

2020 Holy Week Reflections: Spending the last week of Lent together with our friend

Tuesday 07th April 2020: Walking the streets of Jerusalem

Focus reading: John 12: 20-36

Lenten greetings Friends in Christ.

Last night we had a throw back to the last visit Jesus made before his Triumphal entry into Jerusalem, which we commemorated this past Sunday. Today, the lectionary leads us back to the events which occur after Jesus has entered Jerusalem. The invitation remains that each day we reflect on our friendship with Jesus as we share in his experiences during his last week on earth and before his crucifixion. We learnt last night that Jesus shares his journey so that we may gain greater understanding of his identity and that which God is doing through him in the world. Yesterday, we saw that the Bethany family seemed to have an understanding that their friendship with Jesus is not just with any person. Moreover, that Jesus is a friend worthy of their honour; hence their dinner and their elaborate expressions of love for him. In the story we also see another close friend who accompanied Jesus to this visit-Judas. Judas is one of the twelve chosen disciples who follow Jesus throughout his ministry. Therefore, he is a friend- one of the “main men” in Jesus’ friendship circle. But he constantly shows that he has not been fully present in this friendship, at least enough to grasp the uniqueness of Jesus. He rather ridicules Mary’s actions as wasteful while we are told that his interest was not on the poor benefiting but on how he would have made extra money from selling the oil. Interestingly, Jesus does not give up on him and his friendship even when he knows that he has not been honest. At this stage, Jesus already knows that he will be the one to betray him, but Jesus does not let go of him without a struggle. My prayer is that as we reflect about the last days of Jesus; that we be mindful that at this stage, Jesus embraces his disciples with all their faults and misgivings. This applies to us too. The Good News of Holy Week is that Jesus embraces us as we are when we respond to the invitation of friendship extended to us as his followers. The cross will complete the work of that, which is required to offer us a new opportunity to be better in our friendship going forward.

Reflections on John 12: 20-36

In this section of the reading, we also get to meet another two of Jesus’ inner circle of friends. We meet Phillip and we are told he is from Bethsaida and by location, the evangelist connects him with Andrew and Peter, who were also from the same town. Phillip is approached by the Greeks who were requesting to see Jesus. This might have been a request for a simple meeting when read and understood literally. Though that may be the case, another level of meaning may be brought to light if you link the request with the symbolic use of ‘sight’ in the book of John. The evangelist John links seeing to belief (see John 9: 35-41) and those who are in the light are those who have come to believe in the one true light which is Jesus. Those who seek to see Jesus, will be given insight into the identity of who he truly is, as one who has come to reveal God in the world. Therefore, the request by the Greeks, is one of wanting to share in the life of Jesus and gain a deeper understanding of him and signals their desire to grow their faith in him. In other words, they are looking for the friendship that you and I are encouraged to grow. The role of Andrew and Phillip in this narrative is important as they will facilitate the fulfilment of this request. It is through their faithfulness in relaying the message to Jesus that the friendship circle will be opened for others. His role is important in that it will expand the gift of salvation from beyond the confines of the Israelites and include the Greeks which were believed, at the time, to be outside of God’s story of salvation (see Eph. 2: 11-13). If we interpret the request by this Greeks in this manner, this will then explain the importance of Jesus’ response to Andrew and Phillip. Jesus’ response shares insight on the purpose and kind of death that Jesus will

face. It is in his death and resurrection (like a seed buried) that many will be given the gift of rebirth. The much fruit that Jesus refers to is those who will come to faith and receive new life through him and be part of the Kingdom of God, both Jew and Gentile. It is when he is lifted up from the earth, that he will draw ALL people to himself. This also picks up on Old Testament imagery of the serpent that Moses had to raise for the healing of the people (see Numbers 8: 8-9). Therefore, Jesus' response affirms that the request of the Greeks is in line with God's desire for all to have an intimate and reconciled relationship. Thus, pointing the disciples to an all-inclusive mission and vision of God for the world. Andrew and Phillip will later preach this Gospel to all people, both Jew and Gentile in the book of Acts. I believe it is when we desire to see Jesus, that God's love for all of humanity will be deeply revealed to us and through us. It is through us, that God's friendship circle with humanity will grow bigger.

Points to note for reflection:

- Jesus' offer of friendship is not made to a perfect people.
- The invitation of friendship with Jesus is not exclusive to a certain people or nation.
- It is through a desire for the friendship with Jesus that greater insight is shared on the identity of Jesus and greater understanding of the Kingdom of God.
- It is when we too are willing to bring others to Christ, that we also grow in wisdom, understanding and faith in the mysteries of the Cross.

Questions for personal reflection:

1. What does it mean for you to be invited into a friendship with Christ despite your shortcomings?
2. When last did you lead someone to Christ? How was the experience and how did it impact on your own faith in Christ as Lord and Saviour?
3. What new insight about the Kingdom of God have you gained in your journey of Lent this year?
4. How do you intend to continue expanding your own knowledge and understanding of Jesus and his ministry beyond Easter?
5. How do you intend to expand Jesus' friendship circle to those who may feel outside or far from God's reach?

Thought for today:

"Christ did not die to forgive sinners who go on treasuring anything above seeing and savoring God. And people who would be happy in heaven if Christ were not there, will not be there. The gospel is not a way to get people to heaven; it is a way to get people to God. It's a way of overcoming every obstacle to everlasting joy in God. If we don't want God above all things, we have not been converted by the gospel."

John Piper, God Is the Gospel: Meditations on God's Love as the Gift of Himself.