

## Fifth Sunday of Lent B - The Hour Has Come for the Son of Man to Be Glorified

March 21, 2021

Recently we learned from a Chinese documentary program "**Gourmet China**" (美食中國) how to pick the best juicy free running duck with less fat by the colour of its wing feathers. The time is when the feathers start to turn black. We also learned the best time to eat a certain regional fish is when its tail is fully mature before it begins to get thin which is a sign of getting old and the meat is getting tough. It really open my eyes. As in Ecclesiastes 3:2 "**For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: ... a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted**"

During his 3 years ministry life, Jesus also has a lot of "the hour". The theme of Our Lord's hour, as used in John's Gospel is inclusive of Jesus' Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension, a single glorifying act, resulting in the salvation of man. The first use of the word "hour" is in the narrative of the Wedding at Cana (Jn 2:1-11). In response to His Mother's request to help the host who's running out of wine, Jesus says, "**Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.**" (Jn 2:4) In John 7:30, when Jesus was teaching in the temple and people were trying to arrest him, the evangelist writes, "**So they sought to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come.**" The point is clearly stated that this passage is a reference to Jesus' *hour*. Indeed, "Jesus' life unfolds in accord with the divine plan, and nothing happens to him by accident. Then in this Sunday's reading, the evangelist writes "And Jesus answered them, **The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified...**" (Jn 12:23). He said that it was time for him to reveal what all humankind would see about him and his role in the divine drama. This must have elated and excited his disciples and the Greeks, because they surely thought that by being "glorified" Jesus meant he would make all things well. Having recently experienced Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, perhaps they thought he would work even greater wonders and bring an end to their difficulties in life. Maybe they thought he meant it was time for him to restore Israel – by a glorious military victory and prevail over all the world's kingdoms, bringing the leaders to bow and knelt at his feet.

Any such euphoria, however, would have been short-lived. It was a different kind of wonder that would be revealed, a different kind of conquest that Jesus had in mind – the conquest of the cross. Jesus immediately began to lay out the hard truth of what lay ahead. In a similar way, as we worship one week away from Palm Sunday, our gospel reading lets us see what lies ahead for us in making the Holy Week journey. Jesus used a parable to explain how not only Greeks but everyone would see him. "**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 seed, by itself, is only a small piece of matter. If eaten, it provides a little bit of nourishment. If left in the blazing sun, it can dry up and lose its value. If sealed in a jar, it can remain viable for centuries. But even then, it is only potentially powerful. But if it is buried and dies beyond its present condition, it can release all that is contained within – the very nature and substance of a whole stalk of ripened wheat.

His own death and resurrection would be the vehicle through which not only his disciples and curious Greeks, but all humankind, could truly see what Jesus was all about. It was by dying that the power of God contained in Jesus would be fully released. By "glorified," Jesus meant crucified. Jesus was saying that only by his death could true life come. Just as a grain of wheat dying in the earth, we must die to our selfishness before we can start living the life of Christ. We are God's grain of wheat, part of his eternal harvest. Making sure there would be no mistaking the stark reality of what he meant, Jesus added: "**Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.**" So, what was true for Jesus, he said, was also true for his followers. Those who would truly see him would know that

only by their deaths to the values of the lesser life of the world could they gain a true greater life in heaven. Jesus laid out this model not just for the disciples and us to see but also to emulate: ***“Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.”***

Often in the course of human experiences – those of past centuries as well as current times – this truth has proved itself out. When concerned and committed people are prepared to die for their cause, much can be achieved. It was by the deaths of the courageous faithful that Christianity first grew. As Tertullian, a Christian writer in the first century said, **“The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”** Think about the saints. Think about our personal heroes. Aren't they the ones who put aside personal safety and security for the sake of others? Every Christian is called to live out the passion of Jesus Christ in his own life. No one is excused or spared its agony. There are no crown-bearers in heaven who were not cross-bearers on earth. Whenever the world gains spiritual health, it often owes to those who lay down their lives for others and leave everything completely in the hands of God the Father.

In today's gospel, Jesus lets us see an initial view of him as the prototype – the perfect example – of the kind of risk-filled living that love of God requires. The world teaches that we will live longer and prosper more if we watch out for ourselves, if we are careful and avoid risk, if we remain in our homes safe and secure. Jesus teaches that by so doing, we may live longer or in greater comfort, but we will not live well. He helps us see that real living – genuine, meaningful living – involves much more. Only by spending our lives can we keep our true lives. **Jesus calls us into a “give-it-away” faith.** He calls us into a realm not of our ordinary world, but into one that stands in sharp contrast – the world of God. Jesus calls us beyond the common, selfish goals of false security. He calls us to see him – to see his vision – a new view of life, a life of meaning and of glory. Unlike his fellow Jews, Jesus viewed glory not as the acquisition of power or the ability to control their own destiny after centuries of foreign rule, but he looked at glory as the ability to serve others for a greater purpose. Only in this way can we see him for what he really is – the living image of God.

**As we move rapidly toward Holy Week, we would do well to come as the Greeks in the Gospel before the Lord – asking to see Jesus – to discover what he is all about. As we witness the ultimate example that he provides, we can follow him into a life of true meaning and become transformed by what we see.**