

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent - B  
Jeremiah 31:31-34;  
Hebrews 5:7-9;  
John 12:20-33  
Little Flower - 3/18/18

My Brothers and Sisters,

As we approach Holy Week and Easter, the Church reminds us that already in the Old Testament the prophet Jeremiah had prophesied a new covenant: *“The days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.”* According to Jeremiah, the new covenant would be unlike the old covenant: *“I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”* This covenant will be for all people: *“All, from least to greatest, shall know me, says the LORD...”*

In today’s Gospel, Jesus said, *“And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself.”* As Christians and Catholics, we believe that Jesus himself is the New Covenant, the new relationship of love between God and us. If original sin alienated us from God, others, the world, and ourselves, because Jesus is one divine person and is both divine and human, we can say that in Jesus God and humankind came together again. Likewise, if Jesus himself is the New Covenant between God and us, we believe that Jesus’ death on the cross sealed or ratified that Covenant. At each Eucharist, we repeat Jesus’ words from the Last Supper: *“For this is the chalice of my Blood, the Blood of the new and eternal covenant.”*

Today’s readings offer us three important insights into our Christian lives. In today’s Gospel, Jesus, referring both to himself and to us, said, *“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.”* As he did so often, Jesus connected his dying with his rising. He had to die in order to rise. However, when he mentions bearing much fruit, he is saying that he had to die not only to rise to new life but also to become life giving. The same is true for us. We have to die, i.e., die to selfishness and sin, if we want to rise and become life giving to others. To the extent that we remain selfish and sinful, to that extent we are not fully alive nor are we as fully life giving as we could be.

In today’s second reading, the author of Hebrews tells us that Jesus learned obedience from he suffered. For Jesus, obedience meant doing the will of his Father. As we know, the original sin was the disobedience of Adam and Eve. Sometimes we are tempted to reduce Christian living to keeping commandments, whether the Ten Commandments, the laws of the Church, and/or civil laws. Authentic Christian living, authentic Christian morality, is our response to God the Father and to Jesus. It is personal and relational. It is about how our choices affect our relationships with God, others, the world, and ourselves.

My brothers and sisters, in today’s first reading, God tells us that he not only forgives but also forgets. God never has a problem forgiving. We have problems forgiving both ourselves and others. God not only calls us to forgive ourselves, he also calls us to forget, i.e., to let go of, our past sins, no matter what they were. Likewise, God not only calls us to forgive others, he also calls us to forget their sins against us, i.e., to let go of them. I would suggest that our inability or our unwillingness to forgive and forget our own sins and the sins of others is one of the biggest blocks to answering God’s call to serve him and others, one of the biggest blocks to experiencing the peace of Christ within our hearts. As Christians, we are called to imitate Christ. Even on the cross, Jesus forgave those who crucified him.