

My Brothers and Sisters,

The parish staff and I would like to wish all of you a very happy St. Patrick's Day.

In today's first reading, God promises through the prophet Jeremiah to make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, a covenant not based on commandments written on stone tablets, but a covenant written upon their hearts. If the Old Covenant was a covenant of law, the New Covenant would be a covenant of grace, i.e., the Holy Spirit living within us. If a biblical covenant is a relationship of love, God is promising a new relationship with Israel and Judah, a more intimate relationship with them. I often say that the best test of love or friendship is that the two people call forth the best in each other. However, we call forth the best in each other from outside each other. Because of the new covenant, God calls forth the best in us from within.

As I read today's second reading, it struck me that this reading could be tied to Jesus' agony in the garden. The author of Hebrews suggests that Jesus offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death. In Luke's Gospel, during the agony in the garden, Jesus prayed, "*Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done*" [22:42]. Luke added a detail that neither Matthew nor Mark includes: "*And to strengthen him an angel from heaven appeared to him. He was in such agony and he prayed so fervently that his sweat became like drops of blood falling on the ground*" [22:43-44].

According to Msgr. J. Warren Holleran, the second part of Jesus' prayer ("*not my will but yours be done*") does not cancel the first part of his prayer ("*if you are willing, take this cup away from me*"). Jesus really was praying for his life. God did indeed hear his prayer. God did indeed give him life, a new, better, and unending life, but a life that could only be attained by suffering and death.

If it can be said that Jesus learned obedience from what he suffered, we can say that God was asking him to love perfectly, to love God perfectly and to love us perfectly, in the one act of his suffering and dying on the cross. On the cross, Jesus loved perfectly by offering his life to God for us, joining love for God and love for us inseparably.

In today's Gospel, Jesus teaches that unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat. However, if it dies, it produces much fruit. Although he is referring to his own death, he is also referring to us. Unless we die to selfishness and sin in our lives, we never become fully alive. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus tells us that unless we take up our cross and follow in his footsteps, we will not find life. Like Jesus, we will experience our own agonies many times in our lives.

At the end of the Gospel, Jesus said, "*And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself.*" Jesus is telling us that hence forward, instead of being repulsed by the cross, people throughout the world will be drawn to Jesus because of the cross. People have been drawn to Christianity through the centuries by Christians' willingness to die for their faith and by their love for one another.

My brothers and sisters, today's Gospel begins with some Greeks asking to see Jesus. For some reason, we are never told whether they were able to see Jesus or not. I think most of us wish we could see Jesus. The truth is we can and do see Jesus whenever we celebrate the Eucharist. When we see the consecrated host during the Eucharist or as we receive Communion, we see Christ in sacramental form. We do not see him in human form, but we can and do see him in sacramental form. How awesome is that!