

With the arrival of spring this weekend, gardens and fields will be readied for planting. Driving around the country at this time of year, the freshly turned earth makes the countryside look like a giant newly turned grave in a cemetery. Into this ground seed will be dropped. Dry and encased in a hard outer shell, the seed carries within it hidden life potential. Only being buried in the earth, being immersed in a reality bigger and greater than itself, will the seed, in time, crack open, come to its full, life-bearing, life-giving potential, yield an abundant harvest. The seed must die in order to truly live.

Jesus uses this image, so familiar to us here in Iowa, to explain his person, mission and the meaning of his forthcoming passion. He also uses it to point out the way for anyone who wishes to be his disciple, to be "born again", as we reflected on last weekend. As Church we name this process the "Paschal Mystery." We enter into Jesus, enter into the Paschal Mystery, in the sacrament of baptism. Passing through the water, we die and rise in him. The remainder of our lives is the continuing process of allowing God to write even more deeply his "new covenant" the "law of life in Jesus" on our hearts, so that we might bear the fruit of the Kingdom of God not only already in this life, but finally at death, experience being harvested by God, entering fully into Christ having died a death like his in the sure and certain hope of sharing his resurrection to eternal life.

The Paschal Mystery; the "grain of wheat falling to the ground", "losing life in order to find life", abandoning self-interest and choosing serving others, this is the "hour" of Jesus' decision and ours as well. Like us, Jesus struggled with its demands: "I am troubled now." Who doesn't? If we only focus exclusively only on the "dying" part of the Paschal Mystery, we fail to take into account the "rising", the glorification that comes after. Doing this is like only focusing on the seed to be planted in the ground with little or no thought to what will transpire over the next weeks or months, of looking ahead to the harvest it will bear. The bursting open of the shell surrounding the seed releases the life-gift within. In Jesus' giving his life for our salvation, glorification bursts forth. The Father is glorified in the very giving over of the Son. Jesus, the Son, is glorified in giving himself over to the

cross. Without denying the cross, we must see beyond it to the Resurrection. We are glorified in giving ourselves over to following Jesus, to the cross, as he himself tells us: “Anyone who would be my disciple must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.” In this “handing over”, this “breaking out of our shell” of self-preoccupation, or self-interest, is glorification, the fullness of life is found.

This process of growth, of transformation, dying to self in the hope of rising to a new and greater life is never easy. It makes demands on us that seem impossible. For example, what young couple anticipating the joy of the birth of their first child is really prepared for the 2 a.m. feedings; going to work with only a couple of hours of sleep each night (if that at times!); a colicky baby, and then all the other “dyings” that will be demanded of them for the next eighteen to twenty (or more years!) along the way as they bring their child through its many life stages until the day the child-become-adult steps out on her or his own?

Jesus knew this challenge, these fears. The Gospel and second reading make clear that Jesus did not want to suffer. “I am troubled now...save me” Jesus prays in the Gospel and “He offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears “to his Father” the letter to the Hebrews tells us. Yet, when “push comes to shove”, Jesus says “thy will be done” to God’s plan for him, “enduring the cross heedless of its shame”, placing his trust in the Father and that that same Father would ultimately bring him to glory.

Jesus teaches us that the dyings of our lives: difficult, painful, uncertain as to the outcome as they are, themselves are a gift and grace because, though hidden from our eyes and often our understanding, they are the harbingers of new Life.

Our glorification is *in* the very dying because in dying we identify with Jesus who passed through death to risen Life. So will we. This is our faith!