

## Homily 5th Sunday of Lent – Year B 18<sup>th</sup> March 2018

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The word “Christ” comes from Christos, a Greek word meaning “anointed.” It is the equivalent of the Hebrew word Messiah. So, to be the Christ, or the Messiah, is to be “the anointed one of God.” Jesus could be described as the most misunderstood figure of His time. He knew He was the long awaited Messiah; however He knew He was only human and He knew his earthly journey will ultimately lead Him to Calvary where He would be crucified as a common criminal. Yet to the Jews his he was an enigma, a puzzle. They seemed to realise Jesus was a prophet, possibly even a great prophet like Moses or Elijah: But was he the long awaited Messiah? The Jewish concept of a Messiah was a great leader sent by God who would bring glory to Israel. A leader who would subjugate the world, raising Israel, God’s chosen people to rule the world. The Jewish people understood the Messiah in earthly terms; in terms of military power; in terms of domination; in terms of earthly wealth. Jesus understood the Messiah simply in terms of love, love of the Father and love of ones neighbour. Jesus’ whole life was God’s total self-gift of love to His creation.

The song writer Paul Simon wrote “If I never loved I never would have cried”. You see when you love you are vulnerable, you can be hurt. But when you are strong in earthly terms you are as Simon writes “A fortress deep and mighty that none can penetrate.” If I surround myself with the trappings of the world such as wealth, power and influence, these ‘things’ become barriers so strong that nothing not even the love of another person can penetrate. Yet within my fortress I’m desperately afraid of anyone or anything that threatens my ‘world’. At the time of Jesus the Jewish people were searching for the Messiah who would forge Israel into a mighty fortress which no other nation could penetrate. In stark contrast Jesus understood that the Father acted out of love and the only way the Father could act in the world was through love.

In the first reading the prophet speaks of a new covenant. A new covenant not like the old covenant, God made with His people when He brought them out of Egypt, a covenant based on conquest and destruction. God’s new covenant would not be written on stone, but onto the very hearts of humankind, a covenant of love. Jesus’ realised that His unambiguous

message of the love of God and one's neighbour would pose an intolerable threat to the established society, a society based on corrupt privilege, a society that exploited the poor and vulnerable, a society that Jesus held in contempt as we see in the "Cleansing of the Temple." Jesus knew that the threat he posed was so great he would have to be executed; executed in a most brutal and inhumane way, crucifixion.

Jesus' realised, that humanity's response to the Father's boundless love, would be unspeakable violence and death. A realisation that lead Jesus to a deep sorrow and anguish; sorrow in that humanity's only response to love would be death; anguish in the face of the inhumane suffering He was to endure. The feelings of Jesus expressed in the second reading are intense, "Christ offered up prayer and entreaty, aloud and in silent tears, to the one who had the power to save him out of death". I cannot help feel in this prayer the raw human emotion that Jesus is feeling both for Himself and humanity. Jesus knows that humanity is about to crucify the Son of God and yet this rejection of God's love will ultimately sow the seeds for humankind's salvation. To the human mind Jesus' execution presents a great dilemma: How can

the crucifixion of the Son of God lead to our redemption?

This is the question Jesus answers in today's Gospel. Jesus almost explodes with frustration; I can hear Jesus screaming at Andrew and Philip: "Don't you guys get it? Forget about the Greeks, just listen to me!" Jesus points to His impending crucifixion as the culmination of His life's work, using the beautiful analogy of the grain of wheat dying in order to grow. Do you know that once a grain of wheat sprouts it loses all its protein, all its goodness goes into its growth? In order to grow a grain of wheat must die. Jesus says that in order to find our true-selves we must die to the world, we are love and we cannot love if we are a fortress which none can penetrate. We have to die to the worlds values in order to love and if we love we are vulnerable.

At the end of the passage it would seem that the whole of creation resonates with Jesus's frustration of our inability to understand God's total love of His creation; we hear "A voice came from heaven". I ask myself; how will God be glorified? God will be glorified in one

great act of self-giving love, to which humanity responds with unimaginable cruelty.

The lesson for me is Jesus' love made Him, the Son of God, vulnerable. Love is about doing, love is about being vulnerable. Love is not what I think; love is what I do. It is possible for me to live my life thinking I love someone but not actually doing anything about it, not making myself vulnerable. Why don't I love; possibly because I am frightened of being hurt? I may think or assume I live in a family but if I am not prepared to love my family, to allow myself to be hurt by the ones I love, then we are just a collection of people sharing a house.

Why bother? Well love is the language of our God. Love is why the universe exists. God did not need the universe, God did not need me. I was created out of God's love. If I want to be one of God's "anointed ones", Christlike, I must speak His language, love. In the words of Steven Hawking "It would not be much of a universe if it wasn't home to the people you love". I think God and Steven could agree on that.