

Fifth Sunday in Lent, Year B

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Psalm 50

Hebrews 5:7-9

John 12:20-33

“Unless a wheat grain falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest.”

As we approach the latter stages of Lent and the beginning of Holy Week, the liturgical readings switch focus from our need for redemption to the dramatic choice looming before our Redeemer. Jesus knew that the path that lay before him was an exceedingly difficult one.

His earthly life had already involved considerable sacrifice. At his Incarnation, he had descended from heavenly glory to the indignity of a stable. At the beginning of his public ministry, he left the comforts of home and his Blessed Mother for a band of uncomprehending disciples and a fickle crowd. All that was hard enough. But now, if he would fulfil the Father’s plan to deliver us from the bondage of sin, even more would be required. And he knew it.

Our second reading mentions Jesus’ tears and loud cries to God, recalling the agony he experienced in the garden. The Garden of Gethsemane, by the way, is on the slope of a mountain. As the guards approached the garden with their torches to arrest Jesus, they would have been visible to him from a long way off, as they made their way along the Kidron Valley. Jesus would have seen them coming. So he had the option of simply walking over the crest of the Mount of Olives and disappearing into the Judean wilderness if he so chose.

And really, Jesus “saw them coming”—as it were—for weeks before this, and could have eluded them at any time. But his burning desire to save us was greater than his natural aversion to suffering and torture. His love for us was even stronger than death.

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Jesus knew that his death would be fruitful beyond all imagining. And this harvest was more important to him than being *comfortable*.

We gratefully celebrate this love of Christ for us in every Eucharist, and we remember it most solemnly during Holy Week. But the Lord calls us not just to remember his sacrifice, but also to *imitate it*. We are called to be not just believers, but disciples.

Jesus renounced his natural human life, but was given in return a new, risen, humanity which explodes the limits of the human existence that we know.

We all have a life that we're rather attached to, with people, places, things, and activities that we are comfortable with. After all, my life may not be perfect, but it *is* familiar. And it's *mine*.

And so we need to be honest about what is being asked of us during this season of Lent. The Lord is inviting us not just to give up chocolate for a few weeks, but to give up our very selves. He asks us to die to our own plans, our own will, and to put our destiny entirely in his hands.

Incidentally, that is precisely what baptism is supposed to mean – that it is no longer I that live, but Christ that lives in me. That I'm no longer in the driver's seat, but that I've allowed Jesus to take the reins. That all that is dearest to me, I've put on the altar of sacrifice – and that I will only take it back if the Lord offers it back.

This begs the question – why would we do such a radical thing?

Well, only if we truly believe that planting the seed of our lives and dreams in the fertile soil of the Lord's vineyard will bear extraordinary fruit. That we, like the apostles, will grow to be more than we'd ever hoped we'd be. That he would do through us—as he did through them—more than we'd ever dreamt possible.

So here's the question: is being fruitful—bearing a bountiful harvest for the Lord—more important to us than being safe... or being comfortable... or being in control?

It's an important question. It's a gut-check, really. And we are asked to take this gut-check as we approach the holiest commemoration of our year, during which we renew our baptismal promises. Do we really want to follow the Lord and bear him a rich harvest? Or are we content with simply watching from a distance?

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