

## 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent (B) John 12: 20 - 33

Through Lent we are called to come to know Jesus personally, very personally through prayer, fasting and acts of charity.

And yet, this Lent the first readings have presented us with covenants. I mentioned it last month. We know a covenant means a binding agreement between people; it is more than a simple contract. In the case of Sacred Scripture, these covenants were between God and His people. If you remember the First Sunday of Lent we heard of the covenant God made with Noah and his family, the Covenant of the Rainbow. Through that covenant we were reminded that God will never give up on his people or on any one of us as individuals.

The Second Sunday, we heard about the Covenant of Faith made between God and Abraham. We were encouraged to have the faith of Abraham and to trust in God when we face challenges. We might not know how, but somehow God will always set things straight. The Third Sunday of Lent we heard the Covenant of the Law that God made with Moses, the covenant we know as the Ten Commandments.

But, what does this all have to do with my personal relationship with Jesus. Well, we just listened to Jeremiah's prophecy of the Covenant of the Heart. This prophecy leads to the Pascal Mystery and the Blood of the New and Eternal Covenant, the covenant we will renew on our altar in just a few minutes. Our focus today is on Jeremiah's prophecy. First, he reminds us that the people broke the last covenant so a new one is coming. "I will put my law within them and I will write it on their hearts, and I will be their God and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me..."

The prophet Ezekiel also made this same prophecy. Listen to his words. "A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances."

Can you see the connection, here? Moses received the commandments on stone tablets, carved by God's finger, in stone. The new Covenant, the Covenant taught by Jesus through the Gospels, is a Covenant of Love and it is carved on each of our hearts as his followers.

"... for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest", says the Lord through the Prophet.

That day has come. When we are united to God through prayer, then we can look within ourselves, determine what our conscience is telling us, and know in our hearts how to serve our God. It is not that we don't need the Law of Moses or the beautiful sign of the rainbow any more. Jesus came among us, not to do away with the Law as he himself says, but to fulfill the Law – to instill it in our very hearts.

A great example of this fulfillment was given by one of the saints whose feast we celebrate on Monday this week, St. Joseph. Think with me what must have been Joseph's state of mind before the Angel told him to take Mary to be his wife.

He was about to marry a beautiful young woman. He hoped he would have children with her. He was already an established tradesman in Nazareth and now he would start his own family with Mary at its heart. And then he learned she was pregnant. Surely, he must have been devastated. He knew the child was not his. Should he follow the written Law of Moses and reveal Mary's pregnancy to the local synagogue leaders? They would have no choice but to put her to death, probably by stoning. Yes, the law was that unforgiving. The religious leaders and people of Joseph's time would not be gentle with Mary. Joseph knew that. He was convinced that he had been offended against, but within his heart he knew it would be wrong to have her put to death.

It made no difference. Joseph was a just man and that meant that he had a relationship with God. And that relationship told him, that law within his heart told him that he could not expose his fiancé to the Law. He decided, as we have read in Matthew's Gospel, to send her away, to have the baby in the home of a

far off relative where she and the child could spend the rest of their lives. And, after Joseph chose to follow the law of the heart that the Angel appeared to him in a dream and told him of the 'overshadowing' of the Holy Spirit and the Son who would be born to Mary.

When we are united to God, then, like St. Joseph we know what is right and what is wrong. We call that knowledge a certain conscience, a well-formed conscience.

To see Jesus is to enter totally into his way of thinking, to understand why he had to suffer and die and rise again. Like the grain of wheat, Jesus lets go of everything, including his life, to bring eternal life to himself and to you and to me. In the process, both he and we will be transformed. If we find it hard to see this as the core of Jesus life, we can't say we have really seen him. But Jesus goes further and says we must have the same way of thinking. And if we want to be truly close to Jesus we must walk his Way. "Whoever serves me must follow me and where I am there my servant will be also."