

## GOSPEL

JOHN 12:20-33

Among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. These approached Philip, who came from Bethsaida in Galilee, and put this request to him, 'Sir, we should like to see Jesus.' Philip went to tell Andrew, and Andrew and Philip together went to tell Jesus. Jesus replied to them:

'Now the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you most solemnly,

unless a wheat grain falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest. Anyone who loves his life loses it; anyone who hates his life in this world will keep it for the eternal life.

If a man serves me, he must follow me, wherever I am, my servant will be there too. If anyone serves me, my Father will honour him.

Now my soul is troubled. What shall I say: Father, save me from this hour? But it was for this very reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name!' A voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.' People standing by, who heard this, said it was a clap of thunder; others said, 'It was an angel speaking to him.' Jesus answered, 'It was not for my sake that this voice came, but for yours. 'Now sentence is being passed on this world; now the prince of this world is to be overthrown. And when I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all men to myself.'

By these words he indicated the kind of death he would die.

## A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

Today's Gospel narrates an episode which took place in the last days of Jesus' life. The scene takes place in Jerusalem where he finds himself for the feast of the Jewish Passover. Several Greeks had also arrived there for this celebration. These men were driven by religious sentiment, attracted by the faith of the Jewish People and, having heard of this great prophet, they approach Philip, one of the twelve Apostles, and say to him: "we wish to see Jesus". John highlights this sentence, that is centred on the verb **to see**, which in the evangelical lexicon means to go beyond appearances **in order to comprehend the mystery of a person**. The verb John uses, "to see", means to reach the depths of the heart, to reach through sight, with understanding, the depths of a person's soul, within the person.

Jesus' reaction is surprising. He does not answer with a "yes" or with a "no" but says:

"The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified". These words which at first glance appear to ignore the question of those Greeks, in reality provide the true response because those who seek to know Jesus must **look within the Cross** where his glory is revealed; to look **within** the Cross. Today's Gospel invites us to turn our gaze to the Crucifix which is not an ornamental object or a clothing accessory — abused at times! Rather, it is a religious symbol to contemplate and to understand. Within the image of Jesus crucified is revealed the mystery of the death of the Son as a supreme act of love, the source of life and salvation for humanity of all ages. We have been healed in his wounds.

I may think: "How do I look at the Crucifix? As a work of art, to see if it is beautiful or not? Or do I look within; do I penetrate Jesus' wounds unto the depths of his heart? Do I look at the mystery of God who was humiliated unto death, like a slave, like a criminal?". Do not forget this: look to the Crucifix, but look within it. There is a beautiful devotional way of praying one "Our Father" for each of the five wounds. When we pray that "Our Father", we are trying to enter within, through the wounds of Jesus, inside his very heart. And there we will learn the great wisdom of the mystery of Christ, the great wisdom of the Cross.

And in order to explain the meaning of his death and Resurrection, Jesus uses an image and says: "unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit". He wants to explain that his extreme fate — that is the Cross, death and Resurrection — is an act of **fruitfulness** — **his wounds have healed us** — a fruitfulness which will bear fruit for many. He thus compares himself to a grain of wheat which, rotting in the earth, generates new life. Jesus came to earth through the Incarnation, but this is not enough. He must also die to redeem man from the slavery of sin and to offer him a new life reconciled in love. I said "to redeem man": but to redeem me, you, all of us, each of us. He paid that price. This is the mystery of Christ. Go towards his wounds, enter, contemplate, see Jesus — but from within.

And this dynamism of the grain of wheat which was accomplished in Jesus must also take place within us, his disciples. We are called to take on the **Paschal law** of losing life in order to receive it renewed and eternal. And what does **losing life** mean? That is, what does it mean to be the grain of wheat? It means to think less about oneself, about personal interests and to know how to "see" and to meet the needs of our neighbours, especially the least of them. To joyfully carry out works of charity towards those who suffer

in body and spirit is the most authentic way of living the Gospel. It is the necessary foundation upon which our communities can grow in reciprocal fraternity and welcome. I want to see Jesus, but from within. Penetrate his wounds and contemplate that love in his heart for you, for you, for you, for me, for everyone.

May the Virgin Mary who, from the manger in Bethlehem to the Cross on Calvary, has always kept her heart's gaze fixed on her Son, help us to meet and know him just as he desires so that we may live enlightened by Him and bring to the world fruits of justice and peace.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Have you experienced a time when 'dying to your own desires', like the grain of wheat, has produced a richer reward and result than you imagined possible?
- Pope Francis asks us, "How do I look at the Crucifix? As a work of art, to see if it is beautiful or not? Or do I look within; do I penetrate Jesus' wounds unto the depths of his heart? Do I look at the mystery of God who was humiliated unto death, like a slave, like a criminal?". What does this mean for me?
- What have you 'given up' in order to be with and follow Jesus? Has it lead, as Jesus promised, to new life and hope?

## PRAYER

*Spend some time in prayer with one another*

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.