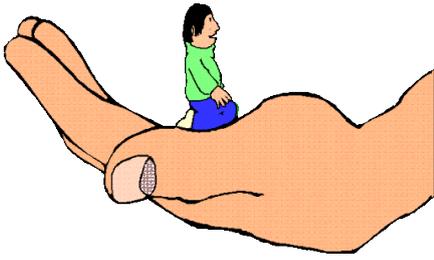


Homily for the Fifth Sunday of Lent.



In the Magnificat, during her pregnancy, Mary says to Elizabeth that she is blessed because God ‘has seen me in my lowliness’.

She wonders that God has paid attention to her, chosen her, even though she would see herself as of no importance at all.

In the gospel today Jesus says something similar about his own life. It’s through God, his Father, that he, Jesus, is glorified and through what he is about to do. The recognition of him as Son.

But why does Jesus accept this task?

What to him and his Father is the purpose of this? What is their being glorified about?

And the answer is us. Each of us, each of those we pass in the street.

Jesus ends this passage in the gospel by saying: “When I am lifted up I shall draw all men, all people, to myself.” What he is doing in this action, that we are about to celebrate at Easter, is about us, and our world, his creation, but here in John’s gospel he is speaking specifically about his people.

In the first reading Jeremiah is opening up a new side of God to his listeners. Last week’s readings were about God’s people. The people in Exile, by the waters of Babylon, the people leaving Exile to new freedom.

But today Jeremiah is saying to them, “Yes, it has always been about the journey of the people as a body. As we heard two week’s ago it was with the people that he made his Covenant and set down the Ten Commandments. But I want to introduce you to a new fact, says Jeremiah, that God loves you. Each of you. Yes, says God, I brought you all out of the land of Egypt, but I am speaking to each of you now. Deep in each of your hearts have I written my Law. Each of you is special to me. I know each of you by your name. Or as Isaiah puts it, I have carved your name on the palm of my hand.

Jesus is giving up his life, and what he hopes from this is that there will be a rich harvest.

I am that harvest, just as you are. Just as is everyone we encounter in life, potentially, if we, they, want it.

God is glorified in Jesus, and vice versa, but where they are both glorified together is in our salvation.

And Jesus' intention and his prayer is that none should be lost. So we now know that whoever we are, whatever we might think of ourselves, we have to let that fact that God is in our hearts be a reality in our lives. If we don't feel it, we have to discover it.

Not only that, but no one is expendable. As Jeremiah says, "They will all know me, the least no less than the greatest."

There are governments both good and not so good, that make laws for us. The decisions of both can be good or bad at times. But one of the great tests of whether they are making good decisions is that they realise no one is expendable. You cannot sacrifice a few (often the weakest) for the greater good. Because we know that God is in each of their hearts. We are all of equal value.

When Pope Francis goes on a trip, he never fails to meet individuals and talk to them of their lives. He has spoken of his being out at night in Buenos Aires in Argentina with the 'cartoneras'. The children and others who collect cardboard from the rubbish, and other bits and pieces, to sell to survive. How he discovered that they had a whole way of life to look after each other, protect the weakest. A society unnoticed to general society.

God has noticed me, each of us, in my/our lowliness. Jesus says: 'What shall I say: Father save me from this hour? But it was for this very reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name!' He gives his life, accepts that his life is expendable to show us that no one else's is.

The language of the gospel sounds very flowery, perhaps poetic is better, and theological, very St. John. But there is a reality in it.

We are the glory of God and if we want to glorify God too, then we need to value the life he has saved in all of us. Perhaps these last two weeks of Lent are a good time to ask ourselves how we value the lives of all others, all of whom have God written in their hearts.