



## CATHOLIC CONVERSATIONS ON THE SCRIPTURES

Archdiocese of Miami - Ministry of Christian Formation

March 22, 2015

Fifth Sunday of Lent

### Gospel reading John 12:20-33 *[To be read aloud]*

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." 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.

### Brief commentary:

As we draw near to the Great Week of the Christian calendar, the biblical readings intensify with the core themes that will characterize the celebration of the Paschal Mystery. Just as ancient Israel is losing its sovereignty to Babylonian conquest and subsequent exile in the sixth century BC, Jeremiah envisions a restoration and transformation of the people that God himself will achieve. Jeremiah prophesies a "new covenant" that God will establish with the people: it will be a covenant inspiring the heart, based on a personal knowledge – or relationship – with God, and one in which sins would be forgiven and the people redeemed. Our psalm today is a well-known penitential psalm, expressing heartfelt contrition and trust in God's gracious forgiveness. As we near Holy Week, the expectation of "the new and everlasting covenant" in the sacrificial love of Jesus, and anticipated in the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper, fills us with a desire to repent more completely of sin, and a hope and eagerness to relive in liturgy and in our lives the mysteries of our redemption in Jesus Christ. The Letter to the Hebrews (perhaps the oldest surviving Christian sermon) presents Jesus as the great intercessor, the true high priest, who with "supplications, loud cries, and tears" prayed and suffered, and now is the "source of salvation" for all who believe. Because Jesus, out of great love, so identified with us in full solidarity, and continues always to do so, every person – without exception – can come to God trusting in God's mercy and forgiveness. The gospel reading, for its part, takes us to the threshold of the Paschal Mystery. It notes that pilgrims were journeying to Jerusalem for the Passover: this would be the Passover when Jesus would suffer and be glorified. That Jews and Jewish converts from other lands were looking for him was a sign to Jesus that the world was ripe for his gospel; it was a sign confirming that the events of the redemption were now imminent. With dramatic words Jesus expresses his own sense of what is drawing near; yet, he does so not in a foreboding tone, but one in which he is in full understanding of the meaning and significance of his nearing suffering and glorification. The heavenly voice powerfully confirms his intuition. Jesus is confident that "when he is lifted high" on the cross "he will draw everyone" to him: all who have come to love and believe in Jesus can say that they are the fulfillment of his prophecy. Though "troubled" at his suffering ahead, he is resolute and obedient to the Father's will, for he knows that "unless a seed falls to the ground and dies, it cannot produce fruit." In today's gospel, Jesus is certain that his suffering and death will not be in vain, but it will yield fruit forever. Indeed, two thousand years later, we can testify to how right he was, how his redemptive suffering and death on the cross has transformed countless of lives and brought so much good to our world. Christians too need to possess the same beliefs as Jesus, that their efforts, suffering, struggles, on behalf of the gospel and the kingdom do bear fruit. That the seeds of faith, hope and love that they plant will yield fruit, sometimes in unforeseen ways; and that their own lives and deaths are not in vain. God will have the last word, the word of eternal life. As we draw near to Holy Week, may the seed of God's Word today take root in the soil of our hearts, and grow and produce abundant fruit for the kingdom, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

### Today's reading offers significant messages:

- As we draw near to the celebration of the Paschal Mystery, we prepare our hearts through sincere contrition of heart and joyful confidence in God's love for us in Jesus Christ.
- The suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus established God's new and everlasting covenant with the human race. The risen Lord intercedes for all humanity, with compassion and mercy.
- Jesus' suffering and death has borne fruit in our world and in our lives. Christians are confident that their own suffering and struggles for the cause of the redemption of the world in Christ, the cause of the gospel and the kingdom, will bear fruit. Christians know that their sufferings are included in the redemptive suffering of Christ, and these are the extension of his sacrificial love.

### For our shared or personal reflection:

*After a brief pause for silent reflection share your answers, ideas or feelings.*

- What is the meaning of covenant relationship in my life?
- How can I prepare spiritually to participate in the Paschal Mystery in Holy Week?
- In what way do I need to "die to self" in order to be born again more fully in Jesus Christ and bear the fruit of the redemption?

Suggested readings: Catechism of the Catholic Church paragraphs 571-73, 1741-42