

## 5<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY OF LENT—Year B—M03-D21-Y2021

01. **“...unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”** With these words, Jesus predicts His impending Death which is becoming **more and more at the forefront of His Mind as He journeys closer and closer to what John refers to as “His Hour.”**
02. Imagine for a moment, if you knew exactly **how and when you were going to die** — and even more so, if you knew that it was not going to be a peaceful death, but rather **a slow, violent, and painful one** — **how would you react to this?**
03. Most of us would probably do **everything in our power to avoid such a fate—as every human instinct within us would rebel against the very thought of this** — and rightly so; after all we were born to live, and not to die.
04. But this is not the case with Jesus, Who is the only person in history born not so much to live—**but to suffer, and to die.**
05. Still, Jesus is no different from the rest of us in the sense that **(being fully human as WELL AS FULLY DIVINE)** His natural instincts for self-preservation, **created an intense conflict within Him about the kind of death He would soon embrace** — a conflict so intense that He sweat **great drops of blood in the Garden of Gethsemane.**
06. The remarkable and profound thing about this is that **Jesus freely CHOOSES to embrace this death—a death that He actually WILLS for Himself.** For as Jesus says elsewhere in the Gospel of John: ***No one takes (My Life) from Me, but I lay it down of my own accord.***
07. And so, the conflict within Him was **between His own natural human instincts for self-preservation, and the avoidance of pain—** as well as His own divine yearning to complete the saving work entrusted to Him by the Father.
08. So, while most of us would do **everything in our power to avoid such a fate—Jesus does everything in His power to embrace it—as**

He gets closer and closer to HIS HOUR. Not because Jesus is a masochist, but because Jesus is a **consummate lover of humanity—One Who desires nothing more than to bring about the healing and salvation the Father wills for each and every one of us.**

09. But even though Jesus chooses to embrace death—death is reality that most of us are not comfortable with—and again, this is rightly so—**because our natural, God-given instincts are for self-preservation, not self-destruction.** And so, it's good and natural to want to live (and to avoid death) for we were created for life. This is why the idea of **making peace with death, of embracing death like Jesus does,** is not something that comes easy to most of us.
10. But God in His infinite wisdom **chose death as the means to bring about an even greater life—and suffering to bring about an even greater joy.** And it is this truth that compels Jesus to hasten toward 'His Hour'.
11. This 'Hour', as the Gospel says, is the moment when **the RULER of this world will be driven out.** The people of that time, in their limited understanding—**having NO CONCEPT of a messiah who would have to suffer and die**—would have interpreted Jesus words as referring to the Roman occupation of Israel. **But Jesus is speaking of a ruler that is far more insidious and destructive than the Romans at that time—Jesus is speaking about sin, death, and the evil one —** all of which held the world in their power.
12. And Jesus is ALSO speaking about such things as **hatred, indifference, and selfishness** — these TOO were the rulers of this world that enslaved the human family. And so, along with sin, death, and the evil one—Jesus is about to overthrow the **hatred, indifference, and selfishness of this world—with the ultimate, and MOST POWERFUL act of love, compassion, and selflessness** in human history—His Death upon the Cross.
13. For God chose self-sacrificing love as **the decisive means by which to conquer sin, suffering, and death**—as the surest path by

which we enter eternal life—as **the ultimate weapon by which to defeat the evil one**—and as the perfect remedy by which to heal our broken, wounded humanity.

14. And this is why Jesus Himself **yearned to die, and why He embraced death—not for its own sake, but for what it would accomplish—the salvation of the world.**
15. Still, EVEN in hindsight, it might seem kind of strange that God would **choose suffering and death as the means to accomplish the salvation of the world**—because again, death is not an idea that most of us are comfortable with—and **it seems counter-intuitive that anything good can come about from death.**
16. But today’s Gospel is inviting us to **broaden our notions of death and life**—and to understand the distinction between **good death and bad death, between true life and false life.**
17. For as followers of Christ, who seek to serve the Lord—we are called to reject the false life the world offers us—**with its distorted notions of what brings happiness**—and to embrace **death in the same spirit that Jesus did — not for its own sake, but for what it will accomplish.**
18. And, as I mentioned last week, the kind of death that we are called to embrace—is the most **profound kind of death that there is**—that is: ***the death to self***. This death to self is the **GOOD kind of death that bears much fruit and brings about true life**—a life rooted in self-sacrificial love — **a life free from the tyranny of hatred, indifference, and selfishness.** For authentic life is not found in things like **power, money, pleasure, and prestige as the world repeatedly tells us.**
19. And (as I also mentioned last week) this death to self means **death to being the centre and focus of our OWN lives — death to putting our OWN will before God’s Will — death to putting ourselves before others — death to living only for ourselves and our own interests.** For once again, even Jesus Himself did not come to earth

**to live, but to die—to deny Himself completely for us, and to put us before His very Self.**

20. For although Jesus DREADED death, He embraced it wholeheartedly — because it meant transforming our pain into peace — turning our vices into virtues — and changing our selfishness into selflessness.
21. For most of my life, I have resisted this kind of death—this death to self — because self-preservation, and pursuing my own interests, comes naturally to me — but *death to self* does not. And is this not the case with many of us? Is it not far more natural for us to place our own self-interests before all else — to embrace self-preservation at all costs and resist *this death to self*? Because no matter HOW GOOD this *death to self* truly is—it rarely FEELS GOOD, and doesn't come naturally to most of us.
22. This is one of the reasons I really enjoy superhero movies—and why I often compare the lives of the Saints to the stories of superheroes—because superheroes are usually ones who sacrifice a lot—who often embrace a life of sacrifice, and who often embrace this death to self—dying to their own interests, and their own dreams for a “normal life”—so that they can embrace a life of doing good for the world.
23. In fact, this is an on-going theme in a lot of superhero movies—as we see in *Superman II* where the Man of Steel sacrifices his love for Lois Lane, and his desire for a normal life with her—in order to continue to be Superman for the good of the world.
24. And in *Spider-Man 2*, we see the same, as Peter Parker is willing to sacrifice his love for Mary-Jane, and a normal life with HER, in order to continue being Spider-Man.
25. And, yet again, we see this in *Wonder Woman 1984*—where the Amazonian Princess is willing to sacrifice a future with the love of her life, Steve Trevor, in order to save the world.

26. But my favourite superhero example of this sacrificial death to self is in *Avengers: End Game*, where Iron-Man is willing to risk **ALL that he values**—all that he wants for himself—all that he loves and treasures—including a normal life with his beloved family—in order to defeat the evil inflicted on the universe by the supervillain Thanos.
27. In all these examples, these superheroes embrace this **death to self with great difficulty and great reluctancy (something I'm sure we can all relate to)**—dying to their own interests and their own vision for their lives—in order to embrace the good they are being called to do. And so, even though these stories are obviously fictional, **they are good depictions of what it means to embrace this death to self.**
28. Because, again, *death to self* rarely feels good—but embracing this kind of death **will bring us true life, and free us from the hatred, indifference and selfishness that still enslave most of the world.** For it is in **losing our life that we will truly find it — and it is in dying to self that we will find our TRUE self.**
29. And so, on the this the Fifth Sunday of Lent, let us ask God for **the grace to fully embrace this *death to self* as wholeheartedly as Jesus embraced His Death —** by putting GOD'S WILL at the center of our lives rather than our own will — **by denying ourselves for the love of God and neighbor —** by not living ONLY for ourselves and our own pursuits, but for God and others. In this way, **we will not only share in the Death of Jesus—the most powerful and beautiful act of love in human history—but we will share in His glorious Resurrection as well. AMEN.**