

5th Sunday Lent (B)

22nd March 2015

'Cross and Forgiveness'

Jer 31: the new covenant

Heb 5: *Christ offered up prayer and entreaty*

Jn 12: 20–30: *Unless a grain of wheat falls on the ground and dies ...*

Why did Jesus have to die? It is the question at the heart of our faith; and at the heart of Passiontide that we are now beginning, approaching Holy Week. Why *did* Jesus have to die? What is often the simplest, most straightforward way of putting it is that “He died for our sins” — He died to “save us from our sins”. But what do we really mean by that?

What we mean is, as He Himself tells us in the Gospel: *Unless a wheat grain falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies it yields a rich harvest.* The power of His witness, in suffering the hatred meted out to Him; the strength of His endurance and faithfulness; all point to His wanting to take on Himself the very worst that mankind could throw at Him; the very worst tortures and ridicule that humanity could invent. This was not just to show He was strong and brave ... It wasn't just as an *example*, but it was a *sacrament*: an action of God that brings God's grace to those of faith. Jesus dies so that we might have life. He dies, like the grain of wheat, so that something

bigger and better might have life: He enters into death, to ruin death, to bring eternal, divine life (the life of the undying immortal all-powerful God) into the realm of the dead. Jesus dies, so that when He rises, He brings us also to resurrection, those who associate themselves with Him in faith.

He dies because humanity in its sinfulness chooses to turn away from what is good, and even to do away with what is good, to eliminate it violently. In going to death; in accepting the Cross, and climbing to Calvary, he takes onto Himself that burden of sin — a weight that no-one else could ever have borne — and He staggers with it up the hill to Golgotha. He takes our sins away .. He takes our sins with Him and puts them to death. He accepts our hatred for Him, and does away with it in perfect forgiveness and love. He does not retaliate; He does not store up a grudge; He does not merely escape the dreadful situation. He takes our sins and dies with them, so that humanity can be reborn afresh, sins forgiven, new and freed from the burden of sin and death ourselves. He dies, so that something new and better can be born: humanity not condemned to death, but with the prospect of life, eternal life in Him.