

5th Sunday of Lent

We are just one week away from the Holy Week and our celebration of God's love shown in the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. For us Christians, this season of Lent is a time of special grace in which we experience the presence of God who cares and loves us. Our response is to transform ourselves and live according to His will. If we want to do something new and come to Him in obedience and freedom, then we need to acknowledge our weakness before God and we know that He is the one who supports us and builds with us a new relationship. We ought to change our lives during Lent and come closer to Him. Therefore the Church calls this season as a joyful time, because it is our preparation for the future joy of Easter that approaches us bringing His blessings, mercy and forgiveness. We realize that God has made a covenant with us through our baptism like He made with the Israelites.

Today's first reading says that the old covenant was inscribed in stone in the days of the exodus in the desert, which marked the beginning of a special bond between God and His people. God was loyal to the terms of the covenant but the people were not. Still the old covenant was carried forward by a new one and this new covenant will be distinct from the old one because it will be written in the hearts of the people, so that it will not be taken away; it will come from the depth of their heart.

Today's Second Reading from the letter to the Hebrews teaches us, Jesus learned obedience through what he suffered. Through his suffering, Jesus was made perfect. Through perfection, He became the source of salvation for all who obey Him. From this perfect example of obedience and submission, we learn that through suffering, our souls are sanctified. When we endure sufferings, we are

spiritually enlightened to the needs of those who are suffering. There is a spiritual lesson to be learned from every form of suffering. Suffering sanctifies the soul so it may become more in the likeness of Christ who is perfect. Jesus is the source of salvation for those who obey him. Therefore we must always be thankful to Jesus for what he has been for us.

Today's gospel tells us a series of teachings about the meaning of the death of Jesus and the urgency of the hour. The tone is set by the imagery of a grain of wheat. Jesus tells His disciples: "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. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life." Here Jesus tells us that this is the price of eternal life. The grain, of course, does not actually die but is totally transformed into something completely new: roots, leaves and fruit. Jesus speaks here about his own life which he sacrificed in order to gain new life in the Kingdom. He invites us also to be ready to lose our life for the sake of Him in order to gain eternal life. Our soul is immortal, but our body can be separated from our soul and can thus die in order to gain eternal life. Here death is understood as a service. It is by giving of one's life, the life will indeed flourish. In all of this the emphasis is on the meaning of Jesus' death and not on pain and suffering of dying.

The message of Good News for us today is that through our dying we are able to reach our own resurrection. Today Jesus explains to us this law of Lent, which is the law of life, through the metaphor of the grain of wheat or any seed. When preserved safely it produces no fruit and remains unproductive. Only when it is buried in the ground then it bears fruit that is a far greater abundance than itself. Our entire lives are similarly a cycle of dying and rising. It is when we are prepared to die that our lives become the most fruitful. Therefore Jesus invites us

today to spend our lives for others in order to find God in them. Through the cross He has gathered us so that we too may glorify in Him.

When we participate in the Eucharist, we are invited by Jesus to come and take part in His divine life. It is Jesus who let go of everything for our sake and he invites us to let go of ourselves in order to be with Him all the way. He is the New Covenant and in His love, forgiveness, concern and compassion he lived his divine word. Through our Lenten prayer, fasting, penance and charity we shall discover Jesus in our day to day Christian life and like him seek for our glorification in the Father. Let us pray for courage and total trust like Jesus in his Father, that the new life, joy, happiness and fulfillment we all long for, is discovered in that letting go and letting God. It is the strength and the power of his Love that invites us to join Him in heaven where He is present for all eternity. We pray to the Blessed Virgin Mary to help us prepare ourselves for this royal feast. We ask the grace that we may allow God that His love and forgiveness may open us up to the total transformation needed in our lives.