

# FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

March 20, 1994

Jeremiah 31:31-34

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Hebrews 5:7-9

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.

John 12:20-33

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very 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. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

"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. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What have you observed or experienced that speaks to you of God's presence and action in the world?
2. In today's Gospel reading we hear Christ say, "If anyone would serve me, let that person follow me; where I am, there will my servant be." Where do you see Christ in the world today? Are you where Christ is?
3. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews tells us, "Son though he was, (Jesus) learned obedience from what he suffered..." What are you learning in the current circumstances of your life?

Diane Banks and Katie Radford □

# Seeds must 'die' to bear fruit

## THE GOOD NEWS

GOD'S WORD IN  
EVERYDAY LIVING

By Father Paul Turner



Note: We offer again this week the readings from cycle B. However, if your community is celebrating the scrutiny rites with catechumens this weekend, you'll hear the story of the raising of Lazarus, John 11:1-45, from cycle A.

THE FIRST DAY of spring next Sunday brings the promise of plants springing to life. It also promises our springing to spiritual life with the celebration of Easter. Easter always falls on the Sunday following the first full moon of spring. This year, spring's first full moon itself falls on a Sunday (March 27), so Easter will follow a week later (April 3).

By sheer coincidence the lectionary's choice of a Gospel for the fifth Sunday of Lent couldn't be more verbal. "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." A passage heard frequently at events from funerals to Teens Encounter Christ weekends, it seals the message of Lent before we begin Holy Week.

Jesus succeeded as a preacher where he failed as a botanist. Seeds don't actually die; they germinate. Nonetheless, John's Jesus puts a different spin on the seed image we find so frequently in the New Testament. Matthew says the kingdom of God resembles a mustard seed (13:31). Mark says the seed the sower sows is the word of God (4:14). Paul says what you sow comes to life if it dies (1 Cor 15:36). But John reflects on the seed above the ground as well as below.

WHAT IS ONLY a single grain of wheat above ground will bear much fruit below. Yes, this dying and rising motif inspires humility and mortification. Yes, it supports the notion of self-denial so revered in Lent. But more, it explains that Jesus is the grain, and the Church is the fruit. Jesus' death brings salvation for others. The seed represents more than the hardships of discipleship; it tells us that Christ is the redeemer.

When John wrote this Gospel, the community he wrote for was suffering persecution. The image of the seed would remind them that if they suffer and die, they will bear fruit. Like Christ, their single

grain will produce great results.

Prompting this saying is the arrival of Greeks looking for Jesus. They signify the advent of the Gentiles among those who felt the allure of Jesus. At the end of this passage we hear Jesus say he will draw all people to himself. Just before this passage begins, the Pharisees have complained about Jesus' popularity, and have become prophets in spite of themselves: "Look, the world has gone after him!" (12:19). So this text captures a theme dear to the other Gospels as well — Jesus, although he was a Jew, came for all, not just the Jews.

The question the Greeks ask offers us a wonderfully profound way to meditate on the Christian life. "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." That prayer could become a daily mantra for any Christian. A pulpit in Europe has it carved on the part which faces the preacher, as a reminder of the listener's desires. Put on the lips of the Greeks, this simple sentence expressed the natural desires of all to know Christ.

Jesus accepts that people want to see him; however, he defines how he will be seen — not as an earthly ruler, but as a grain of wheat which will die to bear fruit.

A KEY WORD in this passage is "hour." "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified," Jesus says. Then later, "And what should I say — 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name."

The "hour" represents the culmination of Jesus' mission, his hour of destiny, his hour of battle, his hour of triumph. John has prepared the reader of his Gospel for this moment. Many times, from his hesitation to perform his first miracle at Cana, Jesus has told the disciples (and the reader) that his hour had not yet come (2:4; 7:6,8,30; 8:20). Now it has come, and he immediately tells us it is for glory. He'll say it again when he reflects on his hour twice more in the Gospel (13:31, 17:1).

John's Jesus already sees through the cross and on to glory. No question of agony or abandonment haunts this Jesus (cf. Mark 14:36; 15:34); he marches intently on to his destiny.

Then John quotes Jesus using an important expression: "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." The evangelist tells us he's speaking of the cross, but surely Jesus also means his resurrection and ascension. All creation will worship the exalted Christ (cf. Phil 2:9-11).

DURING LENT you have meditated on the cost of discipleship. What does it mean to take up the cross? In what way is our dying to self a service to others? Just what is the point of fast, abstinence, and other mortifications of Lent?

Father Paul Turner is pastor of St. John Francis Regis Parish, Kansas City. □

## Daily Scripture Readings

### Fourth Sunday of Lent

Sunday, March 13

2 Chronicles 36:14-17,

19-23

Psalms 137:1-6

Ephesians 2:4-10

John 3:14-21

Monday, March 14

Isaiah 65:17-21

Psalms 30:2, 4-6, 11-13

John 4:43-54

Tuesday, March 15

Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12

Psalms 46:2-3, 5-6, 8-9

John 5:1-3, 1-6

Wednesday, March 16

Isaiah 49:8-15

Psalms 145:8-9, 13-14,

17-18

John 5:17-30

Thursday, March 17

Exodus 32:7-14

Psalms 106:19-23

John 5:31-47

Friday, March 18

Wisdom 2:1, 12-22

Psalms 34:17-21, 23

John 7:1-2, 10, 25-30



Saturday, March 19

2 Samuel 7:4-5, 12-14, 16

Psalms 89:2-5, 27, 29

Romans 4:13, 16-18, 22

Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24

Fifth Sunday of Lent

Sunday, March 20

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Psalms 51:3-4, 12-15

Hebrews 5:7-9

John 12:20-33