

5th Sunday of Lent

Introduction

First, let me say what a joy it is to be here at St. Joseph's to celebrate Mass in Spanish with all of you. I ask your pardon for my accent! I'm working on it! What I cannot say well in words, I say with a pastor's heart: the growth and vitality of the Latino community here at St. Joseph's brings me joy because it is a source of strength not just for this parish but indeed for the whole Archdiocese! Muchas gracias!

For St. Gregory the Great: I am grateful for the opportunity to offer Sunday Mass here at St. Gregory the Great. I take this opportunity to thank your pastor, Fr. Jean-Pierre, for his faithful and loving service to this parish community! With you I remember Msgr. Damien Nalepa who served here with such love for so many years. Since 1884 this parish community has proclaimed the joy of the Gospel. I came today to say thanks, to offer a word of encouragement, and to walk with you on the final leg of the journey toward Easter. Thank you for welcoming me so warmly!

Believe it or not, we are already beginning the Fifth Week of Lent. Where did the time go? How can it be that the 40 days of Lent have passed by so quickly? Next Sunday is Palm Sunday and before we know it, Easter will be here, and, with any luck, we have had our last snow shower! So let me begin by urging myself and urging you to make good use of the remaining days of Lent by praying wholeheartedly, by doing without some good thing that we enjoy, by giving generously to those who are in need, and by going to Confession, especially this coming Friday, March 27th, from 3:00 until 8:00 p.m. when confessions will be heard in all the parishes of the Archdiocese.

Sir, We Would Like to See Jesus

If we pay close attention to today's Scripture readings, we can feel some of the tension that the apostles must have felt. Even though Jesus is moving about openly, the authorities are watching him closely, looking for the opportunity to arrest him. Jesus himself is aware that he is about to be put to death. In words that remind of us of the Agony in the Garden, he says: "I am troubled now. Yet, what should I say...Father, save me from this hour?"

Now, we might expect that Jesus' plight would have caused people to stay away from him and from his disciples. Yet, that's not what happened in the Gospel. Today we heard about some Greeks who wanted to see Jesus. They weren't simply curiosity seekers. They weren't looking for Jesus because he was a celebrity. These Greeks were good and pious men who were really seeking the truth. They wanted to know God and to live their lives accordingly. So they went to Philip, because he had a Greek name, and said: "Sir, we want to see Jesus!"

And what does Jesus do? He doesn't merely smile and shake their hands and sugarcoat his situation. He doesn't say, "Well, things are looking kind of bad right now, but stick with me because everything will turn out just fine!" No, Jesus doesn't try to deceive the Greeks who ask to see him. Instead, he really does allow them to see him. He reveals to them that the hour has come for him to be glorified but not in the way the world thinks about glory. Rather Jesus would be glorified by laying down his life in atonement for our sins. He is the grain of wheat that dies and is buried in the earth. Anyone seeking Jesus must be prepared to do the same. Only by sharing in Jesus' death, by losing our own lives, do we share in the eternal life he won for us. Only by giving up all those things we hold onto as substitutes for God's love—money, power, pleasure, hatred and prejudice—does the Word of God take root in our hearts and raise us up from our sins.

Perhaps the Greeks got more than they bargained for. Not only did Jesus tell them about his own impending death but indeed God the Father confirmed that in dying for our sins, Jesus was clothed in the glory of the Father's self-giving love. To some, God the Father's words sounded like thunder. To the hearts full of faith, they are words that bring us joy. Jesus came to do the Father's will. And the Father's will is that we should be saved from our sins and have eternal life. Whatever sufferings we endure in this life pale in comparison to the greatness of God's love for us. Pope Francis sums up the essential message of the Gospel for you & me this way: "Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; & now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen, & free you." (EG, no. 164)

Be Missionary Disciples

Now let's apply this Gospel to our own lives. Pope Francis has told us that we should not think about the Gospel or the Church or our parish community as a private

possession that we keep only for ourselves. No, once we are convinced that Jesus truly loves us and gave his life for us, and that we have met him in Scripture, in the Eucharist, and in one another... then we cannot keep that good news to ourselves. No, we have to share it with others... not a watered-down version of the Good News made to our own liking, but rather true Gospel of the Christ who died for us and who call us to lives of self-giving love.

Just like the Greeks who said to Philip, "Sir, we want to see Jesus"... there are people all around us who want to see Jesus. Some know it and some don't. There are people who dropped out of the Church but they are not sure how they can come back or if they would be judged severely if they did. With love and understanding we must welcome them home and walk with them on the road of discipleship. There are others who are looking for meaning in their lives. They are looking for something solid to hold onto, for truth and for love... they may not come to us and say, "we want to see Jesus!" - No, we have to bring the love of Jesus out to the by living our faith joyfully and by inviting them to share in the joy of knowing Jesus. Still other people are completely disconnected from God and others. We may think they are lost causes but God doesn't think so...Jesus said: "When I am lifted up, I will draw everyone to myself...."

Conclusion

As Lent draws to a close and Holy Week arrives, let us open our hearts as never before. In this Holy Mass let us join together in giving God heartfelt thanks and praise for sending his Son Jesus to suffer, to die, and to rise for us and our salvation. And filled with a spirit of joy even amid the tears and struggles of daily life, may we show the face of Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, to one and all... Then will we too will be glorified! Then will the Church of Christ grow and flourish! Then will many experience the joy the Gospel!