

What Must Go Down Will Rise Again
March 21, 2021, Fifth Sunday of Lent
Gospel of John 12:20-33
Fr. Brad

In our former relationship with God, externals were everything and they had to be taught culturally. The Mosaic Covenant was written on tablets, the new covenant ***will be written within the hearts of the covenantal people.***

God promises to forgive the 'evil doers' and remember their sins no more. This was the promise made to Noah.

In our first reading, Jeremiah is excited about a new covenant between God and Israel that will be different than before and will lead to life. In it ***God will see the depths of the hearts of the people and see the covenant embedded there.*** That '***within covenant***' remains even though the external execution of response may be imperfect. The outer body is weak. The outer world is loaded with conflict and inconsistencies that we can do nothing about. But God does not give up on us even in our imperfections. And our outward imperfections and limitations become even more obvious as illness, aging and our overall physical and mental capacities slowly dissipate, our external execution of response deteriorates further and accentuates our imperfections.

What is within must come out, and what must go down, will rise again. In other words, what must die to the world will ultimately give life to the world.

Turning to our Gospel, like a grain of wheat that falls to the ground and dies to being just a grain of wheat, in order to bring food for the world, so Jesus must receive his hour of dying so as to bring forth life.

Part of spiritual maturity comes by learning to ***let go***,to recognize and let go of our preferences, in favour of the greater good....***to be indifferent***.... not in the way of not caring or apathy....but in the way of deferring a preference we might have in favour of a higher good....as prompted by the Holy Spirit.... for the sake of the world. As Jesus was guided by the Father's will, so we are invited to listen for and accept this same prompting within our own hearts. Letting go of our preferences (or earthly desires) is a lifelong task. These earthly desires or self-interested preferences are, in a sense, ultimately the husk of the grain of wheat that eventually falls away into the soil as the interior of grain of wheat sprouts from within for the sake of life for the world.

Our preferences come in many forms. Each day we suffer deaths of one sort or another. Life situations challenge us to let go of our preference - - perhaps it's the preference to sleep-in in the morning....or having to deal with a difficult client, or having to do the hard problem solving of the day, and to deal with problems that really don't have a concrete solution. Sometimes there is no pad answer to the problem we are trying to solve. To live with that tension might be among the hardest because we cannot gage whether or not we have accomplished anything.

Facing the loss of a job, facing a life style change, the loss of a loved one. To sit by helplessly as a loved one suffers through a life threatening illness without being able to do anything to help. We think of our seniors in care homes or hospitals who contracted the virus and were isolated from their own families, as family members stood by helplessly as their health deteriorated and they eventually died without a proper goodbye. We stand by helplessly as the injustices of racial injustice run rampant. Whether we are the direct victim of the injustice or are among the countless witnesses who want change but are not equipped to bring it about in a visible way, we often must suffer in silence. We may well ask, 'How does this silent suffering change anything?'

We beg for God's help and for God's insight and strength when things overwhelm us. How can we help others by standing by helplessly as injustice unfolds and there is nothing we can do about it. We feel inadequate to the task of loving and forgiveness.

We see in Jesus passion, that passivity. We ask what is the value of sweating blood in the garden, silent tears that are shed privately, interior dissent and outrage that is powerless to change things on the outside? It is frustrating for each of us to have an interior sense of order and of what is right, but at the same time be unable to remedy the outward situation.

Once again we watch the Lord's response and after the resurrection, His words on the road to Emmaus, 'Wasn't it necessary?'

Sometimes the silent suffering, the interior protest and helpless empathy are the real weapons of change. Is it not when we finally admit our utter helplessness and let go, that God finally enters?

I agree with Ron Rolheiser's observation that we come closer to an answer when we truly listen for a pain, illness or injustice that overwhelms so much, that we can no longer rely on any other power than God's. This is the interior disposition that can bring forth new life from the grain of wheat that falls to the ground and dies.

The Eucharistic Prayer is the re-enactment of Christ's sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins.