

Lent 5th Sunday: Jesus teaching about death

The story of **Maximilian Kolbe** is well-known to most of you. He was a Franciscan priest in Poland and was in a concentration camp during the Second World War. For every prisoner that escaped, they picked a prisoner in the group, and was condemned to die. Once one young man who had a wife and young family back home was picked; as he burst into tears crying for his family, Maximilian stepped forward and offered to take his place. The soldiers were shocked at this, but they took him up on his offer, and the young man returned home. Maximilian died in a horrible fashion, as he was locked in cage and starved to death. When Maximilian was canonized some years later, it was heart-breaking to see the young prisoner set free, present there weeping through the entire ceremony. Only a life spent for others will be glorified in heaven, and sometimes even in this world.

We understand that nothing happens by chance in life, when we realize that everything has a meaning in our life. When we find meaning, life becomes more beautiful and worth living. The life of Jesus was something like that. One week to the holy week, today's readings focus on the approaching death of Jesus, and they offer us a challenge as well.

Whatever written so far about Jesus were attempts to write the new meaning discovered in his life. Down through the centuries how many people have tried to discover meaning in their life my making their life with Jesus? The way Jesus looked at death was that which made his life unique, and different. To talk about death, Jesus used a parable: "Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit". When we speak about death, we often speak about the decaying of the grain of wheat. But what makes the difference in Jesus' talk is its potentiality to produce more fruit. We can find two connotations in this.

1. The wheat of grain decaying in the ground is not just a reference made to death alone. The primary reference is to the '*death of my ego*'. In other words, it refers to the death of pride. When my ego falls, the God in me will be more

revealed. Consequently, my words and actions desiring my own glory will fade away. It is then, that I can meaningfully pray to God, "Father, hallowed be Thy name".

Why could Jesus touch the life of so many? Because he never sought the glory for his own name. His prayer was, 'Father, glorify Thy name'. It was not just his prayer only, but the purpose of his whole life. Since he wanted not his own glory, but god's glory, God touched the life of many through him. Once offered to the Father, Jesus' life experienced producing abundant fruits. Yes, when the 'I' in me dies, God in me takes birth.

2. Decaying in the earth refers secondly to '*physical death itself*'. We often think of death as the end, the conclusion. But Jesus talked about the possibility of a new life through the resurrection. We are ignorant about 'producing fruit after death'. But by celebrating the intercession of so many saints, the Church proclaims the abundant fructification of the grain of wheat after its decaying.

Are you aware that someone who reached the presence of God through death, when prays for other people living in the world means, one can become a blessing ever after death? This is the productivity after death (*post-mortem*) about which Jesus is speaking. Thus, death understood to be a 'punishment', becomes a means of blessing. Jesus was ultimately healing the fear of man about death.

B&S, it is the fear of death that makes our life struggle-some, weak and less beautiful. If your idea about death changes, your idea about life also will change for sure. Since Jesus looked at death from a different point of view, he could live without the fear of death. He gave a new meaning to death, so his life too gained a new meaning.

Therefore, we should pray: "Lord, give me the grace and wisdom to realize that both life and death are possibilities for me to be fruitful, to be a blessing, if I am with you".