



# LIVING THE GOSPEL



**Fifth Sunday of Lent  
March 17, 2024**

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**Theme: "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."**

## **Gathering Prayer**

**All:** By your help, we beseech you, Lord our God, may we walk eagerly in that same charity with which, out of love for the world, your Son handed himself over to death. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## **Exploring the Word**

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

<sup>20</sup> Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. <sup>21</sup> So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." <sup>22</sup> Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew went with Philip and they told Jesus. <sup>23</sup> And Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified. <sup>24</sup> 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. <sup>25</sup> He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. <sup>26</sup> If any one 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.

<sup>27</sup> "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. <sup>28</sup> Father, glorify thy name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." <sup>29</sup> The crowd standing by heard it and said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." <sup>30</sup> Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. <sup>31</sup> Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; <sup>32</sup> and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." <sup>33</sup> He said this to show by what death he was to die.

## **Gospel Focus**

Jesus speaks in paradox here, reminding us that God is in the business of transcending boundaries and surpassing our expectations. He also reminds us that he is in the midst of transforming death. No more will it be a final end for humans. After Jesus completes the work of the crucifixion and resurrection, death is rather a moment of transition. It is a part of life rather than its end. Jesus himself is also a paradox here. He is, of course, troubled by the thought of dying. All humans are; it is not the fate for which God made

us. But he accepts his impending death as the purpose for which he came to earth, and in his calm acknowledge of this shows himself as something more than human as well. He is both fully human and fully divine.

## **Gospel Reflection**

There is a very troublesome assertion in today's second reading. "Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered." This verse conjures up an image of God as a disgruntled parent, who inflicts punishment on a disobedient child to teach the wayward one a lesson. Such an explanation for Jesus' passion is highly problematic, both theologically and pastorally.

It is important to understand the context of this passage from Hebrews, both within the whole of the document and in the broader and liturgical context. Today's second reading is part of an elaborate exposition on Jesus' high priesthood. The author knows that the earthly Jesus was not a priest (Heb 7:14), he speaks metaphorically, arguing that Jesus' suffering and death have the saving effects that the temple sacrifices had, which were offered by the high priest. The author asserts that Jesus' sacrifice put an end to all need for further sacrifices (7:27). In the section we hear in today's reading, the emphasis is that in Jesus we have a "high priest" who can sympathize with us in every way.

Jesus is not removed from humanity in some inaccessible sacred sphere, he experienced everything that we do, except sin. The author of Hebrews is saying that the earthly Jesus, like all human beings, grew in consciousness of what it is to be obedient to God. In verse 9, the verb *teleiotheis*, "made perfect," does not refer to moral perfection but has at its root a sense of "completeness," "wholeness." Thus, it is Jesus' process of coming to full understanding of his mission and its cost to him that the author speaks of Jesus becoming "perfected"

The whole purpose of this exposition in Hebrews is to exhort the hearers to imitate Jesus' attitude towards God. As this Christian community experiences suffering, its members are directed to do as Jesus did. First, they should pour out their hearts to God, as Jesus was shown in the Synoptic Gospels to have done in Gethsemane. Similarly, the psalms of lament, like today's responsorial psalm, supply a pattern. No human being, including Jesus, wants to suffer and die, and God hears such pleas. At the same time, Jesus approaches God with "reverence" (Heb 5:7), that is, awe before the power of God. He knows that God hears him, and at the same time, he hears God, and knows that the cost of being obedient to the divine mission of extending salvific love to all. This is what the author of Hebrews wants us to emulate: obedience as faithfulness to God's desire for life to the full for all, and willingness to embrace the suffering this mission entails. We can learn this kind of obedience by imitating ("obeying") Jesus (Heb 5:9).

God is not intent on teaching us obedience by imposing suffering but leads us to follow Jesus, trusting that God accompanies us and strengthens us through experiences of suffering and death, which bring the full flourishing of life.

## **Old/New Testament and CCC links**

### **First Reading — Jeremiah 31:31-34**

<sup>31</sup> "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, <sup>32</sup> not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. <sup>33</sup> But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. <sup>34</sup> And no longer shall each man teach his

neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

### **Responsorial Psalm — Psalms 51:1-2, 10-13 (3-4, 12-15 NAB)**

***R: Create a clean heart in me, O God.***

Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness; in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense. Thoroughly wash me from my guilt and of my sin cleanse me. **(R)**

A clean heart create for me, O God, and a steadfast spirit renew within me. Cast me not out from your presence, and your Holy Spirit take not from me. **(R)**

Give me back the joy of your salvation, and a willing spirit sustain in me. I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners shall return to you. **(R)**

### **Second Reading — Hebrews 5:7-9**

<sup>7</sup> In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear.

<sup>8</sup> Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; <sup>9</sup> and being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him.

### **Catechism of The Catholic Church**

**160.** To be human, "man's response to God by faith must be free, and... therefore nobody is to be forced to embrace the faith against his will. The act of faith is of its very nature a free act."( DH 10; cf. CIC, can. 748 # 2) "God calls men to serve him in spirit and in truth. Consequently they are bound to him in conscience, but not coerced. . . This fact received its fullest manifestation in Christ Jesus."(DH 11) Indeed, Christ invited people to faith and conversion, but never coerced them. "For he bore witness to the truth but refused to use force to impose it on those who spoke against it. His kingdom... grows by the love with which Christ, lifted up on the cross, draws men to himself."(DH 11; cf. Jn 18:37; 12:32)

**550.** The coming of God's kingdom means the defeat of Satan's: "If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."(Mt 12:26, 28) Jesus' *exorcisms* free some individuals from the domination of demons. They anticipate Jesus' great victory over "the ruler of this world".(Jn 12:31; cf. Lk 8:26-39) The kingdom of God will be definitively established through Christ's cross: "God reigned from the wood."(LH, Lent, Holy Week, Evening Prayer, Hymn Vexilla Regis: Regnavit a ligno Deus)

**662.** "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself."(Jn 12:32) The lifting up of Jesus on the cross signifies and announces his lifting up by his Ascension into heaven, and indeed begins it. Jesus Christ, the one priest of the new and eternal Covenant, "entered, not into a sanctuary made by human hands. . . but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf."(Heb 9:24) There Christ permanently exercises his priesthood, for he "always lives to make intercession" for "those who draw near to God through him".(Heb 7:25) As "high priest of the good things to come" he is the center and the principal actor of the liturgy that honors the Father in heaven.(Heb 9:11; cf. Rev 4:6-11)

**1428.** Christ's call to conversion continues to resound in the lives of Christians. This *second conversion* is an uninterrupted task for the whole Church who, "clasping sinners to her bosom, [is] at once holy and always in need of purification, [and] follows constantly the path of penance and renewal." (LG 8 # 3) This endeavor of conversion is not just a human work. It is the movement of a "contrite heart," drawn and moved by grace to respond to the merciful love of God who loved us first. (Ps 51:17; cf. Jn 6:44; 12:32; 1 Jn 4:10)

**2731.** Another difficulty, especially for those who sincerely want to pray, is *dryness*. Dryness belongs to contemplative prayer when the heart is separated from God, with no taste for thoughts, memories, and feelings, even spiritual ones. This is the moment of sheer faith clinging faithfully to Jesus in his agony and in his tomb. "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." (Jn 12:24) If dryness is due to the lack of roots, because the word has fallen on rocky soil, the battle requires conversion. (Cf. Lk 8:6, 13)

### **Sharing and Discussion**

1. What does Jesus teach about the purpose and focus of our lives?
2. How are you called to "lose your life" in order to follow Jesus? What sacrifices do you make and how do you find life within them?
3. How might God be inviting you to take part in God's ongoing work of giving and sustaining life?

### **Closing Prayer**

**All:** Almighty God, you sent your son into the world for the sake of your people. Through Christ, we will be redeemed and brought into the fullness of life. Receive our prayers that we might reflect your generosity to everyone we meet. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Leader:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life.

**All:** Amen