

**Lent, 5th Sunday, Year B-2009**

Jer. 31:31-34; Ps. 51:3-4, 12-15; Heb. 5:7-9; Jn. 12:20-33

**The Hour of Glory**

We are now in the final weeks of Lent. Next Sunday is Palm Sunday, and in Holy Week we will again commemorate the core truths of our faith—the death and resurrection of our Savior. Today’s readings invite us into this special time of the Christian year with our hearts really open to these central realities.

In today’s reading from the Gospel of John we hear of several Greek Jews who have come up to Jerusalem at Passover time. They have heard about the controversial preacher from Galilee. They approach his friend Philip and tell him: “Sir, we would like to see Jesus.” John doesn’t tell us whether they actually meet Jesus. His main concern is that we come to see Jesus more clearly. In John’s gospel, “seeing” Jesus often means “believing” in Jesus. For example, John tells of a man born blind who is cured by Jesus, comes to believe in him, and then leads many others to see and believe in Jesus.

So we are being invited to approach Holy Week in a spirit that says “we would like to see Jesus.” If we really seek this, what will we see?

Jesus himself tells us that we will see something that we probably don’t expect. Jesus’s followers had heard him proclaim that the reign of God was at hand. Many of them thought this good news meant that the Roman colonial rule

oppressing them for so long was about to be overthrown. When Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, people sang hosannas and put palms on the road before him. Many thought the overthrow of Rome was about to begin. And Jesus tells them: “the hour has come.” He calls it hour when he will be “glorified.” Are the Greeks who want to see Jesus about to witness the hour when Jesus overthrows Rome and reestablishes the glory of Israel as a free people?

What is this “hour of glory” that Jesus says has at last come? “Glory” has many levels of meaning. It is the praise and honor that come to a victorious general in war or to a winner in a sports event. For example, the performance of the teams from the Big East Conference in the current NCAA basketball tournament led an AP headline recently to refer to the return of “Big East Glory.” Is this what comes into view when we want to see Jesus—praise and renown like that of champion athletes or victorious generals?

Those who see Jesus learn that the reality of his true glory is a lot more paradoxical than athletic trophies and military medals. They see him showing his followers the paradox of life and glory coming through surrender and death. Jesus’s glory is like grains of wheat seed, which crack open and seem to die in the soil, but then spring up as new plants that sustain life. New life comes out of what seems like death. So Jesus says he will raise up new life by laying down his life.

He will be lifted up in the splendor of glory by being lowered down into the darkness of death. His glory is his cross. This is the central Christian paradox.

What can this paradox possibly mean? To understand it we need to see that it is the paradox of love. Think of someone you regard as having a really great love. Perhaps it is your mother's or father's love for you. Or the love a really close friend has for you. Because of her love, she is willing to sacrifice and take great risks to insure you are safe. Perhaps it is someone like Nelson Mandela who spent more than 26 years in prison because of his care for his fellow blacks in South Africa. This is the kind of love Jesus says is like the grain of wheat that by falling into the ground and dying can truly bring life. As Jesus puts it a bit later in John's gospel: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."

This is the kind of great love Jesus has for us, his friends. In fact, there is no greater love. The glory of Jesus is the glory of God's unlimited love for us. John's gospel calls the hour of Jesus's death the hour of his glory. This is because it is the hour when Jesus shows us just how much God loves us. God's love for us is greater than the love shown even by loving mothers and fathers for their children or by political heroes like Mandela. The love Jesus has for us is the unconditional love of God. That is Jesus's truest and deepest glory. It is the glory we are being invited to share during this most holy time of the year. Let's ask that during the

holy weeks ahead we will truly see and experience this love Jesus has for us, and let's give thanks for this love today.

**David Hollenbach, S.J.      St. Ignatius Church      March 29, 2009**