

Bible Study

Fifth Sunday of Lent, cycle b

Opening Prayer: (Sign of the Cross) “Lord our God, all truth is from you, for you alone are the source of wisdom. Give us the joy of hearing your voice in the words we read today and the peace of tasting the depth of your goodness. May our reflections lead us to know you better and to love you more. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.”

Focusing Questions:

1. What has been the worst pain – physical or emotional – that you have ever had to endure?
2. Do you prefer written agreements, or are you a “my word in my promise” kind of person?

Commentary before the First Reading: Jeremiah 31:31-33

The Israelites were in exile; the temple had been destroyed; the stones on which God had written the Ten Commandments had been smashed by the invaders. Into this setting God bade Jeremiah to speak this amazing promise: not only would He forgive their infidelity to their covenant with Him; He would make a new covenant with them that would transform their lives from the inside out.

Read the First Reading aloud.

1. What is the difference between forgiving the people’s sins and forgetting their sins?
2. What, then, is the difference between learning about the Lord and coming to know the Lord?
3. If that difference were a continuum 4 miles long, where would you yourself be?
4. God offered several gifts with the new covenant. Which of them means the most to you personally: God remaining your God no matter what you do, forgiveness of your sins, knowing God’s will almost instinctively, or being called one of God’s people?

Commentary before the Second Reading: Hebrews 5:7-9

There is blessing in suffering. We Christians call that “the Paschal Mystery.” In fact, our salvation was the result of Jesus’ suffering, death and resurrection. As you read this short passage, keep in mind that it was addressed to Jews who had become Christians, so they would have recognized the image of Jesus as the high priest. A high priest offered prayers and sacrifices on behalf of the Jewish people. This is precisely what Jesus did/does for us.

Read the Second Reading aloud.

1. Which event in Jesus’ life is being referred to in verse 7?
2. How is it possible that God the Father could have heard the prayers of Jesus in Gethsemane (verse 8) without sparing him from the torture and death about which he prayed?
3. Jesus was absolutely sinless – perfect - throughout his entire life. Instead of saying “when he was made perfect,” it would be a better translation to say “when his life had been completed...” Does that give you better insight into verse 9?
4. Which of these words best names what God the Father demanded of Jesus: obedience, suffering, death, faithfulness? Give a reason for your choice. Can you say that God expects the very same from you?

Commentary before the Gospel Reading: John 12:20-33

Next Sunday is Palm Sunday. However, this selection from John’s Gospel comes immediately after that triumphant entry into Jerusalem. Jesus is aware that his teaching of the Truth about God has upset many leaders who will seek to stop him permanently. John wrote for a primarily Gentile/Greek Christian audience. Much of this reading is unique to his Gospel. It would have helped John’s readers to understand better what Jesus was about to endure. By the way, to “glorify” someone or something is to “give special honor.”

Read the Gospel Reading aloud.

1. Speak the words or phrases that struck you as we read this.
2. Were the Greeks in verse 20 Jewish believers or pagans? How can you tell?
3. Explain how verse 24 applies to Jesus.
4. Would you say that Jesus was looking forward to accomplishing his saving act?
5. Does verse 30 mean that Jesus did not need to hear the Father’s voice from heaven? Explain.

Applying the Readings to our Daily Lives

1. Do these last 2 readings tell us that we should seek suffering in order to be close to God? If not, what is a more accurate statement of their point about suffering?
2. Can you give an example of a time when suffering or perhaps some form of loss gave rise to a new dimension of life for you?
3. What did Jesus mean when he said that one must “hate his life in this world”? What do you choose to do which shows that you “hate your life” in the sense that Jesus meant?
4. Do you find yourself sometimes hesitant or fearful of giving your life so completely to God? How could you do even better at that?
5. To what extent do you find that having reverence for God makes it easier to obey God’s will?
6. What could you choose to do this week which would give glory to God?

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, we are able to study your Holy Word and speak these words of prayer solely because of the Paschal Mystery which you accomplished for us. Help us to love others so deeply and passionately that we, in turn, eagerly lay down our lives for them, even in small ways. We pray for this grace which you and the Father will send to us through the Holy Spirit. Amen. (Sign of the Cross)