

**Facing Jesus' Cross and Our Death** Fifth Sunday of Lent/B March 22, 2015 9:00 AM  
Jer 31:31-34; **Heb 5:7-9**; **Jn 12:20-33** (The human—the human—willingness of Jesus is to give his life away glorifies God. We have the choice to grasp for life in this world or to allow God to take us to himself.)

**“Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit.”**

We are reading from the Gospel of John, and he is the odd man out of the four gospels. You could compare John to Picasso. I don't know if you like Picasso, but one thing you have to admit, what you see is not what you expect. His portraits present the human form in a very unusual way. Well **John presents the narrative of Christ in an unusual way.** For example the voice just mentioned here is in the other gospels too, but at the beginning in association with the baptism of Jesus. The way John makes the portrait of Jesus there is no voice at his baptism; it comes now in this rather complicated narrative, which is part talking to his followers, part talking to himself and part praying to the Father. But **John wants us to see this as a reflection on the meaning of Jesus' baptism and ours. He is connecting it directly to Jesus' fate on the Cross and our eventual passing.**

We are all grains of wheat, and the goal of remaining a grain of wheat is really pointless. A grain of wheat has no purpose remaining just a grain of wheat. **It's in dying that our power is unleashed, our power to feed others, a power to be food.** And this of course was Jesus' very mission. At the very core of Jesus' thinking in this particular moment is this realization: **“But it was for this purpose that I came to this hour.”** He is facing his imminent death. And at the very core of his understanding of life there is this paradox. **This paradox also lies at the very core of all Christian life. “Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it to eternal life.”** This is not philosophizing; **this is facing our own death, and we are foolish to avoid this.**

Jesus in his own human nature had all the natural instincts of self-preservation that we all do. But he realized that self-preservation on this planet is simply impossible, but also preservation is not impossible: it's possible in God. That's the whole idea of **eternal life, living God's life. That's exactly why he came, to share with us eternal life. But in human terms it means losing what we have for now, letting go.**

Now some people are scandalized at the fact that Jesus had to go through such soul-searching. They think that his being close to God meant that he had all the answers, but this is not the case. In fact, **the closer we get to God the more human we become** and that is exactly what Jesus was doing, becoming most human. In the words of Hebrews, **“becoming perfect,” fully human, fully following in the pattern of life that the Father had sent him for.** So it is true for all of us, the closer we get to God the more human we become.

If this soliloquy is connecting Jesus’ baptism with his death, it’s also **a preview of the agony in the garden. “I am troubled, but what should I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’?”** Here the listener overhearing Jesus must not jump to the wrong conclusions. Some of our Christian brothers and sisters have got the idea that the purpose of Jesus’ coming was somehow to undergo punishment. That’s not in the gospel, not in any one of the gospels. **The purpose of this hour is “to glorify your name.”** So what does that mean? Well, in the desert when the people were dying of thirst and complaining to God and really causing trouble for Moses, the glory of the Lord appeared and told Moses to hit the rock from which came forth gushes of water to slake the people’s thirst. Here the glory of God is telling Jesus to pour out his life, to pour out his blood in love to wash away people’s sin. So the connection is between blood and atonement, but it’s not punishment. The blood of Jesus, which is the love of Jesus, washes away all hatred and wickedness and evil. In the ancient world the idea was that blood had all life in it, and so this blood of Jesus has all his life in it, and he is giving it away. He is pouring it out on the Cross. And this glorifies God. **The human—the human—willingness of Jesus to give his life away glorifies God.**

We have to realize that each of us will face the same choice. Every martyr in the history of the Church has always faced the same question, the same **choice to grasp for life in this world or to allow God to take them to himself. Since we all face death sooner or later, this is a question we all have to also face and answer.** Death in fact can become our counselor and clarify a great deal in life: what is important and what it not. Maybe in what remains of Lent we need to talk to ourselves as Jesus did in today’s gospel and ask: **What and for whom am I living?**