

May I speak in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

I am a tidy person, sort of. My wife is a clean person. This might not sound like the source of disagreements, but I'm sorry to say that it often is. As long as things in our house are arranged neatly or tidied away, out of sight, I'm happy, but Laura is not bothered by a bit of clutter, or even rather a lot of clutter. She's happy as long as there's no dirt around. So when she's expecting the house work she's told me to do in the bathroom, I think I've done a good job. The tooth brushes will all be lined up. The towels will be neatly folded, but Laura will notice the grime around the bathtub, the dust around the sink. We'll both be looking at the same thing, but we'll see different things. I look and see clutter. Laura looks and sees dirt. Looking and seeing are not the same thing.

Have you ever done that test for color blindness? It's amazing, you look at a page and this enormous number 37 full of green dots just comes back at you and the doctor will say, "What do you see.?" I'll say, "Well I could see a 37 of course." But if I was color blind, presumably I look at the same sheet and just see a page of dots. When we look at something, we don't all see the same thing and there's a line in the Gospel, which got me thinking this way. It says, "Some Greeks came to Phillip and said we wish to see Jesus." What a wonderful request. We could all wish to see Jesus. In fact what I want to ask today is, when we look at Jesus, what do we see? As we head towards Easter and start to focus on the great events surrounding Jesus' death and resurrection, what do we see when we look at the cross?

For many of Jesus' contemporaries who watched him die, they'd have thought they were simply looking at another Roman execution. They'd have seen nothing unusual going on. Crucifixion was brutal, but not uncommon, yet here we are 2,000 years later worshiping in a building with a cross on top and in a few moments baby Mia will be baptized and she'll have the sign of the cross drawn on her forehead. What some regard as a communal garden execution, is to others seen as something as universal and eternal significance. Each week as we

come to church, we proclaim that by His death, we are saved. How is that? That's the question I want to address this morning and our readings start to help us to construct an answer about how the death of Jesus still has significance. They give us two things that Christians see when we look at the cross.

The first is in the Old Testament, that reading from Jeremiah. Look how it starts, "The days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant." The new covenant of which Jeremiah speaks, is established on the cross of Jesus. Jesus himself says in the words we hear every week, in our communion prayer. When Jesus at the last supper took a cup and gave thanks, he gave it to them and said, "Drink from it all of you. For this is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." Notice how the passage from Jeremiah begins with a promise to make a new covenant and ends with God's promise to forgive their iniquity and remember their sins no more. These twin themes of a new covenant and forgiveness are picked up by Jesus who says, "My blood of a new covenant is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

The Old Testament throughout the various books, talk of several covenants that God made with his people. A covenant is simply an agreement, a treaty, that two parties enter into and the Old Testament records several covenants, because none of them worked. None of them served to give the people forgiveness, to bring them into a state of Holiness where they could enter into a right relationship with God. They didn't work because the people couldn't keep their side of the bargain, but under the terms of the new and final covenant, Jesus fulfilled on our behalf what we were struggling to do. He fulfilled our side of the covenant. That's why we say his death was for us. He offered the sacrifice to end all sacrifice and so he won for us complete forgiveness and brought us into a right relationship with God. That's why each week we celebrate in our Eucharist, what he has done for us in the pouring out of his blood, in the establishing of a new covenant.

So Christians see the cross of Jesus firstly, as the making of a new covenant, the establishing of a new relationship between God and his people. Secondly, in the Gospel, we see that in our tradition we understand the cross, not just as the beginning of a new covenant, but also as the glorification of Jesus. That's what John in his Gospel says is going on, on the cross, which sounds peculiar. Glory is not normally something associated with execution, but here it is. When Jesus is saying, "The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified," he's saying the hour has come for me to die. If we begin to understand this, we need to know that Glory in the Old Testament, refers to the signs of the presence of God. In the Old Testament, when the glory of God appears, it's a manifestation of his presence, which leads directly to the startling New Testament claim, that God and His glory are seen in the person of Jesus and most clearly in his death on the cross. That's because God is love and his love is most evident in the cross of Christ.

It's in the cross of Christ that we see how far God in Christ was prepared to go to show His love to His people. It wasn't the nails that held Jesus to the cross, it was love. At this point, we need to turn to the language of the poets to explore that mystery. We'll sing a great hymn later, which begins, with the line, "When I survey the wondrous cross ..." and ends with, "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my life, my soul, my all." Which takes us back to the theme of looking and seeing. What do we see when we survey the wondrous cross? Herbert in that beautiful poem sees amazing love.

There's a well known story about an old bishop of Paris and he tells it. He tells the story about when a young man went into cathedral in Paris and he was decked out in his leathers. He was something of a gang leader and thought he was very tough and he went into a confession booth and simply abused the priest. The priest was a very wise old priest. He was unperturbed and he said, "Well I'll tell you what, I've only got one thing to say to you, which is, could you please go to the figure on the cross at the front of the church and look that figure in the eye and just repeat to that figure what you told

me?" So the young man didn't want to appear in any way weak, so he says, "fine."

He went to the front of the church. He had to kneel to look into the face of the figure, of the crucifix on the front of the church. So he knelt down, looked up into the face of the figure on the cross and started his his raid of abuse again, but he didn't get very far, because he couldn't say it, and his heart melted. He saw for the first time that the figure on the cross was there because he loved him and the young mans life was turned around. The bishop of Paris said I know that stories true, because I was that man. I was that young man.

The power of the cross is the power of love. God is not glorified by imposing a death sentence on Jesus. God is glorified as God in Christ goes to the bitter end to reveal his gracious and loving heart. "When I am lifted up, lifted up on the cross," Jesus says. "I will draw all people to myself." As we now turn to this baptism service, we see this baptism as a sign of God's love. God's love for baby Mia is there before she's even heard of God, before she's done anything to merit favor or love from God. God's love is there first. Baptism is a great and wonderful sign of God's love for Mia and for each of us. So as we move toward Easter and as we focus again on the death and the resurrection of Jesus, I'll leave you with the question of, what do we see? What do we see happening on the cross? I'll remind you of the two things our readings have shown. The beginning of a new covenant, the winning of our forgiveness and a sign of God's great love. Amen.