

GOSPEL GOSSIP

We want to see Jesus

St John 12. 20-33

Sunday 21 March

This week's gospel begins with the simple request: 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.' These were some Greeks, who had obviously heard about Jesus, and in the quest for knowledge, and perhaps faith, they ask Philip, one of Jesus' disciples. When Jesus was sought out, he did not respond in the way that the disciples maybe expected, offering to meet them, or saying where they could find him. Instead, he used the opportunity to tell the disciples what sort of Jesus would be seen.

This Jesus was not the miracle-working, wise teacher with a large following, but instead someone who was to suffer. The loneliness and pain of this is suggested as Jesus tells them that unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains a single grain, but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He then goes on once more to explain what is likely to happen to him, as well as why it must.

- Who or where would you go with the question 'We wish to see Jesus'?
- How could you be sure of an honest response?
- Why would you want to see Jesus?
- Would you expect Jesus to come running?
- What would you make of his enigmatic reply?

The disciples were warned implicitly and explicitly by Jesus about what his destiny was, yet still could not accept it when it began to happen. Indeed, they may well have been put off by Jesus' words that his fate will be theirs, in some ways, as well. He emphasises that in order to live, one must die first.

Jesus was fully human, and so he was naturally daunted and fearful of what lay ahead for him. He also knew that he had to fulfil his Father's will in order that others may benefit; he was not living his life for himself. It was a struggle, and the Father reassured him by saying that he, the Father, would glorify Jesus. What an affirmation! It would serve to strengthen him, and ultimately his disciples, after his death. Jesus said that this affirmation, this voice from heaven was meant for the disciples' sake; the crowd thought it was thunder.

- Why should Jesus have to suffer and die?
- Would Jesus have known human fear?
- What are the consequences of fear – fight or flight?
- Is it significant that the crowd should think the voice was thunder?
- Did the disciples understand the voice from heaven and Jesus' predictions?

Christians across the ages have struggled with the image of a suffering Saviour. Once Jesus is found, no one wants to lose him. The first disciples certainly didn't, any more than all those across the millennia who have followed in the faithful footsteps. The image that Jesus uses, that of a seed falling into the ground and bringing forth new life, is one drawn from nature. The voice from heaven is not. Yet both point to the purpose and future of Jesus. As the Father glorifies the son, so he will glorify all those who follow Jesus, and remain constant to him.