



Commit to Change

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

Year B

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Psalm 51:3-4, 12-13, 14-15

Hebrews 5:7-9

John 12:20- 33

Gathering

(An unlit purple candle, a bible open to this week's gospel, a crucifix and a clear glass dish of seeds rest on a table covered with a purple cloth.)

Lent is rapidly coming to completion and this week's gospel speaks of the fulfillment of the transforming mystery of dying and rising. Nature resonates with this mystery as it verges on a transformation of its own that will burst open as plants emerge to new life. We reflected last week on God's call to leave darkness behind and to live in the light. When, during the past week, did you show by your words and actions that Jesus is your light?

Prayer

(The candle is lit. The dish of seeds is passed from member to member. The community pauses in silence to be attentive to the presence of God. After a time of quiet, the prayer continues as follows.)

Leader: As we live each day doing our best to follow your way, give us your grace and the will and courage to stay the course and to grow our spiritual dimension.

All: Lord Jesus, transform us.

Leader: As we encounter those in need, soften our hearts and give us the insight and the compassion to reach out to them.

All: Lord Jesus, transform us.

Leader: As we find ourselves living in a mind-set of “insufficiency”, give us the wisdom to see beyond our own material “wants”.

All: Lord Jesus, transform us.

Leader: As we toil to satisfy our material needs and the daily demands on our time, help us to achieve balance and take time to nurture our spiritual being.

All: Lord Jesus, transform us.

(Members join in singing, “Lift High the Cross.” The song may be found on the Internet.)

HEARING THE LORD’S GOSPEL

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the proclamation of the gospel, the leader invites members to name a word or phrase from the gospel that stays with them, but without any additional comment. Some may repeat what another has already said.)

When this naming is complete, the leader passes out copies of the scriptures of the week as needed. Pausing between them, the leader then poses these two questions: “What draws you to this gospel?” “Where do you resist this gospel?” The community pauses for a time of silent reflection. After about a minute, the leader invites members to consider the Reflection and Questions for the week. After a time for silent reflection, the leader invites members to re-arrange themselves in groups of three or four for sharing. The small groups move off so as not to intrude on one another.)

Reflection

The gospel speaks to us of grains of wheat falling to the ground and dying, in order to bear much fruit. Dying is symbolic of transformation. The gospel suggests the image of a dry, seemingly lifeless seed bursting open and germinating, nurtured by warmth and moisture.

Jesus, facing his most difficult moments, was “troubled” and felt, seemingly, on his own, yet he accepts what is to come. He is very clear about his mission and committed to union with the Father. God promises to glorify him – to transform his seemingly senseless suffering and death into redemption for us all.

We each face situations that are sometimes deeply troubling. While we can't often control these situations, we can control what these situations do to us. What might leave us bitter, angry and resentful so that we transfer our pain to others can also transform us into wiser, more understanding and compassionate people.

Deep in Lent, it is time to reassess our spiritual progress. How have you experienced any change or has Lent been a barren, up and down struggle? Have daily routines crowded out your well intentioned Lenten resolve?

Years ago, I attended a parish revival led by a dynamic missionary, who was a self-acknowledged recovering alcoholic. It was a powerful experience that I have never forgotten. At the close, in a thunderous voice, he asked each of us to approach the altar and leave our troubles there and trust that God would guide us to the best resolution. In the lowest point in his life, he had done exactly that. When I am overwhelmed and searching, I place my struggle on the altar and ask God for his wisdom and help. God has always guided me through the maze that seemed so insurmountable. In today's gospel, Jesus had complete trust in his Father. In these final weeks of Lent, commit to a renewed union with our God – a union that will create in you a renewed spirit, an Easter transformations.

Questions for Reflection and Conversation

- ◆ What changes have you experienced this year during Lent?
- ◆ Name a challenging situation in your life that God used to transform you.
- ◆ What do you do when you are “troubled” by a heavy burden?

- ◆ How must you *die* for the sake of new life in Christ?

HEARING THE GOSPEL'S LORD

(After about fifteen minutes of sharing in threes/fours, the leader re-gathers the community. Once back together, members pause for a moment. The leader then poses these questions: "What do you want to hold on to for yourself from this session?" "How are you/we being called to live in response to God's word?" After a pause, the leader invites the community to a time of conversation. When this sharing is complete, the community moves to a time of prayer.)

Response in Action Suggestions

- ◆ Plant seeds, (e.g. flowers, herbs, vegetables). Let what grows remind you of the transformative power of dying to self for the sake of new life in Christ.
- ◆ Reach out and offer support to someone you know who is experiencing a life-changing event (e.g. illness, death, job loss).
- ◆ During the remaining two weeks before Easter, zero in on something you resolved to change and recommit yourself to working on this resolution beyond the Lenten season.

Prayer

(After a brief pause, the gospel or a portion of it, either of the other readings as appropriate or the responsorial psalm are proclaimed. The idea is to select a text that lends itself to inviting members to the time of silent prayer that follows. Following the proclamation, the leader poses these questions to the members: "What does Christ in his Spirit say to you now?" "What do you say to him in response?" The community pauses for a full five minutes of prayerful attention to God. A brief instrumental selection may be played during part of this time. After this time of silence, the leader invites members simply to mention a word or two, or a brief expression that captures what they hear Christ saying to them personally. The community receives this without additional comment. Following this sharing, several members lead the community in prayer on behalf of all.)

All: Create a clean heart in me, O God.

I: Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness;

in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense.
Thoroughly wash me from my guilt
and of my sin cleanse me.

All: Create a clean heart in me, O God.

II: A clean heart create for me, O God;
and a steadfast spirit renew within me.
Cast me not out from your presence,
and your Holy Spirit take not from me.

All: Create a clean heart in me, O God.

III: Give me back the joy of your salvation;
and a willing spirit sustain in me.
I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners shall return to you.

All: Create a clean heart in me, O God.

Psalms 51:3-4, 12-13, 14-15

(A selection of instrumental music is played. When the music is complete, the leader invites prayers of praise, thanksgiving and petition. To each prayer, members respond, "O Crucified Christ, take possession of us." When these prayers are complete, members join hands to pray the Lord's Prayer. The session concludes with the exchange of a sign of peace.)