

Fifth Sunday of Lent, Cycle B

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Hebrews 5:7-9

John 12:20-33

HOMILY

My dad was a hunter with his brothers to provide a treat, (not only for their families) but for the whole village from their hunting expeditions. Even if I was declared a failed hunter by the hunting standards of the village - it was from these hunting expeditions that I first experienced that a deer or a rabbit will flee at the first sign of danger for self-preservation that lions pursue prey for self-preservation and that they will fight intruders like hunters into their territory for self-preservation. When later in school years we were being taught that *'Self-preservation is the first law of nature'* I could confirm this from my failed hunting expeditions.

HUMAN BEINGS

We too are governed by that same instinct. We look both ways before crossing a street; we lock our doors at night; we go to the doctor when sickness strikes. The instinct to survive is a basic part of our nature. Occasionally, this 'built-in need' to survive is overridden by an even more powerful need or urge. Every now and then we hear of times when a parent or a friend risks their life to save a child or a friend from drowning or being burnt alive in a fire. Sadly, today, it is becoming more and more common for suicide bombers to kill themselves) for what they consider a higher cause) than their lives. They could have gone on living. Instead, they chose to sacrifice themselves. So self-preservation, the first law of nature, is sometimes overridden by a perceived higher cause. Jesus talked about this in today's Gospel. He spoke of finding life by losing it, of enlarging life by giving it away. To illustrate His point, He said, *"Unless a wheat grain falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest."* As long as it continues in that form, it will never be anything more. By giving up its own life, it can become a stalk of wheat, and will reproduce itself, many times over.

Jesus first applied that analogy to Himself. He was going to give up His own life. But Jesus wants this analogy to be applied to his disciples today. Like a grain of wheat, we all have the capacity to become more than ourselves. According to the law of arithmetic, of course, giving a part of ourselves away should diminish us. Giving reduces the amount of whatever we have. But in the case of life the very opposite occurs. The more we keep for ourselves, the less we have. The more we give to others, the greater our own supply becomes. Life was never intended to be hoarded. Life is for giving away.