

Fifth Sunday of Lent – B
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Mary, Queen of Peace Catholic Church
Sammamish, Washington
21 March 2021

Jeremiah 31:31-34
Psalm 51
Hebrews 5:7-9
(John 12:26) John 12:20-33

Eternal Covenant: Begin with the End in Mind

As I preached about last Sunday, during Lent in this Year B of our three-year cycle of Sunday Readings, after the first Sunday (when we hear the *Temptation of Jesus*)¹, in each of the other Sundays of Lent, Jesus always makes some kind of reference to the purpose for His coming into our world: that is, to take up His Cross, to die, and to rise again.² This is also the purpose of Lent for us: that is, to help us get better at being Jesus' disciples, by following Him, and entering into His Suffering and Death, so that we can also join Him in His Resurrection at Easter.

In the moments that Jesus made those references, well, the disciples didn't really understand what they meant. But, importantly, they *listened* to Jesus, and they *remembered* what He said.³ And then, after His Passion, Death, and Resurrection:

- they could look back to *The Transfiguration* (Second Sunday of Lent), and understand what He meant when, as they were walking back down the mountain, He told them that He would rise from the dead.⁴
- And, they could look back on *The Cleansing of the Temple* (Third Sunday of Lent), and understand that He meant the Temple of His Body when, after they questioned Him, He told them that if they destroyed this temple, He would raise it up in three days.⁵
- And, Nicodemus could look back on his secret conversation with Jesus (Fourth Sunday of Lent), and understand what He meant when Jesus said He must be lifted up just “as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert.”⁶

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Perhaps you've heard about the book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. Its website describes it as “one of the most compelling books ever written...[for over 30 years it has] played a part in the transformation of millions of lives.” One of its goals is to help people make big changes in their life by helping them change their *paradigm*. That is, changing “the

lens through which we see the world” as they go about the activities and projects in their life.⁷

Habit #2 for accomplishing this is: Begin With the End in Mind.

When we begin a day, a week, a task, or a project, with the end in mind, it helps to keep us focused on where we’re headed. If we don’t have the end in mind, it’s easy to get distracted, start thinking or worrying about other things, or even give up, especially if we encounter some difficulties along the way, which often happens in our fallen world.⁸

For Jesus, we can see that He always had His end, goal, or purpose in mind. This has been demonstrated these Sundays of Lent, through His frequent references to His Passion, Death, and Resurrection.

He was tempted by Satan. His disciples didn’t understand Him. Religious officials opposed Him. And, in today’s Gospel, we heard Jesus say that His hour had come.⁹ He also said that He felt “troubled”—but then we heard Him immediately recommit to where the Father was leading Him, as He said: “...it was for this purpose that I came...”¹⁰ No matter what distractions, difficulties, or troubles He encountered, He kept going forward toward the Cross, because He always kept His purpose in mind.

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So, let’s look again at what was Jesus’ purpose. As He told Nicodemus last Sunday, and repeated today, Jesus’ purpose was to “be lifted up,” that is, crucified.¹¹ But, why? So “that the world might be saved through him.” So that He would “draw everyone to” Himself.¹² So that all people “might have eternal life.”¹³

Why was this needed? As we heard in the First Reading from the Prophet Jeremiah, God had promised to make a new covenant with us.¹⁴ There were several covenants between God and humans in the Old Testament, but each of them was broken—not by God, but by humans.

All these covenants were a foreshadowing of this final covenant which is *unbreakable* and *eternal* because it's been made through the sacrifice of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ—God Himself who is both human and divine. God, who through His conquering of death by rising to new life, now lives and reigns *eternally* in Heaven.

Because God has *conquered* sin and death and is *eternal*, this covenant made with the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ is available to all people of all times and places. And, God has given us the Eucharist as a way for people of all times and places—including us right now—to be present at this Sacrifice that was made on the Cross 2,000 years ago. It does not need to be repeated again and again for people of different times and places.

This is the Way that God has made to draw all people—all His children—back to Him, in order to save all people. The fulfillment of this covenant through Jesus Christ's Sacrifice is what we are preparing to celebrate during Holy Week and Easter.

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But, we don't only celebrate the fulfillment of this covenant during Holy Week and Easter. When else? Every Sunday—and every day during the week when we gather for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. In every Mass, the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ is truly made present in the Eucharist. Therefore, people of all times and places—including us right now—have the opportunity to be present at His Sacrifice, and to join in this covenant through receiving the Eucharist.

If we were to ask ourselves why we come to Mass, we might get a variety of answers: for community, for good music, for time to pray, to learn something, to be inspired. To take a chance that Father will have a good homily. These are all good reasons to come to Mass—and

hopefully these things *do* happen, because they are a sign of God’s love and presence in our community.

But, none of these is really *why* we come to Mass. We come to Mass because we want to be a part of that covenant that our ancestors had waited and longed for, for centuries—the covenant that Jesus was focused on making through His Sacrifice. We come to Mass because we want to receive the Eucharist—the sacrificed Body and Blood of Christ—and we want to affirm that we are part of this everlasting and eternal life-giving covenant between God and us.

Furthermore, when we come to Mass and commit ourselves to this covenant between God and us, we are affirming God’s *purpose* for making this covenant. When we join ourselves to this covenant, we commit to doing *our part* in drawing all people to God. To doing *our part* in helping all people to be saved so that they might have eternal life.

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In the beginning of today’s Gospel, some people came to the Apostles and made a simple yet important request: “Sir, we would like to see Jesus.”¹⁵

When we receive the Eucharist, rather than like regular food, which gets changed into being part of us, this Food from Heaven changes *us* into being more like Jesus Christ. The Eucharist and all of the sacraments help set us free from sin, and strengthen us to go back out into the world. To face whatever distractions, difficulties, or troubles we might encounter, and do our part in helping all people be saved, by allowing people to meet and see Jesus in us.

¹ Mark 1:12-13

² John 12:27

³ Hebrews 5:9: “[Jesus] became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him...” (an alternative meaning for “obey” is to “listen”)

⁴ Mark 9:9-10

⁵ John 2:18-22

⁶ John 3:14-15

⁷ Stephen Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (<https://www.franklincovey.com/the-7-habits/>)

⁸ See John 16:33: “[Jesus said], ‘I have told you this so that you might have peace in me. In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world.’”

⁹ John 12:23

¹⁰ John 12:27

¹¹ See John 3:14 and 12:32-33

¹² John 12:32

¹³ John 3:14, 16-17

¹⁴ Jeremiah 31:31

¹⁵ John 12:21