

LENT 5 -2021 (PASSION SUNDAY)

Jer 31:31-34

Heb 5:7-9

Jn 12:20-33

When God promised a new Covenant with his chosen people through Jeremiah, Jerusalem was in ruins, the Temple had been destroyed, the Ark of the Covenant was gone and most of God's people were in exile in Babylon. No wonder they asked whether God was interested in them. Jeremiah told them that the opposite was the case. God loved them and it was **they** who had broken the Covenant that he had made with them. In fact God loved them so much that he would establish a new covenant with them because the first one was irreparable.

This new promised covenant would introduce a new way for God's people to be in a meaningful relationship with him. The old covenant could only promote or forbid certain types of behaviour. Controlling behaviour does not purify people and cause them to spring into a new way of life. So God made three promises.

God said that his instructions wouldn't be written down in a rule book, but they would be written in people's hearts. Secondly, they would come to know God, not by being taught *about* him, but by *knowing* him in a loving relationship. Head knowledge isn't enough. Love of God cannot be taught, it is learned and practised through prayer and loving action in the world. Thirdly, God would forgive his people and so give them a new sense of worth. What stimulates people into action more than knowing that we are loved and valued?

Jeremiah was confident that God would fulfill his promise even if it would be in the future. That future was realised in and through Jesus Christ. As the Epistle to the Hebrews points out Jesus knew through bitter experience that listening and being obedient to God entails suffering. For him it involved physical pain and mental anguish, but through it he was able to lead God's people to the Father.

Today's gospel reading is St John's equivalent of the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus is soliloquising about which is easier, to be or not to be. Should he ask the Father to save him from this hour or should he accept that, 'it was for this purpose that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name' (Jn 12:27- 28). God's voice is heard, "I have glorified it and will glorify it again" (Jn 12:28). It is glorified in the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus (Jn17:1-5) and in the Church (Jn17:10). As a grain of wheat must die in order for a harvest to grow, so Jesus must be lifted up in order to gather a harvest of faithful disciples. God's presence was no longer to be found in a sacred space, but in the sacred community of the Church.

When Jesus faced Pilate in the Judgement Hall, it appeared that Pilate was judging Jesus. Again the opposite is the case. Jesus judges Pilate and with him all the secular powers in the world. When secular authorities allow their God given ministry to govern with justice and mercy for all, to be perverted, they become the agents of the Evil one whose intention is to subject the world to his evil reign (1Jn 5:19).

Satan may be strong, but the victorious cross is the instrument of Satan's defeat and the liberating reconciliation to God for all who gaze upon it.

On Good Friday we will gaze on our crucified Saviour lifted up on the Cross. Week by week we should gaze on his sacred Body and Blood lifted up during the Mass, for this is God's assurance that his promise of a new covenant has been fulfilled. In the life of every disciple, the first priority must be Jesus so that we too might be honoured by the Father whose name is glorified in us through those who have come to know and love him through us.

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