

Fifth Sunday of Lent B/2009

In high school biology there is the study of the transformational development of organisms, which is called “metamorphosis”. Metamorphosis is the post-embryonic change in some forms of animal, like in the case of the larva of an insect that becomes a pupa, or a tadpole that changes into a frog. This process is so important that if it does not happen, there will never be a new life. Today’s readings tell us that if we want God’s life to develop and grow within us, we have to accept to pass by a similar process of dying to ourselves.

In the first reading, the prophet Jeremiah speaks of the new covenant God is about to conclude with the people of Israel. This covenant will be different from that which God concluded once with their forefathers as he freed them from the bondage of Egypt.

Unlike the mosaic covenant that was written on the tablets of the stones, the new covenant will be written in the hearts of the people. Its principle will be interior, as God places his law in the very heart of the people. Therefore, in a sacred partnership, he will be forever their God and they will be his people. God will forgive all their sins and allow them to know him, not with their head, but from within, from their heart.

Why does God engage himself to conclude a new covenant with the people? Well, because Israel was unfaithful to its commitments before the Lord. That is why God wanted to heal that infidelity in recreating man anew and by giving him a new heart. Plus, God wanted to show his bounty and mercy that go beyond human sins. In other words, human sins will never destroy God’s love for us. God acts like a deceived partner who says to a beloved, “I give you a new chance; let us start again”.

The paroxysm of this love was manifested in the sending of Jesus in the world to be our savior. In order to fulfill that mission, Jesus had to go through suffering and death on the cross. In truth, all that was not a cup of tea. That is why the letter to the Hebrews says that Jesus “offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence”. Through his suffering and obedience, he was made perfect and became the source of salvation for all those who obey him.

Jesus has gone through the bitterest experiences of human life, and for that reason, he understands us in all our strength and weakness. Therefore, there is no agony of human life through which he has not come. He learned from all his experiences because he met them all with reverence.

In fact, God speaks to us in many experiences of life, and more specifically those in which we are in trial. However, we can hear his voice only when we accept in reverence what comes to us. If we accept it with resentment, the rebellious cries of our own heart make us deaf to the voice of God. In regard to all that, we can say that Lent becomes a moment of listening with attention to God murmuring to our hearts and calling us to conversion. Lent is a time of dying to ourselves and to our sins in order to let God’s life prosper in us.

All that helps us understand why Jesus declares in the Gospel that “unless the grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it

dies, it produces much fruit". By these words, Jesus wanted to say three things. First. Like a grain that is planted in the ground and produces fruit, it is only by death that comes life. It is always because men and women have been prepared to die that the great things have been done in the world. Think of the life of our militaries for the security of our country and of the world! But it becomes more personal than that. It is sometimes only when we bury personal desires and ambitions that we begin to be of real use to God and become his servants.

Second. It is only by spending life that we retain it. Those who love their lives more than anything else are moved only by selfishness and desire for security. Jesus insists that it is only by losing our life that we gain it. Think of what the world would have lost if there were no people prepared to forget their personal safety, security and interest for the sake of others.

Third. It is in only by service that greatness comes. In fact, the people whom the world remembers with love are not those who spend their lives by protecting it, but those who forget themselves and serve others with abnegation. That is what Jesus has done and that what he wants us to do for the church and for our brothers and sisters, especially in this time of Lent.

If we lead our lives in that sense, we will certainly be rewarded by the Father and share in Jesus' glory. As Jesus himself says, "Whoever loves his life will lose 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".

By referring to the mystery of the grain that dies in order to produce new life, Jesus wanted to prepare his disciples for his death and resurrection. By his obedience until death on the cross, Jesus has glorified the name of the Father. In turn, the Father will glorify him by raising him from death. Then, there will be a mutual glorification: the Son glorifying the Father and the Father glorifying the Son. In that sense, the death of Jesus becomes an opportunity for the Father to glorify Jesus. That is why I was talking about the process of metamorphosis through which what we lose on earth, we can attain in glory, in heaven.

Through this event, the judgment of the world has come. Humans are put in a position of choosing Jesus, and therefore, sharing in his glory; or choosing the devil who will soon be driven out. This is also the choice of Lent, that is, to be with Jesus or to be against him.

The Greeks who came to the feast of Passover understood well that the time of the decision has come. That is why they wanted to see Jesus and listen to him. Most importantly, Andrew and Phillip helped them to meet Jesus. We are, today, that intermediary for each other that has to help others to meet Jesus and make the decision for the future of their lives. May God bless you all!

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



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