

Homily - John 12: 20-30
5th Sunday of Lent, Year B
20th/21st March 2021, Sooeey

There is a time-honored story about an old farmer who was persuaded by his nephew to visit a big city. The young man proudly took the farmer on a tour of the large metropolis. At one point as they walked down the street the old man suddenly stopped and asked, “Did you hear that?” The young man looked at the milling pedestrians and the traffic and replied, “Hear what?” “A cricket,” the old man said as he walked toward a little tuft of grass growing out of a crack next to a tall building. Sure enough, there tucked in the crack was a cricket. The young man was amazed. “How could you pick up the sound of a cricket in all this noise?” he asked. The old farmer didn’t say a word and just reached into his pocket, pulled out a couple of coins and dropped them on the sidewalk. Immediately a number of people began to reach for their pockets or look down at the sidewalk. The old man then observed, “We hear what our ears are trained to hear.”

Psychologist Ellen Langer says that many people are so preoccupied with their daily tasks that they rarely listen to those little things around them.

Well, today's Gospel presents a few Greek visitors who came to the Apostles, eager to meet and listen to Jesus.

Now, we are already on the 5th Sunday of Lent, just a week away from Palm Sunday and Holy Week. To my mind, the Gospel narrative of this evening is rather intriguing. A group of Greeks come and tell Philip, "we want to see Jesus". Philip takes Andrew with him and tells Jesus about the same. But then, the response of Jesus seems so inappropriate. Instead of saying that He is ready to meet them, or even saying that He does not want to meet them, Jesus gives a couple of verses that seem rather inappropriate as a response.

Jesus says He is to be glorified, and then He says: "unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; if it dies, it bears fruit". And He goes on to say: "He, who wants to save his life, will lose it, but he who is willing to lose his life will save it for eternal life.

Well! The answer of Jesus in fact has a profound meaning. The Greeks as part of the pilgrims come to the Holy city of Jerusalem. May be, they just wanted to see this Jesus, a person of fame and name. But Jesus wants it to be an encounter. Yes! Jesus wants people to shed all their prejudices and expectations about Him, and to

be ready, and open minded to see who He really is: The Saviour who would die and rise again. And if we wish to follow Jesus, we are told we should be willing to lose ourselves, shed our expectations, shed our prejudices about Him and open ourselves to Jesus as He reveals Himself, and follow the path that He has tread before us.

John Newton was an eighteenth century slave-trader. Captain of a trans-Atlantic slaving ship, he had everything that this world could offer. Yes! He in fact made a lucrative living from the brutal business of buying and selling human cargo. Eventually, he encountered Jesus Christ, and he was converted to the Gospel truth, the truth that sets us free, the truth that makes us free (John 8:32).

And once he got to know the truth, he spent the rest of his life crusading to abolish the very business which had proven so enriching. He also wrote a number of great hymns, including a familiar one which begins: “Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound! That saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I'm found, was blind, but now I see.”

Well! There was a time in his life John Newton thought that he was on top of the world, but in truth, in reality, he was wretched and blind. He lacked the moral clarity

to see that he was nothing more than a cynical businessman making money in an evil enterprise; losing his own Christian conscience. Then Jesus came along and the old John Newton died. A new John Newton was born. An old life was lost and a new one was found, a new life whose melodic fruit remains with us to this day.

What about ourselves? What have we got to lose? Remember! We've got to die to ourselves in order to live with Christ!

Well! Dear friends, as we continue our Lenten journey, May the Holy Spirit help us to shed all our prejudices, expectations of Jesus. May we be open to the real Jesus- the Jesus who saves us, through His passion, death and Resurrection. And, may we be able to die to ourselves and have the grace to encounter Him, an encounter that will transform our lives.

God bless you all, **Amen.**