

# Homily for the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent

March 17-18, 2018

Readings: Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 5:7-9; John 12:20-23

Preacher: Deni Mack

Hear Jesus pray with “*loud cries*” (Hebrews 5:7-9) and hear his anguish as he utters, “*I am troubled.*” (John 12: 20-33)

Yes, yes, I know he will rise in glory but let's sit with his suffering for a while.

A contemplative friend, who taught seminarians years ago, suggests we bring suffering to Jesus on the cross, gaze at him and take in his suffering. She wisely advised, after spending some time with Jesus allowing his pain to be ours, return to one's personal suffering and stay with that for awhile. Then gaze again at Jesus on the cross and repeat the process slowly and contemplatively, surrendering ourselves in Jesus, the Christ, and giving over to our hurt and turning yet again to Jesus dying on the Cross.

Teresa of Avila was transformed by gazing on the crucifix. What happens inside you as you reflect on these scriptures and allow his suffering to permeate your being? What happens to your way of seeing, of being?

After many years of suffering both physical illness and prayer that felt as dry as dust, Teresa turned to Jesus on the cross. There she found her Friend. From then on she could talk with Jesus about anything and everything; she listened. Her new strength, good humor, practical wisdom and vision became forces for renewal in church life and mission. She founded seventeen convents despite being opposed by kings, princes of the church, clergy confessors, novices, and even townspeople because the villagers feared having to support the sisters. Teresa would found a convent in the dark of night and cart in bales of straw for the sisters bedding. Her suffering was transformed into visionary service.

A theologian of color, James Cone, offers a critique of Christians' response to lynchings, and today's varied forms of lynching in his, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. He vividly describes intense suffering and onlookers' immunity to it, their callous disregard for humanity and pervasive evil. Many people refused to see Christ's suffering then and now. As we gaze on Jesus suffering then and now, what is being created in us? A new heart? A clean heart? It helps to pray with today's readings, Psalm 51 “*A clean heart create for me, O God, and a steadfast spirit renew within me.*” And Jeremiah 31:31-34 offers us hope with assurances of God's covenant with us. Our hearts are opened to others' pain the more we listen to God.

James Cones' heart must have broken as he researched the lynchings right here in our country. We live in a world where a clean heart is broken every day. We live in a world where God's law written upon our hearts is attacked even by people who say they are Christians.

We also live in a world of unimaginable glory, of profound prophetic action and of people willing to take up godly challenges, to dedicate their lives to what needs doing. A father of one of the 17 people killed in Parkland, Florida, on Ash Wednesday testified to dedicating his life to limit military style weapons to the military and to accurate background checks for the purchase, sale and use of guns. He will have his daughter on his mind and heart all his life long, dying to himself to protect others from the horror she met. That father is a prophet of our time; a spokesperson for God.

So are Emma Gonzales and other students who survived the mass murder at their high school. These young people bravely pursue legislation limiting accessibility of military weapons to those who are trained and capable of being "well regulated" as our 2<sup>nd</sup> amendment demands.

They are prophets and they are young! Some leaders mock these young leaders. Some elected officials spurn their passionate resolve, vote against their demands, try to pour water on their fire, try to squelch their enthusiastic endorsement of common sense regulations. One way I will cooperate with any grace coming my way from 3 until 5 p.m. Saturday, March 24 is to be at Washington Square Park to stand in solidarity with young people who ask for protection from military weapons, from unregulated gun purchase and sale. Youth of Parkland, Florida, saw their classmates, coach and teachers die and I see in their response to their deaths, that biblical grain of wheat bearing much fruit.

This Lent may we see ourselves as grains of wheat dying to produce the fruit of a clean heart, a heart that listens to God's heart.