

No sooner had Jesus dismounted His donkey, no sooner had the parade of Passover pilgrims begun to wind down, than some Greeks arrived upon the scene. The fact that they were Greeks isn't all that important; after all, God-fearing folks from all over the **world** were coming together in Jerusalem for the Passover. What stands out about this group of Greeks is that they were eager for an audience with the man of the hour. "Sir," they said to Philip, "we wish to see Jesus" (v 21).

They probably weren't the only ones with that wish. Just days earlier, Jesus had performed His greatest, grandest miracle—the raising of Lazarus. Everyone was talking about it. The air was electric with anticipation. Even in an era before social media, it's safe to say that Jesus was "trending." He had just entered the city amidst a parade of palm branches and shouts of "hosanna." Those Greeks were probably just the first ones in a long lineup of people who really, **really** wanted to see Jesus.

But as for Jesus, He was past the point of press conferences and interviews. Jesus was thinking, instead, about His death. "The hour has come," said Jesus, "for the Son of Man to be glorified" (v 23). And as Jesus goes on to make it clear, His being "glorified" means His being "lifted up from the earth" to draw all people to himself (v 32). Jesus' ultimate glory is His crucifixion, by which He draws us to Himself.

As if there were still any question about what lay ahead for Jesus, He uses a metaphor to make it even clearer: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (v 24). **Jesus** is that grain of wheat. Try to keep it and preserve it, and you get nothing. But bury it in the earth, and it rises up to bear much fruit. That's how it would be for Jesus. He would go the way of death and the grave, just like a seed is cast into the ground. Jesus will lose His life only to take it up again three days later. And in His dying and rising, He will bear much fruit; He will earn the gift of your salvation.

This is what we expect to hear at the beginning of Holy Week - Jesus talking about dying and rising. It's why Jesus came. It's why we commemorate this week as holy.

But then—the **unexpected** happens. Jesus turns the Palm Sunday tables. If you thought you could glide through Holy Week safely concealed like a spectator in the stands, soaking up the Passion, pomp, and pageantry, think again. It turns out that dying and rising has as much to do with **you** and me as it does with Jesus. "Whoever loves his life loses it," Jesus says, "and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (v 25). And then comes the phrase that pays: "If anyone serves me, he must follow me" (v 26). That's you and I Jesus is referring to. You must follow Him. How it goes for Jesus, is how it goes for you and me. So, expect to get treated like Jesus got treated: trials, temptations, turmoil—and, eventually, dying and rising. Follow Jesus, and that's what you get.

I don't think we care much for this way of speaking. But at least nobody can accuse Jesus of false advertising. Jesus never claimed that following Him would be easy. Yet that's the popular myth to which lots of Christians subconsciously subscribe. Popular TV preachers and televangelists often perpetuate this myth. Many of them have been known to say that following Jesus means you can expect nothing but the best, here and now, today. Follow Jesus, and watch life's pressures and disappointments melt away. Follow Jesus, and you won't have depression or sickness or worry. In **reality**, what Jesus says is, "Follow me, and give up all control. Follow me to the cross and grave. Follow me—and fall into the earth like a grain of wheat and die."

Everybody dies, of course, so what's Jesus talking about? What does he mean? Well, the New Testament tells us that Baptism is a kind of death—that in Baptism we are buried with Jesus into death (Rom 6:4)—that in Baptism we died and our life is now hidden with Christ in God (Col 3:3). Amen to that. If you were thinking of Baptism before I mentioned it, give yourself a pat on the back. But remember, the dying and rising of Baptism isn't a one-time event. It's a daily occurrence. Baptism is a way of life: dying to sin, rising to new life with Jesus. At one point, Paul wrote, "I die every day" (1 Cor 15:31). What he meant was that, as Luther says in the catechism, every day, our old Adam with all his filth and sin needs to be drowned and die. The problem is the Old Adam is a good swimmer.

What needs to die in you? What part of you needs to be put to death? In what area of life does your old Adam reign supreme? There's a very selfish way of thinking about Holy Week that goes like this: Jesus died and rose for me so that I don't have to change a thing—so that I can live complacently and comfortably, without having to do the hard work of changing my sinful life. Everything can be status quo. But in fact isn't the **opposite** true? Jesus died and rose for me so that **everything** is changed in me—so that I can do battle **daily** against the sin in me—against **everything** that prevents me from following Jesus. That's what Luther says baptizing with water indicates. Holy Week is not about living complacently—about watching Jesus' agonizing prayers, arrest, trials, and crucifixion all unfold with a spectator's detachment. Holy Week is about the urgency of putting to death every part of you that loves **this** life more than Jesus and the eternal life He gives.

And so, again, I ask: What—in you—needs to die? What needs to be buried? Is it your need to be in control and in charge at all times, or is it your utter apathy, indifference, and laziness? Maybe it's that you draw your identity from what other people think about you, that you get your self-worth from your good grades or your great career instead of regarding yourself above all else as a baptized child of God. Or maybe you've let yourself be defined by your defeats and you've resigned yourself to victimhood. What part of you needs to be put to death? What are your addictions,

and do you love them or hate them—feed them or starve them? Do you lack generosity because you're holding your money and possessions far too tightly? Do you charge into every challenging situation behind a shield of anger and rage? It could be anything or everything—something different for each of us. But whatever it is, it is evidence. It is evidence of how much we love our life in this world. Whatever sin has enslaved you, dear baptized brothers and sisters, recognize the threat. Put it to death. Bury it with Jesus.

It's not easy. It's painful and difficult. But with Jesus - with faith in Jesus - all things are possible, including the hard work of repentance. In the world of sports there's an old adage: "No guts, no glory." We're often lacking in the guts department, but you have a Savior who *is* all guts and all glory. Jesus saw His impending death as His hour of greatest glory. Being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For all the sin in you and me that needs to die—Jesus died. And it was His moment of glory.

It's a strange combination: death and glory. You and I would never even think of using those two words in the same sentence. What seems glorious to us in this world usually means applause and accolades and compliments. For us, glory means basking in the spotlight, fame and fortune. It means **winning**, not losing—and **certainly** not dying. But the glory of Jesus is centered on the cross. The glory of Jesus doesn't shine; it bleeds. It bleeds for you and for your salvation.

Jesus' greatest glory is to do the will of His Father, to accomplish what He took on human flesh to do: to lay down His life as a sin-sacrifice for the world—to give up His back to those who struck him—to raise His face to spit and shame, disgrace and mockery. We sometimes talk about the glory of Christmas or the glory of Easter. And there the glory is easy to spot. But Jesus' glory shines brightest in the darkness of death—the death of Jesus for you. It was truly a glorious death.

Jesus said, "When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself" (v 32). By His death on the cross, Jesus lifts you up—lifts you up out of your sin and shame and draws you to Himself. Jesus is really undoing what Adam did. When Adam sinned, he took you and me down with him. Adam draws us down to the grave. Adam took everybody from life to death. But in the glorious death of Jesus, Jesus lifts you up from death to life. In that glorious death, God and sinners are reconciled. Your sin is forgiven. "If we have been united with [Jesus] in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his" (Rom 6:5). Die with Jesus—and rise with Jesus. Jesus is drawing you to Himself, and He will not stop until you see him face to face.

You have been crucified with Christ. His glorious death is your glorious death. You no longer live, but Christ lives in you. In Jesus, you are that grain of wheat—a solitary

seed—dead to yourself but alive to God in Christ. You've been buried in the fertile soil of Jesus' death so that you, too, might rise and bear much fruit. May this Holy Week be for you absolutely *glorious*! Amen.