

Homily for the Fifth Sunday of Lent, Year (B)
for St. Anthony Messenger Press Lenten Audio Series
by
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Homily Reflections

My Dear Sisters and Brothers:

Today's Gospel for this Fifth Sunday of Lent gives us a beautiful imagery as Jesus speaks to us about what it means to be his disciple, what it means to live out our Christian vocation.

Jesus uses the image of a grain of wheat to convey what discipleship is all about. In the Gospel we have heard that the grain of wheat must fall to the ground and die so that it can produce fruit. Jesus, in speaking of a grain of wheat dying, in one sense is reflecting on himself, he who emptied himself and became one of us, our Brother, and was obedient even to dying so that we would have the fullness of life. But in speaking to us about the grain of wheat, Jesus is also talking about our own lives as Catholic Christians.

The struggle that we face in discipleship is the struggle of surrender. That imagery of a grain of wheat falling into the ground and dying so that it may produce fruit is the image of each one of us who are called to be disciples. We have to die to ourselves. We have to be forgetful of self. We have to let go. If we don't surrender to Jesus but really hold on ourselves, then we will not be fruitful disciples. Oh, we may do the things that we think we should do, but will we produce fruit in others?

The theology of Baptism that we reflect on in the Church of today is a dynamic one. And it also gives us that sense of dying with Jesus. St. Paul talks about it—that we go down into the water with Jesus and come up with new life.

For us the baptized, among the things that have happened to us at Baptism is that we have been grafted on to Jesus, again, using that example from farming, from husbandry, the grain of wheat dying, the branch being grafted on to the vine. We are grafted on to Jesus at our Baptism. We assume an identity with Jesus. We become by adoption what Jesus is by nature because we are drawn into

that relationship of sonship which Jesus has with his Father by nature. We are the adopted daughters and sons of the Father—sisters and brothers of Jesus. If we have been grafted onto Jesus, and we have, then our growth into Jesus must be total. We are called throughout our lives to become more and more Jesus. And if we do that, then we have to be like Jesus.

As Paul reminds us in his letter to the Philippians that we must have the same mind, the same attitude as in Christ Jesus—emptying ourselves. The grain of wheat falling into the ground and dying gives up everything that it is in order that new life and fruitfulness may come forth. If we are to be disciples, then we must let go of the old self. We must open and empty ourselves of all that is selfish, self-centered, all that we cling to. Jesus did not cling to all that went with being God, as Paul tells us. We should not cling to all that goes with being whomever we are. But, rather we empty ourselves. And in that surrender, that dying to self, we grow more and more into Jesus.

As Catholic Christians we have tended to look at our lives in terms of what are the minimums that I have to do

to save my soul? There aren't any minimums. That grain of wheat that falls into the ground and dies gives everything. Jesus, who emptied himself and didn't cling to all that went with being God, became obedient even to dying. He poured out his blood, he gave up his life for us so that we might be re-inserted into God's plan, so that we might be alive to God's life, so that we might be as co-heirs with Jesus spending eternity with him before the Father.

The grain of wheat, the fruitful grain of wheat, is one image that Jesus sets before us so that we might grow more and more into him so that we might be a sign, a witness to all our sisters and brothers of the presence, of the love of the salvific mercy that is Jesus in our midst. We are invited to grow and to be fruitful. We are invited to empty ourselves as Jesus did.

As we approach the end of Lent on this Fifth Sunday of Lent, it is not too late for us to again look at our own call to self-emptying, to surrender, to dying to self. That's the key to the question that we ask: what do I need to do to be a good Catholic, a good disciple, a good follower of Jesus? I need to empty myself. I need to surrender. I need to be obedient to the will of the

Father. I need to die to myself so that not only I, but all those whose lives I touch, may experience and share in the fruit of Jesus' love, of Jesus' care, of Jesus' mercy, and most of all, of Jesus' presence. May he continue to help you to let go, to surrender, to die to self.