

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

John 12:26

Whoever serves me must follow me, says the Lord;
and where I am, there also will my servant be.

Gospel

John 12:20-33; L35B

Some Greeks who had come to
worship at the Passover Feast
came to Philip, who was from
Bethsaida in Galilee,
and asked him, "Sir, we would
like to see Jesus."

Philip went and told Andrew;
then Andrew and Philip went and
told Jesus.

Jesus answered them,
"The hour has come for the Son
of Man to be glorified.

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.

Whoever serves me must follow me,
and where I am, there also will my
servant be.

The Father will honor whoever serves
me.

"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."

Then a voice came from heaven,
"I have glorified it and will glorify it
again."

Continued in Appendix A, p. 274.

*Year A readings may be used, see Appendix A,
pp. 274-276.*

Reflecting on the Gospel

"The end is near!" says the placard held by the one who firmly believes in the approaching apocalypse. Many claim to know when a disaster will strike, or when God will send his judgment upon the earth. Some look for signs and discern meaning from natural events. An earthquake might mean the foundations of the world are being shaken, in preparation for God's judgment. Terrible and violent storms are understood as God's anger poured out on an unrepentant people. God's activity is often discerned (rightly or wrongly) by interpreting events in daily life.

In today's gospel two Greeks (certainly not Jews) approach not Jesus but Philip, which, by the way, is a Greek name. Up to this point in Jesus' ministry, according to the Gospel of John, Jesus has never, not once, interacted with a Gentile. Luke, of course, paints a different picture, but today we are reading from the Gospel of John.

Philip listens to the request of these two Greeks who want to see Jesus and, in turn, goes to Andrew (another Greek name!) to enlist his help with this unorthodox request. Together the disciples intercede for the Greek interlocutors. Jesus rightly perceives this to be the conclusion of his ministry.

If even the Greeks (that is, Gentiles) are now coming to see him, the end is near! Death is at the ready. Jesus then begins an eloquent teaching on the necessity of death for bearing fruit, and no mention is made that the Greeks ever met Jesus. Instead, they serve merely as a narrative tool to usher in the final days of Jesus.

It's true that the ancients did not have the knowledge about biology that we have today. Upon hearing the metaphor of a seed dying to produce much fruit, many in a modern audience might dispute the analogy. For we know that a seed does not truly die, but the soil, moisture, and light cause an organic change. Still we do not want to lose the message in spite of the metaphor. Only by his death will Jesus' ministry truly bear fruit. That is the necessary next step. His death is necessary because this is the purpose for which Jesus came. There is no sidestepping or dodging this inevitable end, which is ratified by a voice from heaven. The end is near.

Living the Paschal Mystery

In this Lenten Sunday preceding Palm Sunday we share a sense of impending doom. But we are also reminded of the necessity of death for something to bear fruit. If the seed stays on the countertop, it will never bear fruit. But once "dead" and planted in the ground, the seed produces. The paschal mystery is presented for us in a simple, agrarian, even if scientifically outdated, image.

Do we allow ourselves to die to our own desires, wants, and agenda? From today's gospel reading, it seems Jesus was not quite ready for this moment. But the arrival of the Greeks was a clarion signal that the end was near. Even for Jesus there was no fighting this eternal purpose. This was the reason he came into the world. His example of letting go serves as a model for us. We are not the masters of our own fate. We are not in ultimate control of our own destiny. The illusion that we are somehow planning our own destiny is simply that, an illusion. There are greater forces at work. We are called to discern those forces so we can recognize them when they face us. For Jesus it was the request from



two Greeks. What are the signs that encourage us to let go of our own desires and submit to something greater? When we die to ourselves we will see fruit that bears eternal life.

Focusing the Gospel

John 12:20-33

Today's gospel is a pivotal moment in John's narrative. Jesus' words about the coming of his "hour" mark the end of John's "book of signs" and prefaces of the "book of glory": the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

The annual Passover feast is about to begin; many Jews (including some Greeks) have arrived in Jerusalem for the festival. Meanwhile, Jesus' conflict with the Jewish establishment has escalated to a dangerous level. The events that will lead to Jesus' condemnation and death are now in motion. Jesus obediently accepts his fate and is prepared for the outcome.

Jesus compares his "glorification" to a grain of wheat that is buried and dies to produce its potential crop. The death and ultimate harvest of the grain of wheat are the fate and glory of anyone who would be Jesus' disciple.

The "voice" may have only been heard by Jesus. While those around heard thunder, Jesus heard what was called a *bat qol* ("daughter of a voice"): in Jewish tradition, individuals and groups sometimes heard a "voice" from heaven revealing to them God's teaching or will for them. The *bat qol* that Jesus "hears" in today's gospel is a call to all the world that a new Passover was about to begin.

Focusing the First Reading

Jer 31:31-34

In today's first reading, the prophet Jeremiah prophesies a "new covenant" that will be written not on stone (as was the law of Moses) but on human hearts and spirits. Jeremiah's vision will be realized in Jesus' vision of the kingdom of God, a kingdom established on justice, mercy, and peace.

Focusing the Responsorial Psalm

Ps 51:3-4, 12-13, 14-15 (12a)

The image of God recreating hearts, of renewing human souls, that Jeremiah writes of in today's first reading is echoed in the antiphon and verses selected from Psalm 51, today's responsorial psalm.

Focusing the Second Reading

Heb 5:7-9

The theology in the second reading is sophisticated and subtle. The letter to the Hebrews praises Jesus for his obedience to the will of God his Father. In his suffering, the son learns obedience and is thereby perfected. For us who obey him, he is the source of eternal salvation.

PROMPTS FOR HOMILISTS, CATECHISTS, AND RCIA TEAMS

How have you experienced the dying and the harvest of the grain of wheat in your life?

.....
.....
.....
.....

What is the most powerful or authoritative "law" that God has written on your heart?

.....
.....
.....
.....

When have you found it most difficult to be obedient to God?

.....
.....
.....
.....

When have you lost something that, in time, turned out to be a gain?

.....
.....
.....
.....

Fifth Sunday of Lent, March 18, 2018

Gospel (cont.)

John 12:20-33; L35B

The crowd there heard it and said it was thunder;
but others said, "An angel has spoken to him."
Jesus answered and said,
"This voice did not come for my sake but for yours.
Now is the time of judgment on this world;
now the ruler of this world will be driven out.
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.