

**Reflection on the Gospel-Fifth Sunday of Lent Year B
(John 12:20-33)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

Among those who go up to Jerusalem to worship at the feast of Passover are some “Greeks”. The reference is probably to a group known in the early church as “God-fearers”, although that designation is found only in Luke’s second volume, the Acts of the Apostles. These people were a bit like RCIA candidates in relation to Judaism. They were certainly interested in Judaism and, because of their active interest in the Jewish faith and traditions, were possibly better informed about many of the Jewish traditions than those who had been members of the Jewish community all their lives. God-fearers seem to have been among the first Gentiles (non-Jews) to join the early Christian Jewish movement, i.e. the Jews who accepted Jesus as Messiah (or Christ).

For Jesus, the arrival of these God-fearing Greeks signals his “hour”. Earlier in John’s gospel, Jesus has insisted that his “hour” had not yet come. Now that his message receives global acknowledgement, or in the words of the Pharisees, now that “the world has gone after him” (John 20:19), he can announce that the hour of his glorification has come. Characteristically, Jesus uses a potent agricultural image to capture the transformative nature of his imminent death: like the grain of wheat, he must go into the earth and die in order to bear fruit. The same is true for his followers: to be concerned only with self-preservation is to “lose” one’s life; to give one’s life is to “keep it for eternal life”. This image echoes the first reading from the prophet Jeremiah (31:31-34). Jeremiah presents the God of Israel as One who forgives and who is even prepared to forget the sins of the past. The people will be God’s garden: the seed planted within them is God’s Law. They will be God’s own billboard: the Law of forgiveness and mercy will be written in their hearts. John uses the “eternal life” metaphor in much the same way as the other gospel writers use the “reign of God” or “king-dom” image. To keep one’s life for “eternal life” has to do with living God’s transformative vision for creation in the present so that it might one day be fully realised.

In John’s gospel, Jesus’ death is also his being lifted up in glory. The moment of his death becomes the moment of drawing “all” to himself. The “all” includes all people, but is not restricted to the human community. It also allows for an ecological interpretation: in his death and exaltation, Jesus gathers the whole Earth community to himself and into the mystery of God’s redemptive and transforming love.