

"Sir, we would like to see Jesus" (Jn.12:20). How many of us have ever asked that question, at least interiorly in prayer? If Jesus would only answer that prayer so many questions or doubts would be answered we assume. On the other hand, how many of us have been asked by someone to speak to them of Jesus, to "show" them Jesus? If that has ever happened to us, what have we done or said? "Here's Father Jim's phone number. Give him a call." Or, "Go buy a Bible and a copy of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and I'm sure you'll find Jesus there."

When the Apostles Philip and Andrew bring the Greeks request to Jesus, he does not hand them a resume of his vital statistics for them to give to their inquirers. Instead, Jesus tells a parable about a grain of wheat falling to the ground, dying, rising and producing an abundant harvest. Then he ends with an enigmatic saying about losing and saving one's life, hardly a direct answer to the Greeks' question, or ours. Or is it? In fact, Jesus is giving a most direct and radical answer to the question.

The setting for today's Gospel in St. John's account is Jerusalem, early in Holy Week after Jesus' entry and triumphant acclamation by the crowds. Jesus wants his apostles and all who wish to really know him to have no illusions about him, his mission, his message.

Henri Nouwen, the spiritual writer I quoted last Sunday, writes of what he names, the "Theology of the Descendant God." Nouwen reflects that if we want to "see" Jesus, we need to change our perspective, our way of speaking and acting, our comfort level, our self-made image of God and look not for an omnipotent, omniscient, gloriously triumphant divine being who mirrors the powerful of this world, but rather, a God who deliberately chooses to reveal himself in weakness, vulnerability, and brokenness; a God found helplessly lying as an infant in a manger, who grew up to be a homeless wandering preacher, a God who identifies himself and his mission as bread and wine, and chooses to remain among his followers in that same bread and wine broken and shared among a group of like weak, vulnerable and broken people; a God who calls those who claim to know

and follow him to imitate him in his self-emptying, poured out life of service especially to the “least” of people. It is for them and with them and in them that we “see” Jesus. And this is also how we “show” Jesus to others. “Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit” (Jn.12: 23,24).

St. Benedict in chapter 35 of his Rule deals with weekly kitchen and table service. Everyone from the Abbot to the most junior member of the community is to be assigned “kitchen duty”: washing the feet of the monks, preparing and serving the meals and cleaning up afterwards. This service is to last for one week, after which another group begins their rotation. Benedict’s message is clear: in such humble ordinary daily service the lesson of self-emptying divine love is learned. Every day, if we are alert to the call of the Holy Spirit in our lives, presents us multiple opportunities to be “grains of wheat” falling to the ground in self-emptying love. The 20th Century Doctor of the Church St. Therese of Liseaux once observed that picking up a pin dropped on the floor and returning it in love to the one who dropped it can be the cause of the salvation of a soul.

The late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago, in his book, *The Gift of Peace*, completed two weeks before his death from pancreatic cancer, also illuminates the way to this “self-emptying” way of Jesus. **“The more we cling to ourselves and others, the more we try to control our destiny—the more we lose the true sense of our lives. ...It is precisely in letting go, in entering into complete union with the Lord, in letting him take over, that we discover our true selves. It’s in the act of abandonment that we experience redemption that we find life, peace and joy in the midst of physical, emotional and spiritual suffering. ...This is the lesson we must first learn from Jesus before we can teach it to others. We must let the mystery, the tranquility, and the purposefulness of Jesus’ suffering become part of our own life before we can become effective instruments in the hands of the Lord for the sake of others.”**

Create a new heart in us, O God!