

Fifth Sunday of Lent - B

This week I came across an interesting tale that seems to have something to say about the central theme of today's Gospel:

There once was a rich and generous man who freely gives gold to various groups of people. On one day it would be widows; another day it would be invalids; another day it would be poor students, etc.

The only requirement was that the recipients should wait in silence. Not all could meet that requirement.

When it was the day for lawyers to receive gold, one pleaded his case with great gusto before the rich and generous man. The rich and generous man simply passed by.

The next day the designated group was the lame. So the lawyer wrapped splints around his legs and posed as a cripple. The rich and generous man recognized him immediately and passed by.

The following day the group was widows. The lawyer disguised himself as a widow. However, he did not fool the rich and generous man who passed by him without bestowing any gold.

So the lawyer found an undertaker and concocted a plan. The undertaker would wrap him in a shroud and put him in the path of the rich and generous man. The rich and generous man would surely throw gold coins on the shroud for a proper burial. The lawyer and the undertaker would split the money.

The rich and generous man did throw coins on the

Fifth Sunday of Lent - B

shroud. The lawyer's hand quickly broke through the shroud and grabbed the coins before the undertaker could run away with them. Then he emerged from his burial cloths and said, "Do you see at last how I have received your generosity?"

"Yes," said the rich and generous man, "but first you had to die."

The story suggests that there are two dimensions to human beings: There is a surface dimension that is scheming and conniving to get what it wants by promoting itself and disguising itself.

There is an argumentative lawyer in all of us. We are continually exerting our will to get what we want.

But there is a deep dimension that is able to receive gold from someone who is both rich and generous by simply being silently present.

The rub is that we must die to the schemer to become the receiver.

To pick up on the story in today's Gospel, the Greeks that are interested in seeing Jesus may not seem that much to fall into the category of schemers, but they are interested in seeing Jesus and look for the right people who can make the introductions.

Jesus sees the occasion as the moment when his universal mission has emerged. Now, he must show the way in which true transformation occurs: it is the path of dying to self for the sake of others.

We all know that, at death, the scheming and

Fifth Sunday of Lent - B

conniving self who manipulates the world to get its desires will fall away. The deeper self who in its very being is receiving love from God and passing it on to others will emerge.

What Jesus wants to teach the Greeks, and us, is that this deeper self already exists within us. If we are willing to do to the scheming and conniving self now, riches await—the riches of life with God.

Jesus shows himself to be ready, and he proclaims the universal applicability of this approach. Jesus' favorite title for himself is the Son of Man—the essential human being, the person living from his deeper self. The process of dying to the superficial self so that the deeper self may fully live he calls “glorification.” It's like the full flowering of any creature's true nature.

The only thing stopping us from acknowledging that is the unwillingness to see our nature, persons made in the image and likeness of God for the sake of others, for the magnificence that it is.

Instead, we try to work a deal that will save us from the struggle of being transformed. Ultimately, it will not work and we will have to die anyway.

If we die to the superficial self now, though, the transformation awaiting us will have already been accomplished, and we will know in this life the richness and the glory of the children of God.