

Fifth Sunday in Lent
March 18, 2018
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Reflection

Today's Gospel is set after Jesus has arrived in Jerusalem, approaching the end of his earthly ministry. He entered the city with great acclaim, but would soon exit with scorn; the palm branches held by the crowd replaced by a cross across his shoulders. Jesus knew what was coming, but it was hard for his disciples to believe it. A confusing time. The Gospel narrative reinforces the shifting uncertainty, like foggy mist billowing around a granite statue. Some Greeks came to Philip, "and said to him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.'" What did they want? It's left unclear. For other encounters, Scripture lets us know. People wanted healing for leprosy or blindness; the use of crippled limbs; freedom from demons. To these were joined the forgiveness of sins, raising from the dead, life giving waters and bread from heaven. Maybe the Greeks wanted answers: knowledge, wisdom and understanding; philosophical discourse on virtue and ethics; ideas about truth and beauty, being and good. They spoke to Phillip who was from the bilingual town of Bethsaida. He went to Andrew, another disciple with a Greek name. They were mediators to the Greek-speaking Gentiles, those who had turned to the Jews for something more, something beyond pagan teaching.

Jer 31:31-34
Ps 51
Heb 5:7-9
Jn 12:20-33

Maybe these Greeks did want answers, but were left with a sense of darkness, death and trouble - clouds shrouding a seed of glory bringing unity, and thundering truth.

If I'm right, it's worth remembering why the Greeks wanted information, and why they were moved to seek it from Jesus. They knew they were missing something, and that they couldn't find it on their own. Ignorance is a consequence of original sin. The fall of Adam has left us with an inability to hold fast to the truth. There are things that we can know, like two plus two equals four; but saving truth slips from our grasp like a bar of soap. Against this condition, God revealed himself so that we can know his love. He also revealed his law so that we can receive his love - and then share it with others. His revelation is recorded in Scripture. *Dei Verbum* is a document about the Word of God from the Second Vatican Council. Here's what it says: "Since everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching solidly, faithfully and without error that truth which God wanted put into sacred writings for the sake of our salvation (DV 11)." Jesus is the Word of God come down from heaven, so the Greeks wanted to see him, so that they could see as well.

Original sin leaves ignorance and also a tendency to sin. Jeremiah reminds us that God established a covenant with Israel, "a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband." Sin begets sin, shatters unity, deepens confusion, and leaves sadness in its wake. Law was not enough, since only Jesus could keep it. So God told Jeremiah, "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts." This would bring us clarity and forgiveness; togetherness within the Church; knowledge of God and his ways; truth that would save us and bring us joy. "They shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest; for I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more."

Jesus accomplished this through the Cross. He said, "Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." He gave himself with forgiveness for our sins, so that with him we could forgive others. Through the Spirit that he sends to the Church, we learn the truth and then pass it on. In him we join ourselves to rich and poor as the Body of Christ. We share in his death through baptism, when we begin to die to ourselves. We share in his life by obedient suffering in mission, teaching sinners - yes with truth, but mostly with joy - the joy of our salvation.

For this Eucharist, we remember the words of St. Patrick, whose mission brought the joy of conversion to Ireland: "Regardless of danger I must make known the gift of God and everlasting consolation; without fear and frankly I must spread everywhere the name of God, so that after my decease I may leave a bequest to my brethren and sons whom I have baptized in the Lord - so many thousands of people." May his intercession speed our mission here at home.