

Fifth Sunday of Lent

By: Fr. James Gilhooley

Egypt's King Tutankhamen left us his golden furniture and jewels, but he is stone cold dead in the market. Jesus the Nazarene left us no golden toys, but He lives. The answer to this riddle is locked in today's Gospel.

None of the others Gospels' contains this story of the Greek travelers. But that is not too surprising. John's Gospel was written to present the Lord to the Greeks and Gentiles in general.

Nor is it surprising to find Greeks in Jerusalem. Records show Greeks were inveterate wanderers. They had an insatiable desire to see fresh places and taste new ideas. They also had the dollars. They were yesterday's jet set.

The Greeks in question may have seen some of the miracles worked by the Christ in Jerusalem. They may have witnessed Him driving the money-changers out of the Temple. Surely they had heard of His triumphal entrance into Jerusalem. Is it any wonder then that they wanted to pull up chairs with our Christ? They were as inquisitive about Him as we are.

They chose the apostle Philip as their messenger. They liked the sound of his Greek name. Their famous line "Sir, we should like to see Jesus!" contains more than meets the eye. In the argot of the time, it translates into "We want to be with him." But Philip broke into a sweat at their request. Did the Master want to chat with these foreigners? After all, they had no appointment.

Timidly Philip threw the ball to Andrew. He set up the rendezvous immediately. He had learned a long time before that the Teacher had time for everybody. (A good point to keep in mind as one prays, is it not?)

Jesus shares a Greek salads and white house wine with His Gentile guests. There has been a suspicion for centuries that Jesus Himself spoke Greek along with His native Aramaic. He proves every bit as sophisticated as they. He blows their sharp minds with His surreal message. Only death bring life. To illustrate His point He uses the symbolism of grain.

Listen to Fulton Sheen describe the scene so beautifully. "At His birth, the Wise Men of the East came to His cradle; now the Greeks who were the Wise Men of the West came to the Cross. Both the Magi of the East and the Magi of the West were to see a humiliation: in the first instance, God in the form of a Babe of Bethlehem, and, in the latter, God in the form of a criminal on the Cross. As a sign leading to an understanding of His divinity, the Magi were given the star; the Greeks a grain of wheat."

Our Lord was teaching the Greeks and us that only by spending one's life do we retain it. We will exist long into the next century if we take things easily, avoid strain and stress, and protect our lives as would a hypochondriac. We will exist longer, but unhappily we will not live. We will simply be proving once again the point made by a clever priest that not all the dead are buried. Those who are ready to die, we are told, are ready to live.

George Bernard Shaw's Joan of Arc squares off the question splendidly. She knew her enemies were closing in. so she shouts to God, "I shall last only a year. Use me as you can." the Maid of Orleans was simply echoing the cry of Christ to His Father.

Incidentally, the Teacher underlines His teaching that from death springs life more than once. You will find Him doing it two times in Matthew, twice in Luke, and once in Mark. Obviously He had no intention of putting this teaching in the back of the file cabinet or, as we say nowadays, burying it deep in the computer.

The Master picked up the check at the bistro. As He was taking leave of the Greeks, He threw them another curve. "And when I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all men to myself." It was on the magnet of the cross that Jesus lifted all His hopes. And history proved Him right. The empires founded on force have vanished leaving only bad memories - King Tut, Genghis Khan, Alexander, Napoleon, Hitler, and, the latest edition to the rogues' gallery, Stalin. But Jesus lives. Shall we?

READINGS OF THE WEEK

Jeremiah 31: 31-34

Hebrews 5: 7-9

John 12: 20-33

March 25, 2012

靈 修 生 活

一粒麥子死了才能結出許多子粒

呂漁亭神父

「我實在告訴你們，一粒麥子如果不落在地裡死了，仍只是一粒；如果死了，才結出許多子粒來。愛惜自己性命的，必要喪失性命；在現世憎恨自己性命的，必要保存性命入於永生。誰若事奉我，就當跟隨我；如此我在那裡，我的僕人也要在那裡。」(若十二 20-36)

接下去我們要講幾個比喻，且這些比喻都與耶穌即將面臨的苦難有關。

原來那年過逾越節時，曾有某些希臘人，要求面見耶穌，並請裴理伯與安德肋代轉這個意願。希臘人為何也想面見耶穌？理由很簡單：他們之中有些人可能已皈依猶太教，因此按照猶太法律，他們也常到耶路撒冷來朝聖過節。或者有關耶穌所言所行已聽了不少，尤其那天見耶穌憤怒地從聖殿內，驅逐了那些換錢及賣牲口的販子，深深地覺得這個人絕非泛泛之輩，因此希望見祂一面看個明白。

耶穌那天一見這些希臘人，就劈頭說了一句不易理解的話：「人子要受光榮的時辰近了！」我們知道耶穌死後第三天將復活，將受天父的光榮；這點，我們都能了解；但問題是祂為何稱自己為「人子」？我們只知道福音中的這個名字等於天主之子，但為什麼耶穌這樣稱呼自己，我們知其然而不知其所以然，我自己就一直不太清楚。原來人子這個名稱始自達尼爾先知書，達尼爾在第七章內，曾如此寫道：「我仍在夜間的神視中觀望，看見一位相似『人子』者，乘著天上的雲彩而來，走向萬古常存者，隨即被引到祂面前。祂便賜給似人子者統治權、尊榮和國度，各民族、各邦國及各異語人民都要侍奉祂；祂的王權是永遠的王權，永存不替，祂的國度永不滅亡。」(達七 13-14) 從那時開始，猶太民族有時也稱呼那位即將來臨的救世主為人子，耶穌也隨著這個傳統稱自己為人子了。

說完了這句話後，耶穌接著就講了麥粒的比喻。這個比喻對當時的聽眾十分熟悉，因為人人都知道一粒麥子若不埋在地裡死了，永遠只是一粒；但若埋入地裡死了，就能結出許多麥粒來。但接下去的那兩句話就令人費解了：「愛惜自己性命的，必要喪失性命；在現世憎恨自己性命的，必要保存性命於永生！」

這裡我們已進入了一個「生死矛盾」的難題：死了才有生，想要生必須先死！誰想獲得性命，必須先喪失性命，那不想喪失性命的，則永遠得不到性命！請問這不是天大的矛盾是什麼？但耶穌在這裡所要強調的，正是這個生死矛盾律。而這個定律正是一個今生與永生的矛盾律：誰想獲得永生，必須先犧牲今生今世，那些今生享盡人間福樂的，可能死後將得不到永生。關於這點，耶穌在富翁與拉匝祿的比喻中已說得很清楚：那位可憐的乞丐拉匝祿滿身瘡痍，飢腸轆轆，天天躺在富翁的大門口，希望能吃點富人桌上掉下來的碎屑充飢。可惜只有那隻狗同情他，跑來用舌頭舔他的瘡疤。那個富翁卻身穿紫紅袍及細麻衣，天天大吃大喝縱情作樂。不久乞丐死了，天使把他送到亞巴郎懷中享福；後來富翁也死了，他卻進入了痛苦的陰間。當他抬頭望見亞巴郎懷中的拉匝祿時，就哀求亞巴郎叫他用手指蘸點涼水給他解渴，但亞巴郎卻對他說：「孩子，你該記得你活著的時候，已享盡了你的福，而拉匝祿同樣也受盡了苦。現在他在這裡受安慰，而你應受苦了。」(路十六 19-25)

這真是一個解開今生與永生之謎的好故事：今生受苦受難，來生則享永福；今生享盡人間福祿，來生則可能欲入無門！天下沒有白吃的午餐，吃得苦中苦方為人上人，先苦後甜，這一切都是先人傳下來的人生原則，想獲得永福又如何不然？上週與學生談EQ問題，高EQ的第一個特徵，正是為了來日更大的福利，寧可犧牲眼前的蠅頭小利，一位心理學家曾對一群幼兒園的兒童作測驗，他帶了一包糖果進教室，故意對那些三歲的幼兒說：「你們一共有十五人，但我只帶了十塊糖果！這樣吧，我先把糖果放在桌上，出去再買一袋回來；若有人急著想吃，就可立刻拿去吃，但若你們有耐心肯等等，等我買了糖果回來，你們可以多吃一顆。」果然其中有些孩子不能等待，待老師一轉身立刻上前搶糖吃；只有少數願意等待，準備犧牲眼前的那塊糖，以便過一會能多吃一塊。那些學者繼續觀察這些孩子，一直到他們高中畢業，結果十年後他發現，凡能等待的兒童，長大後個性較強，較能自我控制，做事也較有恆心，而這一切正是高EQ的特徵，也是事業有成的密訣，也正是到達永生的必經之路。

希望爭取永恆的天國之福，我們也必須常備犧牲今生今世的種種感官之樂，事事控制自我死於自己，像一粒麥子埋在地裡死了，這樣才能開花結果，死後到天國去享永福。真的，一顆麥子若不死，不能結出更多的麥粒來，誰若愛惜今生，不肯為來生多作犧牲，他可能也將得不到永恆的幸福！

摘自「教友生活周刊」

本 週 讀 經

二零一二年三月廿五日

耶 31:31-24；希 5:7-9；若 12:20-33