

In this morning's Gospel, we meet some Greeks who wanted to see Jesus. They had made their way to Jerusalem at the time of the Passover because, like many people today, they travelled the world to see new places, and to find out how other people live. They may have seen Jesus cleanse the Temple and they must have heard of his miracles, but they would not have wanted to talk about death.

But Jesus wants to talk about death, and he tells us if a grain of seed is never sown in the ground it will remain a single seed and be of no use to itself or anyone else, whereas if it is sown in the ground and dies it will grow and bear much fruit! He says, "Those who love their lives will lose them whereas those who hate their lives in this world will keep them for life eternal." If we, like those Greeks, want to see Jesus, we must be prepared to think about death, and we do this during these two weeks before Easter. The fifth Sunday in Lent is known as Passion Sunday when we think of the passion or suffering of Jesus when he died on a Cross, and we need to know why it was that Jesus was crucified.

Some might say that it was because Jesus provoked the religious leaders of his day who were jealous of his popularity. He exposed their hypocrisy; challenged their authority by healing the sick on the Sabbath Day, taught that the Sabbath was made for Man not Man for the Sabbath! The High Priest Caiaphas, aware of the unrest that was being caused amongst the Jews, said that it was necessary that Jesus should die because Jesus would provoke Rome to intervene by tightening its grip upon the Jews - and by preventing them from worshipping in the Temple according to their own traditions.

But the truth is that Jesus chose to be crucified and he didn't die because he was cheated by his friends, or out-manoeuvred by his enemies. The crucifixion was not the result of God's plan having gone wrong. St. John wrote, "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son – so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life," and Jesus said, "When I am lifted up, meaning on the Cross, I will draw all people to myself." He prayed, before his ordeal began, "What shall I say: "Father – save me from this hour? No, it was for this reason that I have come to this hour." He warned the apostles in advance that he must undergo great suffering, be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the Scribes – and be killed." And Jesus said to

Pontius Pilate: "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above."

So, why did Jesus choose to be crucified? One of the reasons was so that he could reveal God's love for us. St. Paul wrote, "While we were still sinners – Christ died for us." Another was to offer us an example of endurance. The suffering Jesus, with the marks of the nails in his hands, has come to the aid of countless sufferers – lying on hospital beds – or on a distant battlefield, giving them strength, comfort and hope.

Most of all, Jesus died to save us from our sins. He said that he had come to give his life as a ransom for many. We cannot believe that God had to make terms with the Devil, because that would make the devil equal to God, but we do believe is that it was necessary that Jesus should die to save us from sin and death. "There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin." Jesus said, "Drink this all of you – for this is my blood of the new covenant – which is shed for you and for many – for the forgiveness of sins." One day we shall all do this again.

Paul called "the Second Adam" whose perfect obedience countered the disobedience of Adam before he died upon the cross for our sake.

Jesus had to die to obtain our forgiveness because God is both loving and just. He couldn't pardon a sinner without punishment because he is a just God, and he couldn't punish a sinner because he is a loving and merciful God, but by the cross of Jesus he is able to forgive our sins.

On the Cross God exacted the due penalty for our sinful human nature while, in his mercy, he accepted the penalty himself. He first identified himself with our human race by the birth of the Word of God being born of the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem, and then having lived on earth in Jesus - sharing all our human experiences but without sin, he was able to take all our sins upon himself when he died on the cross. St. Peter wrote, "He bore our sins in his body." God could only forgive our sins by taking the punishment himself through the Cross. Paul wrote: "For our sake Jesus was made to be sin, who knew no sin, so that through him we might stand before the righteous God." Isaiah wrote of Jesus that he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, and by his bruises we are healed."

Let us keep Good Friday by sitting or kneeling for a few moments in our homes at the foot of his cross.

