

5th Sunday of Lent

I Surrender! I give up! When we hear these words or say them ourselves they indicate defeat. We're told in our society that you have to be a winner. In so many groups when someone wins a prize for something, everybody gets a prize because no one is supposed to be a loser. But spiritually, winners are losers and losers are winners. We're told in the gospel today, "Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in the world will preserve for eternal life." Spiritually, saying "I surrender" is what allows God's life to reside fully in us. The best example of this is Jesus himself who said on more than one occasion, "I came to do the will of the one who sent me." In other words, Jesus set his own will, his own life aside for the Father. Jesus *surrendered* himself to the Father. In the gospel Jesus says, "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."

In the gospel today Jesus realizes what setting his own will aside for the Father is going to demand of him – nothing less than going to the cross. Sometimes the apostles tried to dissuade him from that. He says, "I am troubled now. Yet, what should I say? 'Father, save me from this hour?' But it was for this purpose I came."

While setting one's will aside may sound difficult and even counter cultural most of us have done that at least with some part of our lives. Married couples set aside their own self interest in favor of mutual life with the partner. Couples who have children know how much self interest has to be set aside in favor of raising children. Anyone dedicated to a cause promotes that cause only through self sacrifice. God invites us to self surrender not for any divine interest but out of human interest; that we might enjoy the fullness of life Jesus came to give.

God is constantly inviting us to surrender so that we might enjoy a fuller life with him. And God never lets up on the invitation. In a beautiful poem titled *The Hound of Heaven* Francis

Thompson writes of how we try to avoid the invitation from God and how God, like a hound dog who won't give up, stays at it until we surrender.

The pursued speaks:

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;

I fled Him, down the arches of the years;

I fled Him, down the labyrinthine way

Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears

I hid from Him, and under running laughter.

Up vistaed hopes I sped;

And shot, precipitated,

A down Titanic glooms of chasmed fears,

From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.

The lengthy poem goes on till it comes to the end where the person being chased surrenders:

Now of that long pursuit

Comes on at hand the bruit;

That voice is round me like a bursting sea;

'and is thy earth so marred

Shattered shard on shard?

Then God speaks:

Lo, all things fly thee, for thou fliest Me!"

Alack, thou knowest not

How little worthy of any love thou art!

Whom wilt thou find to love ignoble thee,

Save Me, save only Me?

All which I took from thee I did but take

Nor for thy harms

But that thou might'st seek it in my arms.

All of which the child's mistake

Fancies as lost, I have stored for thee at home:

Rise, clasp my hand and come!

Shade of His hand, outstretched caressingly!

Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest,

I am He Who thou seekest!

Thou dravest love from thee, who dravest Me.

When all is said and done, it's easier to surrender than to
fight.