

HOMILY FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT 3/21/2021

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ Jesus. A small boy was walking along the seashore, picking up some starfish and throwing them into the ocean. Seeing the act of this boy, a gentleman walked towards him and asked him, "Hey, boy, what are you doing?" He said, "I'm just trying to save some of the starfish that are on the sand and throwing them back into the ocean." Then the gentleman asked him, "How is it possible? The seashore is a mile long and it is impossible for you to save all of them." Then the boy said, throwing yet another one into the ocean, "If I can make a difference for one starfish, I'm happy with that."

Yes my dear sisters and brothers that boy felt that he could make a difference for one starfish - to save it. Now in the Gospel we heard Jesus telling that his hour has come to suffer his own death. Pilate said, just before crucifying Jesus, "It is better that one man dies for the whole of the world." Taking that burden to himself, Jesus offers his own body, his own life, for the sake of humanity. Reflecting on this, we need to go back to the verse in which some Greeks came and inquired about Jesus, expressing their own willingness to speak to him. Who are these Greeks? Greeks are those people who are wanderers; they go from place to place, seeking truth, seeking for knowledge. Right from the beginning, Greeks have traditionally been philosophers, such as Plato and Aristotle. And there are many more Greek philosophers. So they have come out with a lot of philosophies of life; and the tradition goes that all the Greeks have the same inquisitive minds, that they are seekers. These same seekers are hearing about Jesus - that there is a person who has a tremendous power in himself, through whose speech there are lots of changes happening. And now they are eager to see that same Jesus and are asking for Philip (Philip and Andrew are similar to Greek names, so they felt confident that they could go to Philip). Now Philip and Andrew go to Jesus and tell him there are some Greeks who want to see him. Without any other word Jesus tells, "My hour has come." One thing we need to note is that people of that time, when Jesus was doing lots of miracles, expected that he is going to be a political leader who would definitely alleviate all their sufferings from the Roman power. And with that in mind, the Greeks are asking whether he is going to be the one. But now changing their minds, Jesus tells of his own passion; that my hour has come. And again he goes forward and tells that 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. A grain, if it does not die, remains a single grain - all of us know it. I just happened to see a video clip years ago. In this video clip, some grains are put in the granaries and they are bundled up. After a few days these grains feel suffocated and feel so much breathless, and they speak to one another. "I feel uncomfortable here. I want to just get out of this granary." And then some other grains speak, "It is impossible. How can you go like that? We are bundled here. We are stored up here in this granary." And then one of them said, "I don't know; I will try to get out from here." And then one of the grains just jumped out, fell from the sack, and following that, some others also escaped from that granary. When escaping from the granary, they fell into a place where there was lots of muddy water. And then, falling into that muddy water, the grains felt, "Oh, it still is worse here. And we are going to die in this muddy water." With that feeling that they were going to die, they just relaxed themselves, and after two days, the muddy water dries up, then they sprout out. The grains sprout out. All the grains put out one or two leaves; and then they dance. "Oh, we are happy now because we have new life, we are not going to die." And they grow and grow, and they dance with the breeze and the wind.

Yes, my dear sisters and brothers, if those grains were to feel that it is enough that we are going to die and have no other goal, and let our life be just doomed here. But they felt that they need to make a difference, that they wanted to live, not just being dead there. Yes, my dear sisters and brothers, Jesus feels that he - being that grain - he wants to die, die to himself and give life, not for himself again, but for the other.

Today the same message is being passed on to us through the Gospel, that we all need to die, die to ourselves, die to our own selfishness, die to our own sins, die to our own individuality at times. Definitely we should have individuality, but still, for the sake of the other, we need to die to our own selfishness. As that boy felt, that if I can make a difference for one starfish and give life, then all of us should feel that we can give life to one another – and perhaps that is very possible, provided we die to ourselves. If that one man can make a difference 2000 years ago and give us life and fullness, we can all make a great difference. Hearing the words of Jesus, “What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul,” Ignatius of Loyola and St. Francis Xavier went to different continents to live their faith and give their life for the sake of the proclamation of the Gospel. And perhaps we are not asked to go to different continents and preach, but still from places where we are, we can make a difference. It is like one particular village that was having lots of problems and everybody said that the village is not good, evil spirits are there and yet some tried to bring different people in to try to change the situation and all of the problems. One of them said, “Let us bring in a Christian family.” After bringing in the Christian family, the village was slowly getting better and better. Did this Christian family do anything different? Not at all! This family was living with love and understanding and compassion for one another, with their own family members. Seeing the attitude of this family, all the other families thought, “Why can't we live like that? Why can't we do some sacrifices? Why can't we forgive one another?” And that began to change and the whole village began to be a better village. Others from the outside were looking for these people, and for changes they brought. Yes, my sisters and brothers, one family can make a difference in the whole village. Perhaps all of our families can make a great difference in our own society, in Edwardsburg, or wherever we come from, because Jesus tells us, “For anyone who follows me, he must be my servant, and my father will honor him and he who serves me.” And again, Jesus tells, “I will be lifted up from the earth and I will draw everyone to myself.” That is the kind of compassion and the goodwill that Jesus has for all of us. He does not leave us abandoned. He does not leave us orphaned. But still, he wants to draw each one of us to himself so that we have life and fullness. Today being the last Sunday, just before Palm Sunday, we need to really feel how much this Lent has made a difference for us in our own lives. Before making a difference in the other's life, we need to make a difference in our life. If that difference is being experienced through this season of Lent, we can make a difference in the lives of others. Let us pray that God may give us this grace to live a worthy life and make a difference in our life and make differences in the lives of others. Amen.