

Homily of Fifth Sunday of Lent Year B, 2021

Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 51:3-4, 12-15; Hebrews 5:7-9; John 12:20-23

Jeremiah was sent by God to prophesy to the Jews at a time when political and religious leaders offended God so much. There were a lot of corruption and injustice in the land. The political and religious leaders did not care nor believed that corruption and injustice could make them lose favor with God and bring destruction to their land. They prided themselves on the temple, and the covenant God made with their fathers Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses.

The old covenant was sealed with animal sacrifices and animal blood. For instance, in Exodus 24:8, "Then Moses took the blood and splashed it on the people, saying, 'This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you according to all these words.'"

Then, Jeremiah prophesied to them that the temple would be destroyed and the old covenant would no longer hold. Jeremiah prophesied the nature of the new covenant as we see in the first reading, "But this is a covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord. I will place my law within them and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jeremiah 31:33). The new covenant was no longer going to be sealed with animal sacrifices and animal blood, and the law written on scrolls and tablets of stone; but it would be sealed with the Blood of the Lamb, and the law written on the hearts of men and women.

The Book of Hebrews affirms, "For this reason, [Jesus Christ] is the mediator of the new covenant: since a death has taken place for deliverance from transgressions under the first covenant, those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance" (Hebrews 9:15). During the Last Supper (the institution of the Eucharist), Jesus took the cup, gave it to the apostles and said to them, "Each of you drink from it, for this is my blood, which confirms the covenant between God and his people. It is poured out as a sacrifice to forgive the sins of many" (Matthew 26:27-28). This new covenant, hereby, replaces the old covenant.

The Jews prided themselves on the temple and the covenant God made with their fathers, while condoning corruption and injustice in their land. In the same way, some people pride themselves on their church, their position, their ministry, or their organization; but in their hearts are evil desires of murder, adultery, immorality, theft, lies, and slander (Matthew 15:19). Jesus quotes Prophet Isaiah for such people, "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me" (Matthew 15:8).

Each of us is invited to a spiritual checkup during this Lenten Season to examine the state of one's covenant with God. God says, "I will place my law within them and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be my people." How does this apply to me? A finance company advertisement asks, "What is in your wallet?" The question for me is, "What is within me?" "What is written upon my heart?" "Is the law God placed within me still there or have I excreted it out?" "Is God's law written upon my heart still there or have I erased it?"

In today's gospel, Jesus invites us to renew ourselves by dying to our sinful selves. He says, "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. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life" (John 12:24-25). Jesus, further assures us, "Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there also will my servant be. The Father will honor whoever serves me" (John 12:26).

Jesus, further says in today's gospel, "And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself. He said this indicating the kind of death he would die" (John 12:32-33). His passion, crucifixion, death, and glorification made him the mediator of the new covenant and "the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him" (second reading, Hebrews 5:9). As he draws us to himself, let nothing pull us away from him. Let us obey him in order to preserve our life for eternal salvation. Amen.

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