

5th Sunday of Lent (B)  
(Jeremiah 31:31-34 / John 12:20-33)  
21.03.2021  
To see Jesus – To believe in Him

Dear brothers and sisters,

“We would like to see Jesus”. This is a request formulated by some Greeks who had come to Jerusalem to worship with the Jews for the Passover festival. These Greeks were pagans. They belonged to a category of foreigners who were called: “those who worship” or “those who fear God”. Their faith and sympathy for Judaism fell short of full integration into God’s people, however, because they were not circumcised.

These Greeks are considered to be the prototype of all other pagans who would later on hear the gospel and follow it, prototype of each one of us who are gathered in prayer if we are not of Jewish origin. As was the case with the Greeks we encounter in today’s gospel, we also want to see Jesus!

These Greeks wanted to see Jesus: really see Him! If they had simply wanted to catch a glimpse of Jesus, they could have easily satisfied their desire, because Jesus did not hide himself from anyone. But we know that in St John’s gospel the verb “to see” is often used with a specific meaning: “to see” means “to believe”. The perfect model of the believer is the disciple who, having entered the empty tomb on Easter morning, “saw and believed” (Jn 20:8). This means that the request of these God fearing Greeks who wanted to see Jesus was one of faith. They did not want just to catch a glimpse of Jesus; they were not simply nosy people! They wanted to believe in Jesus, to deepen their faith in him. It is the same for us who long to see Jesus: we are not looking simply for a fleeting apparition! We want to deepen our faith in Him in a sustained way!

These Greeks addressed themselves to Philip because he spoke Greek. Philip was a Greek name. Philip and Andrew (another Greek name) go to Jesus to present the request formulated by these men. They had heard about Jesus. They could have tried to meet Him by themselves. But they realized that an encounter with God and Christ by faith takes place within a people, within the Church, largely through the mediation of others. If these Greeks wanted to see and believe in Jesus, they had to be led to Jesus by someone who knew Him. An apostle was the right person to go to for that.

We cannot believe in Jesus without passing by the mediation of the Church: parents, teachers, friends, catechists, ordained ministers... Faith in Jesus is never about me and Jesus, full stop. Faith in Jesus is about each one of us and Jesus as experienced through the mediation of the Church community. The relationship between each one of us and Jesus is always the relationship between three persons: Jesus, me and the Church, Jesus, each one of you and the Church. Faith in Jesus is a process which takes time and entails different steps. It is for this reason that the Greeks asked Philip to introduce them to Jesus.

It is also interesting to note that the request of these Greeks to see Jesus does not progress to the intended end. Jesus does not give them an appointment. Instead of a direct answer to their request, the evangelist reports for us a discourse given by Jesus in the form of a monologue. Jesus tells them what believing in Him means and what it requires from them.

Jesus begins by telling them and by extension each one of us that access to faith in Him is linked to 'his hour', 'the hour of Jesus' to which St John alludes several times in his gospel. You will recall Jesus' words: "My hour has not yet come". This hour is spoken of on at least five occasions (Jn 2:4; 7:6.8.30; 8:20). In today's gospel passage we hear: "Now the hour has come". What is the hour of Jesus? 'The hour of Jesus' is the glorification of the Son of man. Jesus' glorification in John's gospel is Jesus' passion, death and resurrection. It is for this hour that Jesus came into the world; he longs for this hour, even if he fears it. At the hour of his glorification, everyone will be able to see Jesus lifted up on the Cross and, looking at him, they will obtain eternal salvation. To see Jesus, to believe in Him, is to see Jesus' passion, death and resurrection as the place and time of our salvation; Jesus died on the Cross for the forgiveness of our sins and in order to set us free from death. To see and believe in Jesus is to realize that we cannot follow Him without following him in his passion and death in order to have a share in his resurrection. It is to become aware that we have to consent to die to ourselves in order to live to the full in Christ and with Him.

From this perspective the little parable of the grain of wheat which has to fall into the earth arrives at the right moment. The meaning of this parable is clear: The grain of wheat is Jesus who by his death on the Cross becomes the tree from which everyone can receive the fruit of life. What an extraordinary fruit! Through the death of one person, Jesus, the salvation of an innumerable multitude is brought about.

If we want to see and believe in Christ, if we want to share in His glorification, if we want to be where He is, we must follow Him by showing a determination similar to His; we must go to the point of consenting to lose our lives, we must detach ourselves from our life in this world in order to preserve it for eternal life. To quote today's gospel passage from St John: "Anyone who loves his life loses it; anyone who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life". The three other evangelists have kept the memory of what Jesus says here and have recorded it in almost identical terms: In Matthew's account we read: "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Mt 10:39). In Mark's we read: "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it" (Mk 8:35). And in Luke: "Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses it will save it" (Lk 17:33). The fact that the four gospels agree strongly on this point reveal that this teaching of Jesus should be treasured in our hearts and put into practice in our lives and those of all who believe in Him.

This is not an easy message! St John shows us Jesus perturbed and deeply troubled at the moment he faced his own death. "Now my soul is troubled. What shall I say: Father, save me from this hour? But it is for this very reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" These words are the Johannine version of the prayer of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane on the eve of his passion and death. Jesus is troubled and hesitates. But very soon he remembers that he came into the world to fulfil his heavenly Father's will. Even if the Father's

will is a source of fear for Jesus, even if he is tempted to hesitate, finally he freely chooses to do not his own will but the will of his Father. The Father's will is Jesus' kingdom! The Father's will should be our kingdom!

Our vocation is to do the Father's will. At certain hours, this can be very exacting, even crucifying. As it was with Jesus, so it happens that we are deeply troubled. This is the costly price of believing in God, of loving God and our neighbour. May the example of Jesus in his passion – a mystery we shall contemplate in the coming days – encourage us! This is 'to see the Lord' in truth! May we keep our eyes fixed on the Cross of Christ! This is the way to life.