

“Sir, we would like to see Jesus.” Thus the gospel of today subtly suggests what Lent has been all about. With two weeks of Lent remaining, things are getting serious. We are reading chapter twelve of John’s gospel. It is the second half of the gospel, called The Book of Glory. The first eleven chapters of John ended with the raising of Lazarus from the dead. This was the seventh sign of the Book of Signs. That was the first half of the story of Jesus, and also the first half of what it means to follow Jesus. From now on we are challenged to understand more deeply what the love of God for us is all about - and what that love asks of us. Stress, fulfillment, letting our ego-centered life die like grain of wheat, new life, final glory. Get ready for Good Friday but also for Easter Sunday.

The Church has taught the Book of Signs well and impressed on us who Jesus is. As children we have learned the rules and memorized the doctrines. Formerly Christians shared the close community and support of an inner-city parish, rules and doctrines gave us support, meaning, security and confidence in living a good life and preparing for the life to come. Some of you are still strengthened by this foundation. It is a good foundation for the following of Christ. But it is incomplete. There is also the Book of Glory. “Whoever loves his life loses it.... Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there also will my servant be.”

Some Christians have found meaning in their faith as a way to achieve blessings in a successful, healthy, even comfortable life. Have you heard the story of Mother Teresa? A reporter asked her what was the secret to her success. She calmly answered that she did not seek success but love and compassion. We are here on earth to learn to love and to put our hearts and bodies in loving service of others, no matter what our age or condition of life might be.

The final lines of today’s gospel represent John’s equivalent of the agony in the garden. Jesus says, “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.”

When we have mastered the rules and the doctrines, it is time to say, “Sir, we would like to see Jesus.” It is time to really get to know him, to speak with him, to share with him. It is time to get to know Jesus by knowing the scriptures well. Time to pray and deepen our awareness of our own inner life and shortcomings

as well as the real needs of those around us. It is more about relationship than it is rules and doctrines.

When blessed Patrick escaped from slavery in Ireland, he returned to his native Britain, a comfortable life among family and friends. But his heart ached for the poor Irish among whom he had lived for six years. He voluntarily returned to love them and help them. He wanted to see Christ and knew this would be among the poor people of Ireland.

His well known prayer-song, "The Deer's Cry," starts by connecting to the land and binding the singer to the powers of creation. The song then invokes protection from evil agents ("every cruel and merciless power") that disorder the world. Finally, the hymn culminates in Christ whom Patrick saw in the present world, at the present time.

Christ with me, Christ before me,
Christ behind me, Christ within me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ at my right, Christ at my left

"Sir, we would like to see Jesus." I think I will string along.
How about you?

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