

18th March 2018 (Fifth Sunday in Lent, Year B)

50(51):3-4,12-15; Psalm 50(51):3-4,12-15; Hebrews 5:7-9; John 12:20-33.

Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit!

We have come to the end of our Lenten journey; next Sunday we start the celebration of Holy Week with the remembrance of Jesus' solemn entry in to Jerusalem. In the gospel according to John we have also come to the end of Jesus' public life; in the next chapter we read of the last supper. The hour of Jesus has now arrived, this is the hour when Jesus will be lifted up and hung on to the cross and also lifted up and glorified as the Christ of God.

Many among the Jewish people had hoped that the messiah would have been a great king, or at least a commander of a large army, come to liberate them from their Roman rulers. In the Jewish psyche their golden age was the time of King David who ruled peacefully over the twelve tribes of Israel. This golden age did not last but was deeply entrenched in the Jewish minds.

Jesus came not to be king of the Jewish people, but to draw all peoples to himself so that he could lead them to God the Father. We often see him referring to his relationship with the Father and even in today's gospel passage he again prays to the Father to 'glorify your name!' Jesus does not ask that he be glorified, but that the Father is glorified.

The hour of Jesus, the hour of his glorification and hence of the Father's glorification, is when he offers himself in sacrifice on the cross. Here he draws all to himself. In order for this glorification to happen, in order for him to be able to be fruitful and produce new life, Jesus first has to give up his own life. Jesus uses the beautiful analogy of the grain of wheat that has to let go of its present form in order to be able to produce fruit. This is a strange process; Jesus tells us that we cannot hold on to our present life and at the same time enjoy new life.

This dynamic image that is constantly reflected around us in nature, is a process we disciples of Jesus need to engage with both in this life and in the next. Every growth that happens in us can only happen if we let go of our present life. The child grows into a young adult and into a mature adult, then we have to let go of this present life in order to enter the next. If I hold on too tightly to what I have now, then I cannot be free to move on to a new life. Growth always comes at a risk. Even in our life as Christians, we need to open our hands and let go of what we are now certain of in order to be able to gain and understand new realities. If I am too bound to what I think I know now, I will never be able to see beyond my present reality.

Christ calls us, to follow him and serve him. He, the Lamb of God, gave himself for us on the cross. Like him we too are called to give up our lives in service of him especially in those who are needy around us; 'whatever you do with the least of these, you do it to me!'

Fr Mario