

Fifth Sunday of Lent

If we were judging the importance of things by the space that they take up in the Advertiser, then the most important thing that is happening in the world this week is the beginning of the AFL season. Much is being made of how many people are able to gather to watch the matches.

What happened at the Adelaide Oval this weekend is 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. 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 is always in control. In John’s account of the Passion, which we will read on Good Friday afternoon, there is no agony in the garden. But in what we heard today we get a glimpse 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. 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. It would be through the Spirit that Jesus breathed out from the cross that we are filled with his Spirit of love.

When Jesus was lifted up on the cross, he sealed 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.

We began our Mass today by making welcome someone who was about to become a child of God through the Sacrament of Baptism. In a few moments we are going to hear from some of the children who are preparing to celebrate Confirmation and First Holy Communion. We are going to hear what it means for them to belong to the family that gave them life and what it means to belong to the family that we call the Church. We will be asked to support for them and pray for them as they prepare to be drawn ever closer to Jesus and become full members of our family.

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.