March 18, 2018
Fifth Sunday of Lent 2018: “Sacrifice”
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Reading 1   Jeremiah 31:31-34
   The days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of
Israel and the house of Judah.  It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers the day I took
them by the hand to lead them forth from the land of Egypt; for they broke my covenant, and I had to
show myself their master, says the LORD.  But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of
Israel after those days, says the LORD.  I will place my law within them and write it upon their hearts; I
will be their God, and they shall be my people.  No longer will they have need to teach their friends and
relatives how to know the LORD.  All, from least to greatest, shall know me, says the LORD, for I will
forgive their evildoing and remember their sin no more.

Reading 2   Hebrews 5:7-9
   In the days when Christ Jesus was in the flesh, he offered prayers and supplications with loud
cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his
reverence.  Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered; and when he was made
perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.

Gospel   John 12:20-33
   Some Greeks who had come to worship at the Passover 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.

HOMILY
   Oscar was a German from Minnesota.  He was an older, single gentleman, who was born and
raised a Lutheran.  Each Friday night after work, he would fire up his outdoor grill and barbeque a
venison steak.  Now, all of Oscar’s neighbors were Catholic and, since it was Lent, they knew they
shouldn’t meat on Fridays.  But, the delicious aroma from the grilled venison steaks was causing such a
problem for the faithful Catholics that they finally got together and talked to their priest.
The priest came to visit Oscar, and suggested that Oscar convert to Catholicism. After several
classes and much study, Oscar attended Mass. As the priest sprinkled holy water over Oscar he said,
“You were born a Lutheran and you were raised a Lutheran, but now you are Catholic.”

Oscar's neighbors were greatly relieved, until Friday night arrived, and the wonderful aroma of
grilled venison again filled the neighborhood. The priest was called immediately by the neighbors and,
as he rushed into Oscar's yard, clutching a rosary and prepared to have a stern talk with Oscar, he
stopped in amazement and watched. There stood Oscar, clutching a small bottle of water which he
carefully sprinkled over the grilling meat, and chanting: “You were born a deer, and you were raised a
deer, but now you are a salmon.”

There’s a little bit of Oscar in many of us, maybe most of us, at some point of our lives, isn’t
there. At those times, we might bend the truth, or stretch it somewhat, or find some excuse to avoid
what we know we should be doing. Likewise, we might look for a reason to do something we shouldn’t.
We know we should listen to our conscience, but how well-formed is that, and what do we use as the
basis for our conscience? We might often know right from wrong, and when we are unsure, we could
consider researching the answer from the Catechism or other faithful Catholic guide book, or discussing
with a priest. Instead, wouldn’t we more likely check out public opinion or give ourselves the benefit of
the doubt? But then, what might start out in small matters, grows to larger ones. We are our own home
team, and our culture pushes us in directions that make us want to win the game, always, no matter how
and no matter the cost. In the long run, we can become our own higher authority, where our views are
the only ones we will accept or even listen to. If you think this is far-fetched or very rare, consider the
proliferation of fake news stories that are found each and every day, where truth runs second or third to
tales that are made up and circulated to advance personal causes and political agendas. And, consider
the number of people who might cheer on one side of an issue or the other solely because of politics.
Truth can take a back seat. Compromise can become a non-starter, because that’s a sign of weakness.
And the one who blinks first, well, he or she probably loses. /// At other times, our personal life may
become so centered on ourselves, our needs, our comfort, that there may not be much room left for
others, and very little room left for God. Darn it! – we want that steak when we’re out with the team on
a Lenten Friday after a game. Or, God wouldn’t mind if we miss a few Sunday Masses to bring Skippy
to his swim meets or to tee up earlier to beat the mid-morning crowd or to just … sleep-in. We don’t
want to sacrifice, we don’t want to suffer, we don’t want to be exposed to sorrow – we don’t want to
experience the crosses in life, of everyday life, large or small, that could come our way from following
the right and moral path and we try to hide from them, we try to delay them. Some of us might even try
to pretend that they aren’t there by numbing ourselves through alcohol, drugs and other means.

But, there is hope! In today’s Gospel reading from John, Jesus had recently raised Lazarus from
the dead, and the crowds were increasingly growing around Him and acknowledging Him to be the
Messiah, the One who would save Israel and become the people’s great political ruler. How surprised
they must have been as He talked about His passion, and His death, and how troubled He said He was
about it – “I am troubled now.” He was the grain of wheat that must fall to the earth and die. But the
fruit born by that death and then resurrection changed the course of salvation history, defeating the ruler
of this world. And, how shocked His disciples must have been when He stated, “Whoever loves his life
loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life.” He was not referring to
the world that His Father created – the world that just last week we heard in the Gospel reading, that
very popular verse, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world.” God loves the world He created, the physical world around us. Jesus was not sent to condemn the world God created. Jesus was referring to this world of sin, of selfishness, of relying on self. Jesus was telling His disciples, and us, to hate the world we create around ourselves, the one without truth, the one without morality, the one without … God and God’s teachings. And, yes, that can mean difficulties, that can mean personal sacrifice, that can even mean suffering and sorrow. Jesus was telling His disciples that each of them, and each of us, is a grain of wheat that must fall to the earth and die, to be resurrected. We must die to sin and, ultimately, die to this life to be with Him eternally.

Jesus gives us hope. Jesus gives us the hope of eternal life, by believing in Him, by following Him, by keeping God in our lives, by acknowledging that we do have crosses to bear in life, and that God will get us through them. Our crosses will never overwhelm us, if we put our complete trust in God. That trust will help us to understand that these crosses, difficulties, sacrifices are there to help us or others grow, spiritually, emotionally, or in other ways. In humility, we put our full trust in God, Who is total love and Who created each of us out of His great love for us. Our crosses come in all types. They can be very personal. Some time ago, I met a young fellow who was on the verge of tears, because he was confused and didn’t know what was expected of him in life – he was at that age where he felt that he had to decide what his career path was going to be, what he was going to do with his life. To him, this was a huge challenge. If you’re in school, that cross might be that next Math test which you absolutely need to pass, but need to make sacrifices to do so. I think you get the picture. Our crosses can be concern for the health and well-being of others, whether physical, spiritual, emotional, maybe even financial. Consider how many parents and grandparents worry about their children and grandchildren and the seeming lack of a truly spiritual life they might have. A few years ago, about 100 people, maybe more, overwhelmed our parish meeting hall to vent their concerns on this very topic.

Lent provides great opportunities, through the readings, Bible studies, faith-based CD’s, relevant talks and other means to more fully understand our role in following Christ, in helping others follow Christ, in witnessing Christ to others, and encountering difficulties, sacrifices and crosses in doing so. As we approach Holy Week, we can still look for and find opportunities to more fully understand and appreciate the love that God has for each of us, by His suffering, by His sacrifice, by His dying on His cross to give us true, eternal life.