



Encountering Christ
Prayerfully preparing for the
Sunday Mass and praying in
particular for our school families



Preparing for the Mass of Sunday 21st March 2021 - The Fifth Sunday of Lent

1 Relax & Remember

Set aside 10 -15 minutes and create a suitable environment by removing any distractions. Make sure that you are comfortable. Perhaps light a candle. Make the sign of the cross † and remain still for a minute of settling silence. **Call to mind the love that God has for you. Remember that through this scripture our Lord is truly present.** Then read the Gospel, preferably aloud and slowly, and pay attention to any words that stand out. If any do, meditate on them for a few minutes and be invited into a dialogue with God.



2 Read

Taken from the Gospel for Sunday 21st March 2021 (John 12:20-30): Exaltation through Suffering

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.



3 Reflect

After spending a few minutes considering this Gospel, continue by reading Fr Henry Wansbrough's reflection.

This moving gospel reading is the immediate prelude to the account of the Last Supper and the Passion. In it we witness how Jesus' dread (his soul is 'troubled') is mixed with confidence at what he knows is approaching. In the gospel of John there is no agony in the garden before Jesus' arrest, for in John the story of the Passion is so shaped that it is clearly understood as the triumph of the Son of Man. There is no mention of humiliation or mockery. Jesus remains in control from the beginning (when he permits the guards to take him into custody) until the end (when he calls out that he is ready to die: 'It is complete'). This is all about the hour of the exaltation of the Son of Man, when Jesus is raised up in every sense. All the more important, then, for John to show that, before the Passion, the cost for Jesus was real. He does this with this little dialogue in prayer between Jesus and his Father. This is John's equivalent to the prayer in the garden. The second reading from Hebrews is another variant on Jesus' prayer before his Passion. All these prayers express Jesus' very human fear, his unshakable commitment to his task and his loving confidence in his Father's care.

Does Jesus fear death? Do you? What are the grounds for Jesus' confidence? Do you share this confidence?

Dom Henry Wansbrough OSB

4 Respond & Request

Now slowly and prayerfully read the Gospel once again but this time in silence. Consider how this Gospel could apply to your life in general. Then thank God for any insight you may have received. Conclude by asking God to bless you with one of the following spiritual gifts to help you act on any resolution you have made: love, understanding, wisdom, faithfulness, peace, self control, patience, or joy. Please remember to pray for the Church and particularly our school families. **Then conclude by requesting the prayers of Our Lady & St Joseph.**



**The Wednesday Word is under the patronage of St Joseph, Patron Saint of Families and Protector of the Church
Within the tradition of the Catholic Church, each Wednesday is dedicated to St Joseph**

WEDNESDAY WORD PLUS †

Fr Henry's reflections on the first and second readings of Sunday 21st March 2021



First Reading: *The New Covenant*

Jeremiah 31:31-34

See, the days are coming - it is the Lord who speaks - when I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel and the House of Judah, but not a covenant like the one I made with their ancestors on the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant of mine, so I had to show them who was master. It is the Lord who speaks. No, this is the covenant I will make with the House of Israel when those days arrive - it is the Lord who speaks. Deep within them I will plant my Law, writing it on their hearts. Then I will be their God and they shall be my people. There will be no further need for neighbour to try to teach neighbour, or brother to say to brother, 'Learn to know the Lord!' No, they will all know me, the least no less than the greatest - it is the Lord who speaks - since I will forgive their iniquity and never call their sin to mind.

For Christians this reading from Jeremiah can be called the climax of the Old Testament. It is certainly the climax of the history of Israel which we have been following in the first readings of the Sundays of Lent. The exile to Babylon seemed to be the end of the road. Israel had lost king, country, Temple and cult. They had been unfaithful to their Lord once too often, and now the covenant with God was left in tatters. Paradoxically, however, this was the moment of advance, the moment which brought Israel to be a world religion, by which all humanity could benefit from the salvation promised to Abraham. The covenant was to be renewed, not, as previously, dependent on the institutions, the Law and the cult of Israel, but open to every individual, a personal commitment to the Lord, written on human hearts. Did this then mean that there was no need for anyone to teach brother or sister? Yes, we must still learn from one another and accept the guidance of the Church, but the bond is between God and all peoples, not just one specific race as such. This covenant is 'the covenant in my blood for the forgiveness of sin' to which Jesus refers at the Last Supper. He sees it ratified in his blood, as the first covenant was ratified in the blood of animal-sacrifice. The forgiveness it brings is the final forgiveness, pre-echoed in God's forgiveness of the sin of Israel down the ages.

What does the "new covenant" (about which Jeremiah and Jesus both speak) mean to you? How should we, as Christians, live as the people of the "new covenant"?

Second Reading: *Jesus' Prayer*

Hebrews 5:7-9

During his life on earth, Christ offered up prayer and entreaty, aloud and in silent tears, to the one who had the power to save him out of death, and he submitted so humbly that his prayer was heard. Although he was Son, he learnt to obey through suffering; but having been made perfect, he became for all who obey him the source of eternal salvation.

“The prayer... to establish the kingship of God in human hearts.”

This wonderful second reading lies at the heart of the Letter to the Hebrews which dwells on the priesthood of Christ. Here the author prepares us for the coming celebration of the Passion by reflecting on the double aspect of the human fear and pain of Jesus, and his complete, loving obedience to the Father. It says his prayer was heard. What prayer? Not the prayer to be spared death, for that prayer was not heard. Rather the deeper prayer, the prayer which was at the centre of his burning desire to establish the kingship of God in human hearts, bringing peace between heaven and earth by his perfect obedience. How then did he 'learn obedience through suffering'? The secret of the Cross of Jesus is that here he reached the perfect obedience to his Father, giving everything to his Father's will. His whole life and ministry had been devoted to the Father's will, to establishing the Father's kingship on earth. Now it reaches its highest point. His perfect obedience overrode and expunged the disobedience of Adam, that is, the archetypal disobedience of the whole human race. So by accepting defeat, pain and humiliation he obtained for himself, and for all people, victory, joy and exaltation to glory.

How do you discern the will of the Father? Is it always easy to obey God?

The Wednesday Word: *Connecting Home, School & Parish through the Word of God*

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