

Homily Notes for Sunday, March 18, 2018 5th Sunday in Lent

Readings: Jeremiah 31:31-34, Psalm, Ps 51, Hebrews 5:7-9, John 12:20-33

1. Introduction: Lent's fifth Sunday's readings bring us to the very center of the Christian Gospel, to the central value of our Christian-based country; the value of dying to self for the good of others. Just as Jesus became the "Promised Messiah of Glory" and the "Conquering Son of Man" by offering his life for others, we too can only possess heaven by dying to self and spending our lives in self-giving, sacrificial service. Today's readings interpret the upcoming death of Jesus not only as a priestly sacrifice (Heb 5), but also as the moment of his "exaltation" and "glorification" (John 12).

2. The first reading, taken from the book of the prophet Jeremiah, explains how God will replace the Old Covenant of Judgment with a New Covenant of Forgiveness of Sins. This new, or renewed covenant, prophesied by Jeremiah, has been fulfilled through Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Jeremiah lived up to and through the fall and destruction of Judah about 587 B.C. Called by God as a young man, Jeremiah lived through the tragic years preceding the ruin of the kingdom of Judah.

Jeremiah lived as God's messenger through these catastrophic events by preaching, prophesying, and vainly admonishing the incompetent Davidic kings. He tried to keep the people, the priests and the kings faithful to God in an atmosphere of political intrigue. He was blunt and strong in his words which earned him the hate of the leaders, priests, and kings. Jeremiah is a prophetic antecedent of Jesus, risking his life continually for the good of his people.

3. In the second reading, St. Paul tells the Hebrews that it is by Jesus's suffering and death, in obedience to His Father's will, that Jesus established the New Covenant. Later quoting the full text of Jeremiah 31:31-34 (See Heb 8:8-12), St. Paul explains that the new and better covenant was inaugurated through the high priest Jesus' offering of himself as the one perfect sacrifice for sins.

4. In today's gospel, using metaphors of the "*sown wheat grain*" and the "*spent life*", Jesus teaches the same lesson. The Gospel hints at Jesus' inner struggle in accepting the cup of suffering to inaugurate the new and everlasting covenant. However, Jesus accepts the cross as his "*hour*," meaning the stepping stone to his passion, death, resurrection and exaltation. Further, he considers his "*hour*" as the way of glorifying his heavenly Father and of being glorified by his Father. In addition, the "*lifting up*" of Jesus is the assurance of our own exaltation and glorification, provided we accept our crosses. Jesus demonstrates and calls us to follow Him in giving of our lives in sacrifice, not as entering into aggressive war.

5. Importance of dying in order to give new life: Today's gospel teaches us that to receive new life and eternal life we need to die to ourselves through suffering and service. To be "buried in the earth" means avoiding sin, accepting suffering and living for others. This is true in the natural world in many ways. Salt gives its taste by dissolving in water. A candle gives light by having its wax melted and its wick consumed. The oyster produces a priceless pearl by transforming a grain of sand in a long and painful process. Loving parents sacrifice themselves so that their children can enjoy a better life than they themselves had. Let us pray for the gift of this sacrificial spirit, especially during Lent. Better to "burn out" than "rust out."

6. Application:

1. This understanding of sacrificial love as the way of the Lord Jesus is the key to our lives personally and of our society as a whole (John 15:13).
 - a. It is the key to a peaceful society and a peaceful and prosperous civilization.
 - b. It is the key to stable and loving marriage. Example here at St Boniface. One member has six brothers and sisters. All have been married only once, six of the seven for more than 50 years. Are we prepared to sacrifice for our spouse and our children as opposed to having a marriage based on emotion?

- c. It is the key to responsible politics (Example of John Adams, George Washington and the founding fathers of our republic). Key word: Disinterestedness.
- 2. It stands in contrast to the secular way of fulfillment and other religious models.
 - To the despair and immorality of the godless, secular Soviet Union.
 - During its existence, despair and alcoholism, after its fall, moral vacuum and corruption. Vladimir Putin once estimated that only 50% of the Russian budget goes where it is planned.
 - To the warrior Mohammed:
 - At this critical time, when we see so much conflict with Islam, we must realize that historically at its origins, Islam is not a religion of peace, but of war. To imitate Muhammed is to imitate a warrior (See Randall Terry's article on the deeds of Muhammed and Graeme Wood's article on "What Isis Really Wants"). I urge all of us to become more familiar with the tenets of Islam. Please note, that to understand Islamic life and behavior, we must know and use both the Koran and the Sunnah.
 - 3. To the materialism and greed of the secular materialist (compare -generous Christian).

7. A benefit of exemplary sacrifice: "Would you please occupy my room for the night?" One stormy night many years ago, a man in his forties and his wife from New York entered the lobby of a small hotel in Philadelphia. Trying to get out of the rain, the couple approached the front desk hoping to get some shelter for the night. "Could you possibly give us a room here?" the husband asked. The manager, a friendly man with a winning smile, looked at the couple and explained that there were three conventions in town. "All of our rooms are taken," the manager said. "But I can't send a nice couple like you out into the rain at one o'clock in the morning. Would you perhaps be willing to sleep in my room? It's not exactly a suite, but it will be good enough to make you folks comfortable for the night." When the couple declined, the Philadelphia manager pressed on. "Don't worry about me; I'll make out just fine," the manager told them. So the couple agreed. As he paid his bill the next morning, the New Yorker said to the manager, "You are the kind of manager who should be the boss of the best hotel in the United States. Maybe someday I will build one for you." The manager looked at them and smiled. The three of them had a good laugh. As they drove away, the couple agreed that the helpful manager was indeed exceptional, as finding people who are both friendly and helpful isn't easy.

Two years passed. The Philadelphia manager had almost forgotten the incident when he received a letter. It was from the man, who recalled in it that stormy night and enclosed a round-trip ticket to New York so the manager could pay them a visit. The man from New York met him in airport. He then pointed to a great new building there, a palace of reddish stone, with turrets and watchtowers thrusting up to the sky. "That," said the New Yorker, "is the hotel I have just built for you to manage." "You must be joking," the Philadelphia manager said. "I can assure you I am not," said the New Yorker, a sly smile playing around his mouth. The New Yorker's name was William Waldorf Astor, and the magnificent structure was the original Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, one of the world's most glamorous hotels. The Philadelphia guy who became its first manager was George C. Boldt. Here is a striking proof of what Jesus tells us in today's gospel, "*If a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies it produces much fruit.*" Young George Boldt buried his own comfort and convenience by giving up his room. His sacrifice sprouted and brought forth the reward of becoming the manager of the most outstanding hotels in the world.

8. Opportunities for qualified people: 6.3 million jobs offered not filled. Value of soft (moral) values such as work ethic, honesty, all the Christian virtues. A willingness to imitate Jesus Christ in his sacrificial life is the key, not only to the success and stability of our society, but also to responsible success in our personal and professional lives.