

Once a journalist from USA asked Mother Teresa of Kolkata. “Mother you have over 5000 nuns working in around 140 countries. What is your biggest problem in managing such a large number of nuns?”

Without a moment of hesitation, Mother Teresa answered with one word: “Professionalism.” “Professionalism”. Surprised journalist said. “I don't understand.”

She explained, “You see, I send my sisters to have training and degrees so that they will be better able to serve the poorest of the poor. These nuns come back with their medical degrees as Doctors or Nurses and with degrees in Social Works or management. The very first thing they ask is where is my office or where is my clinic, or where is my computer? But do you know what I do to these professionals? I send them over to the House of the Dying where they simply hold the hands of dying people for six months and after that, they're ready to be servants again.”

This was the greatness of Mother Teresa...and the way she made her nuns die in order to produce fruits. Only after the nuns are dead of their egoism, professional pride, then only they are servants to serve the poor and the dying able to produce fruits.

As we come closer to the celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus, the church invites us to reflect upon our life in the modern world. Why did Jesus die on the cross when he was only 33? Why did God allow his son to die at the hands of Jews? We find the answer in today's Gospel.

As we heard, some Greek scholars escorted by Andrew and Philip come to see Jesus expecting greater wisdom from the Lord. Jesus addressed them in a language which may appear strange for us; but it was really a new philosophy of life – “only by death comes life. Only by spending life we retain it. Only by service comes greatness.” Jesus uses the example from day today farming life and says, “unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat”.

Yes, we all very well know that the seeds or the grains are useful to us, but we have to let them die and decay under the fertile soil for bringing up more fruits. We can preserve the grains in the cold storage, but they will not multiply.

With this example Jesus was referring to his own death and resurrection. Dying of seed and bearing fruit forecasts His death on the cross and the resurrection after three days.

But he also teaches us that new life and eternal life are possible only by the death of the self through suffering and service. Salt gives its taste by dissolving in water. A candle gives light by burning its wick and melting its wax. The oyster produces a priceless pearl by transforming a grain of sand through a long and painful process. Loving parents sacrifice themselves so that their children can enjoy a better life than they themselves had.

St. Mother Teresa is one clear example of how by dying one could be more fruitful. She died to her comfortable teaching career, and with just 17 cents in her pocket began her challenging life for the “poorest of the poor” in the crowded streets of Calcutta. Now she has become so fruitful. While many Religious Orders of nuns in Europe and USA are struggling for vocations, Saint Mother Teresa's nuns continue to grow despite very harsh and challenging lives they have to lead. Many women from Europe and America are joining her Order. In fact, the current General is of German born. I have some relatives in her Congregation.

We see similar cases in the history of great saints, scientists and benefactors of mankind in all walks of

life. They chose to die in order to be fruitful.

Today Jesus explains to us the meaning of life, through the metaphor of the grain of wheat or any seed. When preserved safely it produces no fruit and remains unproductive. Only when it is buried in the ground does it bear fruit and that in far greater abundance than itself.

The season of lent offers us good opportunity to reflect on our life in this world. Let's reflect on what Jesus teaches today. Life comes through death. Death is necessary to gain life. Grain has to die in order to bear fruits. In dying to my selfishness, I gain eternal life. We must allow our selfishness, self-centeredness, and egoism to die, we must allow our anger, resentment and hatred to die, we must allow our pride to die. These deaths will yield fruits of love, fruits of compassion and forgiveness, the fruits of service. Try to give your family an extra dose of love each day of the remaining time of lent. Reduce your spending by 20 – 10% and help the poor.

These preparations will help us to enter into the Holy Week which begins with Palm Sunday on the coming Sunday.