

Homily by Canon Philip Dyson
Sunday 21st March 2021 - 5th Sunday in Lent
Readings (Year B): 1st: Jeremiah 31:31-34. Psalm 50. 2nd:
Hebrews 5:7-9. Gospel: John 12:20-33

A year has swept by since the first lockdown. Since then we often have said and continue to say ‘what times we are living in!’ Time comes into the gospel today with the words of Jesus ‘Now the hour has come.’ The ‘hour’ is not just 60 minutes: but the climax of his earthly mission.

In the plan of John’s gospel this passage marks the end of the public ministry of Jesus before the evangelist starts the narrative of the Last Supper. This incident in the gospel marks a turning point in the life of Jesus. He acknowledges this himself with those words “Now the hour has come” It is as if everything in his life has been building up to this moment: “Now sentence is being passed on this world; now the prince of this world is to be overthrown.”

The visit of the Greeks asking to be introduced to Jesus marks that watershed. Why? We may understand that if we bear in mind the troubles in the Middle East both then and now. At that time, Greeks were considered a real danger to the Jewish nation.

Although they no longer posed a military, political or economic danger, they were seen as a cultural threat, because their customs and attitudes were felt to undermine Jewish civilisation, religion and culture. That is not far off some of what has been unleashed during lockdown across the globe. Nor forget the dreadful walls around the Israelite territory to keep people apart.

When Jesus hears of the Greeks visit he realises that everything at last is falling into place: their coming marks the fulfilment of the words of Ezekiel about the Good Shepherd who would gather together the scattered sheep: and that he and his Father will at last be glorified. He adds that this new development will bring pain and suffering. The seed that up to now has kept its genes safely protected, will have to break open and risk a new existence in

order to bring forth its fruit. The lives they have lived and loved up to now will have to be left behind to bring the new life ahead. What we don't know today and often ask is: 'what will life be like after Covid?'

Another way to look at this is that the new covenant that Jeremiah talks about in the first reading is being realised. God will pursue sinners and people can have a direct relationship with God.

Jesus says that the lives he and the disciples have lived and loved up to now will have to be left behind to bring the new life ahead.

This new development will bring pain and suffering, but it is necessary, not only for Jesus but his followers as well. At the end of this gospel Jesus says that when he is lifted up from the earth, he will draw all people to himself. Jesus there reveals a great truth – that we all belong together, and the basis of our togetherness is that we are equally loved by God.

Covid is no respecter of race, culture, religion or non-believer. It can and does attack anyone anywhere across the world. To believe and live out that truth of God's love is simultaneously our greatest joy and our greatest difficulty. There are times when all of us have problems relating to people of different ethnic, racial or religious groups, if only because we feel separated by the cultural differences between us.

At such times, we should resist the temptation to withdraw into our shells and ignore or rebuff them. Jesus tells us that the hour has come to bridge the gulf between ourselves and our fellow human beings.

As we are called to serve God in the world, we are called to find our common humanity amidst all that divides people today. We should throw open wide our arms and welcome anyone who comes asking to be introduced to Jesus.

Canon Philip Dyson

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