

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT
Year B: Jer 31:31-34; Ps 51; Heb 5:7-9; Jn 12:20-33
March 21, 2021
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We are getting closer to the celebration of the sacred mysteries of our redemption. Next Sunday is Palm Sunday, and two weeks from today is Easter Sunday. We're on the "home stretch" now of this Lenten campaign of prayer, sacrifice, and charity, and we're getting closer to the commemoration of the sorrowful Passion of Christ. Hopefully, there are many good things happening in the souls of this parish, and throughout the world, as those who believe in Christ prepare to honor Him for giving His life for the redemption of the world.

In the Gospel for this Sunday, we get a glimpse of what was happening inside the mind and the soul of Christ, as He neared His own suffering and death. Jesus was approaching the climactic moment of His life – the reason for which He had been sent into the world. He knew what lay in front of Him; He knew that His Passion was preordained by God, as He repeatedly told His disciples, "*The Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised*" (Lk 9:22). He knew He was going to die, and He knew precisely the kind of death that awaited Him. As He said in the Gospel for today's Mass, "*And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself.*" He said this indicating the kind of death he would die."

Because Jesus was true man, He was naturally repulsed by the thought of suffering and death. Every true man has a natural desire to survive and to live. So, Christ was experiencing the natural aversion of His soul to the thought of death. We should never think that, because Christ was the Son of God, He was like some divine robot mechanically moving toward His death, without feelings or emotions. No, He was a true man, so He did not desire to die. What He desired was to do His Father's will, and to offer His life for us. His soul recoiled at the thought of a painful death. And, this is what He later felt even more intensely during His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, the night before He died.

And yet, what did Christ do, as He neared the hour of His sacrifice and the purpose for which He was born? What did He do, as He felt the natural aversion to death? We hear His reaction in the Gospel. Jesus said, "*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ... I am troubled now. Yet what should I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But it was for this purpose that I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name.*" Christ did not recoil or retreat from His sorrowful Passion, but rather moved toward it with greater resolution and determination. He

was resolved to redeem us and reconcile us to His Father, no matter what it would take, no matter what it would cost Him. “The desire to embrace his Father’s plan of redeeming love inspired Jesus’ whole life, for [he knew] his redemptive passion was the very reason for his Incarnation” (*Catechism*, 607).

And He knew His death would accomplish something glorious. He knew that the hour of His death would be the reversal of the Fall and the defeat of the evil one who sought the ruin of souls. He said, “*Now is the time of judgment on this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out.*” Although the thought of His Passion would have frightened Christ with the natural fear of death, He kept His eyes and His soul focused on the great good that would come from it, and He overcame the very understandable revulsion He felt. “*For the sake of the joy that lay before him he endured the cross, despising its shame, and has taken his seat at the right of the throne of God*” (Heb 12:2).

So, what does this mean for us? Well, we who believe in Christ and honor Him should learn from His example how to face and overcome what scares us in life, especially if it might keep us from being faithful. It could be that we will find ourselves at a crossroads in life, at a defining moment, when we have to make a major decision, perhaps whether or not to keep and honor a lifelong promise we have made. All priests and all married people know what that’s like. It could be that the thought of remaining faithful to a promise or a vocation scares us with certain consequences. Perhaps, at a moment of decision, we consider all the costs of remaining faithful and all the benefits of reversing course.

But it is then that the example of Christ should inspire us. He had said that those who follow Him will have to practice a certain death-to-self, and that such self-denial will be fruitful: “*Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life.*” And then Jesus showed us by His own example how perseverance in commitment and vocation is honorable and glorious in God’s eyes.

And Jesus also taught us what to do when we are scared to suffer for what is honorable. As we heard in the second reading, “*In the days when Christ Jesus was in the flesh, he offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence.*” Prayer and courage in the face of fear. That’s what Christ showed us, and His example should inspire us to do the same.