

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT: THE SEED MUST DIE

March 21st 2021 Jn 12:20-33

Each of us is like a grain of wheat planted by God. Just as a grain of wheat must die so as to produce a harvest, so we must die to self in order to bear the fruits of love. This dying to self is a gradual process and happens in little ways. Every act of humility involves dying to pride. Every act of courage involves dying to cowardice. Every act of kindness involves dying to cruelty. Every act of love involves dying to selfishness. Thus the false-self dies, and the true self, made in God's image, is born and nurtured. It is by giving that we receive; it is by forgiving that we are forgiven; it is by dying that we are born to eternal life.

Jesus said, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies it bears much fruit. Jesus then explained what he meant. He said, "The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it." It's true in life isn't it? If we are going to get anything out of it we have to invest ourselves in it. Do you remember the second to last album by the Beatles? It was called "Abbey Road" and for my money it was their best. The last song is a little musical reprise called "The End." It's the last lyrical statement the Beatles make on the album. And it went, "And in the end the love you take is equal to the love you make." The truth of this is written in creation. It is evident for everyone to see. It is even found in something as small as grain of wheat, a seed.

Jesus said, first, when a grain of wheat falls it dies. When learn in our text that Jesus is in Jerusalem. It is the feast of the Passover, the week of his death. The town plays host to thousands of pilgrims, the streets swell to twice their normal capacity during this holy festival. Among the pilgrims are gentiles who have converted to Judaism. They are there because they know this is Israel's most important event and there is no more reverent way to worship God in this season than at the Temple, on Mt. Zion in the Holy City. But now they have learned that Jesus has just arrived. They know he is viewed by many to be the Messiah, the new king of Israel. It is no surprise then that they press upon the disciples a request to speak with Jesus.

Some scholars have suggested that these gentiles are not converts but plants by the Roman government to spy on Jesus. They are assessing the seriousness of his claims. This may be the case but I think not. Nothing suggests this. The scriptures say they went up to worship at the feast. But either way Jesus uses the opportunity to announce a shift in his ministry. The hour is at hand. It is time, Jesus said, for the Son of man to be glorified. It was that moment when the last sand falls from the hourglass. No time left for the development of new disciples. No time left for miracles to convince the people. No time left for debates with the religious leaders. No time left, the Passion is upon him. The grain of wheat has left the stalk making its descent to the soil below, its death a certainty, its rebirth yet begun.

For the disciples this is the critical moment. It will be a model for them the rest of their lives. Are they willing to follow Jesus and serve as he has done? Whoever serves me must follow me, Jesus said, and where I am, my servant will also be. Next week is the highlight of Lent. We will relive, along with Christians all over the world, the crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord. It was the critical moment then for his disciples and it is the critical moment now for all of today's disciples; You and me! So I ask you: Do you intend to follow Jesus? Then you must serve.

Jesus said, when a grain of wheat falls it bears much fruit. **And who is this grain of wheat?** The grain of wheat that dies and bears much fruit is Jesus himself. Is Jesus simply extolling the virtues of service. No! This is not a secular ethic. Jesus said, "My Father will honor the one who serves me." Our Lord is the first object of our service. It is interesting to note also that humble service cannot take place unless he first dies. He must be the first grain from the stalk to fall otherwise there can be no fruit. John records these words, "But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself."