

March 18, 2018
5th Sunday of Lent
John 12:20-33

20 Now there were some Greeks among those who had come up to worship at the feast. 21 They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, "Sir, we would like to see Jesus." 22 Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.

23 Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 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. 25 Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life. 26 Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there also will my servant be. The Father will honor whoever serves me. 27 "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. 28 Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it and will glorify it again." 29 The crowd there heard it and said it was thunder; but others said, "An angel has spoken to him." 30 Jesus answered and said, "This voice did not come for my sake but for yours. 31 Now is the time of judgment on this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. 32 And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself." 33 He said this indicating the kind of death he would die.

Background

Most of the preceding chapter of this gospel recounts Jesus' raising Lazarus from the dead. After he did this, some came to believe in Jesus, but others went off to inform the Pharisees. The chief priests and Pharisees convened a meeting of the full Sanhedrin. Because they worried about Rome's reaction to Jesus' growing popularity, they decided to kill Jesus. Therefore, Jesus no longer walked in public, and he left the region. The people who had gathered for the Passover were looking for Jesus and wondering if he would come for the feast. The chief priests and the Pharisees had spread the word that they wanted to arrest him. Six days before the Passover, Jesus traveled to Bethany and the house of Lazarus. While at dinner, Mary anointed Jesus' feet with expensive oil. The crowd learned where Jesus was and came out to see him and Lazarus. The plot to kill Jesus was expanded to include Lazarus. Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem with crowds of people greeting him, waving palm branches and crying out "Hosanna!" At this sight the Pharisees said, "Look, the whole world has gone after him." (John 12:19b) This briefly summarizes the text that immediately precedes this week's gospel. (John 11:45-12:19)

Philip and Andrew are Greek names. It is possible that the Greeks who had come to Jerusalem knew Philip, or at least thought they would have a better chance of meeting Jesus by approaching a fellow Greek.

The text does not say whether or not they were Jews, or why they were in Jerusalem. The assumption that they were there to celebrate the Passover is not confirmed in the text. They may also have been there to sell merchandise to the crowds, or as escorts to Jews who had come for the feast. Their presence and their request to meet Jesus make the Pharisees' statement that "the whole world has gone after him" a statement



of the reality. (One of the techniques used by the gospel writers is to have an adversary or a spirit speak a truth before it is accepted and understood by those who are disciples.)

With the arrival of the Greeks, Jesus says that his hour has also arrived. It is both the hour that he dreads and the hour of his glory. They are one and the same. Jesus uses the image of a grain of wheat to illustrate his point. It is only by the seed's destruction that it can become a plant that can then provide nourishment. The reality that the seed must surrender its life as a seed in order to become a plant is also Jesus' reality, as well as the reality of those who desire to be his followers. The use of the words "love and hate" emphasizes the contrast. A choice is involved here, a decision has to be made. The prayer that begins in verse 28 indicates a sense of the real struggle Jesus experiences in making his choice. With Jesus' decision to be faithful, the events that will lead to his hour of dread and glory have been set in motion. God's affirmation, the voice from heaven, is heard by those present, but not understood. The hour of judgment has come. The rulers of the world, those who do not accept his teaching, will be defeated. In the text, the Greeks have come to Jerusalem for the Passover and to find their way to Jesus. At the end of the text, Jesus says that when he is raised up he will draw everyone to himself. We gather to hear this gospel and we are challenged to accept "our hour."

Reflection Questions

1. Have you ever encountered people who are looking to find or discover Jesus?
2. Has there been a time in your own life when you were looking in some way to find Jesus?
3. Is this Lent in some way an expression of your desire to see or know Jesus more completely?
4. How is the approach of the Greeks seeking to find Jesus a fitting introduction to Jesus' instruction about his own approaching death?
5. In verse 25, Jesus talks about those who love their life. Who are the people in your life you would associate with loving their life?
6. Do you recall a period in your own life when you had to die to yourself in order to be faithful to the gospel or to your own integrity?
7. Do you think that Jesus was really troubled by the fact that his hour was finally approaching? What might have been some of the things that were troubling to him?
8. Have you ever found yourself saying, with the Greeks, "I want to see Jesus?"
9. Can you take some time to talk with God about your own desire to see God more fully, or about Jesus' prayer in this text, or about some other thought that arose within you as you pondered this gospel?

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The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM.

They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel.

