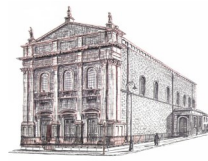




PARISH OF ST. AGATHA 1 20TH/21ST MARCH 2021



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Pope Francis: Witness to Jesus with a life given in service

On the Fifth Sunday of Lent Pope Francis recalled the Gospel reading where some Greeks approach the apostle Philip asking to see Jesus. He said their request reflects symbolically one asked by men and women down through the ages wishing to know Jesus. Pope Francis recalled the great responsibility Christians and our communities have in helping people to meet and know Jesus. The day's Gospel reading recounts how Jesus responds to the request of the Greeks by saying "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.... Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (Jn 12:23-24). The Pope said this answer shows that Jesus is "the hidden seed ready to die in order to bear much fruit" and in order to know and understand Him you look at the Cross.

The Cross, symbol *par excellence* of Christians

The sign of the Cross over the centuries, the Pope said "has become the symbol *par excellence* of Christians", and the Crucifix is often where people "see Jesus", especially those from places where Christianity is not well-known where it is the sign they encounter and come to recognise. They see them in churches, the homes of Christians or worn by believers. The important thing, the Pope says, is that "the sign be consistent with the Gospel: the cross cannot but express love, service, unreserved self-giving" to be truly the "tree of life".

Getting to know Jesus

Often times people today wish to know more about Jesus, implicitly wanting to "see Jesus", and Pope Francis says Christians "must respond with the witness of a life that is given in service". We are called to sow seeds of love through concrete, simple, and courageous gestures, not just words, the Pope said. The Lord with his grace "makes us bear fruit" even where misunderstandings, difficulty, or persecution exist. During these trials while the seed is dying is when "life blossoms, to bear ripe fruit in due time", he noted, since death and life intertwine and we can "experience the joy and true fruitfulness of love, which always, I repeat, is given in God's style: closeness, compassion, tenderness". The Pope prayed that the Virgin Mary might help us all follow Jesus on this journey of service so that "the love of Christ may shine" and all can see and know Him. (Vatican News).

DIE TO SIN IN ORDER TO LIVE A NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

In today's Gospel (John 12: 20-33), Jesus talks about a seed or a grain of wheat that must die in order to change and grow into something better and new. God is the Sower, Jesus is the Seed and He is asking us to follow Him and die to our ego in order for humility to grow. If we sow in the field of the flesh, we will yield a corrupt harvest but if we sow in the field of the Spirit, we will yield an eternal harvest (Gal 6:8). We should ensure that the work we have done every day will be sown for an eternal harvest. Today is the Fifth Sunday of Lent when the Crucifix and Statues are veiled in Churches and in homes. This is done to remind us that we live in a veiled world in exile from our true Home, which is Heaven. Our true citizenship is Heaven and not earth. Our purpose living through this worldly pilgrimage is to give Glory to God. We cannot bear the fruits of the Holy Spirit unless we grasp the hour and become free from the dominion of sin.

BORN TO DIE

Baptism is a Death to sin, a spiritual burial with Christ and a spiritual Resurrection with Him to a New life beginning on earth. Our desires and thoughts should be for the Goods of Heaven and not for the Goods of Earth (Rom 6: 3-7). In the Garden of Gethsemane, after discovering the Apostles made no effort to stay awake with Him to pray (Matt 26:41), Jesus said, *Watch and pray, that you do not enter into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak*. It is important that we do not end up spiritually asleep throughout our lives. Let us not imitate the Bad Unrepentant Thief on the Cross and let Eternal Life pass us by. Imitate the Good Repentant Thief and grasp the sacred opportunity given to us, in order to live beyond the grave. The reason God gives each of us a Cross on earth - is to start the process of dying to ourselves now. Our redemptive suffering gives glory to God. Looking at the three Crosses on Calvary can teach us what our own attitude is to our personal Cross. Do we reject it or embrace it?

SATAN BLINDS THE SOUL TO THE LIGHT OF TRUTH

The second reading today (Hebrews 5:7-9) teaches us that Jesus *learnt to obey through suffering*. This means that to enter the process of dying to sin will entail suffering. Jesus, who was sinless, had taken the deadly sins of the world on Himself, in order to nail them to the Cross of Life. From the Cross He gave us the Church and its Sacraments, by opening His Sacred Heart, becoming the cause of all Grace and Mercy in the world, so that no sin of ours could separate us from the love of God. We must do the same thing with our sins, and open our hearts to love and forgiveness, if we are to live eternally, otherwise we will die in our sins (John 8:21-30). The Repentant Thief opened himself to God's Grace and tried to save his criminal brother from eternal death by pointing out the presence of God before him. He said; *You do not even fear God* (Lk. 23,40). The Bad Thief clearly witnessed the patience and the meekness of Jesus, but it was not enough to open his eyes or ears. In typical satanic fashion, he did not want to die to this passing world but desired to be subject to it, and challenged Jesus by saying; *If you are the Christ, save yourself and us with you* (Lk. 23,29). He asks to escape from suffering and death in order to return to his old sinful way of earthly life. It is the call of those who don't believe and demand a miracle in order to believe a miracle of their own choosing. This was the same satanical call of the soldiers and the priests; *If you are the King of the Jews, save Yourself* (Lk. 23: 27). The priests shouted; *If He is the King of Israel, let Him come down now from the Cross, and we will believe in Him* (Matt. 27:42). Again, it was the call of the devil; *If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become loaves of bread* (Matt. 4:23).

NO CHARITY, NO FAITH, NO LOVE, NO DYING TO SELF

The Unrepentant Thief died desperate and damned, even though Jesus was at his side, waiting for him to repent. Jesus is at all our sides waiting for us to repent. Even with Judas, Jesus did not give up on him when He received the kiss of betrayal. Jesus addressed him as; *Friend, for what did you come?* (Matt. 26:50). But Judas was not prepared to die to his sinful ways and now sadly accompanies the Bad Thief in Hell. Jesus asked the Father for forgiveness on those who killed him, but many were indifferent to their sins and rejected this Mercy. Many descended the Hill of Calvary beating their breasts, acknowledging their sins and were forgiven completely. Jesus came into the world to serve Divine Mercy to those who ask for it. People often say of a loved one before they die: *Thank God they didn't suffer*. They neglect to believe that their suffering is their Cross, and also that part of dying to self, which purifies their soul, in order for them to enter Heaven. All the Holy Souls in Purgatory are purified through Suffering before entering Heaven. We can avoid Purgatory by embracing our sufferings now. Jesus knows it is not easy but says today: *Now my soul is troubled. What shall I say: Father, save me from this hour? But it was for this very reason that I have come to this hour*. We must realise that this hour is given to us all to glorify God with our Christian lives in practicing the Faith. Our Lady prays for us now but also at *the hour of our death*. When this hour arrives for us, may we have the grace and courage to offer it up to God for the redemption of the world and not imitate the bad thief who wasted his suffering. He was blinded by Pride, who is the Prince of this world: the devil. God bless, Fr. Brendan.