

ctkAlive! Scripture Study
5th Sunday of Lent
2024—B Cycle



What do I see?

“Unless a kernel of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains by itself alone. But if it dies, it produces much grain.”

In my life today, how is God asking me to “die” in some way so that someone else may find a new and better life?

Image source: [Wheatfield](#) at sunset by [Tim Matras](#)

Opening Prayer

(edited, abridged, and adapted for use here)

A Prayer for Wisdom

Lord, let me be strong in courage and confidence.

Let me be wise in choices and decisions.

Let me be caring in all relationships...

and compassionate to those in need.

Let me meet life’s adventures...

with a clear mind and a bold heart.

Let my integrity be a gift to the world.

And may the Spirit of God be with me always.

Amen.

Source: [Fr. Brian T. Joyce](#), late pastor of Christ the King Church

Readings

Jeremiah 31: 31-34 “All, from the greatest to the least, shall know me, says the Lord.”

Psalms 51: 3-4, 12-15 “Wash me from my guilt and from my sin cleanse me.”

Hebrews 5: 7-9 “Although he was a son, he learned obedience through the things he suffered.”

John 12: 20-33 “When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself.”

Introduction to the 5th Sunday of Lent

During Jesus’ public ministry, he “hung out” with some pretty unsavory characters. He placed no limits on where he would go or with whom he would associate in his desire to reach even the most physically and spiritually needy people within his limited human reach. As [Sister Mary McGlone, CSJ](#), writes in the *National Catholic Reporter*, “Ours is a God who gambles on love—over and over again.”

Fast forward to the 1970s.... In [Recife](#), Brazil, a group of priests belonging to the [Oblates of Mary Immaculate](#) (OMI) responded to a call of their Archbishop, [Dom Helder Camara](#), to become taxi drivers, as well as parochial pastors. In this unusual ministry, they met and influenced people they might never see in church. What these men learned and taught by their example was that every form of work is a sacred opportunity to meet Christ and model his presence and love in the world.

If my parish priest or minister came to pick me up, when I called for an Uber, Lyft, or taxi ride, how would I feel—embarrassed? proud? Would I think, “You’re neglecting your parish duties to earn some extra money?”

What am I doing or might I be willing to take on as a ministry in my local community to reach people I might never see in our church at any time?

A Reading from the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah (31: 31-34)

“‘Indeed, a time is coming,’ says the Lord, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. It will not be like the old covenant that I made with their ancestors when I delivered them from Egypt. For they violated that covenant, even though I was like a faithful husband to them,’ says the Lord.

“‘But I will make a new covenant with the whole nation of Israel after I plant them back in the land,’ says the Lord. ‘I will put my law within them and write it on their hearts and minds. I will be their God and they will be my people.

“‘People will no longer need to teach their neighbors and relatives to know me. For all of them, from the least important to the most important, will know me,’ says the Lord. ‘For I will forgive their sin and will no longer call to mind the wrong they have done.’”

Personal Reflection

Jeremiah lived from about 650–570 BC/BCE. During his lifetime, the Israelites found themselves on the brink of exile in Babylon. He delivered this prophecy of divine-human reconciliation the darkest of those years. Yahweh revealed and Jeremiah announced a *new* and *eternal* Covenant between God and the Jewish people. Jeremiah recognized that Yahweh’s covenant was for *all* people, “the

greatest to the least.” Yet, their narrow religious sense took them no further than the physical and spiritual borders of their own society. Recall that Jeremiah was one of those few Israelites the Babylonians deemed unfit to be of any use—even as a slave. Wow! After a while, he emigrated with others to Egypt but eventually returned to the devastated land he had fled.

— *Where have I found or experienced the error of exclusion within Christianity? Within my own faith community? Where does exclusion lurk within my own attitudes and relationships?*

— *Who or what class of persons might not feel welcome to share in our local parish liturgies? What would I say to someone who shared that feeling with me?*

A Reading from Psalm 51: 3-4, 12-15

Prayer of contrition and repentance.

Create a clean heart in me, O Lord.

For I am aware of my rebellious acts;
I am forever conscious of my sin.
Against you—you above all—I have sinned;
I have done what is evil in your sight.
So you are just when you confront me;
you are right when you condemn me.
Create a clean heart in me, O Lord.

Let me again experience the joy of your deliverance!
Sustain me by giving me the desire to obey!
Then I will teach rebels your merciful ways,
and sinners will turn to you.
Rescue me from the guilt of murder, O God,
the God who delivers me!
Create a clean heart in me, O Lord.

Then my tongue will shout for joy
because of your deliverance.
O Lord, give me the words!
Then my mouth will praise you.
Create a clean heart in me, O Lord.

Personal Reflection

Spiritual writers consider Psalm 51 the best of the ‘penitential psalms.’ People stand guilty yet unafraid before God. Why? Because God sees their guilt as a reason

for mercy and hope. A sincere and realistic sense of sin marks the first step toward conversion and growth in holiness.

- *When I pray these psalm verses, what within me calls out for “cleansing”?*
- *How willing am I to allow God to “create a clean heart in me”? Why do I sometimes resist God’s offer of forgiveness and compassion?*

From the Letter to the Hebrews (5: 7-9)

“During his earthly life, Christ offered both requests and supplications with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death and he was heard because of his devotion. Although he was a son, he learned obedience through the things he suffered. And by being perfected in this way, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him.”

Personal Reflection

This important letter dates from around 64 AD/CE. According to [Frank Viola](#), author of [The Untold Story of the New Testament Church](#), the author of this letter might have been Barnabas or Silas but not Paul. The new Jewish converts in Rome suffered persecution because they had become followers of Christ.

Jesus offered his sacrifice “with loud cries and tears.” In our daily lives, Jesus calls us to serve as instruments of grace by promoting truth, encouraging love, and establishing peaceful relationships. Scripture uses these words to express the insistent prayer of all oppressed children of God. They cry to God in such a loud voice that God listens to them. On the night before his death, Jesus identified with all who suffer.

The author of Hebrews said the Father “heard” the cries of his son. Yet, the Father did not intervene to spare him.

- *What valuable life lessons have I learned from my own personal experience of physical, mental, and/or spiritual suffering?*
- *How has personal (or shared) suffering shaped my life, my attitudes, my faith?*

Proclamation from the Gospel according to John 12: 20-33

“Some Greeks were among those who had gone up to worship at the feast. So these approached Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and requested, ‘Sir, we would like to see Jesus.’

“Philip went and told Andrew, and they both went and told Jesus.

“Jesus replied, “The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the solemn truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains by itself alone. But if it dies, it produces much grain. The one who loves his life destroys it, and the one who hates his life in this world guards it for eternal life.

“If anyone wants to serve me, he must follow me, and where I am, my servant will be too. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

“Now my soul is greatly distressed. And what should I say? ‘Father, deliver me from this hour’? No, but for this very reason I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.’

“Then a voice came from heaven, ‘I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.’

“The crowd that stood there and heard the voice said that it had thundered. Others said that an angel had spoken to him.

“Jesus said, ‘This voice has not come for my benefit but for yours. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.’ (He said this to indicate clearly what kind of death he was going to die.)”

Personal Reflection

A number of foreigners (called “Greeks” only because of the language they spoke) converted to the Jewish faith. Though they did not observe *all* the Jewish laws, they were accepted in the Temple of Jerusalem—but only within a *segregated* courtyard. In this particular instance, some of these “Greeks” asked to speak with Jesus. As he seemed to do in every case, he dropped whatever he was doing and focused on the pressing needs of the interrupters. Why? Because he accepted these encounters as *important to his ministry*.

The question they asked offered Jesus an opportunity to announce that his kingdom would extend through the whole earth because of his death on a cross. Jesus put the cycle of “life, death and new life” in simple human terms. There would be no bread on our tables if individual grains of wheat did not die. The real human tragedy is to wander through life and arrive at the end of our journey having remained just an unchanged grain of wheat,” when God created us to be and do so much more.

— *What is my own “go to” prayer when I am in distress?*

— *How do I handle interruptions in my daily life—both on the job and at home? Do I have a “pet peeve” interruption—one that really gets to me? What is it? Why does it bother me so much? Is it really that important?*

For Inspirational Listening, Watching and Reading

Listen

“[Unless a Grain of Wheat Shall Fall](#)” by [Bernadette Farrell](#)

[Change My Heart, Oh God](#), by [Maranatha! Music](#)

Watch

[Denzel Washington's "Life Advice"](#) from a college commencement address (12 min.)—truly inspiring!

Read

[Run With the Horses](#) by [Eugene H. Peterson](#)

In a series of profound reflections on the life of Jeremiah the prophet, the late Rev. Eugene Peterson explored the heart of what it meant to be fully and genuinely human. In his signature pastoral style, Peterson invited readers to grasp the biblical truth that each person's faith story is unique, that is, unlike any other person who has ever lived!

(One of my favorite spiritual books—AJG)

Journaling/Prayer Prompts

What insights have I gained from reflecting on this weekend's liturgical readings?

— *After reflecting on the scriptures, what touches my heart the most?*

We mustn't simply be grateful "recipients" of God's good gifts. We also need to "give back."

— *How will this weekend's Scriptures impact the way I think, live, love, and "give back" during the week ahead?*

Preview of Next Session

Sixth Sunday of Lent/Palm Sunday

Isaiah 50:4-7 "Morning after morning he opens his ear that I may hear."

Psalm 22: 8-9, 17-20, 23-24 "I will proclaim your name to my brethren."

St. Paul to the Philippians 2: 6-11 "He emptied himself, taking the form of a slave."

Gospel at the Procession: Mark 1:1-10 "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

(The passion of Christ according to Mark 14: 1 to 15: 47)

Closing Prayer

(edited, abridged, and adapted for use here)

The Spirit Behind Kindness and Charity

Father,

I confess that too often my kindness and charity

are prompted by selfish needs rather than my love for others.

I want to be accepted... to think well of myself...

to merit your praise by stacking up good deeds you will admire.

Please empty me of all that does not resemble Jesus...
and fill me instead with his humility and desire
to bring good to others for their sakes alone.
Remind me that it was the love behind Jesus' death on the cross...
and not the death itself... that won my devotion...
and convinced me of your grace.

Source: Spiritual writer [Judith Ingram](#)

Gender usage in these reflections: We are conscious of gender references to God in Scripture texts. Often, attempts to rewrite these passages result in awkward sentence structures. We have left the biblical translations as they are but do our best to be inclusive in all other parts of the reflection.

Note: Beginning on **Easter Sunday**, we will begin using scriptures from The Message bible (*Catholic/Ecumenical Edition*). This more contemporary translation is the work of the late [Rev. Eugene H. Peterson](#), Presbyterian pastor, scholar, theologian, poet, and author of many wonderful books.

The Sunday readings are from the New English Translation (NET)
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