

- A verse from today's Gospel that always stands out is: *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.*
  - This seeming paradox...as is so much of what Jesus said...and, even more so, what Jesus did.
  - Our Christian faith is full of stated paradoxes; this is why St. Paul says that Jesus' crucifixion is "*...a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles...*" (1 Corinthians 1:23).
  - For the Jews, a "weak" God submitting Himself to not only becoming human, but submitting Himself to torture and death, was inconceivable.
  - For the Gentiles—then, and for those who cannot believe even today—to believe in a "god" who is also Man...who let Himself be killed like a meek lamb...is simply folly. What good is He?!
  - And the resurrection? Forget about it! No way!
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- Yes...paradox...just as St. Paul tells us that Jesus said to him: "*...my power is made perfect in weakness*"...and Paul affirms in faith: "*...when I am weak, then I am strong.*" (2 Corinthians 12:10)
  - And even more...as Jesus tells us: "*He who finds his life shall lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it.*" (Matthew 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...*" (Mark 10:21)
  - "*The first shall be last, and the last shall be first.*"

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- In fact, paradox actually is a defining characteristic of our faith: the all-powerful God come to earth as a helpless man-child...a virgin with child...that same all-powerful God dying upon the cross...the eternal God, dead in the tomb. The dead one rising to eternal life. One who is wholly God, and yet wholly man. One God in three persons...each person wholly, and not only 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, again, Jesus’ words today: *“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.”*

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- 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.
  - And then, like St. Ignatius, martyr...Christians may be ground into flour to become bread for others...not necessarily through martyrdom, but through service—feeding God’s people with their prayer and their work.
  - We, in the Christian paradox, must give of ourselves...die to ourselves...die to selfishness, egoism, pride...in order to truly live.
  - Is it no wonder the unbelieving world regards this is folly...and yet, it is truth.

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- Jesus uses analogies with which His audience would be familiar—the grain of wheat dying—being planted—producing much fruit.

- WE might look at the mountains...the canyons...and see the beauty of the forest, and remember that some pines require extreme heat to bring forth new life; their cones only open in fire, and thus their seed-nuts are planted only in death.
  - But, with the fire and trial are planted thousands, if not millions, of seeds... which had theretofore lain dormant.
  - ...an apt analogy of God's grace...which bring to germinate charity, empathy and love through the fires of faith.
  - Or look at an aspen grove. The trees seemingly unconnected... individual. But, underneath and unseen, they are united in their roots—often one giving rise to hundreds if not thousands of others to become one vast organism...all drawing upon the one source from which they came—an apt analogy of Christ and His Church.
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- This weekend we celebrated St. Patrick's Day—who was not born Irish, but was actually Welsh or Scottish—taken in a slave raid as a boy by Irish pagans.
- But, even after escaping and returning home, he returned to Ireland to evangelize and, of course, his work was instrumental in the conversion of Ireland to Christianity.
- In his “Confession” he writes: *“I give unceasing thanks to my God, who kept me faithful in the day of my testing. Today I can offer him sacrifice with confidence, giving myself as a living victim to Christ, my Lord, who kept me safe through all my trials...I came to the Irish peoples to preach the Gospel and endure the taunts of unbelievers, putting up with reproaches about my earthly pilgrimage, suffering many persecutions...for the benefit of others...I want to spend myself in that country, even in death, if the Lord should grant me this favor...for he gave me the great grace*

*that through me many peoples should be reborn in God...*”

(Breviary for Memorial of St. Patrick, March 17)

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- We may not have such wide or immediate influence as St. Patrick...but some seeds grow quickly...some slowly.
- So plant the seed of self in faith in charity as best you can in each person you meet. You may be an aspen whose roots eventually reach far and wide...like the man whose kindness influenced a young Karol Wojtyla to look into becoming a priest...and pope, and saint.
- For... *“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.”*

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.