



# The Holy Spirit Province NEWSLETTER

16 March 2021



## HIS SUFFERINGS AND OURS: FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT (B)

*Are you and I are saying during Lent - '... we wish to see Jesus'? In what ways are we drawn to him, lifted up on his cross?*

A wise philosopher once said: 'Jesus did not come to do away with suffering or remove it. He came to fill it with his presence' (Paul Claudel).

Our Second Reading today recalls the agony of Jesus in the Garden of Olives. There and then, when he is feeling all alone, the prospect of his passion and death makes him cry out to God in fear and dread. One thought is overwhelming, the thought that he is going to die. Like any young man, he doesn't want to die. He wants to stay alive and enjoy life. But he knows that his enemies are already on their way to arrest him. By this time tomorrow, he'll surely be dead, strung up in disgrace on a rough cross outside the city. What, then, will become of his mission, to make God's kingdom of love, peace, and joy, happen? The horror of it all overpowers him, and though a grown man, reduces him to tears. And yet he does not run away or escape. He does not even think of doing that. He humbly accepts his destiny and submits himself to his mission from God, to save and change the world.

Our gospel according to John, however, has a different angle on the attitude of Jesus to his fate. Even though the thought of it is truly troubling and upsetting, far from asking God the Father to save him from his doom, he welcomes it. For two reasons! In the first place, to give praise, honour, and glory to God! In the second place, to attract the appreciation, respect, and love of all human beings! This is what he means when he says, 'when I am lifted up from the earth [on my cross], I will draw everyone to me'.

Jesus also sees his forthcoming death from a third angle as well. It's in his words, 'whoever serves me will follow me'. He is saying that you and I, and all his friends and followers, have to share his journey to Calvary, share in his sufferings and death.

Suffering comes in many forms and so does death. Death also means many little deaths before our time comes 'to face the final curtain'. There are hundreds of ways in which you and I have to die to ourselves, die to getting our own way, die to our ease, pleasure, and satisfaction. Probably more than any other group with us today, you who are parents know the meaning of laying down your life for others, over and over again.

Raising your family – the sleepless nights, the feeds, the colds, the rashes, the nappy changes, when your children are helpless babies! And the time, care, attention, and skills you give them in their growing- up-years, are all ways you die to yourselves day after day. You do this for the outcomes you hope, expect, and work for. You do this so that your children will grow into adults who will live good, fruitful, useful, and productive lives. The sacrifices you make are another application of what Jesus means with his image of a seed having to first die in the ground before it can spring up a vibrant and productive plant.

In later years the roles are often reversed. Now grown children are asked to be the grain of wheat that falls into the ground and dies. Aging and ailing parents require time, care, and energy from their adult children, who are often still caring for their own children. Schedules are changed and plans are altered, when e.g., an elderly parent requires an emergency trip to the doctor, has a fall at home, cannot find their glasses, or starts losing their mind.

Being alive now means all kinds of ways we are invited and called to follow Jesus in his sufferings and dying. The challenge which goes with our situations is this: - Do we accept the sacrifices we are required to make? Do we accept them as he did, i.e., willingly, cheerfully, generously, and lovingly? Or do we resent and hate what we have to do? Or worse, do we run away from our responsibilities?

It's not all pain, thank God! There is gain as well. The gain of becoming a better person, a more caring, genuine, and generous person! The gain too of closeness to Jesus Christ in the present, and the prospect of everlasting life with him in the hereafter! As Christopher Monaghan puts it: 'Love will always call us into a bigger world where we learn that it is in giving that we receive.' So, the slogans are simply true: 'No pain, no gain!' 'No cross, no crown!'

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