

# Scripture Study

Fifth Sunday of Lent – Cycle B



## Opening prayer

Jeremiah 31:31-34

(Ps 51:3-4, 12-15)

Hebrews 5:7-9

**John 12:20-33**

## Overview of the Gospel:

- The setting for this Sunday's Gospel is Jerusalem on Palm Sunday during the days leading up to the Passover feast (John 12:1). It is right after Jesus' triumphal entry into the city (verses 12-19) where he draws a raucous crowd, prompting the Pharisees to remark, somewhat prophetically, "The whole world is going after him!" (verse 19).
- Some "Greeks" approach Philip and tell him that they want to see Jesus. "Greek" was a term used to describe non-Jews—or Gentiles. These were either Gentile converts to Judaism, or "God fearers"—Gentiles that were attracted to the monotheism and moral code of the Jews, but were put off by either Jewish social restrictions or by having to be circumcised. Philip is a Greek name (meaning "lover of horses"), so perhaps they approached Phillip because he spoke Greek.
- The prophet Isaiah foretold that the Messiah would be "an ensign for nations and the outcasts of Israel" (Isaiah 11:10-12; CCC 542). The request of the Gentiles anticipates Jesus' prophecy that "all men" will be drawn to him (John 12:32). As Gentiles visited him at his birth (Matthew 2:1-12), now they appear at the end of his ministry setting in motion the events leading up to his sacrifice, which will be for all men (John 1:29; 4:42; 1 John 2:2).
- Like a grain of wheat that falls to the ground to bring new life (verses 24-25), Jesus must endure death to bring us to eternal life. This also holds true for his disciples—dying to self, and becoming channels for others (John 12:25; 2 Corinthians 4:11-12; Mark 8:34-38; Philippians 3:10-14; CCC 161).

## Questions:

- In the 1<sup>st</sup> reading, what will be some of the differences between the "old covenant" Jeremiah prophesies, and the "new covenant"? Who will be included?
- How does the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading illuminate the life of Jesus? What did he give up to be our Savior?
- In the Gospel, what brought Gentiles to Jerusalem during the time of Jewish feasts? What was so unique about their request that Philip would filter it first through Andrew?
- Jesus said several times that "his hour had not yet come" (John 2:4; 7:6, 30). What regarding the Gentile's request caused him to say that now the time *has* come (verse 23)?
- In Jesus' parable (verse 24), who is the grain of wheat?
- What is Jesus calling his disciples to do in verses 25-26? What promise do they receive?
- In verses 27-32, what is about to occur "now"? How does this affect Jesus?
- Where is Jesus calling you to *die* so that you might *live*? How has this principal of the spiritual life manifested itself in your life? What was the fruit that resulted?
- What do you tend to hold on to, rather than follow Jesus?

**Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 607, 434, 550, 2851-2853, 542, 662, 786, 1428, 2795**

## Closing prayer

*How few there are, Lord, who wish to follow you, and yet there is not one who does not wish to reach you...All men therefore wish to enjoy you, but not to the extent of following your example; they will reign with you but not suffer with you. ~St. Bernard of Clairvaux*

**Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings!**

# "If the grain of wheat dies, it bears much fruit"

**Gospel Reading:** *John 12:20-33*

Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. So these came to Philip, who was from Beth-sa'ida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew went with Philip and they told Jesus. And Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified. 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. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant be also; if any one serves me, the Father will honor him. "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? `Father, save me from this hour'? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify thy name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." The crowd standing by heard it and said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." He said this to show by what death he was to die.

**Meditation:** How can death lead to life and defeat to glory? Jesus described his approaching death on the cross as his "hour of glory" (John 12:23) when he would be



"lifted up from the earth" and would "draw all men to himself" (John 12:32). Jesus saw his death on the cross as triumph over the powers of sin and darkness. Jesus drew an illustration of the "grain of wheat" to show how this principle works in God's kingdom. Seeds cannot produce new life by themselves. They must first be planted in the earth before they can grow and produce fruit. What is the spiritual analogy which Jesus alludes to? Is this simply a veiled reference to his own impending death on the cross and resurrection? Or does Jesus have another kind of "death and rebirth" in mind for his disciples? Jesus, no doubt, had both meanings in mind. Jesus' obedience and death on the cross obtain for us freedom and new life in the Holy Spirit. His cross frees us from the tyranny of sin and death and shows us the way of perfect love.

If we want to experience the new life which Jesus offers, then the outer shell of our old, fallen nature, must be broken and put to death. In Baptism our "old nature" enslaved by sin is buried with Christ and we rise as a "new creation" in Christ. This process of death to the "old fallen self" is both a one-time event, such as baptism, and a daily,

on-going cycle in which God buries us more deeply into Jesus' death to sin so we might rise anew and bear fruit for God. There is a great paradox here. Death leads to life. When we "die" to ourselves, we "rise" to new life in Jesus Christ.

What does it mean to "die" to oneself? It certainly means that what is contrary to God's will must be "crucified" or "put to death". God gives us grace to say "yes" to his will and to reject whatever is contrary to his loving plan for our lives. Jesus also promises that we will bear much "fruit" for him, if we choose to deny ourselves for his sake. Jesus used forceful language to describe the kind of self-denial he had in mind for his disciples. What did he mean when he said that one must hate himself? The expression to hate something often meant to prefer less. Jesus says that nothing should get in the way of our preferring him and the will of our Father in heaven. Our hope is not earth-based but heaven-bound. St. Paul reminds us that "what is sown in the earth is subject to decay, what rises is incorruptible" (1 Cor.15:42). Do you hope in the Lord and follow joyfully the path he has chosen for you?

*"Lord, let me be wheat sown in the earth, to be harvested for you. I want to follow wherever you lead me. Give me fresh hope and joy in serving you all the days of my life."*

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