

A HOMILY FOR HOLY TUESDAY: SEEING IS DYING

John 12. 20-36

I speak to you in the name of  the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

At the end of our Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the Pharisees are worried. Jesus has raised Lazarus from the dead; and the crowds, steadily increasing in number, cannot stop talking about Christ's miracles. The Pharisees say to one another, 'You see, you can do nothing. Look, the *world* has gone after him!' (12. 19).

And they are not wrong. In the very next verse of John 12, some Greeks who have come to Jerusalem for the Passover festival approach Philip. These Greeks are not (as some have supposed) non-Jews or Gentiles; they are 'diaspora Jews', that is, they are Jews who long ago were 'dispersed' and settled in other Greek-speaking areas of the then-known world.

'Sir, we wish to see Jesus', the Greeks say to Philip. Their request seems simple enough. As it turns out, the Greeks will not see our Lord,¹ and his response to Andrew and Philip is anything but simple.

Christ says, 'Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also' (12. 24-26).

¹ It is not clear whether the 'them' in verse 23 includes the Greeks or not.

Somehow death and seeing our Lord are intimately related. To see Jesus is more than looking at him. It is more than just believing the things that he said and did. We follow Christ as participants, and not just as spectators. If we want to *see* our Lord, then we must learn to *die*. If we avoid and deny this death, then we are (in a manner of speaking) kept from seeing Jesus.

Seeing Christ means dying to all those parts of our lives that blind us: fear, for example; the need to be right or to be in control; anger and resentment; failure to relinquish the guilt and disappointments of our past; attachment to power, wealth and reputation; our obsessions, compulsions and emotional agendas; and the ways in which we hurt one another and damage relationships. Ultimately, seeing our Lord means dying to our own self-sufficiency. We must let go of our lives in order to receive God's life.

This work of dying is, of course, difficult and painful. It is, to quote Jesus, 'soul troubling' (12. 27). It shakes us to the core. Dying in this way, however, begins to clarify and heal our vision. We begin to see a new life and a new way of being. This new life and this new way of being look like Christ, and *his* way of living and being.

Holy Week, as it turns out, provides us with a God-given opportunity. The week is a 'school' for learning how to die to ourselves; and such death is the window through which we see our Lord. We must be careful, however, that we do not get stuck looking *at* the window rather than *through* the window. Dying to self is not the end, but a means; it is a way of transforming who we are.

Do we want to see Jesus? Let us look for those areas of our lives which are most guarded, insulated and isolated. Those are the places of blindness, the places that need to die. Each one of those is a grain of wheat containing much fruit. Let it fall into the earth and die, and we will see Jesus. Amen.