

## Lent 5 Year B 2012

In today's gospel reading we gain a glimpse of Jesus reacting with two of his disciples. Philip and Andrew came to tell Jesus that some Greek folks had arrived and they wanted to see him. As he often did, Jesus answered indirectly. He didn't say, "Send them away" or "Send them on in." Instead, he took that moment to teach and to lay out a reality that his followers needed to understand. It was as if Jesus were saying, "Oh, they want to see me? Okay, I will let them see what I am all about. I will let them know what God is doing in me."

His reply to Phillip and Andrew indicated his awareness for what would be his final days and the climatic encounter between the ways of the world and the way of God. He said that it was time for him to reveal what all humankind would see about him and his role in the divine scheme of things.

His disciples must have been overjoyed and excited because they surely thought that by being "glorified" Jesus meant he was going to make all things well. Having recently experienced Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, perhaps they thought he would work even greater wonders and bring an end to their difficulties in life. Or, maybe, they were thinking about one of the traditional expectations of how the Messiah would restore Israel – by a glorious military victory. Maybe they thought he meant it was time for him to prevail over all the world's

kingdoms, whose leaders would cower before his conquering feet.

But any such euphoria would have been short-lived. It was a different kind of wonder that would be revealed, a different kind of glory that Jesus had in mind. Jesus immediately began to lay out the hard truth of what lay ahead and in a similar way, as we worship one week away from Palm Sunday, this is what our gospel reading lets us see, the journey that lies ahead for us during Holy Week.

Jesus used a parable to explain how not only Greeks but everyone would see him saying, "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." A seed, by itself, is only a small piece of matter. If eaten, it provides a little bit of nourishment. If left in the blazing sun, it can dry up and lose its value. If sealed in a jar, it can remain viable for centuries. But even then it's power remains dormant. But if a seed is buried and dies beyond its present condition, it can release all that is contained within – the very nature and substance of a whole stalk of ripened wheat.

Jesus' own death and resurrection would be the vehicle through which all of humankind could begin to see what Jesus was all about. John is writing this Gospel account decades after Jesus death telling us that Christians of John's day have begun to experience this

power of Jesus' message through his death and resurrection. This perspective I think could only be had after all of the events had occurred and John's Gospel attempts to make sense of what happened to Jesus and to find meaning.

Jesus also added something more to the parable when he says: "Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life." The Christian reality is that only in dying to self can the power of God be embraced and released. Jesus laid out this model not just for the disciples to see but also to emulate.

In today's gospel, Jesus lets us see him as a risk-filled loving... living human being. Whereas the world tempts us to watch out only for ourselves and teaches us that we'll live longer and prosper more if we're careful and avoid taking risks, if we remain in our homes safe and secure, Jesus teaches something different. Jesus teaches that by so doing, we may live longer or in greater comfort, but we will not live as well. He helps us to see that real living – genuine, meaningful living – involves much more.

Only by spending our lives, he says, can we keep our true lives. Jesus calls us into a "give-it-away" faith. Jesus calls us beyond the common, selfish goals of false security. He calls us to see him – to see his vision – a new view of life, a life of meaning and of glory.

Jesus viewed glory not as the acquisition of power or the ability to control his own destiny but he looked at glory as the ability to serve others for a greater purpose. In the encounter in today's gospel, he taught that only in dying to self can we bring forth the kind of redeemed life that God has in store for us; only by spending life can we retain it. Only in our willingness to die to ourselves can we see Jesus for who he really is – the living image of God.

As we move rapidly toward Holy Week, we would do well to ask to come as the Greeks did before the Lord – asking to see Jesus – to discover for ourselves what he's all about. To have that hands on encounter with Jesus and to listen for what we might risk for the kingdom of God. Amen.

*excerpted from The Rev. Ken Kesselus*