

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

March 20-21, 2021

Readings: Jeremiah 31: 31-34; Hebrews 5: 7-9; John 12: 20-33

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God's covenant is written on our hearts. Some of us sense that when we marry. Many sense it when holding their newborn child. Yet, God's covenant is often not recognized. Each Lent we try to draw closer to the real deal that is God's covenant. Jeremiah assures us; we are God's people.

What can that mean when one in five people in our country has lost someone in this pandemic? What does being in covenant with God mean when 600 workers test positive for corona virus in one meat packing plant? What does being God's people mean when 88 million people suffer from acute hunger? We lament these horrors. It helps to sit with Jesus and recall his compassion. As he wept over Jerusalem he weeps with all who hunger and all who are sick. As he wept over the death of Lazarus he weeps with those who have lost loved ones. He does more than weep. He acts through us:

*"Christ has no body on earth but yours, no hands, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes with which Christ looks out his compassion to the world. Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good..." St. Teresa of Avila*

Jesus, in today's gospel tells us we are to follow him in order to be fruitful. In contrast to strong cultural influences suggesting we seek money, prestige, popularity, possessions, ease and power, Jesus, like a grain of wheat, dies to produce much fruit. Are we to lay down our lives for one another, for the common good? Seems impossible...until...we ask God what we might let die in ourselves in order to lovingly serve the common good. We're given the grace to fall in love with humanity. The great spiritual writer, Thomas Merton, while standing at a busy city street corner, sensed what he describes as an oceanic love for all humanity. That all inclusive love helps us see each person as a child of God, a member of God's family. We are each a grain of wheat that become bread for one another. Jesus, the single grain, has become the bread of life. God's love makes our small grain fruitful.

Our contribution seems too small to feed those who hunger, too small to heal those 600 meat packers, too small to comfort those who've lost loved ones. Until we remember Jesus fed bread and fish to 5,000 people with what was only a little bread and fish, until he blessed it and gave it to his followers to feed the multitudes.

Throughout our lives we see a little becoming enough as we let it go for the common good. Could that be a pattern of dying and rising we see in our lives? We let go of some things so we can nurture our children. We later let go of our children so as to free them, to give them wings to fly. We take care of our parents, our disabled spouse, child and neighbor, dying to selfishness for their well-being.

"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." Daniel Prude died. Was it because he did not, could not follow directions? Our brain injured son is not able to do what he is told either. Steve, like Mr. Prude, might run outside naked and spitting. I know a white man who five years ago, during a mental health episode, ran naked and spitting down the street while banging on doors. Calls to 911 found him the help he needed. So, I trust our Steve would also be given help. Daniel Prude died. What will come of Mr. Prude's death? Will mental health professionals be listened to at the redesign of public safety protocols and be on call twenty four hours a day, seven days a week? Will all public safety personnel learn from De-Escalation and Culture and Trauma Informed Response training? I also pray the death of Daniel Prude bears the fruit of racial equity.

Will 525,000 COVID deaths produce compassionate policy changes, healthy protocols, fruitful legislation, civil discourse? Friends tell me each COVID relief check helped them be more generous than ever before. Some are partnering (covenanting) with agencies advocating for equity. Two people told me they didn't lose any money during COVID so they are giving every cent to charity.

We are all one family; God made us and covenants with us all.