

The Gospels do not show us too much of Jesus' interaction with the Greeks. In fact, there are only two such instances in the Bible. One is in this morning's reading, and the other, in Mark 7. In our Johannine text, Greeks were in the company of those pilgrims who came to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. We do not know exactly why they wanted to see Jesus. Could it have been about the miracles he performed? Perhaps they wanted to discuss the theological differences or explore the philosophical views between Judaism and the Greek philosophy?

Strangely, as soon as Jesus learned of the presence of the Greeks from Phillip and Andrew, he entered into a monologue:

The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

Jesus declared out loud that the time had come for him to be glorified, meaning, it was time for him to die.

In the Gospel according to John, Jesus tended to enter into the mode of monologue, and his monologue did not make much sense to the context of the immediate moment. A notable episode took place at the wedding in Cana. When his mother came and told him that the wine had run out, Jesus responded this way:

O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come (Jn. 2:4).

It was non sequitur. Most would have stared him blankly, thinking, "What is this man talking about?"

Let us imagine that it was us, instead of the Greeks, who came to see Jesus. We came to see Jesus, because we had some issues. We needed to ask for his wisdom and help. What issues might we have, nowadays? Losing jobs? Foreclosures? Taxes? Home refinancing? Surviving in this economy? Health problems? Healthcare coverage problems?

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Are we concerned about what our future prospects would be like? Will I be able to afford retirement? Will I be able to send my children to colleges? Will they have secure and successful careers? Or, will they have to join the armed forces, or get a job after the high school? What about dealing with the spouse who is having a difficult time adjusting to the civilian life after sustaining the physical and mental trauma while deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan,? Or, how about just getting along day-by-day with one's own decrepit body? The day you can get out of the bed is a good day, and the good day is full of challenges that young'uns cannot even guess.

And then imagine this was what Jesus answered:

Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

Excuse me? I am trying to survive here, and you are telling me how to die? Did you think I came here, because I did not know how many ways of dying are available out there? And if people drop like flies following Jesus, who else is going to be motivated to follow him?

If we step back and forget about the force of losing one's life, and focus on the effect of a one grain of wheat, then we might understand what fundamental point Jesus was making: a single grain *can* make a huge difference in the end.

Although Jesus seemed preoccupied with his own fate, he viewed his life as a grain of wheat. Maybe that was what enabled him to go through the trials and temptations the cross presented to him: he was convinced that his death would benefit a great number of people,

as a grain of wheat that had fallen in the ground would bear much fruit. In the fundamental sense, Jesus points to the truth that many people wish to avoid: there is no free lunch, and one needs to put up the sacrifice, in order to reap any harvest.

How different Jesus' way of looking at life is from the way of today's corporate culture! The executives bleed the company with the bonuses and the padded compensations and the stock options. On the other side of the fulcrum, the workers have secured so many benefits through the powerful unions, that some companies cannot survive, unless they trim off the good portion of the workforce.

And we should be only thankful, because it could have been worse, had the deserving execs not received the generous retention bonuses and the mega-million dollar salaries. They could have fled for the better paying jobs, leaving the companies in the hands of the less capable, less qualified, and less

knowledgeable novices who would have caused even greater economic disaster, as AIG CEO Liddy intimated at the hearing.

If my memory serves correctly, I think the sign of the bad times began with the debacle of Enron. Enron manipulated the natural gas price and gouged tons of flesh from California. It had created a great panic in the state government, for the government deficit exploded, trying to pay for the skyrocketing energy price. Then suddenly, the company folded. It turned out, the execs had paid themselves handsomely, led lavish lifestyles, all at the expense of the company. The coffer was emptied, earnings report was faked, and the scheme had to be continued, in order to keep the dying beast alive, while bleeding it dry.

After Enron collapsed, the regulators descended upon other corporations, and we saw the flurry of restating the earnings in many companies—I mean, just about every large corporation. Suddenly the ratings plummeted,

and the wealth on the paper began to vanish. The whole structure of stock exchange, investors, and banks colluded to inflate the wealth that did not exist. The execs compensated themselves richly based on this bogus performance of making profit for the investors. The investors were happy to have their stock values go up. And the banks were only happy to lend more money.

What this brought out in the open was that the corporations ran on false pretensions that they were solvent and profitable, and that the execs paid themselves with the wealth that was only on the paper, to indulge in the lifestyles that they led. They expanded too fast and took over too much. The corporations spent more than the profit they generated. Investors lived on the phantom wealth. The banks loaned on the toxic collateral.

The culture to which the corporate execs were addicted can not change in one day, and we will see its lasting effect in

the days to come. Just about every financial and manufacturing corporation is addicted to this culture of deception and indulgence.

The point is: very few tried to sacrifice one's self for the others. But just about every one tried to sacrifice others for one's own splurge. We are living the direct consequence of the culture that caused what we see today.

Although Jesus' monologue triggered by the Greek visitors sounded completely off-the-wall to our ears, in its fundamental sense, Jesus was speaking the truth. If any society is to make a progress, its individual, aggregate members must sacrifice for the next generation. When those who have been entrusted with hope begin to squander the resources for their own indulgence, there is not much left for the next generations, and a disaster is not so far away.

Some one will have to pay, many people will be disgruntled, and

unless the demand is met soon, another war is in the incubator. The culture of self-indulgence and the culture of war sleep in the same bed, and their offspring are greed-fueled economic practices. There will be no peace, as long as we maintain this culture. A century ago, nations resorted to imperialism to satiate their ravenous hunger. Nowadays, nations practice economic imperialism.

Jesus not only calls for individual repentance, but also demands today the change of the culture that dominates the modern, corporate society. But isn't it an impossible thing to do, one might point out, because every one else is doing it? Jesus would say, "If it is an impossible thing to do because everyone else is doing it, then, wouldn't it be a *possible* thing to do, if *every* one else tried?"

Jesus showed us the power of one single grain. One person *can* make a big difference. But it will have to start with someone, somewhere. Who else, but us?

Where else, but here? Each one of us can make a huge difference, *if* we do it together. If each one began to make a sacrifice—began with small things—like getting to worship on time, to start the day with a prayer, to remember the sick one before going to bed, to remind oneself with a line of scripture for the daily guidance, to prepare oneself in the worshipful attitude on Sunday mornings, something will begin to change in our culture. These are not actually any sacrifices, because they cost us nothing. But it would jumpstart the process of the transformation.

Then we may move onto the sacrifices that would actually cost us something. We could begin to participate in the stewardship, by setting aside *joyfully* a self-determined portion of our income for the free will offering. We could sign up to volunteer for ministry programs, such as serving food or collecting food, etc. We could show up on a workday, and do a light cardio-workout, burn some fat, and

make the church look well-kempt to the visitors and members alike. Two birds with one stone. It was a great workout, yesterday.

But how is it going to change the world, one might question. True, it won't. But that is not the end; it is only the beginning onto the larger things that would have the bigger social impact. But first, we must transform. It is hard to imagine that the corporate culture would initiate the spiritual transformation in the society. It has influenced the worshiping communities, however, and the churches began to behave like large corporations doing their businesses. The spiritual transformation can only begin in the worshiping communities.

Jesus said that now is the judgment of this world, and the ruler of this world will be driven out (v. 33). This ruler is not a human person. It will be a critical mistake, if we pin it on a dictator or a madman. There was a shared principle that mobilized the 51% of the population that put the dictator or the madman in

the position. The ruler of this world is the principle that rules the behavior of the majority in the society and the culture.

This ruler of this world is the way of life that we take for granted. It is the rapacious culture that consumes resources, and traps many into economic servitude, in order for the few at the top to indulge in the opulence. It always has been that way.

The ruler of this world is the entitlement culture that drains the present and future reserves, and robs from our children and their children. That is the true ruler of this world, because it motivates just about everyone, and dictates the behavior of almost everyone.

The Apostle Paul observed this in his letter to the Romans 12:2:

Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

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We raise our children to be honest, to work hard, and to be responsible. Do those values transfer to the society at large, when they enter the adulthood? When the children grow up and enter the society, suddenly the childhood education takes the backseat to the dictation of the immediate, surrounding culture: every one is expected to go along with the flow.

Every one is expected to adapt to this culture of greed. Everyone seems to be determined to get a piece of the pie, before the last piece is gone. Or, as one finance consultant would say, the only problem we have is a distribution problem. There is an abundance of pies to go around, so grab as many as you can. It surely sounds comforting to the hearts trained in greed.

It all begins with something small—like a grain of wheat that falls to the ground. We have to build an entirely new culture in our worshiping communities. We need to start with a grain, and teach our children a new vision

of the world. We do not just raise our children to be successful, only to perpetuate the rapacious, entitlement-bound culture. We raise our children to be the grain that initiates the transformation, like the yeast that permeates the whole dough in God's time.