

Gratitude Foundation



*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

The Fifth Sunday of Lent—Year B

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“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”

(1 Thess: 5:18)

Fifth Sunday of Lent - Year B

Reading I

Jeremiah 31:31-34

The days are coming, says the LORD,
when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel
and the house of Judah.
It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers
the day I took them by the hand
to lead them forth from the land of Egypt;
for they broke my covenant,
and I had to show myself their master, says the LORD.
But this is the covenant that I will make
with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD.
I will place my law within them and write it upon their hearts;
I will be their God, and they shall be my people.
No longer will they have need to teach their friends and relatives
how to know the LORD.
All, from least to greatest, shall know me, says the LORD,
for I will forgive their evildoing and remember their sin no more.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 51:3-4, 12-13, 14-15

R. (12a) Create a clean heart in me, O God.

Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness;
in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense.
Thoroughly wash me from my guilt
and of my sin cleanse me.

R. Create a clean heart in me, O God.

A clean heart create for me, O God,
and a steadfast spirit renew within me.
Cast me not out from your presence,
and your Holy Spirit take not from me.

R. Create a clean heart in me, O God.

Give me back the joy of your salvation,
and a willing spirit sustain in me.
I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners shall return to you.

R. Create a clean heart in me, O God.

Reading II

Hebrews 5:7-9

In the days when Christ Jesus was in the flesh,
he offered 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 reverence.
Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered;
and when he was made perfect,
he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.

Verse Before the Gospel

John 12:26

Whoever serves me must follow me, says the Lord;
and where I am, there also will my servant be.

Gospel

John 12:20-33

Some Greeks who had come to worship at the Passover Feast
came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee,
and asked him, "Sir, we would like to see Jesus."
Philip went and told Andrew;
then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.
Jesus answered them,
"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.
Amen, amen, I say to you,
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.
Whoever loves his life loses it,
and whoever hates his life in this world
will preserve it for eternal life.
Whoever serves me must follow me,
and where I am, there also will my servant be.
The Father will honor whoever serves me.
"I am troubled now. Yet what should I say?
'Father, save me from this hour'?"
But it was for this purpose that I came to this hour.
Father, glorify your name."
Then a voice came from heaven,
"I have glorified it and will glorify it again."
The crowd there heard it and said it was thunder;
but others said, "An angel has spoken to him."
Jesus answered and said,
"This voice did not come for my sake but for yours.
Now is the time of judgment on this world;
now the ruler of this world will be driven out.
And when I am lifted up from the earth,
I will draw everyone to myself."
He said this indicating the kind of death he would die.

Exegesis

Jeremiah 31:31-3

This is the only time that the concept of the *New Covenant* appears in the Old Testament. Jesus, Himself, speaks of the *New Covenant* as He holds up the chalice of His Blood at the Last Supper. (See Luke 22:20, 1 Cor. 11:25). *Hebrews* in the longest OT quote in the NT reproduces this entire passage in Chapter 8:8-12. *Hebrews* goes on to articulate in Chapter 9:11-12: “But when Christ became high priest of the good things that have come to be, passing through the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made by hands, that is, not belonging to creation, he entered once for all into the sanctuary, not with the blood of goats and calves but with His own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption.” The blood poured out from the Cross is the sacrifice to end all sacrifices. We continue to make present again the one sacrifice of Calvary. Thus, we have a new and eternal covenant.

The original covenant was written in stone. The new covenant is written in our hearts. God promises through the prophets to take away our stony hearts and give us hearts of flesh. He also promises a portion of His Spirit to be poured into our hearts. With hearts made new we are able to know God on the level of the heart and soul. Through the Pascal Mystery God speaks directly to the human heart.

Psalm 51:3-4, 12-13, 14-15

Psalm 51 is revealed by an ancient heading to be related to the incident of David’s infidelity with Bathsheba. It is a penitential psalm and an individual lament. It is a prayer for the pardon and confession of sin, and prayer for restoration and renewal. The theme of God cleansing and renewing the heart supports our first reading from Jeremiah.

Hebrews 5:7-9

“For it is fitting that He, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the leader of their salvation perfect through suffering.” (Heb 2:10). Scripture reveals to us that God is the creator and that all He has created evolves toward the purpose for which it was created. This is the connotation of the underlying word that we translate as *perfect*. To become *perfect* is to achieve the purpose for which God created it to be. When Jesus talks about His impending death, He says, “It is for this hour that I came.” It is His purpose and thus He reaches perfection in the Pascal Mystery.

Exegesis (Continued)

John 12:20-33

The setting of our Gospel immediately follows Jesus' triumphant entrance into Jerusalem. He enters riding on an ass as people lay palm branches before Him. It replicates the triumphant return of a king or military leader from a victorious campaign. The king would be riding on a great steed or in a decorated chariot. Jesus came riding on an ass. His victory is not in some great military achievement but in surrender. He is surrendering Himself to His own crucifixion.

This is the purpose for which He came into our world. This is the *hour* or the event toward which all of St. John's Gospel is moving. The Book of Signs now becomes the Book of Glory.

Greeks were in Jerusalem for the Passover celebration and were seeking Jesus. The historian Josephus confirms that God-fearing Gentiles came to Jerusalem to worship at Passover. (J.W. 6.9.3. p 427) In subsequent verses Jesus reiterates the universality of salvation, i.e. "I will draw everyone to myself."

The image of the grain of wheat is employed by St. Paul as well in 1 Corinthians in his dissertation on the resurrection of the body. "What you sow is not brought to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be but a bare kernel of wheat." (1 Cor 15:36) "So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown corruptible; it is raised incorruptible. It is sown dishonorable; it is raised glorious. It is sown weak; it is raised powerful. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is a spiritual one." (1 Cor 15:42-44)

"Whoever loves his life (*pseuke*) loses it, and whoever hates his life (*pseuke*) in this world will preserve it for eternal life (*zoe*). There are three different Greek words that we translate into English as *life*. The first word is *bios* which speaks of biological life. The second word is *zoe* of which the breath of God, or the Holy Spirit is the source. It is sometimes translated as the fullness of life, life in the spirit, or life eternal. The third word *pseuke* speaks of an individual sharing or possessing of life and is most often translated as soul. If God is being itself, then the individual manifestation of that being in human flesh is the soul. The path to authentic life is in self-giving love, in dying to self. It is in self-emptying that we are able to be filled with the life breath of God. In order to rise with Christ we must first die with Him.

Reflection

I am sure that most sociologists will agree that there is deep hunger in our society, there are many people searching for meaning and purpose. Without God and the hope of eternal life there can be no real and enduring meaning and purpose for life.

I always found one of the quotes of Jesus in the Gospels rather curious. John quotes Jesus as saying, "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." That of course seems rather impossible for us sinful mortal beings, burdened with the effects of original sin. It is interesting to note that the etymology of the underlying word that is translated into English as "perfect" means to fulfill the purpose for which one exists, in our case the purpose for which God created us. As I was growing up I was learned the Baltimore Catechism. I memorized the answers to the many questions. One of those questions was, "Why did God make me?" The answer I learned was, "God made me to know Him, and to Love Him and to serve Him in this world and to be happy with Him forever in the world to come." This is our purpose, to know, love and serve the Lord in order to be happy with Him forever. In God and only in and through God is perfection obtained.

In our first reading this weekend God speaks to us through the Prophet Jeremiah. God promises that He will send His Spirit to place within our hearts: "All from least to great shall know Me, says the Lord, for I will forgive their evildoing and remember their sins no more." The Psalm this weekend cries out: "Create a clean heart in me, O God." By taking way and remembering not our sins we will know God as a tender, compassionate and loving God.

Our second reading from the Letter to the Hebrews tells us that "when He (Jesus) was made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey." In our Gospel from St. John, Jesus is revealing to His disciples, and us, His coming Hour. Jesus says: "I am troubled now. Yet what should I say? 'Father, save Me from this Hour'? But it is for this purpose that I came to this hour." Jesus reveals to us very precisely that His purpose for entering into our world was to come to His Hour. So He is made perfect by fulfilling His purpose for entering into our humanity, to die for our sins.

I always looked at his Hour as the hour of His passion and death. It is more than that. It is His entire passing over that we call the Paschal Mystery. It is His passion, death, resurrection and ascension into heaven. It is His passage from death to life, from this world to world to come. It is through this Paschal Mystery that Jesus fulfills His purpose and is therefore made perfect and thus becomes the source of salvation for all who obey. His purpose is to take away our sins, to open the way into eternal life for us, to draw all of creation to Himself as He is lifted up, on the cross, from the tomb, into Heaven.

To come to know Jesus is to come to love Him, and to love Him is to serve Him. And so the old Catechism was right, our purpose is to know Him and love Him and serve Him in this world and to be happy with Him in the next. All we have to do is figure out how to do that. So come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of us Your faithful and enkindle within us the fire of Your Love. Amen.

In Christ Jesus,



Personal Witness

I was blessed to be born into a very loving and devout Catholic family. I was immersed in self-giving love. This love extended far beyond our immediate family. It seemed to be a way of life that was embraced by extended family and friends. As a child I was taught the Baltimore Catechism by a group of Dominican Sisters that were lovingly giving of their time for us. I had the privilege of attending a wonderful Catholic High School that was staffed by several orders of sisters, the Franciscan Brothers, and local priests. Self-sacrifice and authentic love enveloped my life.

Something did not take, however. As I went off to college it was all about me. It was about me making the football team, earning my degree, landing a good job and starting my career. And so, my life slowly turned more and more inward. I worked hard and quickly moved up the corporate ladder. There was something missing in my life. There was a definite sense of satisfaction in reaching and exceeding goals that I had set for myself, but there was an emptiness in my life. I was very mechanical in my faith. I attended Mass on Sunday and on holy days. That too was about me. It was about my relationship with Jesus. I would attend Mass to listen to the Word of God and to receive Jesus in Holy Communion. I would sometimes arrive late and leave early, without talking to anyone.

One day I did not leave early enough, and the pastor came up to me after Mass. He somehow knew that I was a CPA and he asked if I would help him on the parish finance council. I instinctively said, "Sure father I would be honored to serve." I enjoyed those first few meetings. I remember feeling good about myself that I could contribute my expertise. My involvement quickly led to a myriad of other ministries around the parish, including parish council, reader and Eucharistic Minister, teaching faith formation, youth group, Cursillo, parish retreats, etc. Something was happening within me throughout. I was experiencing a sense of inner peace and joy, and sense of meaning and purpose that was missing in my life. For me it was a discovery of God and of myself through self-giving love. It was something that was modeled for me over the years, but now I was experiencing it for myself.

Years later when I read Pope Benedict's first letter to the world, *God is Love*, I learned that this was more of a maturing in authentic love than a discovery. Speaking of this maturing in authentic love, of which God is the source the pope writes:

Acknowledgment of the living God is one path towards love, and the "yes" of our will to his will unites our intellect, will and sentiments in the all-embracing act of love. But this process is always open-ended; love is never "finished" and complete; throughout life, it changes and matures, and thus remains faithful to itself.

A few years ago, Pastor Rick Warren published a book that was on the best seller list for several months. It was entitled *The Purpose Driven Life*. I read the book when it was first published. Pastor Warren spoke very eloquently of precisely my experience of maturing in authentic love and of only finding meaning and purpose in self-giving love. This of course is the heart of the Gospel and the entire Christian life. What I found both interesting and alarming would follow. As I listened to a variety of talk show discussions and interviews with Pastor Warren people were responding as if this were some sort of a new concept. It struck me just how far our society has drifted from the basic Christian world view.

In his encyclical Pope Benedict pointed to the Cross of Jesus and said, "This is where the definition of authentic self-giving love must begin." God is love. Jesus' life poured out for us is the source of that love. By uniting ourselves with Christ we are able to participate in that love and be a conduit of that love in our environments. As we now approach Passion Sunday, I encourage all of you to focus on the Cross of Jesus. If we die with Him we will rise with Him.

F. Glenn