

Fifth Sunday of Lent (Cycle B) Homily

St. William, Champion | March 21, 2021

Jer 31:31-34 | Heb 5:7-9 | Jn 12:20-33

Deacon Robert Mintus

There is a saying that a friend of mine often repeated: “If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans...” One fall, I found this to be true. I had some low spots around my house, and I had bought some dirt to fill them in. We had also bought a pumpkin to carve with my daughter, and as we cleaned the pumpkin out, we set the seeds aside in an aluminum pie plate, planning to save them to dry and roast, and left them on the porch to begin drying. Winter came earlier than we anticipated that year, and a stiff wind on a cold day overturned the plate, dumping its contents out onto our yard. I picked up the seeds and threw the plate away. The following spring, I was pleasantly surprised to see that a small vine had sprouted up next to my house. It was in the wrong place, but I left it alone, and over the summer, it gradually grew and grew to about ten feet long, providing us with several pumpkins, one of which was large enough to become my daughter’s jack ‘o lantern that fall.

For the Greek visitors who met with Jesus in our Gospel today, I can imagine their disappointment and confusion. They were coming to Jerusalem just before the feast of Passover, and were expecting something else from their audience with Jesus. Instead, He tells them about the parable of the wheat, and how His followers must give up their life in order to gain eternal life. I doubt this is anything like what they had expected or hoped to hear in their time with Jesus. But it is only after Jesus's death and resurrection that we can begin to unpack and understand all of this – that God loved us enough to send His only Son to save us and reunite us with Him, allowing us to enjoy the gift of eternal life.

Today, Jesus hints about the self-sacrificing love that lies at the core of our faith. That love will be demonstrated over Holy Week, which begins with His triumphant entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. It continues with His washing the feet of the disciples on Holy Thursday and showing us that it is all about our love for each other. And on Good Friday, He shows the depth of His love for all people, when He gives up His life for us and shows how to forgive. It

is through that love that we can reinterpret the cross – a sign of cruelty and brutality – as a symbol of hope and victory. It is that sacrifice which allows Jesus to restore a covenant that we broke. Today we are reminded that our suffering and sacrifices are not hopeless, but that they have value and meaning when we unite them to the sufferings and sacrifice of Jesus.

Jesus warns us that the road up ahead isn't easy. Each one of us has to die to some parts of ourselves so that we are able to live in Him and live for others. This raises some tough questions. If we are truly following Jesus, then are we willing to give up our own comfort, our own security, so that others' lives may be better? Are we willing to love others enough to forgive them and let go of old grudges and let past hurts heal? Are we willing to go outside our own comfort zone, speaking out against injustice, corruption, and sin? Are we willing to speak up for those who cannot defend themselves? Many of the issues we face in our world can be solved... if only somebody is willing to stand up and be a part of the solution. When we are willing

to suffer so that others may live a better life, not only are we better persons, we can transform the world around us, a little bit at a time.

Today, Jesus encourages us to be strong in our faith and unafraid to live out our commitment to following Him, to reach out to others with the same love He had, and to open ourselves to the transforming power of His love. We will also find that in loving and forgiving others that we create an opening for God to work in our lives to heal the wounds which divide us and offer us the hope of closer relationships with our brothers and sisters.

While that pumpkin seed landed silently on the ground, it quietly produced a wonderful harvest that was unexpected. God can do marvelous things with us. Are we willing to let Him use us in His plan to bloom where we've been planted, to make our world a better place?