

Tuesday of Holy Week

Principal Service readings

Isaiah 49.1-7	Second song of the servant of the Lord
Psalms 71.1-14 [or 71.1-8]	Prayer of contentment in old age
1 Corinthians 1.18-31	True and false wisdom
John 12.20-36	Jesus foretells his death and subsequent glorification

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

Jesus foretells his death and glorification

²⁰Among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.' ²²Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³Jesus answered them, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.

²⁷'Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say – "Father, save me from this hour"? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. ²⁸Father, glorify your name.' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.' ²⁹The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to him.' ³⁰Jesus answered, 'This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. ³¹Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. ³²And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.' ³³He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. ³⁴The crowd answered him, 'We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains for ever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?' ³⁵Jesus said to them, 'The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the

darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. ³⁶While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.'

After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them.

John 12.20-36 NRSV¹

Comments and Questions

Jesus has created quite a stir; so much so, that even Greeks have come to see him (v.20). These are Greeks by birth, whose presence in Jerusalem shows them to be 'God-fearers', who admired and lived Judaism as best they could. They ask Philip (who has a Greek-sounding name) if they can 'see Jesus'. Their Gentile origins are highlighted by Philip's approaching another disciple with a Greek name, Andrew, who comes from the same town as Philip. Together they approach Jesus. This event triggers the announcement by Jesus of the arrival of 'the hour' (12.23). The image of the grain further describes the death of Jesus. The seed must 'fall into the earth' to bear fruit, but the death of Jesus has been described as a 'lifting up'. Jesus points to the Father and tells his listeners that service of him, looking beyond the absolutes of this world, being where he is, falling into the ground and 'letting go' of the absolutes imposed by this world, will bear fruit and lead to the servant's being honoured by the Father.

Jesus reflects on his own situation: 'Now is my soul troubled' (12.27). The hour of exaltation is also the hour of suffering. Jesus is certain that the Father will safely bring him through this challenge. As well as asking that the Father bring him through the hour Jesus also asks that the Father be glorified. Jesus' prayer is met by the Father's answer, as a voice from heaven interprets all that has happened in the story so far and all that has yet to take place.

The people who are present misunderstand what is going on and think it is thunder. Recognising Jesus for who he is requires accepting firstly that he is from God, and then making sense of what happens. Jesus explains that the voice from heaven is for their sake, not his. He has no need of reassurance but they still need something so that they can come to believe in Jesus.

A further revelation begins as Jesus says that the judgement of this

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world is beginning. The judgement will occur when he is lifted up (crucified) and people will be drawn to him (12.32). There is an echo here of Moses lifting up the bronze serpent in the desert (Numbers 21.9). Jesus' death will bring many sheep into one fold (10.15-16).

The Jews are not prepared to listen to Jesus. They point out inconsistencies. They think the Messiah will remain for ever (cf. LXX Psalm 88.37). No Jewish Messiah can possibly be 'lifted up', they say. Jesus insists on the uniqueness of the moment: they have the light with them for only a short time. They have an opportunity to become 'children of light'.

Quotations

1

Our tendency in the midst of suffering is to turn on God. To get angry and bitter and shake our fist at the sky and say, 'God, you don't know what it's like! You don't understand! You have no idea what I'm going through. You don't have a clue how much this hurts.'

The cross is God's way of taking away all of our accusations, excuses, and arguments.

The cross is God taking on flesh and blood and saying, 'Me too'.

Rob Bell, 1970–

2

It is to the Cross that the Christian is challenged to follow his Master: no path of redemption can make a detour around it.

Unless you become like this child / Hans Urs von Balthasar. 1991

3

We have never preached violence, except the violence of love, which left Christ nailed to a cross, the violence that we must each do to ourselves to overcome our selfishness and such cruel inequalities among us. The violence we preach is not the violence of the sword, the violence of hatred. It is the violence of love, of brotherhood, the violence that wills to beat weapons into sickles for work.

The violence of love / Oscar A. Romero. 1980

Related topics

For further study:

Cross, salvation

Closing Prayer

Eternal God,
in the cross of Jesus
we see the cost of our sin
and the depth of your love:
in humble hope and fear
may we place at his feet
all that we have and all that we are,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Common Worship · Additional Collects · Good Friday