

5th Sunday of Lent

March 21, 2021

A Peanuts cartoon from years ago begins with Charlie Brown saying: “I learned something today at school. I signed up for guitar, computer programming, stained glass art, shoemaking, and natural foods workshop. But instead, I got spelling, history, math, science, and two study periods.” Charlie’s friend asks: “So what did you learn?” Charlie says: “I learned that what you sign up for and what you get are two different things.” It’s a lesson we all learn. Our expectations and our actual experiences are not always the same. In today’s gospel, Greek pilgrims to Jerusalem ask to meet Jesus. I wonder if He was what they expected Him to be. The gospel doesn’t say. But the gospel often does say that His own disciples were sometimes disappointed that Jesus was not what they expected Him to be. So, now with His popularity at its peak and Jesus is about to ride into Jerusalem to the cheers of people, the Lord seems to ruin the moment by predicting His own suffering and death.

What Jesus described is an important spiritual principle. Death gives birth to new life. The death of Jesus led to His resurrection and our salvation. Jesus then used the example of a grain of wheat. Most seeds get pushed into the ground and are covered with soil and stay there, in the dark, and under some pressure while the miracle of new life happens unseen. When life seems to push us down when we feel in the dark, and under pressure, the miracle of new life could be happening in us and probably is. This is the hope-filled pattern of our lives every day and even on our last day.

So, you expected retirement to be great, and it isn’t. You expected marital bliss; now it’s a challenge you never imagined. You had high hopes for a child; now you watch that child struggle every day. You thought that things would be better in a different community, school, job, or church, but they’re not. So, what can we do?

Without faith in what we call the Paschal Mystery, the principle Jesus lived, we get angry, frustrated, and look for someone to blame. But even as our expectations die, new things can be born in us. Things like courage, patience, humility, the strength of character, and a deeper faith in God’s providential care for us. Today’s gospel prompts us to remember something good that was born into our lives at the expense of an unfulfilled expectation. Remember it with gratitude for what it really is, a gift of new life in Christ.

Fr. Valentine

Scripture Readings: <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/032121-YearB.cfm>