

Fifth Sunday of Lent: Jer 31:31-34. Heb 5:7-9. Jn 12:20-30.

MEDITATION:

The readings this Sunday are opening the door for Easter. They're about how God wants to make a covenant with all mankind, and longs for an obedient "yes" from us. Rather than the cold 'obedience' of an employee, we should let his Word be written on our hearts (Jer 31:33).

In the first reading of Jeremiah, He is promising to make a new covenant with the Jews. That's a prophecy of the Life of Christ. We've been Christians for a long time now, but perhaps God wants to do something new in you. At least, God certainly wants to renew our faith. He longs so much for our love, that Christ is willing to go to Calvary in order to win our hearts. The covenant may sometimes be challenging, and we're sometimes tempted to "give it a miss" or to say "no", but the amazing thing is that Jesus himself lived through those temptations! I should say he lived through them "much more than us", but he replied with a perfect obedience. And he did that in order to convince us of a really surprising truth: that we can love like him! Love is stronger than death, and God can actually turn us into a decent bunch of Christians... if we let Him!

That "us" doesn't refer to a 'chosen few', but to the whole human family. In the Gospel, the Greeks approached Philip of Bethsaida, and he led them to Andrew who led them to Jesus. That speaks to me of how God wants to reach everyone, and it calls us to lead many to Christ. That means all people. Some people of ancient Greece may represent the 'intellectuals' of two thousand years ago, and there's a call here to reach out to our 'intellectual' world of today... of technology, science and philosophy etc.. Those Greeks were actually there for the Jewish passover festival, so there's a tremendous combination of two very different cultures. It reflects how God can bring us all together as one human family today. Of course that includes American and Iraqi and English and Spanish... and even Irish!

Some reject the faith because it involves being obedient to God, but God has made it clear to us that his guidance is for our own good. God is our Father, and is love with a capital 'L'. But when the road gets challenging, we're slow to really trust, and give a complete "Yes" like Mary. In order to convince us, the Son of God himself becomes incarnate, and He goes through a difficult challenge in front of us - the passion on Calvary. The Gospel today has Jesus saying that he could ask to be 'let off the hook', but he chooses to obey his Father's will and the Father urges him on. I think that this is a fantastic sign of how Christ really became one of us - even to the point of feeling the desire to avoid the challenge that lay ahead. That's something that we all feel from time to time, but Jesus is showing us that those temptations can be quickly shut down. Jesus won over them, and we praise him for that, but remember that the reason he goes through them before us, is to show us that we can win over them too. Sometimes the statues in our churches make the saints look like some kind of angelic creatures who couldn't possibly do wrong, but they often did actually do wrong or failed to do right, so we can all identify with that! St Paul himself had persecuted Christians. But the marvel is that we can identify with Jesus himself as he prayed

to be relieved of the coming condemnation in Jerusalem, and if we can just identify with his "yes" to his Father, then we may identify with his resurrection also!

Jesus says "yes", and that's Good News for us! It's bloody good news, but does it get us to face challenges with a "Yes" like him? He talks today of being sown like grain and that sounds undignified. But I suppose we're all destined to hit the dust at some stage. If we could only die to our selfishness now, the grain becomes wheat and the wheat becomes bread and the bread can be consecrated as in the Last Supper. Therefore, we take the host at communion today so that we too can be consecrated. Let's make good use of our brief time here. Let's learn obedience from Jesus and let him sow us wherever he wants!

There are rules to obey on our Christian journey through life, and they bring challenges, but rather than a cold obedience, like that of an intellectual of ancient Greece, we should let God's law be written on our hearts! Philip and Andrew brought the Greeks to Christ, and if people ever ask you about your attitudes of life, will you in some way help lead them to the Word of God? Let's at least 'point the way' towards Christ.

..... Dara.