

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday Lent (B)

18<sup>th</sup> March 2018

‘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, there 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 can bring 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.

To share in this, we have to be baptized: this is our initial entry into life with Christ, our first sharing in His death and resurrection. But sadly we do not all stay perfect and sinless from the day of our Baptism ... In fact, almost none of us does: we sin again, and we are in need of constant forgiveness. But the Lord wants us to be forgiven and to be free of our sins. If we do not look for that forgiveness that flows from the Cross, then what are we about as Christians? We can't celebrate His love for us without seeking His forgiveness. To be truly His disciples, we want to be close to Him in holiness, we don't want to be satisfied with a sinful less-than-best, keeping Him at a distance. And therefore we need to keep celebrating His gift of mercy in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Jesus died to save us from our sins; and if we are to celebrate His death and resurrection, then we will want Him to take our personal sins away, repeatedly, and regularly. If we turn

down Confession; if we never turn to the Lord for His forgiveness, then surely it is like saying, why did you bother dying for us? He bothered, because He knows our frailty and yet He loves us; let us bother to get to experience that love of His in Confession!

There are many opportunities now in the next couple of weeks, to go to Confession: the children in Years 4–6 in the Catholic primary schools have been going to Confession this Lent. The Confirmation candidates and their parents will have the chance soon. The other opportunities are all listed on the special purple sheet for Holy Week and Easter, along with an examination of conscience to help you make a good and thorough preparation. The best opportunity, when about 6 priests will be present, is our Penitential Service on Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> March. Don't neglect this chance to be freed of your sins this Lent. Come and know the forgiveness of your Lord. *Have mercy on me, God, in Your kindness. In Your compassion blot out my offence. O wash me more and more from my guilt, and cleanse me from my sin.*