

**FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT; Cycle – B; March 17<sup>th</sup> 2024**  
**Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 5:7-9; John 12:20-33**

Dear Sisters & Brothers,

In many ways John's gospel is different from the Synoptic gospels, the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. Very often John's readers are stuck with the abstract terms and dual meanings he uses in his gospel. For instance, in today's gospel Jesus says, "*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.*" If we go through the gospel of John we come across the phrase, '**the hour**' nineteen times. By '**the hour**' very often John means the moment of Jesus' **glorification**. Even the meaning of the word '*glorified*' or *glorification* used by John is different from that of the synoptic gospels.

According to the Synoptic gospels the **glorification** of Jesus took place at his resurrection. It seems to be very logical. But John stands alone in his view of the glorification of Jesus. According to John the glorification of Jesus took place at his **crucifixion itself and not at his resurrection.** It looks to be very irrational. But this view is very clear from the words of Jesus too when he spoke to Nicodemus. Jesus says, "***Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life***" (Jn.3: 14 ). What Jesus means, by being **lifted up** is **his crucifixion**, which brings him victory and glorification and the same will give salvation to everybody who believes in him. In today's gospel Jesus repeats the same idea, "***When I am lifted up from the earth I will draw everyone to myself.***" If today millions of non-Christians are attracted towards Jesus, it is not because he came out of the tomb alive rather **he sacrificed his life for mankind**. St. Paul understood the words of Jesus well and he says, "***For, the Jews demand signs and the Greeks look for wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified***" (1Cor. 1:22-23). Of Course, St. Paul writes a lot about the resurrection of the Lord, but emphasizes the sacrifice of Christ, by which salvation is given to all.

So it is very clear from the words of Jesus that only through sacrifice the glorification can occur and only through losing life, the new life can come up. In today's gospel Jesus points out a natural truth, "***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.***" Once again Jesus confirms that death is the sign of life; only by sacrificing one's comforts and security, there comes out the good fruit. If we go through the early history of the Church we know that the

glorious and prosperous period for the growth of the Church was the first three centuries, which was the period of severe persecution. Thousands and thousands of men and women sacrificed their precious lives for faith and Jesus Christ. But even the big Roman power could not wipe out Christianity rather it grew fast. That is why the Church fathers have the saying, **“The blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church.”** Actually the decline of the Church started in A.D. 325 when Emperor Constantine gave the Church the religious freedom.

If we take the long history of the world, we know that if humanity had achieved something good, it happened thanks to the sacrifice of great men and women who were ready to come out of their comfort zones and sacrifice their security, pleasure and even their very life for humanity. They were the seeds which fell on the ground and died to bring more fruit. If Francis Xavier had remained as a professor in Paris, pursuing his selfish ambition, he would have lived as an individual and died as a single grain. But when he threw away his job and became a missionary, literally he fell on the ground and as a result he converted thousands of non-Christians in India and other Asian countries. When Mother Theresa left the comforts of the Loretta convent and buried herself in the slums of Calcutta, thousands of orphans and destitute found life again. Once the famous evangelist Christmas Evans commented, **“It is better to burn out than to rust.”** Joan of Arc prayed, **“I shall only last a year, use me as you can.”**

The virtue of sacrifice is becoming a rare commodity in the world. In modern age people are becoming more and more self-centered and they don't want to come out of their little shell of pleasure and security. Nobody wants to take any risk and sacrifice one's comforts or time for the common good. *This evil tendency is creeping into all walks of life; politicians, religious leaders, couples, parents and teachers are the victims of this evil.* These people are supposed to be the pillars of the society, community and nation as a whole. When they go with their I, me, mine mentality the nation and the Church will be heading towards a great disaster. **John Wesley says, “Do all the good you can; in all the ways you can; in all the places you can; to all the people you can; as long as ever you can.”**