

Fifth Sunday of Lent

There is a special atmosphere associated with the day on which we elect a new government. It is a day on which nearly everybody leaves their homes for a while and lines up with other voters to cast their vote. Those who are working in and around the polling booths would see a great variety of people, many of whom would have come from other countries to make Australia their home.

What was happening at our polling booths today/yesterday was not unlike what happened when pilgrims were drawn to Jerusalem to celebrate the major Festivals that happened there four times a year. Today we make our way with those pilgrims to one of those Festivals. We begin to notice that there were people there from all over Israel and beyond who had come to the festival. Among them were some Greeks. We are told that these Greeks wanted to “see” Jesus. It was more than just curiosity. They were somehow drawn to Jesus and they wanted to know who Jesus was. If you looked into their hearts you could say that they wanted to come to faith in him.

It was the two apostles with Greek names, Philip and Andrew, who brought them to Jesus. And rather surprisingly this becomes the moment when Jesus proclaims that his hour has now come. Up till now we have often heard Jesus say that his hour had not yet come. Today we hear him say, “Now the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” These Greeks become the sign that now the whole world has been drawn to him.” Jesus spells that out in the last line of today’s gospel. “And when I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all people to myself.”

Jesus speaks of his death in terms of a wheat grain that must fall to the ground and die to yield a rich harvest. At our Lenten study this week we pondered on this image. We questioned whether the grain actually dies or if it is transformed into a new way of being. We looked at a head of wheat and counted the number of grains that one grain had produced. But this image is not just for Jesus. All who follow Jesus are called to that same dying to self that allows the new life of God to yield the harvest of good works; works that God wants to bear in and

through us. “If someone serves me, they must follow me. Wherever I am, my servant will be there too.” As servants of the Lord we will expect to share in his suffering and death. But we will also share in his glory. “If anyone serves me, my Father will honour him.”

In John’s gospel Jesus always seems to be in control. But we get a glimpse here of what was happening in the human heart of Jesus as he thought about what lay ahead for him. He cannot face suffering and death without fear. “Now my soul is troubled.” He knows he cannot avoid what faces him. His Father cannot save him from this hour but assures him that he will be there for him.

You and I are often facing things that we have little control over. We are often facing the uncertainty of ill health, whether it is our health or the health of those we love. We can’t help being fearful when life changing things happen to us. Perhaps we were a little fearful as we went to vote today/yesterday. Maybe when we are facing those things that we are fearful about, we can think of Jesus in our gospel today. We can put our hope and trust in the same God in whom Jesus put his trust. Jesus prayed that in whatever was going to happen to him his Father’s name would be glorified. Jesus heard the voice of his Father telling him, “I have glorified it and will glorify it again.” Jesus could only come to the glory that belonged to him as God through a death that nobody should ever have to endure. It was only when he was lifted up on the cross that he would draw all people to himself. It would be through the love that Jesus poured out on the cross that the prince of this world would be overthrown.

When Jesus was lifted up on the cross he would seal the covenant of love that we heard about in our reading from the prophet Jeremiah today. “Deep within them I will plant my law. I will write it on their hearts. Then I will be their God and they shall be my people.” Jesus would draw all people to himself so that they could share in the very life of God. Jesus was lifted up on the cross so that we could all become children of God with him.

The letter to the Hebrews speaks so beautifully of the way that Jesus draws us to himself. “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.” To obey Jesus is to allow him to be the centre of our lives. To obey Jesus is to seek to live in tune with all that he hopes for us. To obey Jesus is to open our hearts to that life that he wants us to live now and forever. This is Christ’s Easter gift for us.