

Father, Glorify Your Name!
5th Sunday of Lent (B)
(Jn 12:20-33)

These words were spoken by Jesus on Palm Sunday, when he arrived in Jerusalem for the Passover during which he was crucified. Jesus knew the time of his death had arrived, which he refers to as the hour of his glory. In this Gospel, Jesus shows his followers how to face and prepare for death.

Death is unavoidable, our time will come. Like Jesus, we are deeply disturbed, troubled, and fearful of death (Jn 12:27). Yet when he prays, Jesus does not ask the Father to “*save me from this hour.*” It cannot be avoided, and the natural ending of our life is necessary to serve our true purpose. Jesus reveals this when he prays instead: “*Father, glorify your name!*”

The purpose of our existence, the reason God created us and put us on this earth and gave us a span of years in which to live, is to give Him glory. Even before the fall, God never intended for man to live forever on earth, but only for a time. Man was not meant to experience “death” which is the separation of body and soul, but man was meant to experience and end of this natural life and a transition, body and soul, to the life of glory in God’s presence. Our purpose was (and is) to live this life in such a way that God will derive glory.

Thus Jesus teaches that we must not love our life in this world (Jn 12:25). If we set our purpose as this life, then by our death we lose everything that was achieved or accomplished in the world. We must leave behind everything, even our body, because we can take nothing with us beyond death. Therefore, Jesus says to hate or be detached from this world, seeking to embrace only those things which serve us for eternity, which do endure beyond death. These are the spiritual realities of the soul, which does not pass away at death.

What is important about our life is not therefore the “externals,” the things of the body and material goods of the world (health, wealth, honors, accomplishments). Or rather, they are important only insofar as they serve our higher purpose, the glory of God. What is important instead is “what is on the inside,” the soul, *who* a person is in his inner spiritual being, and who he makes himself by his choices and cooperation with God’s grace. This does endure beyond death, because his soul and spirit – who he is – endures in God’s sight beyond death. And bound up with “who he is,” is his human relationships. Love creates real spiritual bonds, which is why the unnatural separation of body and soul also causes the spiritual pain of grief when someone we love dies and is separated from our earthly life.

Jesus offers the parable of the grain of wheat to illustrate this truth of human life: unless it dies and is buried in the ground, it does not realize its true purpose and glory. Only after “death” is the real glory of the grain of wheat seen, when it rises in a new form that fully discloses what was “inside” it. We marvel at the way a great bush of flowers or mighty tree comes forth from a tiny seed: how was *this* contained in *that*?

The glory of a human life is even greater, and the day of resurrection will reveal it fully. Whereas now we only see the “outside” of someone (unless you happen to be close to someone, and get to know who he is “on the inside”), in the resurrection of the dead we will see one another in the full truth and glory of who we really are. The “inside” will be manifested in the risen body, and we will marvel in wonder that *this* glory was once contained in *that* seemingly ordinary human life.

The greater the saint, the greater will be the glory revealed in the resurrection. (Likewise, the greater the evil in someone’s soul, the more deformed and corrupted will be his “resurrection” on the last day.) Who a man truly is, will be fully revealed. Only after death is the full purpose of man achieved, as it was for Jesus Christ our head, the “firstborn of the dead” (Col 1:18).

Thus Jesus offers his life as the hour of his death approaches, and prays, “*Father, glorify your name!*” The Father answers him audibly (some of those Greeks who approached Jesus heard the voice, and thought it was thunder): “*I have glorified it and will glorify it again*” (Jn 12:28). The Father is well-pleased by His Son’s life, and the sacrifice of his death. Jesus did indeed give glory to his Father by every word and deed of his human life, culminating with the highest act of love possible, laying down his life for his friends.

But the Father is twice-glorified by His Son, and likewise He is twice-glorified by the followers of his Son. The second and culminating glory is that which will be revealed in the Resurrection. For Jesus this took place on Easter Sunday; for us it will take place in his Second Coming. For both Jesus and ourselves, it takes place only after our death and burial.

It is in the spirit of this Gospel that we come to our funeral Mass. Indeed, this Gospel is the essence of the funeral rites of the Catholic Church. Death cannot be avoided but must be faced. Yet we do not do so in complete despair, though our hearts are torn with grief. We come to our funeral Mass (or rather, our friends and family bring our body) in order to continue and complete that prayer which we have been praying, or trying to pray, every day when we say the Our Father: “*Hallowed be Thy name.*” The funeral Mass is our final earthly prayer to the Father, echoing Jesus’ own prayer: “*Father, glorify your name!*”

Let us seek to live each day from this perspective of our final day, doing only those things that will give glory to God, so that in our final earthly day our funeral Mass can be a legitimate and true prayer, accepted by the Father. Let us seek to keep in our soul only that which is good, true, beautiful, and worthy of God, and avoid sin, evil, and the things which corrupt the soul. Above all, let us ensure that we live and die in the sacramental grace of God, in the grace of his Son, so that our soul has within it the seed of eternal life, and will rise in a new and glorious body on that final eternal Day.