



**Fifth Sunday of Lent (Year B)
City Beach Parish Holy Spirit Church 50th Anniversary**

Homily

**Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB
Archbishop of Perth**

**Sunday 17 March, 2024
Holy Spirit Church, City Beach**

This weekend we are celebrating the Fifth Sunday of Lent and next weekend, of course, we will celebrate Palm Sunday and the beginning of Holy Week. For me, and perhaps for many of you, this time of Lent has seemed to go past very quickly but today we are reminded that we do still have two weeks which we can use to turn our minds and hearts more directly to the Lord and renew our commitment to follow Him as His disciples.

Today's gospel passage comes from the gospel of St John. One of the features of this gospel is the way in which Jesus speaks quite often of what he calls his hour. Early in the gospel story Mary, the mother of Jesus, approaches him at Cana about the embarrassment of a young couple who have not provided enough wine for all the guests at their wedding feast. When Mary asks Jesus to do something about it, He at first seems to refuse because, He says, "My hour has not yet come".

On a number of occasions after that, as the gospel story unfolds, the opponents of Jesus try to silence Him, and even to destroy Him, but they are unsuccessful, again because as Jesus says, "My hour has not yet come".

In today's gospel, the opposite is true. For the first time, Jesus does say that His hour has now come. Jesus is in Jerusalem, preparing for the feast of the Passover, and He is told that people from outside Jerusalem, and in fact from outside Judaism, have come to see Him. It seems as if this desire of people such as this is the signal for the final drama of Jesus's life to begin. At different times throughout the gospel, Jesus has spoken of Himself as the Good Shepherd, who knows His sheep and whose sheep know Him. He has spoken, too, in mysterious language of the idea that when he is lifted up from the earth, he will draw all people, and not just Jewish people, to himself. And as we will hear as Holy Week unfolds in the days following Palm Sunday, Caiaphas, the Jewish High Priest, who authorises the arrest of Jesus and who knows that it will lead to Jesus's death, says quite plainly, "It is better that one man should die than that the whole nation should perish". Caiaphas, of course, was worried that the Roman occupiers would see the followers of Jesus as a potential source of civil unrest and, in reaction would clamp down on the free practice of the Jewish faith. The writer of the gospel, after quoting the words of Caiaphas, makes the comment that Jesus did not die just for the Jewish nation, but so that all the scattered children of God, across the face of the earth, might be gathered into one people.



All of this comes together in today's gospel when Jesus says, "Now my hour has come, and when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself".

What is it that draws people to Jesus? Well, some might say that it was the miracles he worked, or the beauty of his preaching. Jesus himself insists that what will really draw people to him is his death on the cross, his being lifted up. This is because the death of Jesus, brutal, and degrading though it was, proved in a way that nothing else could that Jesus loved God and loved us. It was Jesus, after all, who said that "no one can have greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends". It was also Jesus, as we heard in today's Gospel, who said, " Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains a single grain, but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest".

Because the death of Jesus was the final act of love in a life lived in love, the Cross, rather than being a source of scandal or a place of defeat, becomes a source of life for us and, we might say, an explanation of what Jesus meant when He said to His disciples, "I am the way". Self-sacrificing love for others, in imitation of Jesus, is that the very heart of our vocation as Christians. We have gathered in the Church today to celebrate the Eucharist: we gather to draw strength from each other's faith and encouragement, we gather to listen carefully to the word of God, and we gather in particular to enter into a deep communion with the Lord Jesus through receiving his body and blood. And we do all this so that we can respond, generously and faithfully, to his command, which we hear repeated at every Mass after the consecration of the bread and wine: do this in memory of me. Just as I have given everything I have and everything I am for you, so now, if you wish to be my disciples, you must do the same: give everything you have, and everything you are in generous and self-sacrificing love for the good others.

It is easy for us to make the mistake of thinking that it is only Jesus who, like a grain of wheat, falls to the ground and dies, so that He might bear much fruit. In reality, His words are as much a challenge for us to respond to the way of Jesus as generously as Jesus Himself responded to the will of his Father. Every time we come to Mass, and every time we receive the Lord Jesus in holy communion, we are both reminded and given the grace to live our lives for the good of others.

As our Lenten journey begins to come to an end over the next few weeks, we might pray for the grace to be able to see and respond to all those ways in which other people's lives can be happier and fuller, because, as true disciples of Jesus, are a part of their lives.

May this church, and the parish it serves, help us all to grow into committed and faithful disciples of the Lord who calls us.