

## Homily for the Fifth Sunday of Lent 2021 Year B

In this period now before Easter, the church, in its liturgy and prayers speaks much of what is called the Paschal Mystery and how we live it out in our lives. What is it that we are talking about and how can the notion be a help to us?

The clue lies in Christ words "Unless a grain of wheat falls onto the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain, but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest".

The Paschal Mystery is like a cycle of rebirth, it is a movement or sequence of events that shows us that in order to come to a fuller life and spirit we must be constantly prepared to let go of our present life and spirit. What I mean is this - the Paschal Mystery begins with suffering and death - Good Friday; it moves on to the reception of new life - Easter Sunday; it spends some time grieving the old and adjusting to the new, to the 40 days to the Ascension, to the Ascension itself; then letting go, refusing to cling like Mary Magdalen; and finally, after the old life has been truly let go, the coming of a new spirit for the new life that one is already living - a Pentecost.

That is the sequence or the pattern of the Paschal Mystery. A process of transformation in diverse areas of our life within which we too can be given both new life and new spirit, a share in the Paschal Mystery.

Let's break it down a little bit more.

When we talk here about death and life in the Paschal Mystery it helps to understand what is entailed.

First of all, take the idea of death. There are two kinds of death, there is terminal death and then there is Paschal death.

Terminal death is what we all know about. It is an end to life and all its possibilities.

Then there is what you might call a Paschal death, real, like terminal death, but while ending one kind of life it opens the person undergoing it to receive a deeper and richer form of life.

The image of the grain of wheat falling onto the ground and dying so as to produce new life is a good image of what is meant by Paschal death.

Now the idea of life.

Likewise, there can be two kinds of understanding of the notion of life here - a resuscitated life and a resurrected life.

First of all, there can be a resuscitated life, that can happen when one is restored to one's former life and health, like Lazarus, but only one day to die again.

Then there is resurrected life, not the restoration of one's old life but a radically new life like Jesus at the Resurrection.

He received a new life, a richer life and one within which He would never have to die again.

The Paschal Mystery is about a Paschal death and a Resurrected life, and it's not first something that we must undergo just once, but rather a daily rhythm in all sorts of aspects of our lives.

It's a sort of rhythm that is the underlying secret of life itself and ultimately our happiness depends upon our properly understanding it and living it.

Now all those words are very abstract and very airy fairy, unless I can actually give you an example of how the pattern and rhythm can be worked out in diverse aspects of our lives.

Take for example the absolute certainty of the death, the death of our youth.

You wake up one morning, look into the mirror and realise that you are now 70+ - and all the cosmetics, exercises, plastic surgery, tummy tucks and positive attitudes in the world can't change that - your youth is gone, perhaps long gone, it is dead.

But wait a minute - you are not dead. Look again into the mirror and you can see a still vibrant person, full of deeper life and experience than you had when you were 40 or 50 or 60 or 70.

Good Friday has happened to you, your youth has died.

But Resurrection too has happened to you, for you have received the life of a 70-year-old. You might not be immediately aware of it, but it is a different and richer life than that of a 20-year-old.

Now you have a choice, you can hanker after and refuse to let go of your lost youth, a bit like Mary Magdalen on Easter Morning trying to cling to the Jesus she once knew, you try to still hold onto your youth.

But Christ told her not to cling for He had to ascend to his Father.

If you cannot accept the death of your youth and let it go, it would be akin to blocking the ascension and you will be an unhappy, fearful and frustrated 70-year-old, trying to live your life with someone else's spirit, a 20-year-old.

Better to be able to refuse to cling and let your dead youth ascend and then be able to mean and say "it was good to be 20 or 30 or 40 or 50 or 60" - but it is even better to be 70+ – and then a Pentecost will happen to you.

You have opened yourself up to receive the spirit of the new life that in fact you have already been living, the life of a 70-year-old which is a different spirit than for somebody who is 20.

Some of the happiest people in the world are 70 and some of the unhappiest people in the world are 70, the difference is not who has kept themselves the youngest and slimmest looking, but in a Pentecost.

The happy 70-year-old is one who has received the spirit of someone that age, that spirit which Scripture says is given to each of us in a most particular way for each particular circumstance of life.

The ancient Egyptians used to mummify their dead and soak them in formaldehyde to somehow keep them intact forever, the antithesis of the Paschal Mystery.

The Christian idea is to let go, to not cling, to let nature take its course, and let the Ascension happen and trust that the God who once gave us life will now give it an even deeper way - if I let him.

If I am 70+, but I try through every technique and cosmetic known, to preserve my youth, I am, in my own way, attempting to mummify my body.

To enter into the Paschal Mystery should free us from that sort of unhappiness.

Just one example there, and perhaps a fairly trivial one, of how our lives can be marked and enriched by entering into the sequence and pattern of the Paschal Mystery. If we but open our eyes and let it happen.

A sort of death - a new life, not clinging, letting go, letting an Ascension happen - so that a Pentecost may come.

Now you can apply that sequence to help you cope with any painful situations of change that you will encounter in life, the death of dreams, ideals, relationships, perhaps even our understanding of God and the Church. All are transitory and sometimes painfully change or pass, but if we let them go and make way for something new, if we let them Ascend, then it is Christ's promise that a new Pentecost can be experienced in our lives.

The disciples in the Gospel, very strangely, did not recognise Jesus on the road to Emmaus, preoccupied with the thoughts of the details of his suffering and death, they were clinging to the old Jesus, who still walked beside them.

It was only when they looked afresh at Jesus that they had recognised the new reality of what He had become.

God always walks beside us, but sometimes in our darkness or pain, we need to enter into the sequence and rhythm of the Paschal Mystery to see that He is still with us, but now in a different way.

Things will alter, things will change, and things will die. Don't cling to them, something new will replace them. Grieve for them but don't try to cling to them. Take an enormous leap of faith and trust and let them go. Let them ascend so that a new spirit of Pentecost will replace them.

That is how we can enter and live out the Paschal Mystery in our lives.