

Fr. Michael's Homily: *United in Suffering with Jesus*

Gospel: John 12:20-33

Some Greeks who had come to worship at the Passover Feast came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, "Sir, we would like to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there also will my servant be. The Father will honor whoever serves me.

"I am troubled now. Yet what should I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But it was for this purpose that I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it and will glorify it again." The crowd there heard it and said it was thunder; but others said, "An angel has spoken to him." Jesus answered and said, "This voice did not come for my sake but for yours. Now is the time of judgment on this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself." He said this indicating the kind of death he would die.

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Have you ever held a grain of wheat in your hand? In the retreats that I preach I sometimes invite people into a little ritual. I bless grains of wheat and have folks come forward to Ritual Ministers who give them a single grain. As the people come forward one at a time, they recite a verse from today's gospel – John 12:24:

Unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains a single grain of wheat.

And then they add the phrase: *I pray for the grace to die to –*

Then they name to the Ritual Minister some area in their life they are praying to change.

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This could be anything from having trouble with their temper to watching too many You Tube videos! And then they recite the rest of the verse and add another phrase: *But if the grain dies, it produces much fruit. I want to cultivate –*

They then name some virtue they are praying to acquire –

Patience, serenity, good judgment, prudence and so forth...

I've found this honest naming of how we need to die to ourselves to rise with Christ to be a simple but powerful way to apply today's gospel to our lives. It's a great preparation for making a really good confession!

I then invite people to take the grain of wheat home, soak it in water, and plant it. One woman returned many weeks later to report that her grain of wheat had sprouted and produced two shafts of wheat with more than 8 grains on each. A 16 to 1 yield!

In the stock market that would be considered a very handsome return. But Jesus isn't giving us stock tips or farming lessons. He IS speaking about this process of purification that we all must go through to bear fruit in abundance.

In today's gospel, Jesus knows that his time on earth is drawing to a close. And even he, the Christ, is troubled. None of us, not even Jesus, embrace deep suffering easily. But Jesus knows that this very hour is why he has come to us. In John's gospel, this triumph over suffering is God's glory

When my dear friend, Fr Jim Willig, was struggling with Stage 4 Renal Cell Cancer, he wrote a book with Tammy Bundy entitled *Lessons from the School of Suffering*. And in that book he wrote that the most help thing he learned in his bitter suffering was to unite himself with Jesus on the cross, who unites Himself with us on our cross.

This is the key to transforming our suffering so that it transforms us. Suffering by itself is useless... but when we learn to unite our suffering with the loving heart of Jesus, it can become a powerful tool of transformation. Then we will truly "bear much fruit.

Amen?

Amen!