

Sunday, March 25, 2012

Fifth Sunday in Lent

## INTRODUCTION

*God promises Jeremiah that a "new covenant" will be made in the future: a covenant that will allow all the people to know God by heart. The church sees this promise fulfilled in Christ, who draws all people to himself when he is lifted up on the cross. Our baptismal covenant draws us to God's heart through Christ and draws God's light and truth into our hearts. We see God's heart most clearly in the way Jesus shares human suffering, in an agony both the John and Hebrews readings describe.*

## My Soul Is Troubled

Most of us struggle with sacrifice. We know it is noble. We respect it in others. Accounts of the selfless women and men who have given their lives in defense of the weak bring tears to our eyes, yet we fear copying their example. Even Jesus seems to struggle as he approaches his final confrontation in Jerusalem, and it is in this struggle that we recognize him as truly human: "Now my soul is troubled," he tells his disciples. "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."

Jesus' crucifixion and subsequent resurrection lie at the heart of our faith. His willing sacrifice sweeps away our alienation from God and opens the floodgates of grace. He accepted the trajectory of his life, yet still he wrestled as he walked those final steps.

Knowing this, we can turn to him in our own inner conflicts when as parents, for example, we grapple with the loss of our composure, time, or the financial resources that we pour out for our children. Or, if we are tending an infirm relative, we can remember Jesus in our ambivalence at giving up our independence to serve as caregiver. We can reflect on Jesus as we agonize about speaking out against an injustice for fear it might cost our job or a friendship. "Whoever serves me must follow me," Jesus warns. Following Jesus may take us into uncomfortable places, yet he walks with us each step of the way.

"Very truly," Jesus tells the disciples, "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." We sometimes feel broken by our sacrifices, but Jesus promises that out of them emerges new life.

## PRAYER OF THE DAY (ELW)

O God, with steadfast love you draw us to yourself, and in mercy you receive our prayers. Strengthen us to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, that through life and death we may live in your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

## FIRST READING: Jeremiah 31:31–34

*The Judeans in Babylon blamed their exile on their ancestors, who had broken the covenant established at Sinai. Here the prophet looks to a day when God will make a new covenant with the people. There will be no need to teach the law, because God will write it on their hearts.*

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. <sup>32</sup>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. <sup>33</sup>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. <sup>34</sup>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.

## **PSALM (ELW): Psalm 51:1–12**

*Create in me a clean heart, O God. (Ps. 51:10)*

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; in your great compassion blot out my offenses.

**<sup>2</sup>Wash me through and through from my wickedness, and cleanse me from my sin.**

<sup>3</sup>For I know my offenses, and my sin is ever before me.

**<sup>4</sup>Against you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are justified when you speak and right in your judgment.**

<sup>5</sup>Indeed, I was born steeped in wickedness, a sinner from my mother's womb.

**<sup>6</sup>Indeed, you delight in truth deep within me, and would have me know wisdom deep within.**

<sup>7</sup>Remove my sins with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be purer than snow.

**<sup>8</sup>Let me hear joy and gladness; that the body you have broken may rejoice.**

<sup>9</sup>Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my wickedness.

**<sup>10</sup>Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.**

<sup>11</sup>Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

**<sup>12</sup>Restore to me the joy of your salvation and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit.**

## **SECOND READING: Hebrews 5:5–10**

*Using priestly imagery and references to the Old Testament, the author explains how Christ lived in trusting obedience to God, and so God has made Christ the source of our eternal salvation.*

So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"; <sup>6</sup>as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek." <sup>7</sup>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. <sup>8</sup>Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; <sup>9</sup>and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, <sup>10</sup>having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

## **GOSPEL: John 12:20–33**

*Jesus entered Jerusalem for the last time to celebrate the Passover festival. Here Jesus' words about seeds planted in the ground turn the disaster of his death into the promise of a harvest in which everyone will be gathered.*

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. <sup>21</sup>They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." <sup>22</sup>Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. <sup>23</sup>Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. <sup>24</sup>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. <sup>25</sup>Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. <sup>26</sup>Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. <sup>27</sup>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. <sup>28</sup>Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." <sup>29</sup>The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." <sup>30</sup>Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. <sup>31</sup>Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. <sup>32</sup>And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." <sup>33</sup>He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.