

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent. John 12:20-33

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## **LIFTED UP FROM THE EARTH, I WILL CALL EVERYONE TO MYSELF**

### **Some Greeks asked if they could see Jesus**

During the days of the Jewish Passover festival, Jerusalem was always busy. Then Greeks also went to the temple. 'Greeks' were pagan seekers of God who were interested in Judaism. The gospel started with some of those Greek God-seekers. They not only wanted to visit the temple in Jerusalem, but also wanted to meet Jesus. Through Philip and Andrew, the only apostles with Greek names, they presented their request to Jesus. But Jesus does not answer and gives an explanation about *his hour*, about *glorification* and about *being lifted up*, difficult for us to understand.

### **The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified**

*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified*: what is meant by this? It means that Jesus has his death in mind. His time has come. It also means that he will be glorified. His death is thus referred to as his glorification.

This is also evident from the way in which John depicts in today's Gospel reading Jesus' agony in Gethsemane. In Luke's Gospel, an angel appears from heaven to give Jesus strength (22:43). But in John, instead of an angel, we hear God's voice from heaven: *I have glorified and will glorify again*. Again the word 'glorify'. As we have already seen, Jesus' death is also his glorification.

John provides an explanation in the form of an extremely short parable: *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*. Another explanation follows: a saying that also occurs in Mark's Gospel (8:34-35): *Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life*.

### **Lifted up**

John uses another unusual word in his Gospel: *when I am lifted up*. The term 'lifted up' has two meanings. First: lifted up on the cross, where Jesus will die. The second meaning is: lifted up by God to heaven. Jesus lifted up by men on the cross is the same as Jesus lifted up to heaven by God. Because Jesus remained faithful to his God and his calling until death, God remains faithful to

him, even in death. His exaltation on the cross is at the same time his exaltation by his heavenly Father. So, Good Friday coincides for John with Easter.

The Gospel reading began with the Greeks asking about Jesus. Jesus does not give a direct answer, but an indirect one. The explanation which follows the request of the Greeks ends with the assurance: *when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all to myself*. 'All': that includes the Greeks, also the pagans. And we can add: that's us too.

After his violent death, Jesus' voice was not silenced, because after his resurrection his followers passed on his message, also to the pagans. When John wrote his gospel two generations after Jesus' death, not only Jews but also Gentiles had joined the movement started by Jesus. Although we do not hear in today's Gospel whether the Greeks had actually reached Jesus, around the year 90/100 the risen Christ certainly had many Greek followers. The Gospel reading began with some Greeks who wanted to meet Jesus and ends with Jesus' words: *When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself*, including the Greeks. So the end of today's Gospel ties in with the beginning.

The National Holocaust Museum opened a week ago. This museum reminds us of that unprecedented crime of the planned destruction of the Jewish people. Many crimes have followed in the context of many wars. It makes you despondent. The sight of Jesus *lifted up from the earth* can sustain us. He was lifted up by men on the cross because of his consistent proclamation of God's new world of righteousness and peace. But at the same time he has been confirmed, exalted and glorified by God. By continuing to choose Jesus *lifted up*, we can endure and spread peace.