**Readings for March 17, 2024 – Fifth Sunday of Lent**

Fastened in Service for the Glory of God

*What are my “grains of wheat” that must die to produce fruitful thoughts and actions? How can we glorify God’s name with our lives?*

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**Opening Prayer:** Heavenly Father, today, the words of Jesus remind us that we should live and act for God’s glory, not our own. Help us to continue to hear these words, and to draw closer and closer to you. Amen.

Reading I [**Jer 31:31-34**](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/jeremiah/31?31)

The days are coming, says the LORD,
when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.
It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers
the day I took them by the hand to lead them forth from the land of Egypt;
for they broke my covenant, and I had to show myself their master, says the LORD.
But this is the covenant that I will make
with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD.
I will place my law within them and write it upon their hearts;
I will be their God, and they shall be my people.
No longer will they have need to teach their friends and relatives
how to know the LORD. All, from least to greatest, shall know me, says the LORD,
for I will forgive their evildoing and remember their sin no more.

Responsorial Psalm [**51:3-4, 12-13, 14-15**](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/psalms/51?3)

**R. (12a)  Create a clean heart in me, O God.**Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness;
    in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense.
Thoroughly wash me from my guilt and of my sin cleanse me.
**R. Create a clean heart in me, O God.**A clean heart create for me, O God, and a steadfast spirit renew within me.
Cast me not out from your presence, and your Holy Spirit take not from me.
**R. Create a clean heart in me, O God.**Give me back the joy of your salvation, and a willing spirit sustain in me.
I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners shall return to you.
**R. Create a clean heart in me, O God.**

Reading II [**Heb 5:7-9**](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/hebrews/5?7)

In the days when Christ Jesus was in the flesh,
he offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears
to the one who was able to save him from death,
and he was heard because of his reverence.
Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered;
and when he was made perfect,
he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.

Gospel [**Jn 12:20-33**](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/john/12?20)

Some Greeks who had come to worship at the Passover Feast
came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee,
and asked him, “Sir, we would like to see Jesus.”
Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.
Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.
Amen, amen, I say to you, 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.
Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me,
and where I am, there also will my servant be. The Father will honor whoever serves me. “I am troubled now.  Yet what should I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’?
But it was for this purpose that I came to this hour.
Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven,
“I have glorified it and will glorify it again.”
The crowd there heard it and said it was thunder; but others said, “An angel has spoken to him.”
Jesus answered and said, “This voice did not come for my sake but for yours.
Now is the time of judgment on this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out.
And when I am lifted up from the earth,
I will draw everyone to myself.” He said this indicating the kind of death he would die.

Related Reflections

The word *change* normally refers to new beginnings. But transformation, the mystery we’re examining, more often happens not when something new begins, but when something old falls apart. The pain of something old falling apart—chaos—invites the soul to listen at a deeper level. It invites, and sometimes forces, the soul to go to a new place because the old place is falling apart.

Most of us would never go to new places in any other way. The mystics use many words to describe this chaos: fire, dark night, death, emptiness, abandonment, trial, the Evil One. Whatever it is, it does not feel good and it does not feel like God. We will do anything to keep the old thing from falling apart.

This is when we need patience and guidance, and the freedom to let go instead of tightening our controls and certitudes. Perhaps Jesus is describing just this phenomenon when he says, “It is a narrow gate and a hard road that leads to life, and only a few find it” (Matthew 7:13–14). Not accidentally, he mentions this narrow road right after teaching the Golden Rule. He knows how much letting go it takes to “treat others as you would like them to treat you” (7:12).

So, a change can force a transformation. Spiritual transformation always includes a usually disconcerting reorientation. It can either help people to find a new meaning or it can force people to close down and slowly turn bitter. The difference is determined precisely by the quality of our inner life, our spirituality.

—from [*The Wisdom Pattern: Order, Disorder, Reorder*](https://email.franciscanmedia.org/e2t/tc/VWjF8g8XsQsqW6T48ld2fbThLVZjc4S4m4c92N7KkK2D5nx8NV3Zsc37CgThNW2L6Rz31q-dkZW6pM09x2PLX81W5sYdvb7B3GD0N8V0QB0j__P0W4L7Pl3530P6LN2dDpnRcmXz_W4D0ZTS8trjWwN9m4HmYPYmrXW2xP36r22t-wfW7jy1Wf3hBw5JW7k14Tb3pR_1zW99LXVP2PgzB4W4HqYnh23bVvyW5QG4gt8cy4p4W15522w7mVBlgW3BYf1j4NYrdtW2q8K6m9jnmf-W3Pf4y-3nJC7SN7NgR5srq3RpW3GW9LS1jd57vW990bgN6WPcwPW4VJRwT6Nsy41W7ZrWDd4wT8v7W1822tP7m9B03W4nlTy538YvK6W7TMH5d6lzWSSW96CNgq5MmcfXVmF68j8c5nxHW1CxBvn2Y6lmFW4cD5TN8WY9t3W4YKJ-c4LhBqbW16sYBr1cPPZrW2htX1j4Xp7XhN5nC7Z9QtZFRW1xjsjH6VVpM0W6M4DPt1CkZ5GW69GkWZ5ddS70W6_lMrZ5GmzpqV14HM33gNFQLW2GzQJn6gmfhcV1pgTx1HVDGHW60tHTx5NDklnW3HWjf19ds2TdW2mYJm-6JlD1zM6YQZk-Z455W72dNks2Bv1yN3n_J1) by Richard Rohr, OFM (published on Franciscanmedia.org

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The challenge of this gospel is to serve others, lose one's life, and die. All this, to gain new life. Disciples do this in imitation of Jesus. Discipleship therefore, means a lifelong growing into dying and rising. Learning to serve, we understand what losing our life means. Losing our life, we understand what dying means. Dying, we receive the fruit: fullness of life and a share in Christ's glorification.

***Connecting the Gospel*** ***to the Second Reading***: What Jeremiah anticipates (“the days are coming”) Jesus fulfills (“Now is the time”). What is anticipated and fulfilled? A new covenant with all people, a new people now drawn to Jesus himself.

***Connecting the Gospel to experience***:In our society people often strive to gain glory (self-aggrandizement) for themselves, even if it means hurting others. Followers of Jesus strive to gain glory too. But their glory is a free gift of God, granted to those who serve others by dying to self.

 *From The Order of St. Benedict, Inc., Collegeville, Minnesota, published on https://liturgy.slu.edu/*

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In the Gospel, some Greeks ask to see Jesus. Jesus responds by saying that anyone who loves his life will lose it; to gain your life you have to be like a grain of wheat which brings forth much fruit, but only by falling into the earth and dying. The Greeks must have been baffled. What has this speech of Jesus’ got to do with their request to see him?

But consider those Greeks. They accord Jesus rock star status. They don’t even ask to *talk*to the great man. They want only to *see*him. And they don’t dare come to Jesus directly. They just approach one of his friends, Philip.

Jesus’ response helps those Greeks to see him—the true Lord, not the rock star the Greeks were looking for. The true Lord did not come to get status and power. He came to lose his life, to fall and die, like a grain of wheat. The point is made emphatically at the end of Jesus’ response to the Greeks.

He ends with a prayer: “Father,” he prays, “glorify your name.”  The true Lord came to seek God’s glory, not his own.

The final part of the lesson for the Greeks, and for us, comes in God’s response to Jesus’ prayer.  God honors Jesus by answering his prayer out loud: “I have glorified My name, and I will glorify it again!” Jesus tells the awed bystanders, “This voice didn’t come for my sake, but for yours.” God’s voice came to finish the lesson: God honors those who seek to honor him.

True glory lies not in rock star status, then, but, on the contrary, in being willing to fall and die like a grain of wheat.  It lies in being willing to let go, to lose one’s life in this world in love for the glory of God’s name. And so the Greeks do get what they asked for. In the response of Jesus to them, they, and we, see the true Lord, and with the true Lord the pattern for going for glory in our lives, too.  Glory, glory, hallelujah!

Eleonore Stump, professor of philosophy at St. Louis University

**Seeing Jesus:**

If we should like to see Jesus, we need to look for the fallen grains of wheat around us, the sick and impoverished, the abused and oppressed. If we should like to see Jesus, we need to look for those who are losing their lives, the victims of poverty, abuse, discrimination, and war.

What we need is a new covenant, a covenant of love and forgiveness. We need to have written in our hearts that we are God’s people, that we aspire to be like Christ in transforming the darkness of the world’s pain into the life and joy of Easter.

“Jesus who came as ‘Emmanuel’ (God with us, Mt 1:23) and who promises to be with his people until the end of the age (Mt 28:20) is hidden in those most in need; to reject them is to reject God made manifest in history.” - U.S. Bishops, Economic Justice for All (1986) 44

-Gerald Darring [www.liturgy.slu.edu](http://www.liturgy.slu.edu)

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Discussion Questions

In our first reading, God says “I will forgive their evildoing and remember their sin no more.” How good am I at forgiving others? How about forgetting?

What does it look like when I contemplate the idea of the grain of wheat being crushed to create a new, life-giving substance (bread)? What might have to be “crushed” within myself in order to make way for more life-giving thoughts and behaviors?

Have you ever experienced a time when something good came out of something that seemed bad? What was this like? How do you think it came about?

How is the way of self-denial opposite to the way of egoism? Which produces more fruit, or is more lifegiving to others? In what ways?

Does this concept of self-denial remind you of the Beatitude values that Jesus encouraged us to work on? In what ways?

**Closing Prayer**

Jesus, our bread, and life for the world, help me to be bread for others. Show me the areas of my life that could be transformed, with your Grace, and put to use in more life-sustaining ways. Amen.

*“Oh Lord, I pray, fasten my soul to you.”*

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Something to pray with this week

“Whoever serves me must follow me.” What does following Jesus look like?

What kinds of things does Jesus show us about following him when he uses words like, “servant,” and talks about the need to die to our old selves (like the grains of wheat) in order to be more fruitful and life-giving to others?

**Prayer:**

Loving God, I crave so many things. Too often I look in all the wrong places and at all the wrong things to have my cravings filled. Help me recognize that, at my deepest level, I hunger for you. I desire your truth, beauty, and goodness.

Thank you for the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life. Thank you, Jesus, for the gift of yourself in the Eucharist. May you always be the food that satisfies my hungry heart. Strengthened by your presence within me, may I offer real presence to those I encounter – a presence of compassion and mercy. Amen.