**5th Sunday of Lent, Cycle B**

Jer 31: 31-34; Heb 5: 7-9; John 12: 20-33

March 17/18, 2018

This Gospel account comes right after Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, and triumphantly entered Jerusalem to the shout of “Hosanna!” The people were enthralled by the raising of Lazarus. They were excited about the miracle-worker Jesus entering their city, and so a couple of foreigners (who may have missed seeing the raising of Lazarus) came saying, “We would like to see Jesus.”

“We want to see Jesus!” What did they really want to see? The man or the miracle? They wanted to see the man who had performed the miracles. They wanted to see more of what they had heard he had done. They wanted a miracle for themselves.

Do you want to see Jesus, or the miracles? When you come to Mass, do you really want to see him, or just observe and go home excited about a performance? Do you come to hear the bells, smell the incense, listen to the music, smell the flowers, and admire the stained glass? Do you come hoping to hear something inspiring from your pastor or deacon, or do you come to see Jesus who was crucified to save us all and is present at this altar of sacrifice?

What are the two most prominent things you see in this church? They are the Crucifix and the Altar. Yes, the Cross and the Altar are paired together in a Catholic church.

Jesus says, “If you want to see me, look here. Look at the Cross, and look at this Altar. If you want to see me, look at me hanging on that Cross, sacrificed on that Altar, and then receive me in the Eucharist. On that Cross, on that Altar, and in this Eucharist, you will see me and I will draw you and many others to myself. I died on the altar of the Cross so you would live. Will you take up your cross and your altar? Will you worthily receive me in Holy Communion? I will use the cross in your life to draw you close to me. Through your cross, you will come close to me and you will see me. On your cross, on the altar of your life, you will find glory, you will find eternal life. In a worthy reception of Holy Communion you will become one with me and me with you. You will experience the cross and what I have done for you. Are you ready for this? Do you still want to see me? Will you suffer and rise like I suffered and rose?”

This is the heart of all we believe as Christians. This is the tough part of Christianity, i.e., following Jesus all the way to the Cross and beyond. Many preachers skip right over the Cross. They take away the crucifixes. They take Jesus of the Cross. They speak of power, glory, reward, riches, power, victory, but they bypass the Cross.

The problem is, if you avoid the Cross, you avoid the Resurrection. You end up in a gray zone, neither hot nor cold, neither dead nor alive (and that is not where we want to be!). If you avoid the Cross you end up with a rather meaningless life.

But one thing is important to remember. In order for the Cross to be holy, it must not be sought for its own sake, but rather accepted in obedience. Obedience to whom? To God the Father and his will for us. Suffering isn’t holy unless it comes from following God’s will. If we obey the world, or Satan, or the false idols of our lives, we suffer needlessly. That type of suffering must be avoided. God does not will suffering for its own sake. He knows though, that suffering is a part of our imperfect world, and he will accept it as a sacrifice. He knows that to do his will requires great sacrifice at times. Just as with Jesus, the Father takes our suffering and redeems it, makes it life-giving. This is a great mystery.

Yes, we must do all in obedience to God the Father, just as Jesus did. We must not obey the will of the world, or of Satan, or of any false god in our lives. We must do as God would have us do.

If we are following Jesus, we will experience both the Cross and the Resurrection. It is Jesus we must want to see, not just the miracles, or the wonders.

So, when we come to Mass, who or what do we really want to see? Do we come to see the sacrifice of Jesus offered once for all so many years ago on Calvary and now re-presented at each Mass, or do we come to see something else? Do we come to unite ourselves to Jesus on the Cross, and to receive him worthily in Holy Communion, or do we just sit back and observe the performance?