

Living the Word: Jeremiah 31.31-34

Throughout the Scriptures we hear about various 'covenants'. Today, we use the word 'covenant' to mean 'contract', but this isn't quite the same as what is meant in the Scriptures. The Catholic scholar Scott Hahn says there are two main differences between the two. Firstly, a contract involves a promise, whereas a covenant involves an oath. In other words, a contract involves giving your own word as a promise, whereas a covenant invokes the name of something higher, in this case God. The second difference is that contracts are about things, whereas covenants are about people. In our reading today, the Lord explains how he and Israel had made a covenant, but that the people of Israel had broken the covenant that God had established with them. In order to put this aright, God decides there needs to be a new covenant, and to ensure that it will be fulfilled, he himself will fulfill it. This is why it is so important Jesus Christ was fully human, a member of the Jewish race, because he was able to fulfil the terms of the covenant which the Jewish people failed to fulfil. And after doing this, he would establish a new covenant, sealed by his Blood (Matthew 26.28), which we then partake in when we receive the Sacrament of the Eucharist. This 'draws the faithful and sets them aflame with Christ's insistent love' (Sacrosanctum Concilium).

Our Faith: Passiontide

Traditionally, the final two weeks of Lent are used as an immediate preparation for the sorrowful events of the Easter drama. It is a period of time to focus more and more on the Passion and death of Jesus and so accompany him on his way to Calvary. The Fifth Sunday of Lent is often called Passion Sunday, and many churches veil crosses, statues and other images in purple from today until the Easter Vigil. This is a reminder of the heightened penitential nature of the last two weeks before Easter Day. Passiontide invites us to reflect on the sins that separate us from God and from each other, to repent of those sins, and to experience the joy and freedom of forgiveness from the Lord. Jesus died on the cross to pay the price of your sins and mine; he died to set us free and repair our relationship with our loving Father. This is the time for reconciliation. Knowing we are forgiven leads to real thanksgiving; there is real joy in claiming our forgiveness and new life in Christ. Our Easter joy will be the greater if we use these two weeks to prepare our hearts and souls to receive the graces God offers us in the Paschal mystery.

17th March 2024
Fifth Sunday of Lent



As Jesus' death grows ever closer, his words become more intense, more compressed. He speaks openly now of 'The Hour' – the moment his whole life is about, because it is the moment when his battle with sin and evil will be complete and irreversible. He also reminds us, his friends and followers, that the path he treads is the one we must tread as well – a road where we discover that to live like Jesus is to live completely for others, and that we too will pass through our own 'Hour' – the hour of our death. But if we walk this journey we realize that Jesus walks it with us – indeed, it is the journey to the heart and will of Almighty God – the eternal life which Jesus promises, the life prepared for us by Almighty God since before time itself.

Today's Gospel: St John 12: 20-33

From the Fathers

If we follow Christ closely we shall be allowed, even on this earth, to stand as it were on the threshold of the heavenly Jerusalem, and enjoy the contemplation of that everlasting feast, like the blessed apostles, who in following the Saviour, showed, and still show, the way to obtain the same gift from God. They said: "See, we have left all things and followed you." We too follow the Lord, and we keep his feast by deeds rather than by words.

From an Easter letter by Saint Athanasius, bishop