

LENT 5, Mar. 17, 2024, Year B

- {I have put a handout with your bulletin, and encourage you to look at the top image on the page. / *pause*}
- *It is Passover in Jerusalem.* Many hundreds or even thousands of people have come to the city for the great feast. Among them are *some Greeks*, who may be Gentiles that wish to worship with the Jews.¹ Notice how James Tissot portrays so *much more than* the immediate scene of a conversation, as he displays an immense interest in first century Jerusalem. He visualizes the Greeks walking over an arched causeway, toward the southwest side of the Temple Mount. The festival pilgrims are approaching what was probably *the most dramatic entrance to the Temple*. Finding a fellow visitor *who also speaks Greek*, these pilgrims tell Philip *why they have come*. "Sir," they say; "we wish to see Jesus!"
- In his *usual* way, Tissot depicts Jesus as a *rabbi who is clothed in white*, in a painting faithful to John's presentation of the scene. The artist therefore *does not* show Jesus *moving toward* the inquiring Greeks when he learns that *they want to see him*. Instead, Jesus responds to Philip and Andrew in a *curious* and *indirect* way. Perhaps drawing upon an image in the book of Daniel, he says, "the hour has come for the Son of Man *to be glorified*." Jesus speaks of his coming *death* and his *vocation* as being centered on **God's glorification**.
- Here, we begin to make sense of why Tissot depicts the Greek visitors' arrival *from Jesus' perspective*, instead of from *their's*. And why he portrays the scene from the vantage point of the southwest corner of the Temple Mount. The story is not about *them*; it's about **him**.
- Along with Jesus, the artist has *us* looking out between Hellenistic Temple columns, *toward Mt. Zion*. The occasion has deep meaning, and *not just for* faithful Jews. It has significance for **all** of Jerusalem, and *everyone* who has

come to the great festival. It has implications *for the whole world*, both here in the holy city, and for all that lies over and beyond the hills to the west. Here, on a dramatic high point at the Temple Mount, *under a dark sky*, Jesus stands in a place associated with the *real-presence* of **God's own glory**. A voice from heaven then speaks of God's name being *glorified*. *The Gentile foreigners* who are drawn to Jesus *provide a sign*. *They are a sign of all* those who will be drawn to him, when **his glory** is revealed on the cross.

- This scene records *the decisive moment* that becomes *the hinge point* in John's Gospel. Three times before, as John records, Jesus has said that his hour has *not yet come*.² But *now*, it has! **Now** is the *hour* for him to be *glorified*. For, as Jesus says, *this is the moment when "the ruler of this world will be driven out," and replaced by the Son of Man*. This decisive moment sets in motion what John calls *Jesus' lifting up*,¹ when he will draw *all people* to himself.
- And so, we attend to what the Greeks tell Philip and Nathaniel. "Sir, we *would see Jesus!*"³ John, in quoting them, is reporting *more* than a historical detail. Their request prompts us to *consider a reflective question*, a question suitable for people at *all* times and places. It is especially appropriate for our Lenten self-discernment. You and I can ask ourselves *this: do I approach my tasks, and do I approach my activities, everyday, wishing to see Jesus?* It's such a basic question. And it may not seem relevant to our *immediate* concerns. *But*, doesn't this question reflect our **ultimate** concerns? And, *if the question does point to what is ultimate*, then *why aren't we not more intentional* about making this question a part of **everything** we do?
- We need *always* to ask *this because*, as Jesus tells us, *we find what we seek*. Remember how Jesus says, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks, finds, and to the one who knocks it will be

opened.”⁴ Jesus is simply stating what’s *true*, regardless of our intentions or efforts. Instead of telling us what we *should* do, he seems to be offering an observation about *the nature of what we already* do, and do quite *unconsciously*. People tend to *find* what they are *looking for*! And what we pay attention to, *grows* in our experience!⁵

- Think of a soccer player dribbling toward the goal while focussed on the goalie. Or someone behind the wheel of a car and distracted by a wreck on the roadside. What are they looking at? And toward what are they moving? In each case, *we steer toward what we are looking at*. This begs a central question: *What are we looking at?* What are we focused upon? *For we often find the object of our attention*. So, *why not look for* what is right and true, and for what is good and beautiful?
- Having said this, our Gospel reading also provides us with *a subtle caution*. And this is why I have shared with you *one of the most remarkable* of James Tissot’s paintings, *Jesus Looks Through a Lattice* (invite viewing it). If we examine this image carefully, we will see the eyes of our Lord *looking at us*, and *seeing* us. He who *sometimes* seems *hidden* from us, *sees* us! Now, think about how we earlier noticed the way Tissot depicts the arrival of the Greek visitors: it was *from Jesus’ perspective*, instead of from *their’s*. For we so commonly speak of *looking for* God, and of hoping to *find* God. Yet, the irony of this being a matter of *us searching and finding*, escapes us. *God is not ‘lost’!* But, *we* are! And yet, while telling ourselves that we are *looking for God*, we spend so much of our time and energy actually looking for *other things*. The result is that –so often– *it is not God that we are finding!* Especially because God is not someone or something ‘*we find*.’ Instead –*truly*– *God finds us!*
- *Yes, we don’t find God; God finds us*. He who searches for ‘lost sheep’ has found us. And so... we truly come to ourselves... *when we find that we have*

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already been found by God.⁶ What we really seek is the experience of **having been found**. And so, the fruit of our imagined search is already at hand – He is already here, and within us. The Son of Man has been glorified. He has been glorified *in* God and *by* God, in history. And *now*, through our baptized lives, he is glorified *in us*.



James Tissot, *Gentiles Ask to See Jesus*



James Tissot: Jesus Looks Through a Lattice

John 12:20-33

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 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.

“Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

Notes:

¹ The reference may be to Greek-speaking Jews from the Diaspora; see John 7:35. Yet, as a signal of Jesus’ ministry having ‘cosmic’ or world-wide significance, they may be Greek-speaking Gentiles, “God-fearers,” who come to worship at the Passover in Jerusalem with the people of Israel.

² See John 2:4; 7:30; and 8:20.

³ As the King James Version compactly translates the statement.

⁴ Matthew 7:7-8.

⁵ I am told that this latter phrase comes from Living Systems theory.

⁶ Seek Luke 15:17 in context.