

Fifth Sunday of Lent: The Hour Has Come

I would like to do something a bit different this morning. Rather than develop a homily as such, I would like to lead you in a meditation upon one word, one concept which we find in today's Gospel. Today we come upon the word *hour*. I want to dwell on this with you in a meditative spirit.

First, to begin we need a little background. We just heard the phrase, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." The concept of the hour has a deep theological meaning in the entire *Gospel of John*. Actually I found nineteen times in that Gospel where Jesus uses the phrase, "The hour".

We first come upon this concept at the Wedding Feast of Cana when Jesus says to his Mother, "Woman what concern has this for you or me? My hour has not yet come."

Jesus tells the woman at the well that the hour is coming when people will worship in spirit and in truth.

The second sign of the Messiah in the *Gospel of John* emphasizes the hour that a boy is cured.

Jesus says that the hour is coming when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God.

Temple officials often tried to arrest Jesus, but they couldn't because his hour had not yet come.

In today's Gospel Jesus announces that the hour is upon him.

Today's Gospel also contains the Johannine equivalent of the Agony in the Garden, during which time Jesus says, "What should I say, 'Father save me from this hour?' No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour."

John introduces the Passion of the Lord by saying, "Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own in the world, he loved them to the end."

Jesus concludes the Great Discourse of the Last Supper by praying to his Father, "the hour has come, glorify your Son so that your Son may glorify you."

Obviously, when Jesus uses the phrase, hour, he isn't merely referring to the time of day it might be. No, he is speaking about a central moment of human history. The hour is the moment that the world will be transformed. The hour is the point of human history when spiritual life will be restored. The hour is the moment when death

and evil will be defeated by Love. The hour is the moment when the mortal will receive immortality.

Let's begin our meditation:

And Jesus said in today's Gospel, "When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself."

The power of the cross.

The power of the love of God.

The central moment of human history.

The hour.

We Christians live in this moment, this hour. Whether we stood at the foot of the cross like Mary and John or whether we were born two thousand years later, the hour is real to us. We are there. We are always before the Lord on the cross. We kneel during the Eucharistic Prayer of the Mass and pray to the Father with the Lord as he offers his Body and Blood for us. Every Mass renews the hour.

We exalt when a baby, a child or an adult is baptized because we have witnessed that person being directed into the hour, the hour where spiritual joins physical. We weep when a loved one dies, but our faith is full of hope for now the hour becomes the physical joining the spiritual.

The hour of the Lord is real for us when we come into the Church and meditate before the Cross, or, to put it frankly, just look at it, and then it hits us, "My God, Jesus, you did this for me? How much must you love me?" The hour of the Lord is real for us when we feel ourselves united to him on his cross, drawn to him as the Gospel prophesied, and lifted up from the burdens of this life into the realm of the spiritual.

When we celebrate a funeral, the priest will often incense the body at the final commendation as a sign of our prayers rising up to God for the deceased and as a sign that the body is holy, because God dwelt there. During the ritual we sing the song of farewell. After incensing the body, I like to stand in front of the crucifix and wait for the last verse to begin. These are the words of Job, "I know that my Redeemer lives, the last day I shall rise again." At that point I incense the cross as a sign that it is all one for us: the death of Christ on the cross, the death of our loved ones, our deaths, the rising of Christ from the dead, the rising of our loved ones body and soul, our longed for and hoped for union with them and Him for all eternity. Its all one. Its all the hour of the Lord.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, around the 1835, Alexander Means, meditated on the cross and wrote the words to the hymn, *What Wondrous Love is This*:

What wondrous love is this, O my soul, that caused the Lord of Bliss to bear this dreadful curse for my soul.

To God and to the Lamb, I will sing. To God and to the Lamb who is the great "I AM", I will sing.

And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on. And when from death I'm free, I'll sing joyfully. And through eternity, I'll sing on.

Through the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ, his hour has become our hour, his death has become our life, our deaths have become his life, his love. In the *Paradisio*, the third book of Dante's *Divine Comedy* the poet speaks about the whirl of love that is heaven as each person unites his or her love to the Love of God, all becoming one in love yet each remaining an individual lover.

Death and life are united. Sacrifice and gift are merged.
Love Conquers All.

This is why we honor the cross.

This is why we wear crosses around our necks.

This is why the purpose of our lives is to realize,
to make real, the love of Christ in our homes and in our lives.

We have to allow Christ's love to direct our lives.

His hour is our hour.

And his hour is upon us.