

## **Fifth Sunday of Lent B2024**

Since we started the celebration of Lenten Season, I told you that Lent was a time of fight against evil and a time of making choice in favor of God, a time of true worship of God and a time of experiencing the merciful love of God. Today as we celebrate the last Sunday of Lent before the Holy Week, I want to say, finally, that Lent is a time of renewing our Covenant with God.

The necessity of renewing the Covenant plays out in the first reading as a consequence of the infidelity of Israel. Because the first covenant was broken by the sin of Israel, God decided to make a new one by renewing his ownership over his people and by placing his laws within their hearts. He committed to forgive their sin and not to remember anything of what they did in the past.

This way of handling Israel is inherent to the nature of God. Today, as it was in the past, God desires that we live in sacred partnership with him where he is our God and we his people. He wants to heal our infidelities in recreating us anew and by giving us a new heart. He wants to forgive our sins and allow us to know him, not with our heads, but from within, that is, from our hearts. He wants to wright his laws in our hearts so that we live by it internally and not simply externally.

The renewal of covenant with God requires first of all the conversion of heart, an abandon of old ways of life and a return to God. The Gospel of this morning tells us that the Greeks who came to the feast of Passover in Jerusalem understood well that the time had come for them to make a decision in favor of God and establish a relationship with him. That is why they wanted to see Jesus and. Because they had an acquaintance in the person of Philip, they talked to him and he, in turn, talked to Andrew, and both went to see Jesus.

We see here how the chain of the transmission of the word of God works. Philip and Andrew see themselves as a link in the chain by organizing meeting Jesus at the request of the Greeks. That is what the work of evangelization is all about, that is, to be a link in the chain of the transmission of the word of God to others.

We who already know Jesus should help others to meet him and establish a relationship with him. We are today intermediaries for one another, destined to help others to meet Jesus and make the decision for the future of their lives. This Lenten season reminds us that important role of ours.

When our Lord realized what was going around him, he understood that his time too had come to be glorified by the Father. However, there could not be glorification without the cross, because it is only when the grain of wheat dies in the ground that it can produce much fruit. It is for that reason that our Lord says, "Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life".

By saying the words, like "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", our Lord wants to tell us that like a grain that is planted in the ground and produces fruit, it is only through death that life comes out. True enough. It is always because men and women have been prepared to die that the great things have been done in the world.

That is also true at personal level. It is sometimes only when we bury our personal ambitions that we begin to be of real use to God and become his true servants. The

people whom the world remembers with love are not those who spent their lives by protecting it, but those who forgot themselves and served others with abnegation. That is what our Lord has done and that is what he wants us to do for the church and for our brothers and sisters.

Let me come back again to the idea of glory through suffering. For sure, the idea of glorification through suffering gave our Lord a little bit of anxiety. But, there was nothing more to do about it than to obey the Father. Was not that the reason why he came into the world, namely to die for the salvation of the world? The Father himself through the voice coming from heaven confirmed that he would be glorified, but through suffering.

The experience of our Lord's trouble and anxiety is absolutely normal and human. We too at the moment of our death could be facing anxiety and fear. But, the fact of having those feelings of angst and fear does not mean a lack of faith. It means only that the possibility of losing conscience about everything of this world, like about our family or our goods, makes us uncomfortable with regard to the unknown of death.

The trouble of our Lord indicates that although he was God, he was plainly human. 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, our Lord was made perfect and became the source of salvation for all those who obey him. He has gone through the bitterest experiences of human life, and for that reason, our Lord understands us in all our strength and weakness. There is no human agony on this world he does not understand or through which he has not entered before. As a human being, he learned from all his experiences that the Father never abandons him.

This experience of our Lord is what is awaiting each one of us. At the hour of our death, whatever might be our anxiety and fear, 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 daily and insistently for a peaceful death.

The experience of our Lord in the crucial moment preceding his passion reminds us of the popular saying: "No pain, no gain." As there is no gain without pain, so there is no glory without the cross. By renewing our covenant with our Lord, we will certainly share in his glory. But, it is the glory that comes to us through suffering. Our Lord himself says, "And when I am lifted up from earth, I will draw everyone to myself."

Let us pray that Lent might be for us a time of dying to ourselves and 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 Geeks who understood that the time of the judgment of the world has come, let us seek our Lord.

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



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