

God's Saving Grace

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TURNER

The season of Lent is a powerful time of grace and mercy. The Lord calls us back to the basics: to love God and neighbor through prayer, penance, and almsgiving.

We spend so much time focused on ourselves that our hearts become turned inward. The disciplines of Lent are a kind of “spiritual therapy” designed by God to turn us back toward God and neighbor.

Like physical therapy, it can feel a bit painful at first as our hearts are bent back in the direction they're supposed to be. But the result is greater freedom and joy.

The blessing in this great season is God's mercy. It is only because of his great mercy that we can recommit to loving God and our neighbor as we were made to love and share it.

The Church uses St. John during Lent to prepare catechumens for initiation into the sacraments. John's Gospel is also a good companion for

prayer and reflection during Lent, which is a time to scrutinize our Christian identity and renew our commitment to Christ.

Saint John had a clear purpose in mind when he wrote his gospel. John seeks to strengthen the faith of those early Christians and the young churches of Asia Minor. These churches are in danger of going astray. John goes straight to the point. Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.

Jesus has come to Jerusalem for his Passion, death and resurrection. He has ridden into town like a king with the waving of palms, and cries of joy. John's Gospel for the 5th Sunday of Lent contains one of the most beautiful and yet challenging statements of our Christian faith. In Chapter 12 verse 24 he writes

“Amen, Amen, I say to you, 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.”

Now John's record of Jesus is saying-The one (Jesus) who all the crowds have put their hopes into is speaking of falling to the earth and dying. What does that mean? It even gets stranger.

Whoever loves his life loses it. And whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life. What? Can you imagine how the followers of Jesus are confused?

Just when you are being raised up and all of your followers are growing, you are talking about falling?

Just when you are showing us that your life is come to fulfill the law and that you are the messiah, you are talking about hating this life? What is really being said here?

Jesus is explaining that he must die, sacrifice himself like the grain of wheat must die to bring new life. Jesus is the seed of wheat. To understand what all this means, we should think about the grain of wheat that falls to the earth. A seed's life is inside, yes, but its life grows by cracking and dying and mixing with the soil to bring new life. It must crack open to grow by being destroyed. Jesus is the grain of wheat for us. His death leads us to our transfiguration and conversion through his resurrection.

John in 12:25 is not telling us that Jesus says we should hate our lives. And hate the world around us.

Our goal isn't to look at or feel negative about our lives with the things around us. Jesus is talking about spiritual detachment from the world. It is a reminder to always keep our eyes on the prize: Our forgiveness...

because of Christ death and resurrection. Also, to grab ahold of hope and to cling to our eternal communion with God. It is easy to fall into the false promises of this world. There is a risk.

When doing the hard work of self-examination you may find yourself paying too much attention to your sin sometimes. And we can get too focused on ourselves, which can take us down a dark path.

The goal is to know our sins so we can understand the depth of God's mercy and love for us.

This helps us be the best version of ourselves. Jesus shows us a radical spiritual detachment from the world. And that is a model for us. It is Jesus' radical self-giving love that glorifies God.

So, we are called to give ourselves unselfishly in our relationships with one another to die to self and watch new life grow in our relationships, especially in our families.

We can die to self to begin to repair our relationship with God our Father. We can die to self by serving those in the most need and bringing new life to them. Don't worry, you still have time. And that leads us to some homework. I invite you to reflect on the following two questions:

- 1- Have I found the root causes of sin in my life?
- 2- What are some concrete things I can do over the next two weeks to better prepare myself for the glory of Easter?

You can do it! Jesus is waiting with open arms to help you to realize the desires of your heart.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, thank you for your son and your gift of mercy. In these next two weeks, help us reflect on how we can better serve you and those in most need. We look forward to the glory of Easter, which is the hope of our eternal future. Have mercy on us. Have mercy on us. Have mercy on us. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.