

Now that I've lived through an actual plague, I totally understand why Italian renaissance paintings are full of naked fat people laying on couches!

At my birthday, I was thinking of how wild and crazy we used to be—remember? We ate cake after someone had blown on it! Ahhh, the good times!

I saw my financial planner this week, and it looks like I can retire at 70 and live comfortably -- for about 11 minutes.

I have a friend who is a taxidermist. When people ask him what he does every day, he says: "You know. Stuff."

I've finally told my suitcases there will be no holiday this year. Now I'm dealing with the emotional baggage.

And one more: Lockdown can only go 4-ways. You'll come out a monk, a hunk, a chunk, or a drunk. Choices matter folks!

Like so much of John's gospel, this passage is dense, thick. Just preceding this week's gospel is the stunning miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead. Yet as amazing as Jesus' ability to bring Lazarus back to life was, for John that event is simply an introduction to the real heart and power of the gospel. The climax of the Lazarus drama does not come when the bound figure stumbles out of the tomb. The punch line of that story is here – where the true miracle yet to come is disclosed -- and the full scope of Jesus' mission is revealed. Ironically, it is in bringing Lazarus back to life that the wheels are set in motion for Jesus' own death. His HOUR is at hand.

To confirm the Pharisees' fears, voiced in verse 19, that "the world has gone after Him," John immediately introduces as representatives of the whole world -- "some Greeks" seeking Jesus. These Greeks are probably Greek-speaking Gentiles who have become converts to Judaism, or perhaps are still only 'God-fearers,' Gentiles who respect the beliefs of Judaism without yet becoming full members of the faith. They are on their own pilgrimage to Jerusalem during this Passover festival when, probably, as a result of the Lazarus healing, they seek out Jesus. Thus, even as the Pharisees and the established elders of Judaism are rejecting Jesus and starting to plot against Him, the Gentile mission begins.

There are a couple of theories as to why these seekers go first to Philip. The text takes the trouble to define Philip as being from "Bethsaida in Galilee." It is likely that Philip, from the ethnically diverse region of Galilee and bearing a Greek name, himself spoke Greek. Likewise Andrew, the disciple Philip next turns to, is the only other one of the 12 sporting a Greek name, and, thus, perhaps also speaking the language. Other commentators suggest the explanation for John to have the Greek strangers go through Jesus' disciples first, is that it demonstrates what Jesus will say in John 17:20 that others will come to know Him through the witness of His disciples.

Either way, John moves quickly to the heart of this scene, for his focus is not on the seekers, but on the one sought. Before Jew and Gentile alike, Jesus now proclaims that "the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." (v. 23) But this 'glorification' has nothing to do with becoming an admired teacher and healer. Jesus' next words are, in fact, shockingly distant from 'glorification' – for He immediately begins to speak

about His own death, describing how the grain of wheat must first die in the earth before bearing fruit. Jesus implies that for the glorification of the Son of Man to be complete, there must be a new crop of disciples who can proclaim Him as the glorified one.

Even as the unexpected nature of Jesus' glorification must have stunned His disciples, once it has been pronounced, Jesus too admits this is not an easy way to follow. In v. 27, there is some debate over whether Jesus' plea, "Father, save me from this hour," is only part of His rhetorical question, "What shall I say?" or is actually a petition standing by itself. But He ultimately rejects being delivered from His hour, saying that "it was for this purpose that I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name." (all taken from HOMILETICS ONLINE, March 2012, p. 7-8)

Second -- so what does this have to do with us, all this talk of glory and dying? Well, we all nurse a secret dream of glory. We daydream that in some way we will stand out and be recognized. And so we fantasize about great achievements that will set us apart from others and make us famous. The daydreams vary but, inside them, always we are at the center -- the most admired person, the one scoring the winning goal, the ballerina star, the actor picking up the Academy award, the author writing the best-seller, the biggest, best, most wonderful, magnificent Monsignor of all times!

What we are chasing in all of this is notice, appreciation, uniqueness, and adulation so that we can be duly recognized and loved. We want the light to be shining on us.

And this isn't all bad or unhealthy. We are built to stand in the spotlight. Our own reality is massively (sometimes oppressively) real to us and scientists today tell us that the universe has no single center -- but that everywhere and every person is its center. And so it is not a big secret that each of us feels ourselves at the center and wants to be recognized as being there. We nurse a secret dream of glory and, partly, this is healthy. It gives us drive, direction and passion.

What's less healthy in our daydreams is how we envision that glory. In our fantasies, glory almost always consists in being famous, in standing out, in achieving a success that makes others envious, in somehow being the best-looking or the brightest or the most talented person in the room. In our fantasy, glory means having the power to actuate ourselves in ways that set us above others, even if that is for a good motive. For instance, some of our fantasies are daydreams of goodness, of being powerful enough to squash evil. Indeed, that was the messianic fantasy. Before Jesus was born, good-hearted and religious people prayed for a Messiah to come and, in their fantasy, that Messiah was generally envisioned as a worldly superstar, a person with a superior heart and superior muscles, a Messiah who would reveal the superiority of God by out-muscling the bad.

Third, as we see from this Gospel, real glory does not consist in triumph, in adulation, in a life of ease. A seed has to die -- and it dies in the ground in silence, alone, forgotten. It has to disintegrate, fall apart, and be abandoned to its own, lonely work in order to bear fruit. On the cross, Jesus was offered precisely the challenge to prove that He was special by doing something spectacular -- some gesture that would leave all of His detractors stunned and helpless: "If you are the Son of God, prove it, come down off the cross! Save yourself!"

But, with a subtlety that's easy to miss, the Gospels teach a very different lesson: on the cross, Jesus proves that He is powerful beyond measure, not by doing some spectacular thing that leaves everyone around Him speechless -- but in a spectacular act of the heart wherein He forgives those who are mocking and killing Him. Divine kingship -- real glory -- is manifest in forgiveness, not in muscle and triumph over the enemy.

That is real glory, and that is the one thing of which we really should be envious, namely, the compassion and forgiveness that Jesus manifested in the face of jealousy, hatred, and murder.

We see this illustrated in the Gospels in the incident where James and John come to Jesus and ask Him to give them the seats of glory at His side in His kingdom. Jesus takes their request seriously and does not, on that occasion, caution them against pride. Rather He asks them: “can you drink from the cup (of suffering) that I shall drink?” In naivete, they answer: “We can!” Jesus replies: “The cup that I shall drink, you shall drink, but as for the seats (of glory) at my right hand or left, these are not mine to give.”

What Jesus is saying, in effect, is this: We will taste suffering, everyone will, and that suffering WILL DEFINITELY make us deep. But, it won't necessarily make us deep in the right way. Suffering can make us deep in compassion and forgiveness, but it can also make us deep in bitterness and anger. However only compassion and forgiveness bring glory into our lives.

Jesus defines glory very differently than we generally do. Real glory, for Him, is not the winning of a gold medal, of being a champion, of winning an Oscar, or being envied because of our looks or achievements. Glory consists in being deep -- deep in compassion, forgiveness, generosity and graciousness – and these are not often spawned by worldly success, by being better-looking, brighter, richer, or better muscled than those around us.

We all nurse the secret dream of glory. Partly this is healthy, a sign that we are emotionally well. However, this is something that needs to grow and mature inside of us. Our ego has to die, like that seed, so that our love, compassion, mercy, generosity, and kindness give life to our world. Amen. (adapted from Rolheiser, posting of 11/25/2007))