

# Fifth weekend of Lent 2021

A Reflection on the scriptures by Fr Sylvester O'Flynn OFM Cap., Rochestown, Cork

## Dying and Rising with Christ

“When I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all people to myself”.

Lent is advancing rapidly and we are coming close to the celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus. When I entered religious life more than sixty years ago, there was great emphasis on meditating on the passion of the Lord but scarcely anything about the resurrection as a pattern for life. Mass was understood as the memorial of the sacrificial death of Jesus without any focus on his resurrection, while the Holy Spirit, then known as the Holy Ghost, was the forgotten Paraclete. We were fortunate to have Fr Hilary McDonagh lecturing us for the final two years before ordination. He anticipated the Second Vatican Council by introducing us to the paschal mystery as the centre of our liturgy. Paschal comes from the Hebrew word for a passing in the sense of a journey. The full journey of Jesus was in coming down to us in the incarnation, living a human life before completing his journey by dying on the cross and rising in his return to the Father. For me, this opened up a new spirituality which sees Christian life as a constant process of dying with Christ to sin and rising with Christ in a life illuminated and inspired by his ideals.



### Wheat seed dying and rising

Today's Gospel (John 12:20-33) begins with some Greeks coming to see Jesus. This signifies the outreach of Jesus beyond the Jews to all other nations. He says that the hour has come for his glorification, that is, it is now the time for him to advance to the next stage of his journey or pasch. He explains his journey through death and resurrection by the simple parable of the grain of wheat which dies in the earth before it rises to yield a rich harvest. Not only is this the roadmap for Jesus but it is also the plan of life for his followers.

### Rising with Christ to new life

The writer who, more than anybody else, developed this spirituality of dying and rising with Christ was Saint Paul. In the sacrament of baptism by immersion, water is a symbol of both death and life.

“By our baptism into his death we were buried with him, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glorious power, we too should begin living a new life.” (Romans 6:4). What is this new life? It means breaking free from the slavery of sin so to grow into the likeness of Christ. It is a lifelong journey. The seed that sprouted may have to battle through competing weeds, storms and droughts before it bears fruit.

Jesus said, “Anyone who loves his life loses it; anyone who hates his life in this world will keep it for the eternal life.” In this context, hating one's life in this world refers to a worldly life rather than one based on spiritual values.

Writing to the Galatians Chapter 5, Paul contrasts the results of worldly self-indulgence with the fruits of the Spirit. Self-indulgence results in sexual vice, impurity, sensuality, worship of false gods, sorcery, antagonisms, fighting, rivalry, bad temper, quarrels, disagreements, factions, malice, drunkenness, orgies and such like. These are the vices to be overcome. By contrast, Paul lists nine fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control. "All who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified self with all its passions and its desires." That's an outline of the spirituality of following the pattern of dying and rising with Christ.

### **Sacrament of Reconciliation**

The highlight of the Christian year is the renewal of our baptismal promises at Easter. We renounce Satan and his empty promises and we promise to live in the light of Christ. In any normal year we would have access to the wonderful Sacrament of Reconciliation for the grace to eradicate the sinful weeds that inhibit our Christian growth. Some parishes will make the Sacrament available. Other parishes will stream a service inviting you to reach out privately to the healing mercy of the Saviour. God understands our limitations at this time and his forgiveness will not be restricted to 5 kilometres.

That day when some Greeks came to see Jesus, he said that his hour had come. Sentence would be passed on this world and the so-called prince of this world would be overthrown. "And when I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all people to myself."

We are fortunate to have this word DRAW in the English translation. Its letters stand for the death of Jesus, his rising, and the day of Ascension when he told the apostles to spread his message to all nations. The letter W stands for his promise that he will return to "take you to myself so that you may be with me where I am" (John 14:3).

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, I see you lifted up before me, crucified to all selfishness and abandoned totally to the will of the Father. Draw me up from my slavery to sinful self-indulgence. Plant within me the seeds that will blossom and produce the beautiful fruits of the Spirit. May the Spirit guide me and strengthen me in fidelity to the promises of my baptism.