

Fifth Sunday of Lent B/2012

The readings of this fifth Sunday of Lent talk about God's covenant as expression of his love for us. They show us that, what God wanted to achieve with his people in the past, has been fulfilled once and for all in the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Therefore, it is impossible to show our love of God and of our brothers without accepting to sacrifice a little bit of our own life.

In the first reading, the prophet Jeremiah recalls the renewal of the covenant between God and his people. Because the first covenant was broken by the sin, God decided to make a new one by renewing his ownership over his people and by placing his law within their hearts. In the line of that renewal, God committed to forgive the sin of his people and not to remember anything of what they did in the past.

What is behind this text is the idea that where human beings fail in their commitment, God shows them his love and mercy by renewing his faithfulness to them. By doing so, not only does God forgive their wrong doings, but he also invites them to accept the sacrifice that conversion of heart requires of those who want to turn back to him.

This text helps us understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus speaks of his imminent death. First of all, the Gospel starts with the mention of some Greeks who were at the feast in Jerusalem who wanted to see Jesus. Because they had an acquaintance in the person of Philip, they talked to him who, in turn, talked to Andrew, and both went to see Jesus.

Realizing what was going on around him, Jesus understood that the time has come for him to be glorified. However, there could not be glorification without the cross, because it is only when a grain of wheat dies in the ground that it can produce much fruit. Therefore, Jesus declared that whoever loves his life can only lose it and whoever hates his life in this world can save it.

After saying that, Jesus felt troubled because his hour was very close. He started praying the Father to deliver him, although he knew well that it was the purpose of his mission in the world to die for the salvation of the world. The Father answered him through a voice from heaven that he will glorify him.

As the crowd was amazed at all that was happening, Jesus assured them that it was for them that the voice came when he was about to die on the cross in order to save those believe in him.

What do we learn from this Gospel? First thing we learn is about the pride of being a link in the chain. What do I mean by that? What I want to express is the role that Philip and Andrew play as a link in the chain by organizing meeting Jesus at the inquiry of the Greeks. That is what the work of evangelization is all about, that is, being a link in the chain of the transmission of the word of God to others. Each one of us has his role to play and each one should be proud to do so. Without us taking our part in the proclamation of the word of God, it can suffer a lot of setbacks. That is why we have to be aware that we are a link in the chain of the transmission of the word of God.

The second thing we learn is about the relevance of glory through suffering. In fact, we usually praise successful people and winners. But what we do not realize, at first

glance, is that in order to come to such a success, they passed through a lot of pain, sacrifice and suffering. That is one of the things Jesus wants to tell us in this Gospel. Of course, the time has come for him to be glorified; but he has to pass first through the cross. That is why he reminds us that, like a grain that has to fall down before producing fruits, we too have to be ready to accept sacrifice before receiving God's glory. After all, there is no glory without the cross.

But whatever suffering we might endure, we are not alone. Jesus is with us, as the letter to the Hebrews said. In fact, he went through the bitter experience of pain with tears and cries and God heard him, because of his obedience. In that sense, God made him perfect through suffering so that he becomes a source of consolation and provider of eternal salvation for those who obey him.

The last point I want to highlight is about the triumph of certainty over tension. In fact, when someone is about to die, especially when someone knows it very well, like a prisoner condemned to capital punishment, he lives in a deep internal tension. We see a same tension in Jesus when he says that he is troubled. However, he knows also very well that this is the reason why he has come into the world. Therefore, there is no way of escaping this fatal moment of his life.

Such an experience is normal and human. It does not mean that those who feel tension in them because they are about to die do not believe in God. It means only that the possibility of losing consciousness and everything of this world, like family or goods, makes them uncomfortable with regard to the unknown of death.

Here, Jesus reacts as any human being would, but it is also here that something extraordinary happens to him, namely a comfort from heaven. In fact, the voice from heaven gave him certainty that even if he has to die, he will be glorified. This experience of Jesus is what is awaiting each one of us. At the hour of death, whatever might be our anxiety, God will not let us down. We have the certainty that he will reward us with eternal life. However, that does not prevent us from praying for a peaceful death.

Let us, then, pray that Lent might be for us a time of dying to ourselves and to our sins in order to let God's life prosper in us. Let us make our Lent an opportunity of renewing our covenant with God. Like the Greeks who understood that this is the time of the judgment for this world, therefore they have to seek Jesus, let us make Lent a time of decision in favor of the Lord. May God bless you all!

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



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