

Think for a minute about the person you love the most besides Jesus. How recently have you thought of dying for that person? This may seem like a strange question, but in the context of today's readings, it makes perfect sense.

One of the last hand-drawn animated features that Disney made is a little gem called "The Emperor's New Groove." It features some excellent voice acting by David Spader and John Goodman and is both hilarious and meaningful.

The story follows the misadventures of a narcissistic emperor named Kusco, who is forced into relying on a kindly peasant from his realm named Pacha. During the first part of the movie, we get to see Kusco's worst qualities on display: he is selfish, callous, and spoiled. It is these very qualities that end up putting him in danger of death. Through a twist of fate, Pacha, the peasant whom he has recently booted from his home in order to build a summer house for himself, becomes the only one able to save him. They go through their ups and downs as Pacha tries to crack through the emperor's barrier of self-centeredness. A turning point comes when Pacha is about to fall off a cliff and Kusco snatches him to safety. When Pacha thanks him for rescuing him, he replies, "Nobody is that heartless."

In that moment, Kusco is given clarity about how much his own preoccupation with himself has been killing him on the inside. He realizes the very lesson that Jesus is trying to teach all of us today: unless we die to ourselves in service of others, we will kill ourselves apart from others. One is a foretaste of the Heaven we are all made for; the other is a foretaste of the Hell that some of us choose instead.

In the first reading, the prophet Jeremiah foresees a time when the Lord will write His law on our hearts. This beautiful passage reminds us that we are called to have God replace our stony, selfish hearts with hearts of flesh, hearts that beat with the love of Jesus Himself. This can only happen

through the grace of Jesus being poured out upon us, and this Lent is the appointed time for us to have that heart surgery we all need. It's time to ask God to write *His* love on our hearts!

If we want to be worthy of the name Christian, we are called to live as Christ lived. When we receive the great grace of Jesus in the Eucharist at every Mass, it gives us the power to do just that. Jesus' life was marked by dying right from the start. From the very beginning, He was on the path to the Cross to die for each and every one of us. He prepared for that death each day dying to Himself in service of others. He healed them, listened to them, made time for them, defended them, challenged them, cried with them. All of this cost Him something. Ultimately, it cost His entire life.

Jesus calls each of us to die daily, but this dying is the central paradox of what it means to be Christian. When we love to the point of giving up our own needs, wants and desires, then we truly live. Then we begin to have hearts that beat in time with the Sacred Heart of Christ Jesus. "Amen, amen I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat, but if it dies, it produces much fruit."

What kind of fruit are we producing in our lives? All of us can think of places in our lives where we are dying through lack of self-giving love. Let us pray today to spend the remainder of Lent allowing Jesus to strip us of our selfishness through the power of the Holy Spirit. Let's resolve to be faithful to fasting, prayer and almsgiving in order to die to ourselves for Jesus and all those He has given us to love.

I pray for all of us: *Jesus, thank you for the challenge You give us to die to ourselves and live for You and others. Help us to spend these last days of Lent with our hearts open to You. Through the Holy Spirit, heal us of that selfishness that kills us alone, and replace it with Your love that leads us to die for You and others in order to live abundantly. Amen.*