

Fifth Sunday of Lent
March 22, 2015
4:00 p.m. and 8:30 a.m. Masses

Our Gospel reading today it marks an important shift in St John's Gospel. Up to now we have been hearing about the ministry of Jesus; his teaching, his 7 miracles, or signs as John calls them, and other important events in his life.

But now we suddenly take a new turn, we're delving into the events leading directly up to his Passion and death on the Cross of Calvary. It's important to get the sequence of events right as laid out in John's Gospel.

Jesus had just come from Bethany where Mary had anointed his feet with precious perfume and wiped them with her hair. Jesus replies to Judas' question about the use of the money this ointment cost that it was fitting that she should anoint him in preparation for his burial.

This is the first clue we get of the serious events that are to follow. Immediately afterwards Jesus then enters Jerusalem, the Holy City, on the back of a donkey and the crowds spontaneously welcome him waving palms and crying out, "Hosanna, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." They're greeting the much-anticipated Messiah as he takes possession of his own city.

This is another clue as to nature of the events that are to follow. Which brings us to today's reading. Philip tells Jesus that some Greeks have come who want to see him. Jesus then very dramatically says, "Now the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."

These Greeks get only the briefest of mentions and yet they are extremely important. They approach Jesus indirectly going through Philip who has a Greek name and so is a disciple of Jesus who might be favorable to them.

Jesus then launches in to a prediction of his death; but this is unlike the similar predictions in the other Gospels because there is a prelude that invites his disciples to embrace their own passion and death.

He tells them in these famous words, "Unless a wheat grain falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest." He uses this metaphor to point out to the disciples that each of them must also die in order to be raised up to new life.

Of course, this is not simply to undergo death because everyone must do that regardless of their belief or disbelief, this dying, then, is one that bears fruit by detachment from this world for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

A daily dying to the self by overcoming a million petty urges and desires. It means a generous acceptance of the duties of marriage and family life with cheerfulness.

It means configuring to the truth by celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation and regularly and the rejection of sin.

A husband meets his greatest challenge to die to self and live for Christ as he cares for his terminally ill wife unto the end, never counting the cost in dollars or days. He has chosen Christ and "hated" his own life in this world so that he can live forever.

A wife attends to her paraplegic husband in a heroic living of her marriage vows, choosing Christ and his life, and "hating" her life in this world because she looks forward with anticipation to the day when both she and her husband will know no more pain, suffering, or temptation.

Parents unconditionally love their child even if he or she is affected by Down's syndrome, open to the Godly beauty and goodness that this precious child has brought into the world. They "hate" their life in this world and together they see a foretaste of heaven in the innocence of their child. They desire to share forever in the glory of God's love and understand that they must reject the very easy path of selfishness.

The infertile couple rejects the temptation to manipulate the process of life-giving through unnatural methods of conception and open themselves to the joys of adoption.

They truly "hate" their lives in this world in reverence for God and the desire to do his will, choosing salvation as their greatest hope over the other good things this life offers.

We're not alone in our temptation to reject the crosses by which we are born into life if we will only bear them with patience and courage. Our sharing in baptism is the gift of grace so that we can desire a share in Christ's redemptive passion as the focus and purpose of our lives. The desire to embrace his Father's plan of redeeming love inspired Jesus' whole life for his redemptive passion that was the very reason for his Incarnation.

In our daily prayers let's pray for the grace to thirst for the Father's will in and with Jesus our Lord as we echo His words "Thy will be done."