

We all know the story of Socrates, the Greek philosopher. Socrates is regarded as one of the wisest men of all time. He was calling the Athenians to a radical re-examination of life. "The unexamined life," he said, "is not worth living."

He challenged popular opinions regarding religion and politics as he sought to bring people to a better understanding of virtue, justice, piety and right conduct. He attracted many followers, especially among the youth.

When you challenge political viewpoints or religious teachings, you get into trouble.

He was arrested, tried and sentenced to death. He was charged with false teaching regarding the gods of the state, propagating revolutionary ideas and corrupting the youth of Athens.

His family and friends wanted to intervene to overturn the sentence, but he would not let them. He had the option to accept going into exile from Athens, but he would not take it.

Instead, he accepted a death sentence to drink the poison, hemlock. Subsequent generations of Greeks came to regard Socrates as a martyr for truth. They resolved never again to persecute anyone on account of their beliefs.

By the time of Jesus, the Greeks had become among the most broad-minded people in the world. We see, in today's gospel, that among the huge crowds that had come to Jerusalem for the Passover feast were some Greeks. It did not take these Greeks long to see that all was not well in Jerusalem.

They were aware of the hostility and the ensuing confrontations between the religious leaders and Jesus. So they came to see Jesus. Why did they come to see Jesus? One theory is that they came to alert Jesus to the seriousness of the danger surrounding him and to suggest that he flee with them to Greece, the land of freedom.

These Greeks had seen Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem, and must have been edified by the noble bearing of the Lord. Perhaps what appealed most to them was the fact that Jesus had cleansed the temple and said that His Father had made it a "house for all nations."

This revolutionary concept must have deeply stirred a spirit of universalism, the spirit of inclusion and outreach, which was a characteristic of the Greeks.

The answer Jesus gave to the Greeks was most appropriate. "A grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies.."
Just stay with the import of those words. "Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies..."

The Greeks had come to Jesus because of the majesty and beauty of his appearance, which they regarded highly as followers of Apollo. They were also inspired his spirit of universalism, inclusiveness and love.

Today, Jesus explains to them an important characteristic about his person. To the Greeks, who were inspired by his revolutionary concept of universalism, to a group of people who believed in beauty, strength, self-expression and what you can accomplish on your own, Jesus says "Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies.."

Jesus is talking about self-renunciation or self-denial or dying to self.

Human nature, He was telling the Greeks, does not achieve greatness through poetry and art, or a great career or fame, or even survival but by passing through death, by renouncing oneself.

Jesus pointed to his own battered self on a hill as he said “Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies..”

Many people see death as an interruption in their life and mission. But Jesus saw death as a fulfillment of his life and mission. Jesus uses this parable of the grain of wheat to explain that by shying away from death, one only reduces one’s life and mission (“remains just a single grain”).

Whereas, by giving oneself up to death when the hour has come, one enhances it (“bears much fruit”).

Renunciation sits at the heart of Christian discipleship. Whoever wants to be a disciple of mine, Jesus says, must deny himself or herself, and follow me.

Self-denial brings medieval images to mind: mortification of the flesh, hard beds, hair shirts, cold showers, drafty monasteries, celibacy, the absence of fun and creature comforts.

The monks of old used to beat themselves with a cane or belt behind closed doors as a way to suffer. Yet, self-denial is none of these. Neither is it having low self-esteem, always running yourself down, never rejoicing in the good you accomplish or never laughing.

The greatest example of self renunciation is the example of Jesus himself. While He was in the Garden of Gethsemane, lying prostrate and sweating blood, He cried out to his father and said, “Father, if it is possible take this chalice away from me. But not my will, but yours be done.”

Self renunciation is your ability to say “No” to your will, what you want to do and what you want to be. It is about saying “Yes” to God’s will, what He wants you to be, what He wants you to do.”

Let me tell you a story. You may have heard this before.

A very successful man, who was conscious of his riches and status, parked his brand-new Lamborghini in front of his office, ready to show it off to his colleagues. As he got out, a truck passed too close and completely tore the door off of the driver’s side.

The man immediately grabbed his cell phone, dialed 911, and within minutes a policeman pulled up.

Before the officer had a chance to ask any questions, the distressed man started screaming hysterically. His Lamborghini, which he had just picked up the day before, was now completely ruined and would never be the same, no matter what the body shop did to it.

When the man finally wound down from his ranting and raving, the officer shook his head in disgust and disbelief. "I can't believe how materialistic you are," he said. "You are so focused on your possessions, your status, that you don't notice anything else."

"How can you say such a thing?" asked the man. The cop replied, "Don't you know that your left arm is missing from the elbow down? It must have been torn off when the truck hit you."

"Ahhh!" he screamed. "Where's my Rolex!"

Think a moment. What drives your life? Really, what drives your every day life and decisions? Your Rolex? What you have? Your accomplishments? Your job?

Every day we face these temptations of life: **idolatry**—placing something of this world ahead of God in one's life; making something temporal of a greater priority than that which is spiritual; **covetousness**—Living an unhappy life thinking about what you don't have and others have, desiring that which God has withheld or forbidden; **conformity**—modeling one's thinking or behavior after the world rather than after the Word and will of God.

I think CTK is a great community. We are broadminded and progressive. We are very welcoming, and we reach out to people especially the most vulnerable.

To us, as to the Greeks, Jesus says, "Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies." We must embrace self-renunciation. We must learn to deny ourselves.

Can you imagine how many marriages could have been saved or will be save if only couples learns to die to selves, what they want to do, what they want to be and live for the new reality of marriage or family and how they need to move together.

If only we could die to selves!

Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground! As we enter deeper and deeper into the Lenten mystery, the message is self-renunciation- dying to self.

Just a couple of days ago, a woman told me that she resigned from her position of Superintendent of Schools to take care of her mother. She said, when she quit her job, a part of her died too.

Yes. Jesus will show us the way. He will deny himself, take up the cross and die. In the spirit of Christian discipleship, we, too must deny ourselves, and take up the cross and follow Jesus.