

## Fr James' homily for The Fifth Sunday of Lent 2021



First Reading: The Prophecy of Jeremiah 31:31-34  
Second Reading: Letter to the Hebrews 5:7-9  
Gospel: John 12:20-30

Once again the Gospel for this Sunday, as the last two Sundays, is from St John rather than from St Mark, and today we whiz forward in St John from that scene near the beginning of Jesus' ministry to towards the climax of the Gospel, for today our keeping of Holy Lent begins to move to that climax. Today begins that "Season of the Passion" within Lent, and to mark this the images in our churches are veiled, so as to concentrate our attention on the mystery of our redemption being worked out in front of us.

The Gospel is thrilling and repays careful reading and prayer. The word "now" is repeated, showing us the urgency of Jesus' mission. It is linked with the word "glory", for the glory of God is being revealed to us.

What is that glory? Well, for that we can pay attention to the first reading from the prophet Jeremiah. This is another vital, pivotal scripture helping us to understand the purposes of God. It refers to the covenant God has made with his people. A covenant is more than an agreement or a legal contract; it is something physical and binding and transforming. God has repeatedly made covenants with his people: with Noah (look back at the readings for Sundays in Lent); with Abraham (same again); with Moses (same again); with David, of course to whom God make the promise of a descendent who will rule in his place; trying every time to bring his people into conformity with his will. "Choose life" God had urged his people...but time and again they would choose the opposite.

Now, says Jeremiah, something new will happen. God will "write his law on their hearts". He will make it possible truly for choosing life to become second nature, truly internalised. This definitive covenant needs personality, it needs intimacy - think of Jesus and Nicodemus talking together intimately last Sunday. It needs God-with-us. It needs Jesus. This is the mystery we as the church place before the world in this holy time, but really all the time. Everything about the church is supposed to be about what Jeremiah calls "leaning to know the Lord", making it possible to touch God.

This is the context for our Gospel, which shows us the genius of St John as a Gospel writer. First, he grounds the scene in reality. The "Greeks" - i.e. outsiders - want to see Jesus. Like everyone, they want to "learn to know the Lord". John shows us the dynamics of personality between his friends and fellow disciples Philip and Andrew,

and then from this very real, everyday scene, he shows us the heart of God in the voice of Jesus and the heavenly voice of God the Father.

Jesus begins to reveal how he is now, imminently, to make the covenant of God a new and everlasting covenant. He likens himself to that wheat grain: a seed is hard, dry and filled with locked up potential. Unless the seed gives away its very being, it is just a shell. Love is always a breaking open of the self. Jesus describes our lives in a way that shocks us: we must hate our lives in this world. The enemies of our faith take such words and say “there you are, religion is all about feeling miserable and guilty”... but that is to miss the meaning entirely. God tells us the truth: that “hating” life means exactly the opposite, it means rejecting the illusion of self-sufficiency and self-determination and choosing life, the life that is God’s covenant, the eternal horizon.

At every Mass we hear the words that Jesus will say just a few days after this Gospel scene when , in the upper room, he takes the chalice and calls it the “blood of the everlasting covenant” which is his very self and his sacrifice of himself. Where better can we “learn to know the Lord”? Christ passion is that he will break his life open so that we may know his Father and have his law written on our hearts - like second nature.

Amen.

*Fr James and Fr Tom wish you a blessed Sunday. Keep safe and well, and never hesitate to pick up the telephone and be in touch. See you in church I hope! Keep in close contact with the website for news of how practical plans are developing.*