

Reflection

Feast of St. Lawrence

John 12: 24-26

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Today, as the Church remembers St Lawrence. I wondered why it is a feast rather than a memorial like the great St Dominic, founder of Dominicans, and so many other saints we celebrate and recognize for their influence. What message does the Church want to convey in this celebration of Lawrence?

I learned that Lawrence is the third most important patron of the city of Rome, after Peter and Paul.

Lawrence, of Spanish heritage, was born in Spain as was Pope Sixtus II, martyred 6 days before Lawrence in the year 258. They had come together from Spain in Rome. Sixtus became Pope and made his friend Lawrence, a deacon, really an archdeacon, since he was the head of the six other deacons in Rome. What was special about Lawrence? His life and death exemplify the essence of Christianity.

Lawrence, a deacon, was one who served. We read in Acts of the Apostles the beginning of diaconate ministry. It was to care for the neglected widows, to distribute food, bread to the poor. In that spirit the diaconate developed, a ministry of service. At the Last Supper, Jesus wanted to convey to his disciples, the essence of his message: to "Love one another." Jesus did that by washing the feet of his disciples and asked that they do this for one another, be they women or men of service and love, caring for each other.

As the time of Jesus' passion approached, the context of today's Gospel from John, chapter 12, Jesus attempted to prepare his followers by saying to them, "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." Did the Apostles understand? Not at that time.

Anyone in a rural community knows well the value of planting the kernel of wheat. Valuable as it is, to produce bread for the table, it has an even greater value as seed, a kernel of life for many more kernels and seeds. Each seed placed in the dark earth, to die itself, produces much more, at least eight new kernels and that continues to multiply over and over, unending.

Jesus' death and ultimate sacrifice meant opening the gospel to the entire world, not just Jews and Gentiles. Jesus wanted those who chose to follow him, to follow, in suffering and death, if necessary. It was not always physical death that Jesus asked, but a dying of the self. The seed, planted in darkness, releases its potential, the kernel of life- to become what it was meant to be, to lose its life, to fulfill its ultimate purpose. It is crucial we are willing to die.

Each one of us, in our own life, day by day, can know what dying and suffering means for us. In our own ministries throughout our lives, we have each planted many seeds, within us, we continue to be called to that ultimate sacrifice, to be willing to live in darkness, in suffering, dying ourselves in small and sometimes big ways, to let new life blossom forth, life that we cannot control, but give.

Lawrence, as Archdeacon, was commissioned with care of the treasury and riches of the Church in Rome. He was responsible for distribution of alms to the indigent. When persecution of Christians began, the governing prefect of Rome demanded that Lawrence, as Archdeacon, turn over the riches of the Church. Lawrence asked for three days to gather those riches. During that time, Lawrence delivered as much property as possible to the indigents to prevent it from being seized by the emperor. After three days, Lawrence returned bringing the poor, the blind, the crippled, those on the margins and said to the Prefect, "these are the riches of the Church."

Lawrence then, followed in the steps of Christ and was put to death, the ultimate sacrifice, believing it was meant for the seed to be planted to release the potential of new and greater life. Lawrence indeed, shows us what is essential, to love, to serve, to be willing to suffer, die to our own expectations of others, our way of doing things and to give our life, day by day to God, at times it is through darkness. Though painful, God can lead us to new life and bring a deep peace and joy to our life and life for many others.

Lawrence had a sharp vision of the essential in following Christ, service and love of God's people, particularly those who had little in earthly goods and advantages, but rich in God's sight.

Who or what is God putting in your path today? How will you respond?