

March 25, 2012 – Fifth Sunday in Lent
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Jeremiah 31: 31-34; Psalm 51:3-4, 12-13, 14-15; Hebrews 5:7-9; John 12:20-33

Today the Scripture readings which mark the fifth Sunday or Passion Sunday of Lent, have a pedagogical sense, preparing us to live with deliberate intensity the passion, death and the resurrection of Jesus in today's world.

The reading from Jeremiah is perhaps one of the most beautiful religious insights in the Bible and certainly in the Old Testament. From the law of God written on tablets of stone, we are being brought to a much deeper way of knowing God through the mind and the heart. Thus we all, from the least to the greatest, have been given an internal power and possibility to know God who proclaimed: "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." This passage shows the religious development of humanity toward the knowing of God as loving and merciful.

Psalm 51 echoes this relationship of love and mercy in God's new covenant: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love ... blot out my transgressions..." The passage from Hebrews prepares us to hear the message of the gospel of John, that is, it is through death in the gift of self for others that life will bloom.

Just one example out of many of sacrificing self for others can be seen in a national solidarity action. This action is being taken to defend the water rights flagrantly violated of the rural people in the northern part of Peru:

In the department of Cajamarca, thousands of indigenous people have united to defend their water rights. The mining companies of Newmont and Yanacocha have been given permission by the government to explore and then mine for gold underneath the lakes of this area, causing contamination and destruction of animal life, farming and the violation of the people's water rights. Loss of water means the death of life. People from diverse regions of the country are undertaking a sacrificial march, walking hundreds of miles, to meet in Lima in order to be in solidarity with the peoples of Cajamarca, and to defend the access to water as an irrevocable human right. This national march is calling great attention in Peru to the ecological contamination caused by irresponsible mining companies.

This focus of the gospel for today is the well known metaphor which graphically illustrates that through death comes life: "...[U]nless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

Jesus participates in the reality of all those who suffer and plead to God for their liberation. God listens to the cry of Jesus for God's suffering people. In this way, we can truly see that Jesus is in solidarity with all those who suffer in all places, for all times. Jesus gives meaning to death as self gift, giving life to others. It is through the death of Jesus that God's life overflows as gift to all humanity. Death is not the last word; rather it is passage to abundant and overflowing Life.

Today we celebrate the self gift of many sisters and brothers who offer their life to underscore the glory of God in the defense of life and of human dignity.