that I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it and will glorify it again.” The crowd there heard it and said it was thunder; but others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” Jesus answered and said, “This voice did not come for my sake but for yours. Now is the time of judgment on this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself.” He said this indicating the kind of death he would die.

“Whoever serves me must follow me”

Fr. Vimal MSUSAI
(Ranchi, Jharkhand, India)

Today's Gospel provided powerful words of encouragement in the faith journey of members of the persecuted early Christian community to whom the "beloved disciple" wrote. In this passage, the evangelist describes how, during the festivals in Jerusalem, some Greeks went to worship, and wanted to see Jesus with the help of disciples.

To "see" Jesus is not just to look at Him, which is what those Greeks presumably wanted. Rather, to "see" Jesus is to enter totally into his way of thinking, to understand why he had to suffer and die and rise again. Like the grain of wheat, Jesus has to let go of everything, including his own life, in order to bring life to him and many others.

If we cannot see this as the core of Jesus' life, we have not really seen Him. In the words of St. Athanasius, we can see Jesus only through death since "it is only through death, through the Cross that Christ bears much fruit for all the centuries." To "see" Jesus means recognizing that His undeserved death on the Cross has conferred the grace of faith and salvation to the whole human race. Mahatma Gandhi reflects the same, saying "the best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others."

Jesus' words remind us that we must follow in his steps even unto death. The grain, of course, does not actually die; rather, it is totally transformed into something completely new: roots, leaves and fruit (Easter). Similarly, the caterpillar lets go of being a caterpillar to become transformed into something altogether different and often much more beautiful—a butterfly.

And, if we want to see Jesus, we have to walk his Way. "Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there also will my servant be" (Jn 12:26). It means walking with Jesus and with Mary all the way to Calvary, wherever that happens to be for each of us. Jesus, who let go of everything for us, invites each of us to be with Him too— by letting go of ourselves, and letting our Father's will be done.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

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“They thought Christ unworthy of their belief; because in their impiety they treated His dying with contempt, they ridiculed the idea of His being slain: and yet it was the very death of the grain that was to lead to its own multiplication, and the lifting up of one who was drawing all things after Him.” (Saint Augustine)

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“He himself is the grain of wheat which came from God, the divine grain that lets itself fall to the ground, that lets itself sink, be broken down in death and precisely by so doing germinates and can thus bear fruit in the immensity of the world.” (Benedict XVI)

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“... But above all he would accomplish the coming of his kingdom... through his death on the cross and his Resurrection. ‘And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself’ (Jn 12:32). Into this union with Christ all men are called.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, N° 542)

Other comments

«Unless the grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much fruit»

Fr. Ferran JARABO i Carbonell
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Today, in the last part of Lent, the Church proposes this Gospel to help us attain Palm Sunday ready to live up to these mysteries so outstanding for our Christian life. The Via crucis, or the Way of the Cross, becomes for us Christians a “via lucis”, or the Way of Light, for dying is to be born again or, even better, we must die to this world so that we can live the Truth.

In the first part of this Gospel, Jesus tells the Apostles: «Unless the grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much fruit» (Jn 12:24). In this respect, St. Augustine comments: «Jesus said He was “grain”, that was to be mortified, to multiply afterwards; He was to be mortified by the infidelity of the Jews and He was to multiply for the faith of all the people». The bread of the Eucharist, made out of grains of wheat, is multiplied and divided to nourish all Christians. Dying in martyrdom always bear fruit; this is why «Those who love their life», paradoxically, «destroy it». Christ died to bear, with his blood,

fruit; we have to imitate Him to resurrect with Him and bear fruit with Him. Many are those who offer their lives silently for the welfare of their brothers. Through silence and self effacement we have to learn to become that grain that dies to get back to Life.

The Gospel of this Sunday ends with an exhortation to walk in the light of the Son lifted up from the earth: «And when I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all to myself» (Jn 12:32). Let God's light shine always through us to help us dissipating all darkness. It is God's moment now, let us not lose it! «Are you sleeping?; the time granted to you goes by fast!» (St. Ambrose of Milan). We must not stop being a light to the world. As the moon gets its light from the sun, we are to be seen reflecting God's light.