

- *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.*
- A Paradox. What is a paradox?
- One definition is: *“A seemingly absurd or self-contradictory statement or proposition that when investigated or explained may prove to be well founded or true.”*
- And when one explores our Christian faith, he finds that it is full of stated paradoxes.
- St. Paul tells us that Jesus said to him: *“...my power is made perfect in weakness,”* ...and Paul then affirms: *“...when I am weak, then I am strong.”* (2Co 12:10 RSV)
- Jesus tells us: *“He who finds his life shall lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it.”* (Mt 10:39)
- *“...whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.”*
- *“Love your enemies; do good to those who hurt you.”*
- *“...go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven...”* (Mar 10:21 RSV)
- *“The first shall be last, and the last shall be first.”*
- In fact, it is paradox which defines our faith: the all-powerful God come to earth as a helpless man-child...a virgin with child...an all-powerful God dying upon the cross...the eternal God dead in the tomb. A dead one rising to eternal life. One who is wholly God, and yet wholly man. One God in three persons...each person is wholly, and not simply partly, God.
- As St. Augustine wrote: *“Life goes down to be killed; Bread goes down to suffer hunger; the Way goes down to be exhausted on his journey; the Spring goes down to suffer thirst...”* (Catechism, 556)

- And today Jesus tells us: *“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.”*

 - And yet how like our Christian lives that is.
 - We grow in the Church...watered by God’s Word and the sacraments, warmed by God’s grace...until spiritual maturity.
 - Christians may be ground into flour to become bread for others through service—feeding God’s people with their prayer and their work.
 - Some are parents—planted to produce other seeds—other children of God—through which nourishment comes into the little immature seeds to help them grow to maturity.
 - Or...we can fall to the ground fruitlessly...barren...to be eaten by scavengers.
 - We, in the Christian paradox, must die to ourselves...die to selfishness, egoism, pride...in order to truly live.
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- Have you ever gone through stuff in a cabinet and found some old packets of seeds? After many years still the same...not doing much more than taking up space.
 - And yet, still...there remains amazing potential in those seeds...a potential which has lain dormant for years.
 - And if you plant them, many of them would still come to their true life and purpose and bear fruit for the world.
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- Now the seeds might object: “We like it down here in the dark. We’re safe...we’re comfortable...we’re hidden. We have our dark, tiny, self-absorbed existence...and we’re happy with that! In the

ground it'll be cold and damp at times, hot and dry at other times. Here in this dark drawer nobody bothers us.”

- But...what do you think? “Well, these didn’t serve their purpose. I’ll just throw them out—they’re just taking up space.”

- ❖ If only those seeds had realized their potential.
- ❖ If the apple seed could have only seen the apple tree that it was meant to become...or the rose seed had seen the beauty it could have brought forth.
- ❖ But...they would have had to die to themselves.
- And now another of Jesus’ paradoxes comes back to us:
“Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life.”
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- We tend to be like those unused seeds—we like our comfortable, our unmolested existences. We want to live without being bothered too much by others.
- We do what we want...the vast bulk of our money and time and talent for ourselves alone. And thus we remain a seed unplanted—bearing little fruit for others...bearing little fruit for God.
- But we are worse, because we have eyes and ears and reason.
- We can see the apple tree...the rose...that we might be, and yet we turn away back into the dark corner of the drawer.
- We see the examples of Mother Teresa...of Pope St. John Paul...of Saints Therese and Maximillian Kolbe and of all the saints who have gone before us into the soil to bear fruit.
- They, too, began as simple seeds...and yet they planted themselves, and dared to die to the world.

- And now?...they live eternally in the hearts of people throughout the world...and especially in the tender, loving presence of God.
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- We may not be able to have an effect on the whole world as did those saints...but we don't have to.
- Remember the woman Jesus saw give her last pennies to God?
"Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; ...she out of her poverty put in all the living that she had."
(Luk 21:3-4 RSV)
- She did not have much to give...but what she had, she gave freely out of love for God.

- St. Paul tells us: *"Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for beauty and another for menial use?"* (Rom 9:21 RSV)
- In a house, you find a lot more plates for daily use than you do fine china.
- Most of us God has made for daily use...to help that neighbor in need...to visit that lonely elderly person...to comfort that friend in despair when we'd rather not be bothered.
- THAT is the fruit we are most often called to bear...
- ...to love God with all our being...and to love our neighbor. To help those in material and spiritual need who come into our sphere...strengthened by the grace of the Eucharist of weekly Mass.
- To die to ourselves...and to live for God and neighbor.
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- In the river of Christian life, there IS no standing still. If we stop swimming...if we stop striving...we are swept away in the currents of the world.
- Jesus tells us in Matthew 25 that we cannot be content simply not to sin and look to our own good...but rather we must look to the

good of those in need, which is ultimately the work also of His Church. If not, He warns that we will hear: “*Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels...*” (Mat 25:41)

- So let us live the Christian paradox...this “*seemingly absurd or self-contradictory proposition*” that is true—even most true—nonetheless...dying to self, becoming the servant of all...and thus investing the gifts—the talents—that God has given...that we may rather hear those words at our judgment that we so long to hear: “*Well done, good and faithful servant...come, enter into your master’s joy.*” (Mat 25:21)

Reading 1

[Jer 31:31-34](#)

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

[Ps 51:3-4, 12-13, 14-15](#)

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](#)

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](#)

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.