

Homily - March 17, 2024 – 5th Sunday of Lent



In the opening line of this gospel story we just heard, we are told that some Greeks have come to Jerusalem obviously to a Jewish festival. These Greek-speaking people are non-Jews, or what we call “Gentiles.” They have heard something intriguing about this Jesus, and whatever

has stirred within them, they cannot let it go unaddressed. They want to make an appointment and so they say to Philip, **“Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”** The reason the Greeks go to Philip and Andrew is probably because these are the only two Apostles who had Greek names. The Greeks hope to get backstage passes. Philip may have been particularly pleased, even proud that they had some hot prospects for the R.C.I.A. process! (Eventually, both Philip and Andrew become missionaries to Greek-speaking people in Asia Minor where they die as martyrs).

We never find out if these Greeks ever got to have their personal audience with Jesus or not. It seems more likely that as they got closer they heard Jesus telling the crowd that **“the hour has come for the Son of Man (Jesus) to be glorified.”** Glory is a tricky word in the Bible. It basically means weighty, heavy, pregnant, or to bear fruit. Jesus continues on, with the Greeks eavesdropping, **“Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it will remain only a grain and nothing more. But if it dies, it will bear much fruit.”** Perhaps, even without a private audience with Jesus, the Greeks had their desire granted; they were beginning to see Jesus. To see in the Scripture has nothing to do with physical sight. To see means to understand, much like we say, “Do you see what I mean? Do you understand what I am talking about?”

These seem to be the steps of evangelization for all of us and not just for the people who are entering the Church through the R.C.I.A. process. We come to know and love God first by being *intrigued*, fascinated by someone of something we don’t understand. Then we *meet* someone, like a Philip or an Andrew, a person

who is a little further along the journey than we are. And, finally we see for ourselves; we begin to understand. Faith in it's earliest form is first someone else's experience before it becomes our own. First you have to be dragged to church by your mother and then you fall in love with the Divine source of love.

On a subconscious level, that is, on a level we're rarely aware of, every time we participate at Mass we are saying inwardly, "I wish to see Jesus." I've never had a private audience with Jesus. Maybe if I cleaned the rectory up, and stopped living in my own filth, Jesus might come by more often. However, just because I haven't had a private revelation of the Divine in my life doesn't mean for a moment that I haven't see Jesus. I have seen Jesus in my mother and many parishioners who have accepted their terminal illness with serenity and even joy. I have seen Jesus in parents who are always available to their children and never see it as an inconvenience. They stand by and love children of broken marriages without judgment. I have seen Jesus in people who nurse their elderly parents in their final years. These are people who, like Jesus, know that, at some deep level, they are the seeds that fall to the earth and die and bear much fruit. To put it another way, they die before they die, so that when they die, they don't have to die. They get dying over with early on in the game, so that when they physically die, it's no big deal.

Not to make my late mother into a saint, because she wasn't, but she died a thousand deaths before she breathed her last 23 years ago. Apparently, she was the one who broke the news to the sheepish doctor that she was dying. And apparently, without disclosing how close she was to death, she became a source of incredible strength to the woman whom she shared a hospital room with. Only later did the husband of that woman tell us that my mother was the main reason his wife survived and thrived after a serious brain tumor operation. My mother showed no concern for her impending death, only concern for the wellbeing of this stranger in the bed next to hers.

What is this Jesus like, that the Greeks sought out? One thing we know about him is that he is the Lord of all the world, the Lord of the Jews and the non-Jews, the

Gentiles. Jesus comes from God, a God who no longer gives us the Law from the outside written on stone tablets. This is the God who writes the Law of love in our hearts as Jeremiah told us in that first reading. This is the God of intimacy, the One who lives in the depth of every one of our hearts, whether we are aware of it or not. We don't have to scale Mount Sinai as Moses did to access God. God comes to us in our hearts. We don't have to have rabbis, priests, Biblical scholars, theology masters, or a lot of middlemen to **"Know the Lord."** We shall all know God, if we simply open our hearts to where God's law has always been written never to be erased.

Lastly, in that second reading, the Letter to the Hebrews, we are told about Jesus that, **"Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered."** Obedience, in the Biblical sense, is not simply submitting your will to another. It's more than that. Obedience here means "listening," deep listening. In the case of Jesus, he not only listened to his Father as the compassionate One, but Jesus also listened to the sufferings of his brother and sisters. Jesus' own life and suffering were a school of deep listening and compassion. The most compassionate person you ever met in your life, I bet, was also the best listener in your life. Out of listening comes compassion.

Perhaps the Greeks who came to see Jesus never did get their private audience with him. Perhaps they simply listened, deeply listened, and that was enough. Their hearts were touched and they left Jerusalem and returned home more compassionate than ever before.

They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."

I do, too.

~Fr. Phil