

## Homily of Fifth Sunday of Lent, Year B, 2024

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 was 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 of Jerusalem and God's covenant 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...'"

Jeremiah prophesied to them that the temple would be destroyed and the old covenant would no longer hold. He 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 13:33). 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 calls Jesus "the mediator of a new covenant" (Hebrews 9:15).

Each of us is invited to a spiritual checkup during this Lenten season to examine the state of our 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? Regularly, God tries to place his law within me and tries to write it on my heart. How recipient am I? Do I do away with it, and place something else within me, and write something else on my heart?

Someone says, "Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are." This is to say that what we consume is what we become. Ordinarily, if we eat healthy food, we become healthy. If we eat junk food, our health becomes junky. Those who accept God's law and retain it in their hearts and put it to practice are children of the new covenant. Those who consume worldly things become children of the world. Worst still, those who consume bedeviled things become children of the devil and tools of the devil.

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).

Further in today's gospel, Jesus says, "And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself" (John 12:32). 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" (Hebrews 5:9). As he draws us to himself, let nothing pull us away from him.

"What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? ... No, in all these things, we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:35, 37-39). Amen.

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