

**March 21, 2021 | Fifth Sunday in Lent:** <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/032121-YearB.cfm>

Jer 31:31-34

Psalm 51:3-4, 12-13, 14-15

Heb 5:7-9

Jn 12:20-33

*By Kayla S. Jacobs*

Last fall I was preparing to plant garlic cloves in our garden. The cloves we were planting we saved from the garlic we harvested a couple months earlier. As I was standing in the garden, with the basket of cloves in my hands, I felt a deep sense of peace in my heart. The more years I grow a garden the more my sense of awe and wonderment of God's creation grows along with it. For me, there are few things more convincing of God's existence and the divine handiwork work of creation than planting a seed, caring for its growth, harvesting its fruit, saving its seeds, and planting those seeds to start the cycle again. Every plant has the ability to "produce much fruit." (John 12:24). The continuous cycle of our food source gives me confidence of the Lord's desire and commitment to providing for His people. This perpetual giving of life is one of the most hopeful things in the world.

In order for this cycle to work, however, the fallen seed must be cultivated. Germination requires water, oxygen, light, darkness, and patience before a seed can sprout and bear fruit. It requires the right conditions. A theme in this week's readings is God telling us He is actively drawing us close to Himself ("I will draw everyone to Myself," John 12:32), actively putting us in a right condition. By doing so He is giving us all the necessary means of cultivation.

Around this time last year, I, like many others, felt the need of that cultivation more than any other time of my life. The isolation we experienced during quarantine and the absence of community intensified our Lenten season more than we could have ever imagined. It felt like a time of desolation: we were scared, unsure, lonely.

Several months later, still quarantining, is when I found myself in the garden with my basket of garlic cloves and sense of peace. I was about to put the cloves in the ground, into what seemed to be darkness, but I knew from previous experiences the hope that comes from planting seeds. I knew that it was just the continuation of its process of growth. Then it occurred to me that the peace that I was feeling was the realization that the time of desolation I had experienced the months before were actually a time of "germination" and cultivation. Like the grain of wheat from the Gospel (John 12:24), I had to learn to let go and allow myself to be drawn close to God.

The fruit of that cultivation is a clean heart (Psalm 51:10) in which He will "write His [law] upon" (Jeremiah 31:33). That being the ultimate Christian law: to love God and neighbor. When we allow ourselves to be cultivated by God's love and being "His people" (Jeremiah 31:33) we are in the

right condition to serve the poor, comfort the afflicted, bury the dead, visit the sick and imprisoned, and to bear wrongs patiently.

I am writing this on a nice midwestern Spring day. The snow is almost entirely melted, my garden beds are visible again, my seedlings are growing in the greenhouse, I am preparing for a new season of cultivation. My eyes are patiently set on Easter.

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