

5th Sunday of Lent

In today's Gospel Jesus shows us the value of love and sacrifice as we journey towards the kingdom of God.

As we prepare to celebrate God's love for us today, let us bring all our failures and weakness before the Lord, the source of eternal salvation.

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Jeremiah reminds us of the Lord's "new covenant" with his people.

Hebrews 5:7-9

Christ submits humbly to suffering and, having been made perfect, becomes the source of our salvation.

John 12:20-33

Jesus prays to God his Father that his "hour" will be for the glory of God.

Reflection



"Look after 'Number One' – that's a modern phrase (and there's no mistaking who 'Number One' is: it's your own self and, evidently, you've got to look after 'Number One').

Selfishness has been made into a kind of virtue;
sacrifice for others, is treated as the sign of a fool.

Man named Christopher Lasch wrote book about this 'I'm all right, Jack' attitude: it's called 'The Culture of Narcissism'. Advertisers haven't been slow to latch on to this trend: you see such ads as 'Treat yourself', 'You deserve it', 'Give yourself a break', 'You can't do enough for yourself', Sainsbury's have got a line 'Be good to yourself' - all with idea that you've got to 'look after' 'Number One'.

I'm not just talking about relaxing after hard days work. I'm not saying we shouldn't have an enjoyable holiday. But the underlying attitude of putting yourself as centre of things - even at expense of other people, is, let's say "unfortunate". Some people even see religion as just being something just between themselves and God – their idea of religion doesn't seem to include concern for others.

In the 60's we discovered the need to 'respect individual personality'; now we've made this such an exclusive concern that we take it as the only thing that matters. The psychological jargon of 'I must love myself' (true enough in the right context) can easily lead to egotism, self-centredness - plain selfishness.

The Philosophy of 'Number One' is contradicted by the Gospel. Lots of passages put SELFLESSNESS at the heart of religion, but today's is one of the most powerful.

The context: Jesus' death is ahead of him. His "hour" has come. The pilgrims are arriving in Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. There's some Greek converts among the pilgrims; they want to see Jesus. They're all there for the Passover feast, but at this Passover, the sacrificial lamb will be Jesus himself. Now the 'time has come' for Jesus; there is no more time. He's got to face the loss of freedom, the loss of friends, the loss of support, and the loss of his own life. Not surprisingly, Jesus says: "now my soul is troubled".

Anyway, these Greek-speaking converts to Judaism, find Philip (a Greek name and he probably spoke Greek) and ask him to arrange an interview. Philip teams up with Andrew and they both go and tell Jesus that there are a couple of Greeks wanting to talk to him. Jesus probably reads the request right: they want to see some display of power. The recent raising to life of Lazarus had caused uproar. The Pharisees were concerned because, they said, 'the whole world had gone after him'. Everyone tries to get in on act; everyone wants to share the limelight. It was a good chance for Jesus to say what he expected of his followers. His words are totally unambiguous. You can't mistake their meaning:

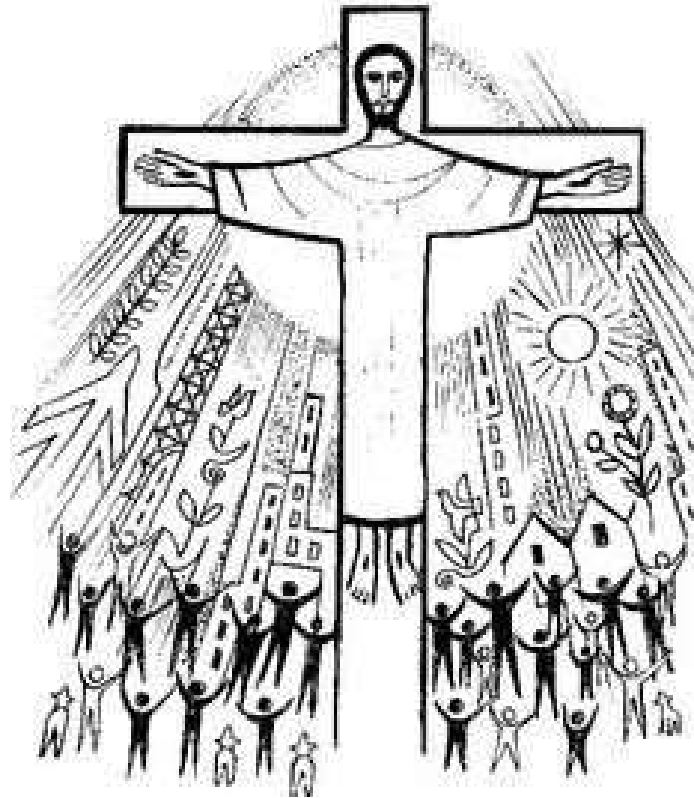


‘Unless the wheat grain falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest. Anyone who loves his life loses it; anyone who hates his life in this world will keep it for the eternal life.’

The word ‘hate’ needs bit of explanation. It’s really what’s called a Semitic exaggeration; it’s often used in the Scriptures to mean ‘love less’ in other words preferring (or giving a preference to) something else; in this case, in fact, making someone else ‘Number One’. It’s the Paradox of the Gospel: if we strive for our own personal fulfilment at expense of other people, we’ll never be fulfilled; if we stop thinking about ourselves so much and use our abilities, our talents, our lives, for service of other people, then we will be really fulfilled. Like that tiny wheat-grain, we’ve got to, in some way, ‘die’ if we’re going to grow.

If you’ve seen the film “Rainman” (if you haven’t it’s worth seeing). It’s a variation on today’s Gospel theme. Tom Cruise plays the selfish, pushy, car-salesman: Charlie Babbitt, Dustin Hoffman plays his older brother Raymond. Raymond is autistic and has been put in an asylum. Charlie Babbitt didn’t even know he had an older brother, much less an autistic one, and the only reason he got to know, is that the father had died and left 3 million dollars to his autistic son, Raymond. All Charlie, the high flier, gets is old Buick car. Charlie finds out where his brother is and tries to take advantage of poor Raymond and cheat him out of the inheritance. After all, fellows like him wouldn’t know what to do with all that money! But in course of film, against his will, Charlie begins to care for Raymond. Before he knows it, for first time in his life, he’s thinking more about someone else than himself. Slowly he begins to ‘die’ to self and ‘live’ for Raymond. At one point he’s got to make a decision to do just that. He becomes different; he becomes a whole person. Or, as we would say in religious

language, he becomes redeemed. He lost his life for Raymond's sake only to find it for his own.



A Rich Harvest

Exactly what Jesus is telling us. It's the Gospel. We want to do his will. That's why we're Catholics. We want to be the kind of follower he wants us to be. We all know how difficult it is at times. 'Number One' keeps demanding attention.

However all is not lost: There's solid ground for hope in Jesus himself. He empowers our weakness with his strength. He had come, as we learn in Gospel, 'to his "hour"', the "hour" of his crucifixion and glory. He's completely ready to be lifted up - lifted up on the cross & lifted up in the Resurrection/Ascension - to lose his life to save it for all of us: '...and when I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw EVERYONE', every single man-jack of us, 'to myself.'

So, this Gospel puts a question that challenges us. Life's fundamental question is not Hamlet's 'To be or not to be' but Jesus' 'To love or not to love.' 'Love one another, as I have loved you' – yes, it involves death. Are we going to live just for ourselves only; or are we going to die to ourselves and live for other people.

The choice, is of course, as they say, OURS. We can make up our minds to put ourselves first all the time - and end up an empty shell. Or, with Jesus, , we

can, like Charlie Babbitt, make other people ‘Number One’ and end up with more fulfilment than we ever dreamt of

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SOLEMNITY OF THE ANUNCIATION OF THE LORD
THURSDAY, MARCH 25,



Lady Day, the old English name for feast of the Annunciation, survives as the name of an English quarter day (if you pay rent you may be familiar with it). But for us, we can say that it is today, rather than Christmas, (nine months

away) that is the true feast of the Incarnation: God taking human nature, the Word becoming flesh in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

St Luke's simple story of Mary, the village girl of Nazareth, being surprised by an angelic messenger with the news that she is to be the mother of God's promised Messiah has been the subject of countless paintings.

It's difficult to paint a conversation. A lot of pictures of the Annunciation seem to be static, to show an angel, sometimes with rainbow coloured wings, facing Mary. But it's the moment when heaven and earth hold their breath waiting Mary's "Yes." Sometimes the Father and all of heaven seems to be in an upstairs room; also waiting!

In Zeffirelli's film 'Jesus of Nazareth' Mary is asleep in a simple whitewashed room. She is wakened by a window shutter moving in the breeze and gazes up at the high window, lit by the bright night sky. She covers back and then kneels. We see Mary but we don't follow her line of sight. We only hear Mary's part of the conversation. No angel is visible to us. This has a special power to see with fresh eyes the familiar story.

The Annunciation story is so familiar that it's easy to think Mary's acceptance was effortless. We're told she was deeply disturbed, she had to question. She was alone with God in reaching a decision which she made in faith.



THE ANNUNCIATION.

According to the 16th-century bishop, Lancelot Andrewes, God in the incarnation God went "to the very groundsel of our nature". Like a humble weed that grows so close to the ground, God's sharing in our human condition was from the very moment of conception. It was not a choosing of a human being, it was God being bound up with the life of Jesus from the very start. Yet that conception was in the nature of a new creation, a new beginning. That's the significance of the Virgin Birth. In the Annunciation story, God does not **compel**, He **invites** a response of faith, and it is Mary's *fiat*, her trusting giving of herself to whatever God wills, that makes her the channel of grace, and the pattern of Christian obedience.

Gerard Manley Hopkins says of Mary,

"this one work (she) has to do,
to let God's glory through".

The One through whom everything was created emptied himself, made himself nothing, came down to where we all begin - in a knot of cells in our mother's womb. Christians are compelled to witness on behalf of unborn human life, especially because of that child carried in the Virgin's womb. Mary is honoured because of her Child. Her vocation is the highest human calling there could be. It is for that reason that the Council of Ephesus, in AD 431, gave her the title of 'Theotokos', the God-bearer.

All devotion to Mary is because of the incarnation, the stupendous, overwhelming fact that "the word became flesh", that the Creator chose to know his creation from the inside. Our Lady Day is our Lord's Day too.

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[The Logo: The cross planted by the Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan on the island of Cebu signifies Christianity and serves as the mast of a ship. The ship represents the navigators of the expedition that brought the faith to the island. It also signifies the Church and its sacraments. Other symbols are in the Logo; can you see the fish sign (The Icthus) the sign, in the early Church of Christ. The central figure is taken from the painting of national artist Fernando Amorsolo's "First Baptism in the Philippines." The sun, a trademark of Amorsolo's various artworks, is derived from the Philippine flag, suggesting the idea of the Philippines as "the pearl of the orient sea."

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Philippine Church

500 years of Christianity

Christianity was brought to the Philippines when the first Mass was celebrated and the first Baptism performed after Portuguese explorer, Ferdinand Magellan, landed there, in 1521.

“Gifted to Give”, taken from Matthew’s Gospel (10:8), is the theme for the celebration.

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WORDSEARCH

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WORSHIP
BETHSAIDA
VOICE
SENTENCE

FESTIVAL
SINGLE
THUNDER
PRINCE

WHEAT
SOUL
ANGEL
DEATH

