

## Fifth Sunday of Lent

Dear Friends,

We start the season of spring sometime this week. We have had a mild winter so far; still, we have some beautiful sunny days and gloomy days. Spring always reminds us of new life. The spring plants sprout out during these days, which tell us of new life and new beginning.

As we dive deep into Lent, today's readings help us reflect about new life and dying of oneself to bring the new life.

In the first reading, Prophet Jeremiah talks about the new covenant that God was going to make with the people of Judah. In the life of Israel, they had made covenants before and they were broken many times because of so many destructions, slavery, and other things over the years. The covenant that God made was not being lived out by the people. Now God says that he will make the covenant and write it in their hearts, unlike the covenants before which was written in tablets and taught to the generations. The new covenant brought intimacy in their relationship with God and God was ready to forgive their evildoing and forget their sins. This New Covenant does not abolish the earlier Covenants with Noah, Abraham, and Moses, for these earlier covenants are really the progressive stages of the history of the one Great Covenant between the one God and His people. Jeremiah's prophecy of a New or Renewed Covenant would be fulfilled, at least in part, through Jesus' life, death, and Resurrection. What a new life in God.

In the Gospel today we have two important messages that run across each other to make us understand better. To add more relevance to this theme of hopeful changes that mark Lent and Spring, today's Gospel brings us one of the famous sayings of Jesus about the 'grain of wheat'.

Last week we reflected on one of the most famous quotes from the Bible known as the 'gospel of all the gospels', namely, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3: 16) Today we have another equally famous quote from John's gospel, namely, "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." (John 12: 24)

There are two things about this passage of the Gospel. The request to see Jesus comes from some Greeks through Philip who was Greece. This request symbolized the nations of the world are ready to see the light. It is a fulfilment of what Simeon spoke in the temple, "My eyes have seen the salvation of light ". (Luke 2:28-32) This directly connects

with Jesus saying, " My hour has come". Earlier he said in many places that his hour has not yet come. Ex. The wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11, John 7:30, John 8:20). There is another explanation given by a scripture scholar, Fr. Munachi from Nigeria, "The Greek philosopher Socrates is regarded as one of the wisest men of all time. This man... devoted his life to exposing ignorance, hypocrisy and conceit among his fellow Athenians and calling them to a radical re-examination of life... But those in power arrested him, tried him, and sentenced him to death... Subsequent generations of Greeks came to regard Socrates as a martyr for truth. They resolved never again to persecute anyone on account of their beliefs.

By the time of Jesus, the Greeks had become among the most broad-minded people in the world. Various religious and philosophical traditions flourished among them and vied for popularity. We see in today's gospel that among the huge crowds that had come to Jerusalem for the Passover feast, some were Greeks. It did not take these Greeks long to see that all was not well in Jerusalem. So, they came to see Jesus. Why did they come to see Jesus? Although John has somewhat spiritualized the story, thereby giving the impression that they came to seek admission into the "body" of Christ (cf. John 12:32), it is more probable that they came to alert Jesus of the seriousness of the danger surrounding him and to suggest to him to flee with them to Greece, the land of freedom. The response that Jesus gives to their request shows that it has to do with his impending death and that he has chosen to stay and face it rather than seek a way to escape it."

Dying to oneself doesn't mean a physical death, rather a small change into oneself will bring a new life in ourselves. Salt delivers its taste by dissolving in water; a candle gives light by having its wick burned and its wax melted. The oyster produces a priceless pearl by a long and painful process.

This week I would like you to consider making little sacrifices of yourselves or for our spouses or families. By doing this you might bring newness to your relationship and then we also can experience a newness of life of living the Gospel and celebrating spring. Let us think about how we can die for ourselves and bring life to other people?