

RENEW LENT - FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

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Parenting as Unfolding: Sacrifice and Joy

By Linda M Michaud

"Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany." Jews from all the surrounding regions came to Jerusalem to purify themselves, recall their covenant, prepare, and celebrate together. Imagine the excitement in the city and the regions around, with families reuniting, crowds of shoppers searching for the best vegetables, herbs, wines, and lamb for the gatherings and the much-anticipated Passover meal.

Many more people gathered in Jerusalem as they learned he was in Bethany, close to Jerusalem, visiting Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Many more believers came to Jesus because of Lazarus, so the chief priests planned to kill Lazarus as well. The city was in a frenzy as Jesus entered Jerusalem. It is at this point that today's gospel begins with some Greeks seeking to see Jesus. As Philip arrives with them, Jesus says that his time to be glorified has come, adding,

"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."

Even those who do not plant seeds understand the "grain of wheat story." Let's allow ourselves to contemplate the mystery of the seed, that tiny embryo invisible to the naked eye, which determines the story of its unfolding, leaf by leaf, stem by stem, blossom by blossom, fruit by fruit. The seed does not think; its cells simply respond to the plan of its Creator and bears fruit as it is made to do.

Jesus is telling us that we, too, are called to die, first, and then to bear fruit. The change in a seed is easy to imagine, for we know it well. But how well can we understand our own dying? Dying to what? A change to what? It's about dying to self. Jesus is promising us that in the dying to self, there will be an unfolding, yes, an unfolding within us that will be mysterious and beautiful. This Unfolding will eventually bear fruit in God's time.

Mothers, do you recall the day you said yes to the new life beginning in your womb? Perhaps you had waited a long time for this to happen, and this moment was ecstatic. Perhaps this baby was not planned, and you were not sure you could cope with a child at that time. Very ready or not ready at all, you carried on. The dying to self for the life of the child brought nausea, varicose veins, headaches, swelling, the expenses of a larger wardrobe, and plenty of nervous, worrisome anticipation. The grateful joy of holding your firstborn helped (well, almost) to forget the pains of birthing.



Is there more dying to self when we are raising a child? Hello! We know it all too well! Breastfeeding, sleepless nights, special diets, diapers, costs, and more costs. No longer was there enough money for your favorite treats or nights out. The baby's needs came first.

Mothers and fathers, we do this because we love our children. Can we recognize what has happened here? We have taken part in the Unfolding of something beautiful and were changed because we said yes. In becoming a parent, we embarked on a journey full of 'toil, danger, and fears'. We gave up control; we could not decide the personality of our boy or girl. What we got is what we got. With the help of our partner, grandparents, friends, and teachers, we did our best to figure the kid out. It's a walk on the water, the step out in faith like no other! And as the years went by, they were filled with laughter and tears, one adventure after another.

Becoming a parent is life-changing and full of challenges and joy. If we can understand this, we can understand and dare to embrace the challenges of dying to self in other ways. The crazy part is that we won't know what will happen or unfold in us as we let go and become new, somehow. Can I let go? What will it cost me?

This week, let us venture into contemplative prayer, asking our loving Creator to enlighten us on how and where we have made choices along the way, difficult or easy, which have brought forward an unfolding and a change within us.

Meister Eckhart wrote, "Deep within us all, there is an amazing inner sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a Divine Center, a speaking Voice, to which we may continuously return." Trusting in this sanctuary of our soul, let us pray:

O God, source of all blessings, you light up what is hidden in the darkness and reveal to us the truth within our hearts. Lead us to recall the moments in our journey when the Spirit has moved us to a dying to self and a blessed Unfolding.

Light a candle, be still, enjoy this blessed time, and give thanks!

For Your Reflection:

- Think about your experience as a parent or caregiver. How has the journey of raising a child challenged you to let go of control and embrace the unknown?
- How does the anticipation and preparation for the Passover in ancient Jerusalem resonate with the anticipation and preparation in your own life for significant events or celebrations?
- Take a moment to contemplate the idea of the "inner sanctuary of the soul" mentioned by Meister Eckhart. How can you cultivate a deeper connection to this sacred space within yourself through contemplative practices like prayer or meditation?
- In what ways can you incorporate more moments of stillness and gratitude into your daily life to foster a sense of inner peace and awareness?

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Amen
