

## Homily - Lent 5 B - March 15, 2018

I am the center of the universe. I have to be me. I want what I want when I want it. After all, it's all about me. These expressions are commonplace today. They may not be as blatant as I just spoke them, but the fact remains that "What's in it for me?" and "Why should I bother?" and "Is it worth my time?" are our other ways of expressing one's self-importance. They are spoken by self-centered adults who were once probably self-centered children.

Then, we come to church and hear Jesus say: "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."

Jesus speaks these words as he approaches his crucifixion. He says them not just to justify the death that he will endure, but to clarify the full meaning of life. In a nutshell, if we don't stop living for ourselves, we will live lonely lives, and just fade into oblivion. Jesus lived for others and clearly tells us that the fullness and meaning of life will be found only when we live for others.

There is a rather well-known expression that illustrates this point: "The blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church." Those early martyrs gave their lives for the faith. Even today we see people slaughtered because they are Christians. Just flipping through the pages of history, we can easily note that all of the memorable leaders, movers, shakers, and saints were those who gave of themselves for the sake of others. Jesus makes that point very clearly when he speaks about the grain of wheat. He lives that message with his own life.

Jesus spent his life for others and wanted us to do the same. Wouldn't the world be much different if we took that message seriously. There was a well-known evangelist (Christmas Evans) who was always on the move. His friends urged him to slow down and to take life a little more easily. His response was simply: "It is better to burn out rather than to rust out." Jesus is not suggesting that we burn out, but you get the point.

If we focus on ourselves and treat life as a hypochondriac looks after his life, we will probably exist longer, but we will never fully live, never fully appreciate life.

Jesus' life reveals that service towards others formulates the true key to happiness and the fullness of life. The Mother Theresa's, the St. Vincent

de Paul's, the Joans of Arc, the Brothers Andre have all shown us that the path to success and happiness and rewards and fulfillment is centered on being the grain of wheat that dies so that there can be life.

God has written his law in our hearts. It's really quite simple. When we stop making ourselves number one, we will gain so much more. When we forget about ourselves, as did the saints and the great leaders of the world, then we gain a treasure. We gain the whole world.

Others have echoed Jesus' message in their own way. For example, Albert Schweitzer said it this ways: "The purpose of human life is to serve, and to show compassion and the will to help others." Einstein's version: "A person starts to live when he can live outside himself."

As our Lenten journey continue to unfold, we see and experience more deeply a Jesus who gives himself for others, for us. Will we ever learn that self-giving is a model for true success in our world. This formula has worked for centuries. Let's do the right thing!