

**Saint Catherine of Siena-Saint Lucy and
Saint Giles Parish**

Path of Prayer



Return to me with your whole heart.

- Joel 2:12

Lent 2024

Tuesday Before Ash Wednesday February 13, 2024

James 1:12-18; Psalm 94; Mark 8:14-21

Judgment shall again be with justice, and all the upright of heart shall follow it. When I say, "My foot is slipping," your mercy, O LORD, sustains me. Psalm 94: 15, 18

Dear Parishioners,

With Ash Wednesday upon us we begin the liturgical season of Lent. As we join together on our communal Path of Prayer, I reflected: What is the challenge of Lent? Today's final Readings in Ordinary Time before we turn to those assigned to Lent suggest a segue to the Season: Repent and consciously seek to change our heart!

Will we take seriously the invitation of this season - or will we just show up for the ashes? Are we ready to receive the words of the minister as the ashes are placed on our forehead: Repent and believe the Good News?

The Spiritual writer Father Richard Rohr writes, "Jesus' freedom demands surrender. When we let go of what traps us ... our small self, our cultural biases, even our fear of loss and death, we are liberated from the constant anxiety of such preoccupations, from the hopeless responsibility of managing our own destiny." I hope these daily reflections can set the tone for your day and be a help to fast from noise and the swirl of daily life; to slow down and be still as we seek to live as God's children.

As we enter Lent and hear the word of God throughout the season, we are consistently reminded everything is a choice. We choose to be disciples, or we don't. Seeking repentance and a change to heart, may we use these reflections and our time of prayer together to help choose, as best we can, to live as Christ demonstrated.

May I suggest a simple daily prayer:

"God help me" ... to be more patient, be more kind, to show more compassion, to offer more forgiveness, to let go of anything that enslaves me and keeps me from trusting you more.

**Fr. Carl Morello,
Pastor of St. Catherine of Siena-St. Lucy
and St. Giles Parish**

Ash Wednesday February 14, 2024

Joel 2:12-18; 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2; Psalm 51;
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

“Even now, says the Lord, return to me with your whole heart...” Joel 2:12

As I retreated from all the noise and clutter of my life, to reflect on the season of Lent and the Ash Wednesday readings, I realized I first had to stop. As is said today – Full Stop: something not easy to do in our contemporary lives, multitasking constantly and rushing from one event or obligation to the next. Never clearing the mind, let alone the heart and soul. I pride myself in searching for truth... What about soul searching?

Even now, says the LORD,
return to me with your whole heart,
with fasting, and weeping, and mourning;
Rend your hearts, not your garments,
and return to the LORD, your God. -Joel 2:12

When did I last quiet myself in prayer? To find the desert within, to center myself and surrender to the stillness and really enter the Word, “Even now, says the Lord, return to me with your whole heart...” As I consider our Lenten invitation to prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, I am struck by my own distance from my inner self, my spiritual practices, my need for prayer and my need to pray for my neighbor. How far are you from the heart of your faith?

In a world ripe with personal and structural sin, our God invites us in Lent to return, to refresh, and to renew our faith, to activate ourselves, heart and soul, in this sacred season. So go to the desert, make time for prayer, for openness and concern, for the other. “Return to me with fasting and weeping, and mourning...”

I pray our Lenten prayer will deepen our connection to our God, and to our neighbors; our fasting will evoke thoughts of surrender, trust and deep longing, and activate our hunger for community and connection. Our inner work and vulnerability, our outreach and care, will recognize the profound presence of God in our neighbor.

Trudi Goggin

Thursday After Ash Wednesday February 15, 2024

Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Psalm 1; Luke 9:22-25

*"Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live."
-Deuteronomy 30:19*

Today's readings give advice on how to reach eternal salvation. Moses says that we should love the Lord and follow God's commandments, so that we will be blessed. The writer of the psalms adds another layer by stating that we should not sit in the company of the insolent so that the Lord will watch over us for all our days. Jesus further instructs "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." These directives are clear, but how can we apply them during Lent 2024?

Traditionally Lent is a time of "giving up." These offerings that we make increase our self-discipline and remind us of Jesus' sacrifices for us. These acts of self-renunciation help us not only to deny ourselves, but to choose love versus instant self-gratification. Choosing love is the way to follow Jesus and save our own lives. Is this easy? Should this be easy?

Choose love to donate some money instead of buying an extra pair of shoes.

Choose love to be generous in speech and action.

Choose love to respect the differences in people.

Treat all with compassion.

When we are choosing to love in this selfless way, we are also choosing life with Jesus. First, choose love for ourselves and then show people the way to God by pointing others to Jesus. Material wealth may make our path to salvation more difficult.

As Jesus states "What profit is there for one to gain the whole world yet lose or forfeit himself?"

Lord Jesus, you chose to give your life in love. Help me to choose love, even when the road is difficult.

Nancy Mangiantini

Friday After Ash Wednesday February 16, 2024

Isaiah 58:1-9; Psalm 51; Matthew 9:14-15

"This, rather, is the fasting that I wish..." -Isaiah 58:6

As we begin the Lenten season this week, the reading from Isaiah wastes little time reminding us of the ultimate purpose of our fasting. Fasting is not to be for the sake of achieving greater individual purity and holiness. It is not a matter of personal piety, nor self-affliction. Rather, the fasting that our God seeks is that which ultimately leads us to social action which embodies mercy and justice. The corporal works of mercy modeled by Jesus and told in his well-known words in the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 25, have strong roots in this passage from Isaiah: free the oppressed, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless. This fasting is quite a different thing than fasting from chocolate bars! It is an invitation to put faith into outward action in concrete and embodied ways, individually and communally. This is a fasting that leads to things like the work of caring for the needs of migrant families, reaching out to comfort the lonely or broken-hearted, or making space in our lives, however we might do so, for generous service to others.

In the short passage from the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus is questioned why his disciples were not fasting. His response dismantles the notion that fasting indicates piety and fidelity. Rather, he puts fasting in its proper place, centering it around deepening our relationship with him and remaining open to the dynamic life that his presence in our life offers and calls us to.

May our fasting this Lenten season lead us to generous action and to a deepened commitment to celebrate the life which our relationship with God (Jesus) makes possible.

Mark Laboe

Saturday After Ash Wednesday February 17, 2024

Isaiah 58:9-14; Psalm 86; Luke 5:27-32

*"Those who are healthy do not need a physician, but the sick do.
I have not come to call the righteous to repentance,
but sinners." Luke 27:32*

While today's Gospel is familiar, let's not miss the miracle. Levi was a tax collector, taking people's hard-earned money while keeping some for himself and the Romans. Yet, when Jesus called, Levi left his way of life and followed Jesus - without looking back. He did an about face becoming Matthew. What do we do when He calls? Do we follow? Do we attend to other things first, saying I will, but let me finish this. Do we say, yes, but... there are pressing matters, such as soccer games or a need to catch up. Do we attend to these things or ensure that our family is up ready to greet our Lord and His Body every Sunday?

One might ask, what does following Jesus look like? Sometimes it means saying goodbye to old ways, moving in a new direction entirely. Sometimes it means less of me and more of God and others. It certainly does not mean more screen time instead of real presence with others. And why were those Pharisees so concerned that Jesus dined with tax collectors, those rejected in Jewish society? Welcoming imperfect people didn't fit their script. Yet Jesus came for all, especially the sick, those caught in sin, those with meager resources but plentiful faith, those in need of a savior. This should make most of us feel much better. We need a savior!

Jesus called all to repentance and abundant life. He didn't encourage people to continue their old ways- but saw the person behind such ways. He saw people as they were and helped them become so much more. He does the same for you and me as we learn to follow and trust in Him - and His ways. Like the caterpillar who starts out crawling, when we follow the heart of Jesus, trusting Him, we transform into something more beautiful. It may not feel great at first to leave things behind, but like the butterfly in flight, we will radiate the light of Christ shining in a dark world as we become who God intended us to be. While our Lord asks much of His followers, He delivers even more. We are united to the merciful heart of Jesus as part of the mystical Body of Christ.

Tatia Gibbons

First Sunday of Lent February 18, 2024

Genesis 9:8-17; Psalm 25:1-10; 1 Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:12-15

“This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.” (Mark 1:12-15)

In Mark, Jesus emerges from the desert darkness of encounter with satanic forces, to shed light on the Kingdom of God. His words disclose the heart of his work, relevant throughout his entire public life, bringing the light and scattering the darkness. Jesus calls us to repentance: a change of mind and heart, in a lifelong process of transformation. He invites us to turn away from whatever inhibits us, and toward the source of divine love. This is the time!

The psalm affirms that God is our guide and companion on life’s journey, a path full of challenges and joys. Just as Jesus began his public life motivated by the crisis of John’s arrest, so also we encounter moments of crisis that are often moments of clarity. We take stock of our lives and priorities, and reassess how we spend our time. These are Privileged Moments for hearing God’s call. This is the time!

In this Lenten season, as we prepare for the most sacred time of the Church year—the Paschal Mystery of Jesus’ death and resurrection, our Sacred Space becomes a place that resonates and rings with the jubilant strains of new life, when the time in the wilderness ends.

How do you feel called to proclaim God’s kingdom in your current season of life?

Tom Lynch

Monday of the First Week of Lent February 19, 2024

Leviticus 19:1-2, 11-18; Psalm 19; Matthew 25:31-46

*“Whatever you did for one of the least of these...you did for me.”
- Matthew 25:46*

Everyone is a child of God.

When we read this passage from the Gospel of Matthew, we can easily remember the times that we helped in a soup kitchen, donated some of our clothes, or brought blessing bags to the Migrant Ministry. Some acts of service are very visible. But, what is God really saying to us in this passage? Who are the “least of these sisters and brothers?” If we believe that each one of us is a child of God, then we need to love each other: to treat everyone we meet the same way we would like to be treated. More importantly, we need to treat them the way we would treat Jesus. We don’t only have to do large acts of service: we can smile at one another, be kind to those who need a friend, help with the dishes or the kitchen even when we don’t want to. These chores are really acts of love. Service is really how we live our life each day.

Any good we do for each other makes an impact: kindness or acts of mercy bring out the good in others—and in ourselves. This parable is about the kingdom of heaven. Loving others the way Jesus cause calls us to can cause a chain reaction—the love and kindness in the world will spread, and hatred will shrink. Isn’t that one way to see the kingdom of heaven in the world today? And perhaps, if we can see each other as children of God, as brothers and sisters to love, we will find God in the unlikeliest places.

This selection was compiled from reflections of the Confirmation Candidates after reading and discussing this Gospel passage in their small faith groups.

The Confirmation Candidates of 2024

Tuesday of the First Week of Lent February 20, 2024

Isaiah 55:10-11, Psalm 34, Matthew 6:7-15

"Come... listen to me and eat what is good and your soul will delight in the richest of fare." -Isaiah 55:2

Jesus loved the natural world and walked along the fields, lakes and hills that brought forth the figs, wheat, wine, bread, fish and refreshing water that sustained and taught His followers. In Isaiah 55 the natural imagery inspires and says, "Come...listen to me and eat what is good and your soul will delight in the richest of fare." In today's Isaiah passage the Lord provides the perfect explanation of the natural water cycle and how it provides for the Earth. But there's more than bread for the eater here. Just like the rain and snow, God's Word is poured upon us. It comes down to refresh and restore us through scripture, the sacraments and faithful witnesses, so that we do not simply live and eat, but "flourish". How do we complete this cycle? How does this life-giving water return to the Lord fulfilled?

I know that I can pray like Jesus taught us, marveling at calling God my Father. I extol His name, and call out, even through tears, as the Psalmist proclaims. I pray for my daily bread. But when it comes to the Kingdom, I know I need to help build it—now, here on Earth. I want to put goodness into a broken world through my prayers and through acts of mercy, service and love. Continual, everlasting action from the Lord and to the Lord. If I respond, "all the trees of the field will clap their hands." (Isaiah 55:12)

Kimberly McGuire

Wednesday of the First Week of Lent February 21, 2024

Jonah 3:1-10, Psalm 51, Luke 11:29-32

"Create a clean heart in me, O God" – Psalm 51

The readings contrast the response of the inhabitants of Nineveh to the warning of the prophet Jonah with the people in Jesus' time. When the Ninevites heard Jonah warning of God's forthcoming wrath, they all repented, from the greatest to the least, putting on sackcloth and ashes and fasting. After Jesus performed many miracles - curing the sick, giving sight to the blind, and raising the dead - the people of his time still wanted a sign, leading Jesus to say, "This generation is a wicked generation..."

Today we dwell in the tension between repentance and denial, seeking certainty rather than trusting faith. Will we listen to the prophet crying, "Repent!" or demand proof before acting? The plea of the psalmist offers us a path forward, "Create a clean heart in me, O God."

Let us pray for God's guidance in opening our hearts to God and to one another.

Maura Junius

Thursday of the First Week of Lent February 22, 2024

1 Peter 5:1-4, Psalm 23, Matthew 16:13-19

*“And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock
I will build my Church.” – Matthew 16:18*

When I was a child, I thought that Peter was Jesus' best friend. The idea of having Jesus as a best friend was wondrous and totally cool. Jesus says: “Follow me!” and Peter follows. Jesus takes Peter to the mountain top for the transfiguration. Jesus says: “Walk on the water!” and Peter gets out of the boat and walks on the water with Him. Peter is one of the first to go into the Empty Tomb and Peter watches Jesus ascend into Heaven. But, like everyone in relationships, Peter is imperfect. He pulls his sword, he needs to be rebuked, he denies. Still, Jesus calls Peter the rock on which he built His Church.

Today's first reading emphasizes the role of church leaders in shepherding God's flock with qualities that include willingness, sincerity, and eagerness to serve. The Gospel recounts the moment when Peter acknowledges Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Peter received this revelation through God and so Peter is blessed with authority and responsibility in leading the Church. Sincerity, willingness to serve, candor, and enthusiasm, which Peter exemplifies, are foundations of a solid friendship. Peter shows us that we don't have to be perfect to be blessed by Jesus. He did everything for the love of Jesus.

How can we nourish our own solid friendship with Jesus?

Lynne DesLauriers

Friday of the First Week of Lent February 23, 2024

Ezekiel 18:21-28; Psalm 130; Matthew 5:20-26

*“But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother
will be liable to judgment” - Matthew 5:22*

In this gospel reading Jesus sounds like an Old Testament God. Yet, these stories, with threats of a fiery hell, are medicine for me. The brutal images break through my defenses, to the heart of my daily struggles. In this “civilized” world I can avoid killing someone physically, but can I avoid my anger? I may deny my hostile thoughts, but they sit in me - sometimes becoming volatile, sometimes staying hidden.

I’ve always been fascinated by emotions and have explored them since childhood. Later, I studied “emotional intelligence” and gave workshops on that concept to corporate audiences. I believe that God gave us emotions for a reason and that ALL emotions are helpful. (Science agrees.) So why is this reading so hard on us here? We can’t help how we feel.

For me, scripture describes not what our reality SHOULD BE but what our reality IS. God tells us the facts of the matter. The scary outcome (we are thrown into prison) doesn’t come because God is a fierce tyrant. Our punishment comes (as Dante knew) from within. We might hide our aggression from ourselves but God sees through us. Even our “slight” aggression (i.e. when we call someone a fool) is known.

This scripture urges me to face even my most subtle violence. If I don’t, daily life can feel like a prison or a fiery Gehenna, as I am separated from God and others. This reading offers guidance but I must do the hard work - admitting my anger and working to reconcile with others. Perhaps that’s why the images are so fierce. Like a bad dream, these metaphors show me the high price of avoiding my inner (“shadow”) work.

Laura Lewis-Barr

Saturday of the First Week of Lent February 24, 2024

Deuteronomy 26:16-19; Psalm 119; Matthew 5:43-48

*“Observe the commandments with all your heart and all your soul...
Walk in God’s ways.” Dt. 26:16-19
“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” Mt. 5:43-48*

Today’s readings made me look at myself more carefully than usual. The Ten Commandments often seem easy to obey. I haven’t killed anybody or wished to steal a neighbor’s spouse. But what does it mean to observe commandments wholeheartedly and to walk in God’s ways? Moses seems to be asking for more than obeying a list of “nots.” Then Jesus tells us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. Can I do that? How would I do that? Why would I do that?

If God asks us to do it, God probably knows we can. So how would we do it? We could look at Jesus. Jesus did a couple of things we don’t always talk about. He gathered a community around him. He asked for help, both from his Father and his community. If He needed grace, prayer, and community to complete his mission on Earth, we probably need grace, prayer, and community too. It is in community that we are most supported. It is often in community where we are most hurt and need to ask for or grant forgiveness.

Why would we love our enemies and pray for them? This seems to make no sense, especially today. I think it is related to the freedom we are promised by so many Biblical writers. When we forgive people who have hurt us or hurt others, we recognize the other as fully human. We disconnect ourselves from the mistreatment, detach ourselves from a cycle of bitterness and resentment. We become free people and freedom-fighters for peace.

Mary Ziegler

Second Sunday of Lent February 25, 2024

***Genesis 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18; Psalm 116;
Romans 8:31b-34; Mark 9:2-10***

"Abraham, Abraham!" "Here I am!" he answered." - Genesis 22:11

"Hush, hush, hush, Somebody's Callin' My Name," is an African American spiritual from the soundtrack of the television series *Roots, The Saga of An American Family*. Music can touch our souls and stir emotions within us on a spiritual level. In today's first reading, those emotions of God calling Abraham and Abraham's response to God's request were tall orders.

God called on Abraham two separate times in the first reading. Each time, Abraham's response was, "Here I Am!" Each time, Abraham was obedient to God's call. God was struck by Abraham's obedience and his willingness to make sacrifices beyond anyone's imagination. Because of his obedience, God blessed Abraham abundantly for all future generations.

"Oh my Lord, oh my Lord, what shall I do? What shall I do?" is the second line in the spiritual. It begs for a response from God. To hear the voice of God, let's hush, let's be still, and let's listen with an open heart and an open mind.

What will you do when you hear God's voice? Will you answer God's call?

Valerie Jennings

Monday of the Second Week of Lent February 26, 2024

Daniel 9:4b-10, Psalm 79; Luke 6:36-38

"For the measure with which you measure will in turn be measured out to you." Lk 6:38

We could read this line as a threat, we who are never as merciful or as generous as our great God. Instead, let us see it as a call to action. God has a long history of making covenants with people who have failed to uphold their end of the bargain. Then Jesus came; Jesus, who walks among us and knows our humanity intimately. He makes promises that look to the future. "Stop judging, and you will not be judged...Forgive, and you will be forgiven." Rather than castigate us for our past actions, he calls us to improve our future actions. He reminds us of whose we are and encourages us to be our best selves, to bring God's mercy into the world.

In the catechesis atrium, we often read words of Jesus and then ask the children, "I wonder what the world would look like if everyone followed these words of Jesus?" What would our world look like if everyone stopped judging, if everyone forgave? I want to live in that world, and so I will work to do my part.

O God, let me measure mercifully like you. Let me be your mercy in the world, that our world might be more merciful, as you are merciful.

Katie Arvidson Kralik

Tuesday of the Second Week of Lent February 27, 2024

Isaiah 1:10, 16-20; Psalm 50; Matthew 23:1-12

*“Come now, let us set things right, says the Lord” – Isaiah 1:18-20
“Therefore, do and observe all things whatsoever they tell you,
but do not follow their example. For they preach but they do not practice. They
tie up heavy burdens hard to carry and lay them on people's shoulders, but
they will not lift a finger to move them.” - Matthew 23:3-4*

The Scriptures today set up a contrast between the mercy of the Lord, and the mercilessness of performative religion. They are a reminder that our observances of Lent – our prayer, our fasting, our almsgiving—are not taken up as burdens heavy to carry. Rather, they are meant to “set things right” by lifting burdens from our shoulders and lightening the loads that others are carrying. As Pope Francis says, “God’s mercy is like a great light of love and tenderness because God forgives not with a decree, but with a caress.” God’s mercy sets things right with a caress.

Can you remember ever being gathered up into the arms of a loving adult after a bruising fall as a child? One of my friends used to have a box of cartoon-themed Band-Aids that she would bring out at the slightest scrape or the first tear. What are the crimson red scrapes that need the attention of God’s First Aid kit? And what is inside the kit of your own? With a caress of what kind are you redressing the wronged, answering the orphan’s plea, defending the widow? This is a Lent to set things right with love and tenderness.

Claire Noonan

Wednesday of the Second Week of Lent February 28, 2024

Jeremiah 18:18-20, Psalm 31; Matthew 20:17-28

"Come let us destroy him by his own tongue. Let us pay careful attention to his every word." - Jeremiah 18:18

Were you ever afraid to speak, for fear that what you had to say might come out wrong? Were you worried that you might be judged, or people might turn away from you? Or did you ever listen intently to a person who had a different opinion than you, only to realize that you were finding even more problems with what they were saying and so not allowing for their need to share?

I have found myself in both situations: worrying that I might alienate a particular group of people, by speaking my truth, but on the other hand being too judgmental while others were doing the same. This scripture reminds me that although we all appreciate being heard, speaking without fear and listening with an open heart are just as important.

Lord, I pray that your love continues to encourage me to have the patience and respect for others that I value myself.

Susan Hepner

Thursday of the Second Week of Lent February 29, 2024

Jeremiah 17:5-10, Psalm 1; Luke 16:19-31

"There is a great chasm separating us..." – Luke 16:26

Even before angels carry Lazarus to Abraham and the Rich Man is tormented in Hades, a great chasm separates them. Lazarus is right outside the rich man's door, but they have no relationship, no interaction. The rich man offers no food, no care, and no interest in Lazarus. I imagine with the dogs licking his wounds and perhaps an odor, Lazarus would be hard to miss.

After they both die, we see that the rich man at least knows Lazarus's name. I'm struck by the rich man's arrogance. He demands many things from Lazarus. Even then he doesn't speak directly to Lazarus but asks Abraham to tell Lazarus to do these things for him. That is another great chasm separating them.

This Lent I'll look for chasms in my life. Do I neglect someone else's needs to focus on my own interests and concerns? Do I think my way is better or more valuable, or more important? What can I do to bridge that chasm?

Andrea Legatzke

Friday of the Second Week of Lent March 1, 2024

Genesis 37:3-4, 12-13, 17-28; Psalm 105; Matthew 21:33-43, 45-46

"The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone."

What--Kill the Landowner's Son and inherit the property? Having heard this Parable of the Tenants many times, I have always questioned the bizarre logic of the tenants. What would make them think that if the son is out of the way the landowner will give them his vineyard? It is true that under Jewish law at the time that a lessee of land would succeed to full ownership if the lessor died without an heir. However, the murderers would not inherit the property; they themselves would be put to death. Did Jesus just create this parable with its crazy logic of the tenants to show the Pharisees and chief priests just how illogical, irrational, hypocritical and yes, perhaps, even crazy they had become with interpretation and adherence to certain religious and societal laws (but not others)? It may be easy to summarize this parable as merely a historical warning and lesson to the religious leaders of that day, but I think of it now as a lesson to all of us in God's vineyard.

We, like the tenants, often get deeply involved in our day-to-day routines, methodologies, and yes, even Church, parish, and prayer routines and customs. Especially if our routines seem to be going well, we fail to either ask for God's direction or to recognize God's presence in a different way. Yes, that dirty and troublesome stone, that more difficult path, that we want to reject, God may indeed be telling us is the cornerstone that will save the vineyard.

This Lent, let us take the time to stop, pray and listen to what God may be telling us: and perhaps even see that His presence and direction is in something different than our current routines.

Steve Legatzke

Saturday of the Second Week of Lent

March 2, 2024

Micah 7:14-15, 18-20; Psalm 103; Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

*“But now we must celebrate and rejoice,
because your brother was dead and has come to life again;
he was lost and has been found”. – Luke 15:32*

The Prodigal Son parable is a reminder of God's faithfulness and how much He wants to be in a relationship with us. Through free will and faith we can choose to be in a relationship with God and claim His gift of eternal life - our inheritance and divine right. Instant gratification over divine right can result in being destitute materially and spiritually, as was demonstrated by both sons in the parable. Humility, forgiveness, love and acceptance allowed the younger son to re-claim his inheritance and be blessed abundantly by his father. Conversely, the older son in the parable demonstrated he did not accept his brother's conversion nor his father's will of allowing his son back into his family fully. The father rightly points out to the older son everything he has is already his and he acknowledges he has been with him the whole time; in other words, celebrating another's conversion to love for Jesus does not diminish our own love or worthiness. In fact, it does the opposite, it glorifies God when we welcome all being at His table.

What cause for celebration when we and others rely on our faith in the Holy Trinity, even when it seems remarkably hard in grave or difficult times! How much more does Jesus rejoice each time we return to Him and support others for doing the same as He has called us to do? Not every conversion ends in a grand celebration, but every conversion fills us more with His love and peace. The centurion comes to mind: "Lord I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed." -Matthew 8:8. Jesus has said the word and continues to speak the word. Conversion is a life-long journey and every time we go back, or support another in going to Jesus, He rejoices, and we are healed.

How God loves us is not because we are lovable but because He is love, not because He needs to receive but He delights to give. – C.S. Lewis

Let us seek the approval of God and not of public opinion. - Unknown

Julie Denise

Third Sunday of Lent March 3, 2024

Exodus 17:3-7, Psalm 19; Romans 5:1-2, 5-8; John 4:5-42

"Come to the Water... "

The imperatives "Drink more water!" and "Hydrate!" underscore the importance of water for our body. Clean safe water came into sharp focus for me when a visiting priest from Togo, Africa described a scene hard to forget: People from the village go to the river or stream to bathe and wash their clothes. People living downstream in the next village take water from that same stream in buckets for drinking and cooking. What a desperate need for wells with safe water! I never looked at water the same way again.

In today's gospel the Samaritan woman encounters Jesus at the well of Jacob. She is shocked that he would approach her, a woman and a Samaritan, for a drink because religious and social rules prohibited such interactions. He offers a different kind of water--living water--a wellspring of eternal life. As the conversation progresses, she comes to know Jesus more deeply, especially as he eventually tells her he is the Messiah. That trip to the well changed the Samaritan woman's life and moved her to tell many others what she experienced.

The Samaritan woman is a powerful role model for us. At baptism we too are offered the living water that sustains our life in grace. Our baptism is not simply something we "get" once--a kind of "one and done." Rather, it is a process we enter into...the commitment to follow Christ in what we say and do daily (first made for the child by parents in infant baptism). Would you say the Samaritan woman is: confused, skeptical, tenacious, attentive, open, enlightened, grateful, bold? Anything else? Most noteworthy is that she hurries to share what Jesus told her. She wants to make Jesus available to others. How can I be more like her?

Catherine Konsky
Reflecting on the readings for the First Scrutiny

Monday of the Third Week of Lent

March 4, 2024

2 Kings 5:1-15; Psalm 42; Luke 4:24-30

*"Now I know there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel."
2 Kings 5:15*

God surprises us. The story of Naaman, the commander of the army of the king of Aram, is remarkable. In order to be healed of leprosy, he turns to the prophet of God, Elisha, who does not perform magic or demand anything unusual of him, but asks him simply to trust in God and to wash in the waters of the river. Not, however, in one of the great rivers of Damascus, but in the little stream of the Jordan. Naaman is left surprised, even taken aback. What kind of God is this who asks for something so simple? He wants to turn back, but then he goes ahead, he immerses himself in the Jordan and is immediately healed (cf. 2 Kg 5:1-4). There it is: God surprises us. It is precisely in poverty, in weakness and in humility that he reveals himself and grants us his love, which saves us, heals us and gives us strength. He asks us only to obey his word and to trust in him.

Today let us all ask ourselves whether we are afraid of what God might ask, or of what he does ask. Do I let myself be surprised by God, or do I remain caught up in my own safety zone: in forms of material, intellectual or ideological security, taking refuge in my own projects and plans? Do I truly let God into my life? How do I answer him?

Pope Francis

Tuesday of the Third Week of Lent

March 5, 2024

Daniel 3:25, 34-43; Psalm 25; Matthew 18:21-35

"Now we follow you with our whole heart...deal with us in your kindness and great mercy." – Daniel 3

One of the many quotable lines from the Catholic writer and apologist G.K. Chesterton is: "Not only are we all in the same boat, but we are all seasick." The characters featured in both the first reading and Gospel for today could certainly relate to the "seasickness" which Chesterton is describing - that experience of being awash and almost completely overcome by the despairs and tragedies of life. As he prays, Azariah in the first reading is surrounded by fire brought forth by tormenters pushing him to rebuke his faith in God. The servant in the Gospel is driven to despair, and unfortunately also sinful spite, by mounting debt to his master.

As we journey through this season of Lent, we know the Lord is calling us to greater awareness of our own sickness. More than that, however, perhaps the Lord is calling us to not allow this sickness to draw us into loathing of ourselves, our circumstances, or others, but to be lifted into greater focus on God's mercy, and how His mercy can transform our own hearts. When we remember and come into contact with the Lord's mercies through the Sacraments, prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, we can grow in our ability to forgive our brothers, sisters, and ourselves deeply from the heart, and prepare ourselves for the forgiveness and resurrection offered by Christ's love.

Ben Zelmer

Wednesday of the Third Week of Lent March 6, 2024

Deuteronomy 4:1, 5-9; Psalm 147; Matthew 5:17-19

"I come, not to abolish, but to fulfill..." – Matthew 5:17

A very simple, but very straightforward message is given to us in the Gospel here by Jesus. If we follow God's commandments, then we are on the path to the Kingdom. If we do not follow the commandments, then we are distancing ourselves from God. At times, if we are in violation, we may not feel we have committed anything wrong, but eventually we will realize that something is not right - our conscience, if working properly, will move us to the realization that we may have acted in error.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation here at St. Giles on Saturday mornings (8:30 a.m.) is our "oasis," our "safety zone" to help us get back on our feet spiritually and morally. We are not perfect beings, but it is "life-saving" to know that the Lord's ever-present Mercy can restore us on our way to the Kingdom. See you all in church!

Russell Parker

Thursday of the Third Week of Lent
March 7, 2024

Jeremiah 7:23-28; Psalm 95; Luke 11:14-23

"Listen to my voice..." - Jeremiah 7:23

We cannot put ourselves directly in the presence of God if we do not practice internal and external silence.

In silence we will find new energy and true unity. Silence gives us a new outlook on everything.

The essential thing is not what we say but what God says to us and through us. In that silence, He will listen to us; there He will speak to our soul, and there we will hear His voice.

Listen in silence because if your heart is full of other things you cannot hear the voice of God. But when you have listened to the voice of God in the stillness of your heart, then your heart is filled with God.

How will I quiet myself today to listen to the voice of God?

St. Teresa of Calcutta

Friday of the Third Week of Lent March 8, 2024

Hosea 14:2-10; Psalm 81; Mark 12:28-34

"I am the Lord your God: hear my voice." – Psalm 81

"I hear ya" is one of those catchphrases used so often that the meaning is no longer all that meaningful; so common that the understanding isn't always common. Sometimes it expresses deep sympathy or empathy. The phrase may even be followed with action: I hear what you're asking, and I'll take care of it. Other times it can have an impatient flavor, a sort of "Yeah, yeah, you made your point...I get it...now shut up already."

In today's Scriptures, the Lord is inviting us to hear. "I am the Lord your God: hear my voice" is repeated as the Psalm response, a refrain quoting that invitation over and over again to make sure we get it. In verses 8 and 13, the tone moves from inviting to imploring: "Oh, Israel, will you not hear me...If only my people would hear me." God seems to realize that the people may be saying "I hear ya" without any depth – if they're hearing at all. God sounds brokenhearted, with words almost tearful. The feeling can be heard in the passage from Hosea as well.

In the Gospel, Jesus invites the people to hear, this time as an introduction to his announcement of the great commandments. One of the Pharisees responds "I hear ya" which Jesus recognizes as hearing with understanding – this Pharisee gets it. We don't know, though, if the response ultimately goes beyond hearing and into action.

What is your "I hear ya" for today? Lip service? Genuine grasping? Responding in action? How will you hear God's invitation to love?

Connie Rakitan

Saturday of the Third Week of Lent March 9, 2024

Hosea 6:1-6; Psalm 51; Luke 18:9-14

*“As certain as the dawn is his coming,
and his judgment shines forth like the light of day!
He will come to us like the rain,
like spring rain that waters the earth.”- Hosea 6*

I remember a number of years ago reading about an ancient tribe of people who, every winter, would send a young member of their community out alone to travel east and wait for the sun. They depended on the sun for light, warmth, growth, and safety. Every year the sun disappeared and they were not sure it would come back so they sent a scout who could only return if he saw that the days were growing longer.

Recently, we began our liturgical year in Advent with the call to wake from our sleep, to leave the darkness and prepare the way. Now the scene changes and we find ourselves in the desert thrust into the unknown. We, like the ancient tribe are uncertain that we will find what is life giving on our journey.

There are many demands that call us away from what sustains us. We must be attentive. We can be tempted in this desert to forget the certainty of dawn and the presence of God in our broken and divided world. We are tempted to look back to better days that we fear will never return. But, let us be present to our time now wherever we find ourselves in our desert. Let us remember that God will come to us even in our doubts, our conflicts and sorrows, griefs and losses. God will come like the spring rain that waters the earth. Let that hope sustain us and shine through us to all whom we encounter along the way. The days are growing longer.

Sue Kaszynski

Fourth Sunday in Lent March 10, 2024

***2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23; Psalm 137; Ephesians 2:4-10;
John 3:14-21***

“But whoever lives the truth comes to the light.” - John 3:21

The conversation we hear in today’s gospel happens under cover of darkness. Nicodemus is afraid to be seen with Jesus, and so visits him clandestinely, at night. Jesus knows that Nicodemus’ fear is keeping him in the dark. It is stopping him from wholeheartedly following Jesus. So, Jesus points out that whoever lives in truth will come to the light, where their works can be seen as done in God.

Nicodemus will come to the light when he beholds Jesus on the cross. Witnessing the heart of Jesus take on all the anguish of humankind, Nicodemus is filled with compassion. His fear removed, he will respond to this example of supreme love by helping to prepare Jesus’ body for burial. For a devout Jew, this action is the holiest of *mitzvahs* or works. It will take courage, since it identifies him as a follower of Jesus.

In our times the light of Christ has cast stark illumination on the oppression and inequality built into our culture. As a society we are recognizing this darkness as never before. In recent months the four Catholic campuses of Oak Park have encountered the oppression and inequality experienced by the migrants now being brought to our collective doorstep. Like Nicodemus we have had to decide whether we could lose our fear and extend compassion to these suffering ones. We pray today that, by the light of Christ, we may find the continuing courage to perform this *mitzvah*—this holy work to which we have so clearly been called.

Mary Ellen Hynes

Monday of the Fourth Week of Lent

March 11, 2024

Isaiah 65:17-21; Psalm 30; John 4:43-54

"I will praise you Lord, for you have rescued me." – Psalm 30

In the first reading, Isaiah prophesies "a new heaven and a new earth," where "the voice of weeping shall be heard no more." These prophesies are echoed elsewhere in the scriptures as a description of events after Jesus' second coming.

In our current world, filled with division, strife, war, and hunger, that idea seems like a dream, something so far beyond our times. God's promise for us seems distant.

In today's gospel, however, Jesus is present in our lives. The gospel takes place in a world that is far from a new heaven and earth, in a society where Jews are governed by their conquerors, and life is often very harsh. A government official comes to Jesus, asking Jesus to heal his son, who is on the brink of death.

We know little about the government official, whether he is a believer, or simply a father desperately looking for any means of saving his son's life.

Jesus first admonishes those around him about his need to perform miracles for people to believe. Jesus doesn't come to the man's house, but he tells the man that his son is healed. And the man believes.

And his son is healed.

We don't know if this was a good, honest man or not, although we can surmise that he loved his son. It doesn't matter.

Jesus didn't go to the man's house as he had asked either. But the man accepted the gift Jesus offered, and his son was healed.

The new heaven and the new earth seem far away, but Jesus is present with us here and now. And he is here for everyone. He may not provide for us in the exact way we hope for, but if we accept and trust him, he'll provide for us.

In this Lenten season, we think about our sinfulness, and how it separates us from God. In these readings, we are reminded that Jesus is here for us if we'll accept him and believe. It doesn't matter who we are or where we've been. Jesus is here for us, here and now. It may be a long way to a new heaven and a new earth, but Jesus will provide what we need today. And his love will brighten even the darkest of times.

John McGuire

Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Lent March 12, 2024

Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12; Psalm 46; John 5:1-16

"Do you want to be well?" - John 5:6

The gospel of John lays out an orderly progression of witnessing by John the Baptist and a series of miracles to establish the true identity of Jesus. The Prologue says: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The world was brought into being through speaking. John the Baptist points to Jesus and said: "Behold the Lamb of God." Then Jesus begins his ministry with a number of miracles or signs confirming his relationship as Son to God the Father. Curing the paralytic is Jesus's third sign in John's Gospel and again we see the power of the Word.

What strikes me when I read this passage is how little is actually said by Jesus. He comes to the area of the pool where folks with all sorts of afflictions are hoping to be cured. The pool was periodically disturbed, probably by an underground spring bubbling up. And if those seeking a cure could enter the water as it was active, they believed a miracle would happen. One man near the pool was unable to enter the water on his own and he was singled out by Jesus. In that situation, I probably would have quizzed the man to find out what he had already done on his own to get well. If he couldn't walk into the water, did he ask his friends or a family member for help? Was there no one in the temple who could provide aid? My 21st Century mind would want an accounting of his own efforts and a rationale for his predicament. Jesus, however, asked only "Do you want to be well?" Then: "Rise and walk." And immediately the man suffering from paralysis was cured. The word of Jesus, and Jesus the Word, healed him.

The temple leaders, as so often happens, failed to appreciate the significance of this event brought about by the word of Jesus. Their only concern was that a law was broken by doing work on the Sabbath. How often do I revert to the cover of the law or demand an accounting when I encounter people who only wish to stand independently and make their own way?

Henrietta Yardley

Wednesday of the Fourth Week of Lent March 13, 2024

Isaiah 49:8-15; Psalm 145; John 5:17-30

“Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you.”

- Isaiah 49:15

The motherhood of God is not all that frequently preached in our churches, but today the prophet Isaiah gives us this unforgettable image. I am reminded that the Church is to be a visible sign of God’s maternal tenderness in the world. As Pope Francis writes of a Church that embodies its mission, “The Church is showing her maternal side, her motherly face, to a humanity that is wounded. She does not wait for the wounded to knock on her doors, she looks for them on the streets, she gathers them in, she embraces them, she takes care of them, she makes them feel loved.”

We are the Church. And so these words are a summons to action. They are a clear call to mercy on the move. Susan Sanders, a Sister of Mercy, points out that “When used in the singular, we get a different sense of God’s mercy and from where it emanates: *rehem*, meaning womb. So here, mercy is associated with generating life and all the things that are essential to life such as health, freedom from poverty and oppression, deliverance from death and destruction, peace, justice, *shalom*. So the purpose of mercy is to generate and support life, and to ensure that all the essentials of life are provided – and where they are not, to remediate the situation.”

God never forgets us, but where have we forgotten one another?

Claire Noonan

Thursday of the Fourth Week of Lent
March 14, 2024

Exodus 32:7-14; Psalm 106; John 5:31-47

*"How can you believe, when you accept praise from one another?"
- John 5:44*

Lord Jesus, when you walked the earth,
Your humility obscure your Kingship.
Your meekness confused the arrogant,
Hindering them from grasping your purpose,
Your nobleness attending to the destitute.

Teach me to model after your eminence,
To subject my human nature to humility.
Grant me with a natural inclination
To never view myself greater than anyone.
Banish all lingering sparks of self-importance
That could elevate me greater than you.
Let my heart always imitate your humility.

Author Unknown

Friday of the Fourth Week of Lent March 15, 2024

Wisdom 2:1a, 12-22; Psalm 34; John 7:1-2, 10, 25-30

"He professes to have knowledge of God and styles himself a child of the Lord" - Wisdom 2:1a, 2-22.

As I read this passage I ask myself: do I have knowledge of God and am I a child of the Lord? I profess that I do and that I am, but do I openly show it and express it? I selected this reflection because I like Wisdom; Wisdom is she and also the Spirit. These qualities are very important to me, especially during the Lenten season. We come so quickly from Christmas, the coming of the Baby Jesus, and move into the Lenten Season to the crucifixion, that I stop and question if I am showing my knowledge of God and acting like a child of the Lord.

I question myself: am I doing what God would want me to do? Do I care for my fellow human? Do I act as Jesus would act? Do I show compassion, understanding, empathy, forgiveness, love and act the way that Jesus would want me to act?

Lent is the time for us to take time and inventory of ourselves. This time is not just about what can we give up, but how we can show we are the children of God. Now, lent is almost over and there are two weeks and two days before Easter. Take a moment and ask yourself: do I act as a child of the Lord? You and I can still make a change in our behavior if we see some things can be different. Wisdom is the spirit. Let Wisdom guide us.

Christine Wedekind

Saturday of the Fourth Week of Lent March 16, 2024

Jeremiah 11:18-20; Psalm 7; John 7:40-53

"In you, O God, I take refuge." - Psalm 7

Jeremiah's reading reminds us of the despair we can sometimes feel—Jeremiah feels surrounded by evil. But, later in the story, God promises to make a new covenant with us, a pact written upon our hearts—not on stone tablets. Even with the darkness that Jeremiah sees, God promises that all people will know God and we'll no longer have to teach this to each other.

As a retired teacher I can relax knowing this but it also causes me to happily reflect on moments of awe when students gained insight into God's plan for salvation which they do in unique ways. One time when I was trying to describe God's plan in today's world a 9yr. old interrupted, "Wait a minute, Jesus is like Superman only better?" I agreed, "Right, Jesus has the power to transform evil into good, not just destroy it but He wants our help by doing good where we can." The child reacted: "Wow, we get it now."

Certainly we each have "Wow!" moments but just as certainly we haven't completely learned to "know the Lord!" What a wonderful promise to anticipate! We can continue to grow in our understanding of how strongly and uniquely God loves each of us. We can reflect on His providential plan for all creation to exist harmoniously, complementing each other's gifts and talents flawlessly.

Yet we're very much aware that this isn't the current reality. How do we close this gap between promise and reality? One answer is in tomorrow's Psalm, "Create a clean heart in me, O God. Give me back the joy of your salvation and a willing spirit sustain in me."

Pray this Psalm for everyone, confident that all will pay it forward to propel God's promise closer to fulfillment and trust that God is present, patiently pleased with our trust and efforts to bring creation closer to His promised peace.

Lynne Kutyllo

Fifth Sunday of Lent

March 17, 2024

***Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 51;
Hebrews 5:8-9; John 12:20-33***

“Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat.”, John 12:24

Happy Saint Patrick’s Day! Saint Patrick’s life story began with a surprise, as he was stolen from his comfortable Roman-Britain home when he was just 16. He was forced to reimagine a new life, and eventually found his life transformed. What certainly seemed to be insurmountable hardship became his salvation.

Unlike Patrick, the Gospel of John tells us that Jesus knows his path. Yet when Jesus sees that his hour has come, he says, “I am troubled now. Yet what should I say? Father, save me from this hour?” I am moved by this statement, as Jesus expresses fear in this moment. Even after everything Jesus has said and done in his ministry, teaching, healing and even miracles, he is called to give still more. He is called to transform his life.

As Jesus explains to Andrew and Phillip, “Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat.” I feel like a grain of wheat sometimes, quite comfortable the way I am. I have shared my gifts and my treasure and my love, to the best of my ability. But we are called to do even more! We are called to die every day, to transform our lives at every opportunity. This requires courage, faith, and stamina in a world with so many in need. Helping all the people without shelter, without food, without a country to call home, may seem an impossible task, requiring more than we can afford to give.

Perhaps though, what appears to be too much for us to handle is an invitation to transform our world and ourselves in unimaginable ways. It is an opportunity to follow the path of Jesus.

John M Boyle

Monday of the Fifth Week of Lent March 18, 2024

Daniel 13:41-62; Psalm 23; John 8:1-11

“Let the one who is without sin cast the first stone.” – John 8:7

Alice Roosevelt Longworth was the eldest child of Theodore Roosevelt. Known for her love of gossip, she had a pillow embroidered with the words: “If you can’t say something good about someone, sit right here by me.” The pillow elicited many smiles and made for a good conversation piece. And yet, beneath the humor lay a darker side of humanity.

In the gospel the scribes and Pharisees bring a woman caught in adultery to Jesus in order to trap him. They relate that the law of Moses stated that the woman should be stoned. They then pose the question to Jesus, “What do you say?” Jesus gives them his now iconic response, “Let the one who is without sin cast the first stone.”

We do not stone people with rocks very often these days. However, we do stone people quite regularly with words. And today, even more than in former days, we can toss our verbal stones from a distance without having to look our targets in the eyes. We can focus on the flaws and sins of others, and so not have to deal with our own sinfulness. It is quite often the action of insecure people struggling with their own egos. The irony is, if we recognize that our God is a loving and forgiving God, not only can we better acknowledge our own sinfulness, but also be more compassionate when we see shortcomings in others.

John Walters

Tuesday of the Fifth Week of Lent

March 19, 2024

***2 Samuel 7:4-5, 12-14, 16; Psalm 89; Romans 4:13-22;
Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24a***

“Though there seemed no hope, he hoped and believed...” Romans 4:18

Because of his faith in God, even though he was almost 100 years old and his wife was barren, Abraham believed that he would become the father of many nations. His faith gave him hope.

Because of his faith in God, Joseph believed what the angel had told him in a dream and took Mary into his home, even though she was carrying a child that was not his. He believed that Mary’s unborn child would be the savior of the world and he trusted that God would help him protect his holy family. His faith gave him hope.

Because of my faith in God, I believe that I am wholly and deeply loved by Him, even though, at times, I am far from worthy of that love. I trust that I never walk alone, and that if I listen the Spirit will guide me in life. My faith gives me hope.

Our God calls into existence what does not yet exist. May you have faith and hope in Him always!

Happy St. Joseph’s Day!

Maria Samatas

Wednesday of the Fifth Week of Lent March 20, 2024

Daniel 3:14, 20, 91-92, 95; Luke 8:31-42

*"May God save us! But even if he will not...
we will not serve your god." – Daniel 3:17*

In today's first reading, we hear the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, three Jewish men who were officials of Babylon and who refused King Nebuchadnezzar's order to serve his god and worship the golden statue that he set up. The penalty was to be cast into a white-hot furnace.

When questioned, they responded, "If our God, whom we serve, can save us from the white-hot furnace and from your hands, O king, may he save us! But even if he will not, you should know, that we will not serve your god or worship the golden statue which you set up." (Daniel 3:17)

These three men were clearly committed to their beliefs and ready to die for their faith. They completely surrendered themselves to the Lord, trusting that He would be with them no matter the outcome. Then when bound and thrown into the furnace, no harm came to them. The king looked into the furnace and saw, "four men unbound and unhurt, walking in the fire, and the fourth looks like a son of God." (Daniel 3:25) Their deep faith in God had saved them.

Most of us will never be called to demonstrate our faith in such a bold way, to literally be martyrs for what we believe. But how strong is our faith? Do we find ourselves reaching out to God in prayer only when we are faced with a problem we can't handle on our own? We've heard the adage that God helps those who help themselves, but we are never on our own. Our Lord is with us in everything – our joys and our sorrows. Only when we are willing to completely surrender ourselves to God, will we find the true peace He offers us.

Fr. Don Dolindo Ruotolo, an Italian Franciscan who lived from 1882-1970, received a powerful novena prayer from Jesus, The Surrender Novena. It is said that the Lord taught Fr. Ruotolo to abandon himself completely and to put his trust in the Lord's power and love. This novena holds true for us today, as we struggle with so many uncertainties and sufferings in our world. It is beautiful in its simplicity, intimacy and trust. I share it with you:

Jesus, I surrender myself to you. Take care of everything!

Sharon Bresnahan

Thursday of the Fifth Week of Lent March 21, 2024

Genesis 17:3-9; Psalm 105; John 8:51-59

“Jesus said to them, Amen, Amen I say to you: before Abraham came to be, I AM.” - John 8:58

Where is your heart? Where is my heart?

Through Jesus time as an itinerant preacher, he had many confrontations with the leaders of the Synagogues. Often, he avoided confrontations by answering their questions with another question or a parable. Today, he makes very clear who he is.

Jesus has now been preaching his Gospel of Love for close to three years. He has traveled through all of Israel working miracles, touching the leper, casting out devils, curing the unclean woman. He has broken cultural norms by eating with the poor, the Gentiles, the tax collectors and the Samaritan woman. For many his message has been a healing balm and thousands have changed their hearts and followed him. For others, particularly the leaders of the synagogue, this message of love, inclusion and forgiveness has threatened their positions of power.

In today's Gospel, Jesus boldly speaks about who he is. He is the great I AM, the son of God. For those challenging him, their hearts are too hardened by their love of power, money and things of the world to be able to accept Jesus's radical message. In their privilege, they can only see him as a threat.

We have now walked through weeks of Lent. Have we heard Jesus's message to love the outsider, to give to the poor, to forgive those who have wronged us?

Where is your heart? Where is my heart?

Mary Ellen Lesniak

Friday of the Fifth Week of Lent
March 22, 2024

Jeremiah 20:10-13; Psalm 18; John 10:31-42

"In my distress I called upon the Lord." - Psalm 18

*To harbor no envy, no anger, no resentment against an
offender is still not to have charity for him.
It is possible, without any charity,
to avoid rendering evil for evil.
But to render, spontaneously, good for evil
-- such belongs to a perfect spiritual love.*

St. Maximus the Confessor

Saturday of the Fifth Week of Lent

March 23, 2024

Ezekiel 37:21-28; Jeremiah 31:10-13; John 11:45-56

“I shall make them into one nation... and one king is to be king of them all.” Ezekiel 38: 22

One of our five daughters is being married today in St. Giles church. I reflected on today's readings in light of that sacred occasion, and as I write this, the Presidential primary season is upon us.

The prophet Ezekiel is writing to the Israelites who have been scattered into exile after the siege of Jerusalem, scared, demoralized, searching for answers. Ezekiel assures them of a brighter future, but only with Yahweh as their king, their guide, the center of all their being. Yahweh says, “I shall make them into one nation... I shall make my home above them; I shall be their God and they will be my people.”

John's gospel relates the turning point, the culmination, of Jesus' earthly ministry, when his fate – death – is sealed by the chief priests. Caiaphas prophesied “that Jesus was to die for the nation – and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the scattered children of God.” Although the Pharisees and chief priests' intention was to squelch the rising “dissent” by killing its leader, Caiaphas understood that this sacrifice would somehow unite Jesus' followers.

As Sarah and Drew enter into married life, I pray that they will unite as one with God as the center of their union.

As our country elects a President, I pray that we unite as one nation “under God, with liberty and justice for all.”

Wouldn't we be better off if God were at the center of all of our relationships, all of our interactions with others, all of our decisions?

Chris Ritten

Palm Sunday **March 24, 2024**

Isaiah 50:4-7; Philippians 2:6-11; Mark 14:1-15:47

*"They pressed into service a passer-by, Simon, a Cyrenian...
to carry his cross." -Mark 15:21*

The fourth mystery of the Sorrowful Mysteries is Jesus taking up his cross. It never fails to resonate with me as I begin the day. As I grow older, getting ready for the tasks of the day is often challenging. Anticipating chores or even just finding the energy to smile when I don't feel like smiling requires my remembering that we are all in situations that can be trying. So, Jesus taking up his cross and trudging on toward Golgotha after having been brutally beaten, humiliated and falsely accused sort of "puts my mind right."

Reading the Passion of Jesus again, I thought about Simon of Cyrene. Since he is mentioned as the father of Rufus and Alexander (Mark 15:21), they were most likely followers of Jesus. He is ordered to help Jesus carry the cross, and he does. Because Jesus is fully human and divine, he is experiencing utter exhaustion. He accepts Simon's help. Simon is there to make Jesus' burden lighter for a while, allowing him to regain some strength. Was Simon honored to be the one to bring a moment's solace to Jesus? We can only imagine how thankful Jesus was to have some time to gather his ebbing strength.

Let us pray for the humility to accept our vulnerability and neediness and accept another's help. Let us be ready to come to the aid of another when we see an opportunity to lend a hand.

Sr. Sue Paweski

Monday of Holy Week March 25, 2024

Isaiah 42:1-7; Psalm 27; Hebrews 9:11-15; John 12:1-11

"Mary...anointed the feet of Jesus...the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil." - John 12:3

I invite you to leave chronological time. Enter Kairos time - God's time, where all time is simply "the now". This sacred moment will release a fresh aliveness--the incarnational presence of Jesus! We are now in Bethany. Lazarus and Jesus lie along a lengthy table. Martha prepares the food. But in the "now", we are Mary. We gaze at Jesus. An image stirs in us...an image of Jesus as a bloody gash on hewn wood. An image of recently perfumed feet pierced with nails. Our "Mary heart" gasps. We see that Father God will leave his son unguarded. Love surrenders him! Jesus offers his body to be bruised rather than break the reed that is bruised.

Jesus, let us now become a "Mary" for you. Let us caress your sacred feet with precious ointment. Let our hearts become containers of sacred ointment by entering into contemplative union with you.

For your feet are now the brown feet of migrants darting across the Darien gap. Your feet are now the chafed, soiled feet of the homeless. Your feet are now grazed by the grenades in Gaza. So precious Jesus, carry us into a daily contemplative silence. Let silence become a still for nard to ooze into the oil of compassion. Then birth in us the courage to act, to resist, to challenge with direct non-violence the crucifixion our culture now inflicts on those who walk with your feet. Challenge us to slather those wounded feet with the ointment of compassion and sacrifice. Then let us all dance and celebrate as the fragrance from the perfume poured out on feet fills not only the house in Bethany but on the one we call mother...the earth, the universe, the galaxy.

John Hynes

Tuesday of Holy Week
March 26, 2024

Isaiah 49:1-6; Psalm 71; John 13:21-33, 36-38

"Master, where are you going?" - John 13

Merciful God in heaven,
who sent your only Son Jesus Christ to save us from our sin,
show me how to honor you and bring glory to your name,
by walking in the way of Jesus.

Give me grace and mercy as I try and fail,
give me guidance when I am not sure which way to go,
and give me wisdom to trust you in all things.

For your love brings light and life to all who seek it.

May I seek you evermore
as I walk with you through this Holy Week and beyond.

Amen.

Unknown

Wednesday of Holy Week March 27, 2024

Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 69; Matthew 26:14-25

*"Morning after morning he opens my ear that I may hear; and I have not rebelled...The Lord God is my help, therefore I am not disgraced."
-Isaiah 50*

It is Holy Week and we are now on the cusp of Triduum. We are about to enter the formal days of remembrance of the last days of the life of Jesus. We will again recount, share in, and honor the suffering Jesus endured, his crucifixion, and the mystery of His resurrection from the dead, all of which was for our benefit due to sin.

In today's Isaiah reading, Isaiah gives reference to his own personal suffering, accompanied by the determination to face the adversity he sometimes encountered, as Jesus did, due to the guidance he tried to provide. Engaged in his community, Isaiah wrote, "The Lord God has given me a well-trained tongue, that I might know how to speak to the weary a word that will rouse them." What gifts am I given and what skillfulness am I able to share to benefit the well-being of others? It may be a small gesture, but it may make all the difference in a person's day in my family, in my neighborhood, in my circle of friends, in my community. Isaiah continues, "Morning after morning he opens my ear that I may hear." Lord, help me, to be aware of my own opportunities to hear you and to listen to you, to hear the goodness as well as the needs of those around me and to hear your urging to help and not ignore those needs nor the deafening silence of the weary and down-trodden. Help me to pursue these things despite obstacles and with your grace. Isaiah doesn't seem shy about his efforts in doing so. He said, "I have not rebelled, have not turned back. . .The Lord God is my help, therefore I am not disgraced." On the contrary, Isaiah seems to be graced with fortitude and resilience as he moves through his challenges confident that God is always with him and will help him.

Lord, as our liturgical year moves out of the season of Lent, help us focus on the "morning after morning", day after day nature of the need and the benefit of hearing, of listening, and of outreach to others as well as to you. Likewise, help us be open to the need and the benefit of being the recipient of the outreach from others to us, and the outreach from you. We ask this in your name. Amen.

Susan Schouten

Holy Thursday March 28, 2024

*Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14; Psalm 116;
1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-15*

*"He who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet..."
-John 13:10*

I intentionally chose a day with John as the Gospel because John has always confused and confounded me. I much prefer Luke's straightforward narrative, but I wanted to challenge myself. In some ways, the foot washing scene is fairly straightforward, but this line jumped out at me. Why the feet?

In light of the other readings (and bolstered by the notes in one of my study Bibles), I think "who has bathed" means one who has been baptized. Under that interpretation, perhaps our feet need washing because we baptized folks are meant to be on them, doing corporal works of mercy and spreading the good news.

I've heard that some people think there's a conflict between the liturgical business of the Church and the works of social justice; but based on these readings, this is a false dichotomy. Worship done rightly causes us to appreciate God for who He is and fosters an attitude of gratefulness for what we've been given. This is the impetus to get out and do God's work.

The Israelites were to sacrifice the lamb, an act of worship and sacrifice to the Lord to be sure, but they were to do it with their loins girt, sandals on their feet, and walking staff in hand. Ready to move and get those feet dirty.

Paul makes the connection between the Passover meal Jesus shared with the Twelve Apostles and the Eucharistic meal that was becoming ritualized in the early Church and which is now the climax of our Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. What we do now is connected to what they did then, which was connected to what the Israelites did in Egypt.

What does that mean for us? It means that when the Mass is ended, we should go on feet, glorifying the Lord by our lives (pun intended). And keep coming back for a good foot washing.

Chris Reisor

Good Friday March 29, 2024

*Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Psalm 22; Hebrews 4:14-16, 5:7-9;
John 18:1-19:42*

Dear Lord Jesus,

You, "the image of the unseen God, the first-born of all creation, for whom all things are created in heaven and on earth, everything visible and everything invisible," you hang dead on a cross. You have just spoken your last words, "It is fulfilled," and given up your spirit.

Your heart is broken, the heart that did not know hatred, revenge, resentment, jealousy or envy but only love, love so deep and so wide that it embraces your Father in heaven as well as all humanity in time and space. Your broken heart is the source of my salvation, the foundation of my hope, the cause of my love. It is the sacred place where all that was, is and ever shall be is held in unity. There all suffering has been suffered, all anguish lived, all loneliness endured, all abandonment felt and all agony cried out. There, human and divine love have kissed, and there God and all men and women of history are reconciled. All the tears of the human race have been cried there, all pain understood and all despair touched. Together with all people of all times, I look up to you whom they have pierced, and I gradually come to know what it means to be part of your body and your blood, what it means to be human.

Your broken heart becomes the heart of all of humanity, the heart of all the world... O compassionate Lord, your heart is broken because of all the love that is not given or received.

Let the blood and water that flow from your heart give me a new heart to live a new life. I know that in this world water and blood will never be separated. There will be peace and anguish, joy and tears, love and agony. They will be there always—together—leading me daily closer to you who give your heart to my heart.

Selections from Henri Nouwen, Good Friday Prayer

Easter Vigil

March 30, 2024

Mark 16:1-7

Something strange is happening - there is a great silence on earth today, a great silence and stillness. The whole earth keeps silence because the King is asleep. The earth trembled and is still because God has fallen asleep in the flesh and God has raised up all who have slept ever since the world began.

-Anonymous from an ancient Homily

Every Holy Saturday, the Church waits as it were beside the tomb, meditating on Christ's death while awaiting the announcement of his resurrection. Like John, we can take Mary into our homes and ponder with her the last words of Christ. Like her, we can rest in a place between anguish and joy, waiting in quiet hope. We can pray the Divine Office, which parts the veil to show us Christ defeating death and releasing sinners from captivity. The King is not dead; he rests from his work. A new day will come. His Cross is not defeat; it is victory!

Today, try to take some time to feel the silence of Holy Saturday. Set aside the business of preparations for Easter and feel how the world is waiting.

Sarah Christmyer, Walking in Her Sandals

Easter Sunday

March 31, 2024

***Acts 10:34-43; Psalm 118;
Colossians 3:1-4; John 20:1-9***

Christ is Risen – Christ is Risen Indeed!

Christòs anesti! – “Christ is risen; he is truly risen!” In this traditional proclamation of the Churches of the East, the word “truly” reminds us that our hope is not an illusion, but the truth! And that, in the wake of Easter, humanity’s journey, now marked by hope, advances all the more readily. The first witnesses of the resurrection show this by their example. The Gospels speak of the haste with which, on the morning of Easter, the women “ran to tell the disciples” (Mt 28:8). Mary Magdalene “ran and went to Simon Peter” (Jn 20:2), while John and Peter himself then “ran together” (cf. v. 4) to the place where Jesus had been buried. Later, on the evening of Easter, after meeting the Risen Lord on the road to Emmaus, two disciples “set out without delay” (cf. Lk 24:33) and travelled several miles, uphill and in the dark, spurred on by the irrepressible joy of Easter that burned in their hearts (cf. v. 32). The same joy that led Peter, on the shore of the Lake of Galilee, after catching sight of the risen Jesus, to leave the boat with the others, to throw himself immediately into the water and to swim quickly towards him (cf. Jn 21:7). At Easter, then, the journey quickens and becomes a race, since humanity now sees the goal of its journey, the meaning of its destiny, Jesus Christ, and is called to make haste to meet him, who is the hope of the world.

May we too make haste to progress on a journey of reciprocal trust: trust among individuals, peoples and nations. May we allow ourselves to experience amazement at the joyful proclamation of Easter, at the light that illumines the darkness and the gloom in which, all too often, our world finds itself enveloped.

Let us make haste to surmount our conflicts and divisions, and to open our hearts to those in greatest need. Let us hasten to pursue paths of peace and fraternity. Let us rejoice at the concrete signs of hope that reach us from so many countries, beginning with those that offer assistance and welcome to all fleeing from war and poverty.

We believe in you, Lord Jesus. We believe that, with you, hope is reborn and the journey continues. May you, the Lord of life, encourage us on our journey and repeat to us, as you did to the disciples on the evening of Easter: “Peace be with you!” (Jn 19:21).

Pope Francis, April 9, 2023

Monday in the Octave of Easter April 1, 2024

Acts 2:14, 22-33; Psalm 16; Matthew 28:8-15

Even now says the Lord, return to me with your whole hearts.

Easter stands in stark witness, not to the meaning of death, but to the meaning of what it is to go on despite death, in the face of death—because of death. To celebrate Easter means to stand in the light of the empty tomb and decide what to do next. Until we come to realize that, we stand to misread the meaning not simply of the Easter gospel but of our own lives. We miss the point. We make Easter an historical event rather than a life-changing commitment. We fail to realize that Easter demands as much of us now as it did of the apostles then.

Most of all we miss the very meaning of the Easter that we are dealing with in our own lives, in our own time.

Easter is the feast that gives meaning to life. It is the feast that never ends. After Easter, the tomb stands open for all of us to enter. If Jesus is risen, then you and I have no choice but to go into the tomb, put on the leftover garments ourselves, and follow Jesus back to Galilee where the poor cry for food and the sick beg to be taken to the pool and the blind wait for the spittle on their eyes to dry. All the fidelity in the world will not substitute for leaving the tomb and beginning the journey all over again. Today. Every day. Always.

That's what Easter is really about. It is the "division of humanity" to which Hugo refers in his dramatic rendering of the struggle between light and dark. Yes, Easter is about dazzling light—but only if it shines through us.

Joan Chittister, OSB, In the Light of the Messengers

Tuesday in the Octave of Easter

April 2, 2024

Acts 2:36-41; Psalm 33; John 20:11-18

"Stop holding onto Me." "Who are you seeking?" – John 20

I often cringe when I hear the words Jesus spoke to Mary Magdalene at the empty tomb: "Stop holding onto me." It feels so rejecting! But upon reflection, I've come to a very different understanding of Mary's encounter with the risen Jesus.

After Jesus' death, Mary goes to the tomb and she is absolutely bereft. Her only desire is to find Jesus' body so she can respectfully lay Him to rest. Imagine her distress to see only two Angels – but no body! Mary also sees a person she thinks is the gardener, who gently asks: "Whom are seeking?" It is only when the gardener calls her by name, does Mary recognize the risen Jesus. She knows his Voice intimately! I have no doubt that the depth of her relationship with Jesus sends her leaping towards him, embracing him as friend and teacher. But Jesus says: "Stop holding onto me." He is not rejecting Mary. He is telling her to let go of the past and to release who He was before His death. Now He is eternal and Mary is called to a new relationship, a new vision of life with Jesus - an embodied divine union, already in this life.

Several years ago, I visited the empty tomb while traveling in the Holy Land – an experience that changed my life. I was grumpy waiting in the long line of visitors, but inside the tomb, as I stood facing the concrete slab Jesus may have been placed on, a voice said: "Annette, He is here." Immediately a flash of light pierced my heart, releasing waves of heat throughout my body. I was terrorized, wondering if I was having another stroke. Was I dying? But the voice said: "Annette, I am here." In that instant, my attachment to life and fear of death dissolved. I was given a direct experience of Divine Union. Like Mary, I was called to stop clinging to issues that were keeping me trapped in fear, including health and religious/spiritual beliefs. Part of the radical call required me to go beyond imitating Christ and fully embrace the life I'd been given, and embody the union I'd experienced.

I still have a tendency to cling to old patterns, but my relationship with Christ is there to help me let go!

Annette Hulefeld. D.Min

Wednesday in the Octave of Easter April 3, 2024

Acts 3:1-10; Psalm 105; Luke 24: 13-35

“While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them.” -Luke 24: 15

Wouldn't it be wonderful to be walking along a dusty road, trying to puzzle out with a friend the many questions about the current events of the day, and suddenly be joined by Jesus himself? In his typical gentle way, He first listens. Afterwards, in no uncertain terms He delivers the definitive answers to all our questions with insight and confidence. Even though he was hidden at first, and they didn't know who He was, they noted that their hearts burned within them while he talked to them and opened to them the Scriptures.

How often do we go about our day, along the dusty roads of our lives, and suddenly He joins us? We know that he comes to us in the Eucharist, at every mass. Perhaps at other times we, like the two followers, don't see Him immediately, but our hearts burn within us when He speaks to us through the words of others, the circumstances of our lives, a memory, a song, or Scripture. Let's put ourselves in a place where He can join us and we can sense our hearts burning within us. We may be focused on the destination, but He is with us even now, on the journey. Let's talk to him and listen, so that He can draw close, and we may hear His voice.

Katrina S. Duque-Kappe

Thursday in the Octave of Easter
April 4, 2024

Acts 3:11-26; Psalm 8; Luke 24:35-48

"Peace be with you." Luke 24

Do not abandon yourselves to despair.

***We are the Easter people
and Hallelujah is our song!***

Pope St. John Paul II

Friday in the Octave of Easter
April 5, 2024

Acts 4:1-12; Psalm 118; John 21:1-14

"When Simon Peter heard it was the Lord, he tucked in his garment...and jumped into the sea." - John 21:7

In that exclamation: "It is the Lord!", there is all the enthusiasm of the Paschal faith, full of joy and wonder, which sharply contrasts with the disappearance, the dejection, the sense of powerlessness that had accumulated in the disciples' hearts. The presence of the Risen Jesus transforms everything: darkness has become light, futile work has again become fruitful and promising, the sense of weariness and abandonment give way to a new impetus and to the certainty that He is with us. May he, the Lord, also renew in us the Paschal faith. May he render us ever more aware of our mission at the service of the Gospel and of our brothers and sisters; may he fill us with his Holy Spirit so that, sustained by the intercession of Mary, with all the Church we may proclaim the greatness of his love and the abundance of his mercy.

Pope Francis

Saturday in the Octave of Easter April 6, 2024

Acts 4:13-21; Psalm 118; Mark 16:9-15

"He appeared first to Mary Magdalene..." – Mark 16:9

In all four Gospels, Jesus' resurrection is revealed to the women at the empty tomb first. In today's passage from Mark, as in Luke and John, Mary Magdalene is the first person visited by the risen Jesus. But when she tells the Disciples what she has seen, they do not believe.

Placing myself in that room beside Mary Magdalene, I imagine how much courage it must have taken to come forward. She is a woman on her own, branded a sinner, likely thought unworthy to be chosen by Jesus, and she is speaking before eleven men who walked alongside Him. So many women leaders in the Church have been similarly dismissed, silenced, and cast out of the rooms where decisions are made, making it difficult for me to be a woman – and even more painful for me to be a mother – within our Church.

At the same time, I empathize with the Disciples, whose friend and teacher has been ripped from them. They are paralyzed by grief, fear, and uncertainty, incapable of hope or belief. Jesus knew that their grief was hardening their hearts, too, so he appeared multiple times and even allowed them to put their hands into his wounds to rekindle their faith.

When have we allowed our sadness and anxiety to dismiss those around us? Whose voices do we most easily disregard? Let us remember that Jesus trusted Mary Magdalene not only to know Him when he appeared but also to tell her story no matter the cost. Let us hear and lift up those prophets among us who have been written off, replacing our doubt with faith and responding, "I believe you."

Kelly Birch Maginot

Second Sunday of Easter April 7, 2024

Acts 4:32-35; Psalm 133; 1 John 5:1-6; John 20:19-31

"Who indeed is the victor over the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" - 1 John 5:4

They call him "Doubting Thomas," but I have always thought that a great injustice.

It seems unfair to define him by this one moment because, after all, Luke tells us that Jesus invited a whole room full of the Apostles to touch his hands and feet and then pointedly ate some fish in front of them. Why should we expect Thomas to be any more credulous than the rest of them? None of them believed the women returning from the grave when they said they had seen the Lord alive.

In the end, the Apostle I will now dub "Reasonably Incredulous Thomas" proclaimed Jesus "my Lord and my God," and so do we. And going backwards through today's readings, we can see what that should lead us to do.

The second reading says that believing Jesus is the Christ means we love God, and loving God is manifested by following His commandments. This is what makes us victors of the world as indicated in my selected quote. Great! but this is still theoretical until we go back to the first reading and see an example of what that means concretely.

It says that among the community, "no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common" – that's shocking to this Cold War kid's sensibilities. But of course, this wasn't communism or socialism, but love. "There was no needy person among them." That is what we should be experiencing. Somebody once quipped that if even 10% of the world practiced true Christianity, the world would be a radically different place. I think this reading from Acts supports that theory.

Which leads me to ask myself: does my belief in Jesus, my love of God, manifest itself in a way of living that is radically out of step with the rest of the individualistic, dog-eat-dog world I live in? Would somebody looking at me from the outside say "wow, that person bends over backwards to make sure there's nobody in need in his community."

Unfortunately, the half dozen or so needy people I saw today wouldn't say that about me. I don't feel particularly victorious over the world. All I can do is repeat those profound words of the father of the boy with the mute spirit in Mark's gospel: "I believe; help my unbelief!"

Chris Reisor

*A special note of appreciation to all of
this year's writers, editors, and
digital creators. Our growth as
individuals and as a parish
community during this Lenten season
would not have been possible without
your gift of time spent praying and
reflecting on the Scriptures. Thank
you for sharing your gifts, insights
and wisdom with us all!*

Fr. Carl



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