

Fifth Sunday in Lent (B)
March 22, 2015.

'And I when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.' Jesus said this indicate the kind of death he was to die (Jn. 12:33).

The veiled statues and images in our church indicate that we have entered into what was once known as Passiontide. The sacred liturgy leads us to ponder and to reflect on the saving mystery of our Lord's sacred Passion which our Lord refers to as his *hour*. *Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say – 'Father, save me from this hour'? No it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.'* (Jn. 12:27). This hour begins at what we refer to as the Last Supper. *Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end* (Jn. 13:1). Having instructed His disciples and having entrusted to them the gift of the Eucharist, our Lord prayed: *Father, the hour has come; glorify thy Son that the Son may glorify thee, since thou hast given him power over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom thou hast given him* (Jn. 17:1-2). This prayer, *the longest transmitted by the Gospel, embraces the whole economy of creation and salvation, as well as his death and Resurrection. The prayer of the Hour of Jesus always remains his own, just as his Passover 'once for all' remains ever present in the liturgy of his Church. Christian Tradition rightly calls this prayer the 'priestly' prayer of Jesus. It is the prayer our high priest, inseparable from his sacrifice, from his passing over (Passover) to the Father to whom he is wholly 'consecrated'.* (*The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2746-47).

The readings of the Mass make it very clear that the scope of God's saving will is universal. The Prophet Jeremiah prophesies that the new covenant would return Israel's exiled tribes from the ends of the earth (Cf. Jer. 31:1, 3-4, 7-8). Our Lord also predicted that His Passion would gather together the dispersed children of God (Cf. Jn. 11:52) but today it is clear that by His saving Passion He promises to draw all men and women to Himself. *'And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself'* (Jn. 12:33). This prophecy, fulfilled in His crucifixion, is no less a reference to His glorification; fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah which says that after suffering for Israel's sins, the Messiah would be raised high and greatly exalted.

The celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass enables us to be one with our Lord in His Hour and in His Passover. In the coming days we will recall these saving mysteries in sacred rites and with ancient prayers that make it very clear that the sacred liturgy of the Church is a continuation of and participation in the prayer of the Hour of Jesus. In His agony in the garden of Gethsemane our Lord asked His disciples, *Could you not watch one hour?* (Mk. 14:37). These words of our Lord also echo through the ages and are addressed to those who either neglect to keep the third commandment, or who think that Mass is too long. The preference for doing anything or nothing at all, rather than attend Mass on Sunday has proven to be almost as destructive to Christian faith and life and culture as outright iconoclasm, though without physical harm to Catholics. What spiritual harm we have endured, however.

The coming days are for us the most important in the year. Next Sunday, Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion will begin the observance of Holy Week and we will devoutly recall both the events of our Lord's Passion and the gift of the Eucharistic Sacrifice. In the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass the *Hour of Jesus* continues and we join our sacrifices to His Sacrifice and in so doing we give over to God our Father our lives in reverence and in obedience. United to this Sacrifice our lives are marked by reverent submission. What we participate in and gaze upon are eternal realities that are signs of authentic meaning. This is why the Second Vatican Council clearly said that the Eucharist is *the source and summit of Christian life* (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10; Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Vatican Council II); the very heart of all that Church is and does. The English Martyr, St John Fisher, who died upholding the sanctity of marriage and the integrity of the Mass, observed: *If anyone should attentively consider the progress and the decline, and the reformations of life which have often occurred in the Church, he will find that neglect or abuse of this Sacrament has been the cause of decline; and, on the other hand, that faithful worship and devout frequentation of this Sacrament have wonderfully contributed to progress and reform.... Whenever the divine mysteries are undevoutly performed, no hope of any good need be entertained* (Quoted in *Resurgent in the Midst of Crisis, Sacred Liturgy, the Traditional Mass, and Renewal in the Church* by Peter Kwasniewski, Angelico Press, 2014).

As we hasten towards the approaching Holy Days, may our reverent and devout prayer enable us to *walk eagerly in that same charity with which, out of love for the world, [our Lord] handed himself over to death*. The path of the Church is the path which our Lord Himself has walked. To follow Him means that we are engaged by God in the work of salvation as active participants in a mystery that unfolds in the world and first and foremost in the heart of everyone who believes. *Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour* (Jn. 12:26).