

Homily for 5th Sunday of Lent, March 21, 2021

Today's passage takes place in the Gospel According to Saint John right after Christ's entry into Jerusalem. However, this week it makes a great preparation for His entrance into Jerusalem next week, the beginning of Holy Week. Today, Our Lord speaks of "the Hour."

There are four gospels. They all agree on the meaning of the Good News and of Christ. But they approach it differently. This adds a depth of understanding to the mysteries of our faith.

For instance, In the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, the Descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is presented as a particular event, with all its meaning and ramifications to be reflected upon.

In John, the giving of the Spirit is presented twice. The first time is at His death on the Cross where He "hands over His Spirit." The second time is on the evening of the Resurrection, where He comes to the Disciples in the Upper Room and "Breathes" on them while telling them to "receive the Holy Spirit."

John presents the interconnectedness of all the events in the mystery of salvation in Christ; His Incarnation, life, ministry, passion, Death, Resurrection, Ascension, and the coming of the Holy Spirit. They overlap and are understood in the light of each other.

We encounter this approach today. For John, "the Hour" is the hour of darkness and Christ's passion and Death. Yet it is also the hour of His Glorification. Jesus being Lifted Up is His being raised on the Cross. AND it is also His Resurrection and Ascension.

To enter into the mystery of Our Faith is to understand that the absurdity of the Cross is the way God's wisdom and God's love conquers sin and death. This suffering and worldly defeat is how God triumphs.

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Our Second Reading today speaks of Jesus' suffering. This passage speaks of Christ praying. Our Lord is fully divine, and also fully human. In the fullness

of His humanity, part of His communion with His Heavenly Father was lived out in his prayer life.

We often are told of Christ's prayer. He went off alone to pray. He taught us the Our Father. He went to the Temple and the Synagogue. At the Last Supper He prayed for our unity and our protection.

In what seems to be a reference to the Agony in the Garden, we are told in our passage, "In the days when Christ Jesus was in the flesh, he offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence."

We are told in the passage that he was heard. Being heard does not always mean getting what we request. But being heard – truly heard – means being respected, and loved. The Father loves the Son, and the Son loves the Father.

The Second Reading goes on to say, "Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered; and when he was made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him."

Such words can be confusing, and are worth pondering; that Christ would "learn obedience" through His suffering.

Part of an exploration of this sentence goes back to the roots of the word "obey." It comes from the word "to listen to." Ancient wisdom included the idea that disciplining helped a disobedient son learn to listen.

Certainly we would not say Jesus was ever disobedient to The Father or any legitimate authority or any just law. However, the interplay of The Father hearing The Son and The Son hearing The Father brings us back to that mutual love of the Father and the Son so often spoke of in John's gospel. To truly pay attention, to truly listen and hear, is an act of love.

And knowing that He has suffered, we can be confident that He hears our prayers with a clarity we might not otherwise believe.

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Suffering is one of the hardest things for people to deal with in accepting that God is all-loving. One of the explanations that have been offered is that: just as

physical discipline improves our abilities, in the same way our sufferings can build us up; as gold is purified in a furnace, our sufferings can perfect us.

This seems to be the direction Hebrews is going here. Christ is already perfect because He is God the Son. But as a man, He has truly experienced suffering. As human beings we can know that He understands our plight. And at those times when following Him may include suffering, we can have confidence that He will allow that suffering to perfect us as well.

“and when he was made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.”

Jesus listens to and obeys The Father who listens to Him. And in turn, Jesus (who can truly hear us) is the source of eternal salvation for all who hear him and obey.

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To sum up: Being lifted up is both passion and glory. Suffering obedience is connected with perfection and salvation. We are listened to and we are to listen.

Regarding this second part on obedience and listening:

This dynamic between the Father and the Son, which is repeated in the dynamic between Christ and all of us, is spoken of in the Holy Father’s Apostolic Letter for this Year of Saint Joseph. He even mentions this passage from our Second Reading. Under a reflection on Joseph as Obedient Father, Pope Francis writes:

“During the hidden years in Nazareth, Jesus learned at the school of Joseph to do the will of the Father. That will was to be his daily food (cf. *Jn* 4:34). Even at the most difficult moment of his life, in Gethsemane, Jesus chose to do the Father’s will rather than his own, becoming “obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (*Phil* 2:8). The author of the Letter to the Hebrews thus concludes that Jesus “learned obedience through what he suffered” (5:8)...All this makes it clear that “Saint Joseph was called by God to serve the person and mission of Jesus directly through the exercise of his fatherhood” and that in this way, “he cooperated in the fullness of time in the great mystery of salvation and is truly a minister of salvation.””

Certainly we can take the example that is given to us today in both Christ Our Savior and Saint Joseph. Looking to them as guides, we can listen and obey the will of the heavenly Father in our particular lives, and our particular homes.