

## Fifth Sunday of Lent: Our Hour

*The days are coming when I will write my law deep within their hearts. All of them, from the least to the greatest will know that I am their God.*

In the first reading, the Prophet Jeremiah spoke about a time when God's people would be so united to God that they would know within themselves how to serve Him. That time is now. God's law is written deep within each of our hearts. We don't need anyone to tell us what we should do. Deep within ourselves we know if we are true to God or not. Some people will argue with that. They will say, "It's OK to get drunk, to try this, to do that." They will argue that all the bad things that people of all ages get into is really normal behavior. We know that is a lie. Everything within us, deep within us, tells us that this is a lie. We know that we cannot behave immorally and face our God. So much of what the world tells us to do conflicts with the life deep within us. We have to recognize that what some call normal behavior is for us Christians, abnormal behavior.

This is our time. This is our hour. We have the choice to stand for Christ and live in peace with God and with ourselves, or to turn towards that which is popular and sinful and live in turmoil. See, that is what sin does to us. It puts us in turmoil. We make believe that we are OK with whatever is happening, but we aren't. Sometimes we even have a hard time looking into the mirror. We can't stand looking at ourselves because we can't stand the person we are becoming when our actions contradict all that is within us.

Jesus spoke about time in today's Gospel. He called it His Hour. When Andrew and Philip told him that people were asking Him to go to the Passover Festival in Jerusalem, Jesus knew what was going to happen. He did not run from it. He embraced it. This was His Time. It was what He was put on earth to do. He would stand against evil.

We all have hours, and we have our hour. We have many times in our lives when we have to stand up for God and be whom we are. All during Lent we have been asking ourselves, "Am I the person that God wants me to be? Do I try to reflect the image of God within me, or am I untrue to my very self. There are many temptations, many ways that we are tempted to hedge on our commitment to Christ. The cost of being true to the law written within our hearts can sometimes be quite heavy. We might find ourselves excluded from that society, that sport, or those people with whom we really want to belong. It hurts to have someone say, "What, are you too good to join us?" But the peace of Christ surpasses all things. Nothing is more important than living in this peace, then living united to the Lord.

We all have our hours, and we have our hour. There are continual choices for God that we make throughout our lives. Those are our hours. There is also that one choice that is the reason why God placed us on earth. That is our hour. Our hour is the action that expresses whom we are deep within ourselves. It is the fundamental expression of our Christian life. For some people that hour is a public affirmation of

Christ in the face of death. Little St. Agnes was probably only 12 when she refused to embrace paganism and was tortured to death. Old St. Ignatius of Antioch was probably in his 70's or 80's when he would not let his friends bribe the Romans to save him from being thrown to the wild animals in the Roman Colosseum.

When we read about the saints, we learn about people who chose to suffer rather than deny Christ. But these are people about whom we read or heard. There are others whom we do not know. There is that girl with the unexpected pregnancy. It is her hour. Does she stand for Christ and bring this baby into the world regardless of what would happen to the plans she had for her future, or does she walk away from her hour and walk into that abortion clinic? There is that elderly man who chooses to care for his slowly dying wife because he could and because she wanted to stay at home. It is his hour. We know many others who are confronted with the choice of their lives, their hour, and embrace the law written within their hearts.

On April 20, 1999 our country was shocked by the horrible massacre at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. Twelve students and a teacher were killed. Twenty-four others were injured as they tried to escape. One of the teenagers killed was Cassie Bernall. She was 17. The story, which many people have affirmed, is that Cassie was known to be a devoted Christian. One of the gunmen put a gun to her head and told her to deny Christ. She refused and was killed. Michael W. Smith went to Cassie's funeral and was overpowered by the stories of her faith as well as the faith witness of her parents. He wrote a song about this called, "This is your time." In it he sings that the time was clear for her to embrace the mystery of all she could be.

How did she get there? How did she get to that point of her life that she was ready for her hour? She did it by choosing Christ at the various moments, the various hours of her life. She was prepared. Cassie was ready when her hour came.

Maybe something so radical will not happen to us. Perhaps our hour will only be the sum total of the choices we have made in our lives which we present to the Lord when this life is over. The big question is: Are we ready? Are we ready to embrace the moment of our lives when all of our existence proclaims our union with Christ? Are we ready at all times to embrace all that we can be? All the little yeses we make to Christ, all those times that we deny ourselves what others say we should have or do, all these affirmations of our Christianity strengthen us for the total affirmation of our life, strengthen us for our hour.

Now, listen again to the conclusion of today's Gospel:

*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 not soft-selling religion to you. I am not telling you to do this or that and everything will be easy and wonderful in your lives. No, instead I proclaim to you what our Gospel is teaching us. We are called to live and die for Christ. This is our time. This is our hour.