

Closing Prayer

In our hearts, O God,
you have written a covenant of grace,
sealed by the obedience of Jesus your Son.

Raise us up with Christ,
the grain fallen to earth
that yields a harvest of everlasting life.
Bring us to glorify your name
by following faithfully where he has led.

We ask this through Christ, our deliverance and hope,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
holy and mighty God for ever and ever.

Opening prayers. Lent 5, Year B²

CPL • LBC Year B Lent 5.odt • 2021-02-15

² *Opening prayers : scripture-related collects for the years A, B and C from the sacramentary / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999.*

The Fifth Sunday of Lent

Principal Service readings

Jeremiah 31.31-34	God promises a new covenant, written on hearts, not stones
Psalm 51.1-13 or Psalm 119.9-16	Purify me from my sin / I delight in your will
Hebrews 5.5-10	Christ was appointed and was obedient even in suffering
John 12.20-33	The grain of wheat has to die to produce fruit

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

The grain of wheat has to die to produce fruit

²⁰Among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.' ²²Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³Jesus answered them, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.

²⁷'Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say – "Father, save me from this hour"? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. ²⁸Father, glorify your name.' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.' ²⁹The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to him.' ³⁰Jesus answered, 'This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. ³¹Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. ³²And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.' ³³He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

John 12.20-33 NRSV¹

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Comments and Questions

The theme of Jesus' death, so prominent in chapter 11, dominates the events of chapter 12. Jesus has entered Jerusalem (12.12-16), and the arrival of some Greeks (12.20-22) leads to the announcement that that the hour has come (12.20). The presence of Greeks in Jerusalem shows them to be 'God-fearers', Greeks by birth who admired and lived Judaism as best they could. Their desire to see Jesus (12.21-22) shows that the words of the Pharisees are true: 'The world has gone after him' (12.19). Since they are Greek, they approach a disciple with a Greek name, Philip, who came from Bethsaida, a town close to the Gentile Decapolis. Their request to 'see Jesus' is more than curiosity. The Greeks are seeking insight and understanding. The Gentile connection is highlighted by Philip's approaching another disciple with a Greek name, Andrew, who comes from the same town as Philip (cf. 1.44; 6.7-8). Together, they speak to Jesus (12.22).

The scene is set and then Jesus announces that the hour has come, and explains some consequences of it: for himself, his followers, and 'the Jews'. Jesus uses the image of a grain of wheat falling into the ground to describe his own situation. The idea of 'falling' to the earth to convey death is at odds with the earlier image of being 'lifted up'. However, this way of speaking allows Jesus to associate such self-sacrifice with the bystanders. The disciples of Jesus must be prepared to lay down their lives in self-giving (12.25). But they are also called to reverse the attitude of the opponents of Jesus who want to cling to what is theirs. They make an absolute of it, and love their lives (12.25). But the disciple must be where Jesus is, and so self-giving in love is critical. Such self-giving is not just for Jesus, but will be honoured by the Father (12.26).

'Now my soul is troubled', says Jesus, the 'now' of the hour that has come (12.27). Jesus asks to be safely brought through this hour. He also asks that the Father be glorified (12.28), showing that he is entirely dependent on the Father. A voice from heaven sounds in reply (12.28), which interprets all that has happened and all that is going to happen. The people around wonder at what they have heard. Was it natural or was it an angel (12.29)? It only makes sense if one is prepared to accept

that it comes from God. Jesus explains that the voice from heaven is for their sake, not his own.

A second moment of revelation begins as Jesus announces judgement on this world (12.31). The 'now' of v.31 is closely related to the 'hour' of the glorification of the Son of Man (12.23). Jesus says that the hour of his glorification is the hour of judgement of this world (12.31). His hour and fruitful death have come. In his being raised from the ground, at the same time as a physical 'lifting up' and of exaltation, he will draw all people to himself (12.32). This will occur by a lifting up on a stake, as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert. (3.14).

Quotations

1

Above all the grace and the gifts that Christ gives to his beloved is that of overcoming self.

St. Francis of Assisi, c.1181–1226

2

Those who live as though God sets the rules are not going by their own rules. That is the self-sacrifice, or selflessness, that peace more often than not requires. Those who insist on going by their own rules cannot make that sacrifice. They are the steady adherents of (global) conflict because they are forever fighting both themselves and others to do whatever they think that they want to do.

Killosophy / Criss Jami. 2015

3

If we seek spiritual heroism ourselves, the old ego is just back in control under a new name. There would not really be any change at all, but only disguise, just bogus self-improvement on our own terms.

Falling upward: a spirituality for the two halves of life / Richard Rohr. 2004

Related topics

For further study:

Paschal mystery; cross; mystery of suffering; Christology; redemption; soteriology; salvation; conversion; faith, hope, and love; discipleship