

Homily for 5th Sunday in Lent b

Jeremiah speaks of a New Covenant that God will enter into with His people. This promise of a New Covenant is fulfilled in the life, death and Resurrection of Jesus as found in the Gospel. Reading 2 is a beautiful example of the humanity of Christ. We can only grow spiritually when we open our hearts to God and develop a personal relationship with Him. Jesus in the gospel reminds of a great paradox - the paradox of life through death, success through failure. To understand this paradox better, he invites us to look at nature. Truly, truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. The lowest, the darkest and the most painful hour in the life of a seed is the hour in which it dies. Yet this is precisely the hour in which new life is born. It's an amazing contradiction - life coming from death. The great statesman, Sir Winston Churchill, once said, "we make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give". Our highest life does not consist in self-expression but in self-sacrifice.

Jesus spoke about his hour several times during his public ministry. But he always spoke of it as not yet come. However in today's Gospel passage, we hear Jesus say, "The hour has come for the Son to be glorified." What kind of hour is he referring to? The hour in question is the hour of his death. It was an hour of supreme self-giving in which he made a complete sacrifice of himself for us. From a worldly point of view that hour was an hour of failure. Worse, it was an hour of shame and humiliation. But from raising from the dead, God turned it into an hour of triumph for Jesus, and an hour of grace for us. It is the same with our life. Our lowest moments can prove to be turning points. Moments of great worldly success soon fade and often leave people empty inside. On the other hand, moments of darkness, weakness, and failure can prove to be moments of great change and growth, if we die to our self, and stay open to God's will. Just as the wheat of grain has to die in order to bear fruit, so we must die to self if we are to live fully and fruitfully. Indeed, by dying to some of our old attitudes and forms of behaviour we will discover a new way of life. Salt gives its taste by dissolving in water. A candle gives light by burning its wick and melting its wax. The oyster produces a priceless pearl by transforming a grain of sand through a long and painful process. Loving parents sacrifice themselves so that their children can enjoy a better life than they themselves had. We have to die to familiar routine to make room for a transformation, a new direction in life.

All these daily deaths bring fresh energy into our life-a sense of newness so to say! Dying to self would mean, sacrificing one's self-will for the sake of God's will which is placed within us and written in our hearts as pointed out by Jeremiah. By dying to our self-seeking and vain ambitions, we come closer to God and to one another. But for all this to be possible, we need to have the courage of our convictions to let go. Let go of the past, let go of all that keeps us from advancing in the faith. We need to have complete trust in God to transform us into a new creation. Only a life spent for others will be glorified in Heaven, and sometimes even in this world. We know that the world owes everything to people who have spent their time and talents for God and for their fellow human beings. Let us pray that we may acquire this self-sacrificial spirit, especially during Lent.