

Read

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Psalm 51:3-4, 12-13,
14-15

Hebrews 5:7-9

John 12:20-33

LIVING THE WORD

Fifth Sunday of Lent

March 21, 2021



REFLECTION

Skilled teachers know that it is important to make real-life connections to the material they share with their students, and this is exactly what Jesus does in today's Gospel. While the imagery might seem strange to those of us who are not directly involved with agriculture, Jesus' followers could easily relate to the description of the grain of wheat that falls to the ground. In order to produce more wheat, the original grain must die. New life springs from death. Jesus tells his followers that this is the same reality for Christian life. This can seem scary, but it is our Christian story! Jesus' suffering and death leads to the Resurrection. Sadness vanishes; life and love will always win. We, too, have dying to do on our way to life in God. We die to selfishness, pride, greed, and all other forms of sin. Only after we die in these ways can we come to fully encounter and know life in Christ.

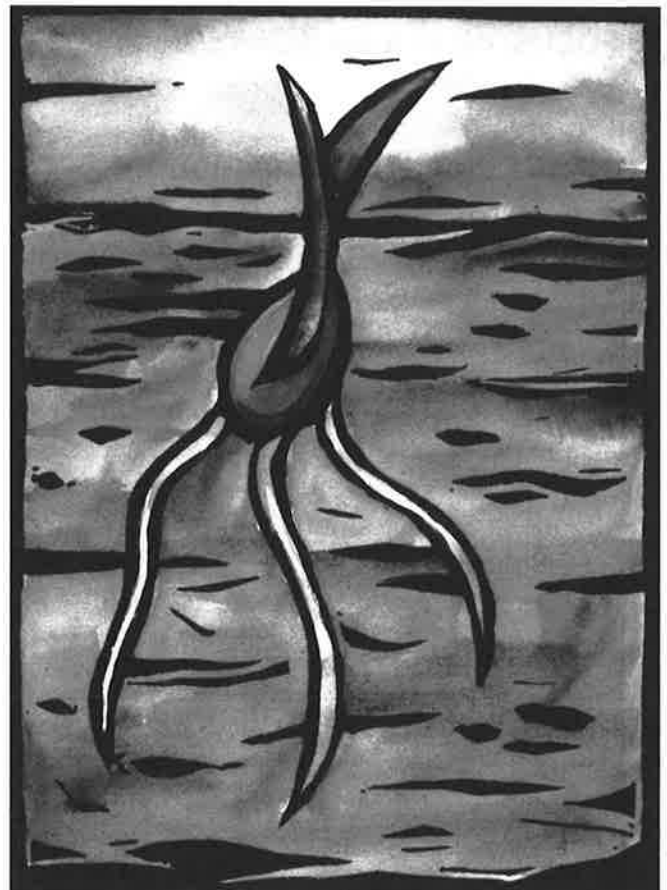


ACTION

Jesus used the image of grains of wheat to describe the Christian life. Imagine Jesus discusses the Christian life with you and your peers today. What imagery might Jesus use to convey his message instead of grains of wheat? Think about something that people today can easily relate to and understand. Write down your reflections and share them with someone in your family or a friend. As we get closer to Holy Week and Easter, it is helpful to remind ourselves of the new life we have through Jesus' death and Resurrection.

? QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ Where have you noticed God bringing new life into your relationships?
- ❖ What do you find challenging about Jesus' teaching in today's Gospel? Why does it challenge you?





March 21, 2021

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

LECTIONARY #35B

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Psalm 51:3-4, 12-13, 14-15

Hebrews 5:7-9

John 12:20-33

Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

Leader's Context

In today's Gospel, Jesus reminds his followers—and us—that we all must die to our desires and our wills in order to do his will in this life. If we do not give up these selfish desires, then there is no room for the Word of God to take root and grow in love in our lives.

Q FOCUS: *We die to our desires and our own wills.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

This week the Church celebrates the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord on Thursday, March 25. This date is nine months before Christmas. The Gospel reading for this solemnity is the story of the angel Gabriel appearing to the Blessed Virgin Mary and announcing the Good News of Christ's Incarnation (Luke 1:26-38). Mary placed her trust in God's plan for salvation and humbly accepted this great honor to become the mother of the Savior. Celebrating this solemnity during Lent juxtaposes Christ's imminent sacrifice on Good Friday with his initial outpouring of self—becoming human.

Church Teaching Connection

"Christians reply that all these human activities, which are daily endangered by pride and inordinate self love, must be purified and protected by the cross and resurrection of Christ. Redeemed by Christ and made a new creature by the holy Spirit, a person can,

and indeed must love the things which God has created: it is from God that they have been received, and it is as coming from God's hand that they are seen and revered" (*Gaudium et spes*, 37).

Hear the Word

Use this resource, a Lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ, king of endless glory.

Gospel

John 12:20-33

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to John.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the Sign of the Cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

Some Greeks who had come to worship at the Pass-over Feast came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, "Sir, we would like to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there also will my servant be. The Father will honor whoever serves me.

"I am troubled now. Yet what should I say, 'Father, save me from this hour'? But it was for this purpose that I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it

and will glorify it again." The crowd there heard it and said it was thunder; but others said, "An angel has spoken to him." Jesus answered and said, "This voice did not come for my sake but for yours. Now is the time of judgment on this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself." He said this indicating the kind of death he would die.

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone may be seated.

Reflect on the Word

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

Each fall, leaves turn red, yellow, and orange and finally, brown. The leaves fall from the trees and are swept away by the wind. The trees are bare as winter approaches. After a winter of quiet hibernation, the days become warmer, and we know that spring is on its way. New buds are forming. New leaves are beginning to grow. New life begins. From death and decay comes a fresh start.

The grain of wheat remains only a grain of wheat unless it dies and produces the seed for a new stalk to grow. Jesus reminds his followers today, as Holy Week rapidly approaches, that in order for new growth to occur in our hearts and minds, we must die to ourselves: our desires, our selfish tendencies, and our old ways. If we do so, then the seed of faith, service, and goodness planted by God in our hearts can bloom and grow and change us.

► **How do we die to ourselves? How do we throw aside all those things that make us selfish, jealous, greedy, and vain?**

Each of us has these tendencies and desires within us. Jesus is attempting to help the disciples—and us—understand that we must work to align our wills with his. Reconciliation is often a priority for people during Lent. There is something especially

significant in celebrating this sacrament during Lent. It is one method we can employ in order to die to self—we admit to the priest, who is acting as God's representative and the Church's representative, that we have done wrong. We also express that we are sorry. Our hearts are then made clean through the prayer of absolution. We put ourselves into God's hands and pray for his mercy and forgiveness. At the same time, we admit that we are not strong enough to do this on our own and that we need God's help.

► **Is it easy to admit that we need help? What stops us from asking for it from God or even from others?**

Jesus reinforces this idea of admitting our faults and need for help when he says, "Whoever loves his life loses it" (John 12:25). This means that those who are selfish, greedy, and reluctant to admit mistakes will falter in life. They are incapable of admitting that they are reliant on God's goodness, love, and mercy. Serving Jesus requires the death of our own desires and our own will in order to follow him. We cannot follow him when we have so many obstacles in our way: the need to be right, the need to be popular, the need to be the best at all we do. Our needs and desires make us deaf to all that Christ is calling us to. Our needs and desires make us deaf also to the needs of others.

► **What needs and desires have made you deaf to those around you? How can these obstacles be cleared away or leveled?**

By asking God to make the selfishness, greed, and vanity that is within each of us die, our deafness might be cured. We will be able to address the needs of those around us—the student sitting by himself at lunch, the friend that your group is excluding from an activity, or the stranger who is asking for something to eat. Addressing the needs of others makes us vulnerable to embarrassment and hurt, to inconvenience, and sometimes to unkindness in return, but we must still keep our ears open to the cries of those around us.

Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the "Church Teaching Connection" on page 154.

What desires and negative thoughts or ideas stand in your way of following Jesus?

When we allow our sins to die, we make room for the love of God to grow.

How do you feel after receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

Act on the Word

Dying to Sin, Rising to New Life

You will need paper and pens to complete this activity.

Divide the young people into small groups. Begin the activity by talking with them about Jesus' exhortation in today's Gospel, that we must die to self in order to rise to eternal life, reminds us that this is a central aspect of Christian life. This is not just something that we focus on during Lent, giving up things that keep us from God until Easter, and then going right back to sinful behaviors. Rather, it should guide our actions throughout the year so that we are always moving away from our sins and closer to God.

In each group, have the teens create a list of sinful behaviors that keep them from Christ. These could be ones they struggle with personally or things they have observed in the actions of others. This is not a time for admitting faults; it is a time to recognize that there are things that most people struggle with, for example, gossip. Then, for each item on their list, have the teens create a parallel list that has

positive, live-giving behaviors. Instead of allowing these sinful ways to take us away from God, we should replace with actions that bring us closer to Christ. Using the example of gossip again, a life-giving behavior to replace it would be saying one positive thing about the person you were tempted to gossip about. These actions could also be used when the young people see others participating in non-life-giving activities. (If they hear someone gossiping about another person, the teen could say something positive about that other person.)

Have the groups share their observations and ideas with one another. Encourage them to pick two or three life-giving activities to work on over the next few months.

Closing Prayer

*Benevolent God,
the suffering, death, and Resurrection of your
Son reveal the mystery of our life,
that to experience real transformation we must
be obedient to your will and die to self.
Like the grain of wheat that falls to the ground,
help us to let go of evil and selfish ways and find
our true life in you.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday's Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at www.ltp.org/lwgr. Encourage teens to attend Palm Sunday Mass with family or friends. Give teens the Holy Week schedule and encourage them to attend the Triduum liturgies.