

# Archbishop Lori's Homily: 5th Sunday of Lent

*Fifth Sunday in Lent*

*St. Joseph Parish, Midland*

*March 18, 2018*

Thank you for your very warm welcome. I'm delighted to visit Divine Mercy Parish at St. Joseph's Church! Even more, I thank you for striving to live your faith and to make this a vibrant community faith, worship, service. Thank you for striving to live your God-given vocations, most especially the vocation to marriage and family. Let me also note in passing that my visit nearly coincides with the patronal feast day of your parish, the feast of the great St. Joseph, the spouse of Mary and Jesus' foster-father. So happy feast day, a day early!

Being with you this morning also gives me a chance and gives you a chance to express our common gratitude to your pastor, Fr. Ed, for his devoted and loving priestly service. Fr. Ed, you are a wonderful pastor & missionary; with all our hearts we thank you!

We turn now to the Scriptures just proclaimed, beginning with the reading from St. John's Gospel. There we met the Apostle, Philip, who had the reputation for being the most outgoing, accessible, and practical of all the Apostles. While many of the other Apostles were brought to Jesus by others who introduced them to him, Jesus was comfortable in asking Philip directly to follow him. Philip also was likely a 'road manager' for Jesus' travels, in charge of food & supplies. For example, when Jesus wanted to feed a large crowd that was tired and hungry, it was Philip who told Jesus what they had on hand (five loaves and two fish) and how much it would cost to feed a crowd numbering almost 5,000 people.

So, it's no surprise that when some Greek converts to the Jewish faith wanted to see Jesus, they went to Philip with their request - and no doubt Philip was very accommodating. We might also think that Jesus would have been equally accommodating to the Greeks... greeting them by name, asking them about how they

happened to convert, making them feel comfortable and at home with him, etcetera... Instead, Jesus started talking intensely about his impending passion and death. In doing this Jesus ran the risk (or so we think) of unsettling the Greeks. In a time when we talk a lot about being a friendly and welcoming Church, what are we to make of this? Did Jesus give up a chance to make new disciples? Did he scare some well-meaning people away from his company?

What Jesus did was not to scare them off but to reveal himself to them. Beyond their expectations, in fact, beyond anything they could imagine, Jesus spoke from the heart about who he was and what he was sent to do. When these Greeks who were Gentiles asked to see Jesus, then Jesus himself realized that his hour had come: the moment chosen by God the Father when he, the Christ, would redeem *the whole world*. Just as Philip had given these Gentiles access to Jesus, so now it was Jesus' role to give access, unparalleled access, to his Father's mercy, first to the Apostles, and then through them, to the world.

And how would Jesus do this? He would do it by surrendering completely to the Father's love by obediently laying down his human life for us and for our salvation. To repeat, only one thing would give Jesus and all of us access to the Father, Jesus' utter surrender to God, his complete obedience to the Father's saving will. In fact, this complete union of Jesus' will with the Father's will is what unleashes the Holy Spirit, who pours into our hearts the love of God... the only love that conquers our sins, transforms our hearts, changes our world, and gives us hope of everlasting life.

Jesus teaches us what such surrender to God's will means when he describes himself as a grain of wheat that falls into the ground and dies so as to produce an abundant harvest. We've heard this image so often that it might be lost on us; what does it mean? The seed buried in the cold, damp darkness of the earth breaks apart, disintegrates, and from this disintegration there comes forth new life. So too Jesus in his Passion will undergo intense suffering, physical disintegration and death as well as burial... so as to bring forth the new life of the Resurrection, a new and redeemed humanity alive in the Holy Spirit with the glory of God. By his suffering Jesus makes God's presence in our midst visible - palpably, tangibly present, first in his own Person, then his Body, which is the Church... and for this reason his name is exalted.

And what Jesus had to suffer, all of us who follow him in our turn must suffer, for unless we deny ourselves and pick up our cross each day, we cannot be the Lord's disciples. This is what the Apostles did; this is what all the saints who ever lived did. Now it's our turn to embrace the Cross in our own lives, in whatever form it presents itself – our worries, illnesses, our loneliness, our sorrows – so that we too can have access to God the Father and his mercy.

In our reading from the Letter to the Hebrews, there's an interesting phrase. It says that Jesus "learned obedience through what he suffered." We may wonder what Jesus, God's only Son, had to learn but in his humanity – our humanity – he had to learn obedience to the Father. As the hour of his Passion and Death approached, Jesus now had to claim who he is and what he was sent to do. He had to be deepened in love, deepened in trust, and deepened in his obedience to the Father . . . so much so that he was able to surrender himself entirely in love to Father for our salvation. In his humanity, Jesus was changed and deepened in his love for God and for us and thus made the ultimate sacrifice which we are preparing to celebrate anew during Holy Week and Easter.

And what about us? What does this mean to us? In the reading from Jeremiah, God promises to take us by the hand, to lead us out of our exile, that is, our alienation from him and from one another, and to write upon our hearts his new law of love. The LORD, in short, promises to give us a new heart, a new spirit, one that is capable of learning trustful, obedient love, the kind of love Jesus revealed as he endured the Cross "with loud cries and tears." For when we take up our Cross in union with Jesus, the door of our hearts is opened to the Father's love and mercy. This, really, is what the Season of Lent, this time of self-denial is all about... it is a time for us to learn afresh what it means to surrender in love to God, to prefer nothing to the love of Christ, to unite our wills to God's will.

As you know, Lent is almost over and if you find it's been 'business as usual', let me hasten to assure you that it is still not too late. There's still time to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation; there's still time to pray more intently, to embrace our sufferings, to go out of our way for others, to ask for that new heart and that new spirit that is alive and joyful in God's love... so much so, that people will ask us, as once they asked Philip, to help them to seek and to find Jesus.

May God bless us and keep us always in his love.