

## Homily for the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent

Have you ever noticed that sometimes an hour can fly by, and yet you feel like you've accomplished next to nothing? Maybe it's at your job on an early Monday morning. Or perhaps it's a Sunday night doing homework for the next day. Or maybe it's just working around the house over the weekend. Whatever the case might be sometimes an hour just flies by – and we can feel pretty unaccomplished. Well, just to rub it in a little more, take a look at these facts about our bodies. Did you know: that in one hour our heart beats 4,320 times? That we breathe 960 times? That your – notice I didn't say my – hair grows .0007 (7 ten-thousandths) of an inch? And finally, that we exercise over 291,000 brain cells? All this in just one hour! I feel like taking a nap just thinking about it!

Our Gospel this weekend throws that word “hour” around quite a bit. Last week it was “believe”. This week it's “hour”. For example, when some Greek-speaking Gentiles come to Jerusalem seeking Jesus on the occasion of the Passover, He responds to them, “The *hour* has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” So what is Jesus talking about here? Is He saying, “Yep, it's 3:00 – right on time. Now that the Greeks are here I can finally be glorified?” Not quite. When Jesus speaks of His “hour”, He uses that word to signify that the appointed time for **His Passion** – that is, His suffering and death – has finally arrived. And in fact, in the very next chapter of John's Gospel, Jesus celebrates the Last Supper together with His disciples – His last action before His trial before Pontius Pilate begins.

Now, as interesting as that might be from a trivia point of view, this word “hour” – more importantly – goes way beyond a purely historical or chronological use. In fact, right after Jesus speaks about the arrival of these Gentiles, which initiates His Passion, He goes on to say, “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.” By saying such a thing, Jesus is revealing to them that He is that grain of wheat, who soon will die, since His hour has finally arrived. And just as a grain is buried in the ground, so will He be – only to rise again in His Resurrection on Easter Sunday, which will bring about an incredible harvest of believers from every nation. And to bring the gift of His sacrifice on the cross to all those who believe in Him in a tangible way week in and week out, Jesus continues to offer us His very Body – for that very grain of wheat, which did die, has now become the Bread of Life we receive in the Eucharist.

All this makes me think about another hour – an hour that we share together here at church each week: the Mass. Again, sometimes this hour passes quickly, and sometimes it passes slowly. Sometimes we feel like we are accomplishing something here, and sometimes we don’t. Sometimes we feel like we are getting so much out of Mass, while sometimes we feel just the opposite. But my brothers and sisters, it’s not so much about what *we* get from coming to Mass. Yes, we hear God’s Word, and receive the Eucharist, and we get the strength we need to be His faithful disciples for the coming week. But much more than what we can take away, the Eucharistic celebration is about what we can *give* to God.

I've heard the complaint before from people who no longer come to Mass that they don't go anymore because "they don't get anything out of it." You may have heard something like this from someone you know. While it's true that God desires to nourish us spiritually through the Eucharist, through His Word in the Scriptures, and through our communal prayer, Mass is not merely about what we get from Him – it's about what we offer Him. If we come to Mass to get as we would at a movie, a party, or a Broadway show, we'll probably be disappointed that Mass isn't more exciting, entertaining, or engaging. But, if we come here each week as a community of believers, who seek to praise and thank the God who has given His life to save ours, then we will find ourselves so much more invested. Did you know that you can have a truly personal relationship with God? That you can interact with Him as someone who is truly interested in who you are and how you're doing? Ponder this for yourself. Because, if we're not at Mass to give to God who has so freely given to us in Jesus, then Mass will be a mere obligation – dare I say even boring and monotonous.

My friends, in His own sacrifice on the cross, Jesus teaches us personally to offer ourselves to God each and every day of our lives. His one sacrifice for all as Savior of the world has borne so much fruit. Similarly, the gift of ourselves and our praise to God at Mass can bear so much fruit in our lives too – all starting with just one faithful hour a week – if we're really here and if we really mean it. God bless you.