

Celebration

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A Comprehensive Worship Resource



Finding Mercy at the Table

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EDITOR'S CORNER

February begins in Ordinary Time and ends in Lent.

The penitential seasons of the church year remind us that God's mercy is the ordinary mode of all our relationships. Every disciple is in a lifelong school of mercy, for our very existence depends on God's unconditional love. Everything we are and have is gift. Therefore we must learn to let love pass through us to one another. Freely given, freely shared is the heart of the Gospel.

This month's feature article by Dominican Fr. Paul Philibert reminds us that the Eucharist is Jesus' gift of himself to us not as saints but as sinners. Our Communion with God and with one another is total mercy, the unearned gift that nourishes us on the journey and guides us to eternal life with God. It is not a reward for the perfect but the medicine of mercy that touches our broken intentions and wounded efforts to give and receive love. Every marquee in front of every church should proclaim that "Jesus ate with sinners. All are



Pat Marrin

welcome here."

How the Eucharist became a formal dinner reserved for the few is one of the predictable twists of history for institutions that have great power. The Eucharist as a reward for obedience has been promoted by men who think

the best way to enforce conformity is to starve into submission anyone who falls short of the ideal, or to publicly shame those who break under the weight of life's dilemmas.

The church's role in protecting doctrine is clear, but her teaching must also preserve the scandal Jesus taught when he welcomed and ate with sinners.

Pope Francis has recovered the Gospel of mercy as the cornerstone of the church's renewed evangelization. The church's family table awaits the return of all her children, as evening falls and the weary find they have no other place to find food and shelter except to come home. Turn on the light, unlock the door, make room at the table. Everything is a gift.

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Finding Mercy at the Table

The Eucharist welcomes everyone

By PAUL PHILIBERT, OP

Some time ago, I took a guided tour of a megachurch in Louisville, Ky., that welcomes approximately 20,000 people every weekend at its three huge worship services. The elderly gentleman who was my tour guide was full of admiration for this community, its preaching and its spiritual guidance. Responding to someone in my group, he explained that he was a former Catholic whose life in the Roman Catholic church ended after his divorce. Among all the other changes that divorce brought into his life, he said, “This made me a *nobody* in my Catholic parish — a failure, a bad guy, a loser.” In his new church home, however, he appears to be a winner — happy and eager to help, committed and feeling close to Christ. His is only one story, but one that symbolically represents hundreds of thousands of Catholics for whom divorce has made them feel like misfits in their church community.

In his new Christian community, holy Communion is not celebrated weekly but only occasionally. However, powerful preaching, weekly Bible study and weekly community service are essential parts of belonging to his congregation. This is a very different world from your average Catholic parish, and one to which more and more Catholics find themselves attracted.

Former Catholics make up the largest demographic of the growing number of evangelical churches in the United States and a large segment of the new megachurches.¹ What have they discovered that Catholics have yet to learn? Is it that church is about life and not only about rituals? Is it the respect these churches give to study, faith sharing, community building and service? And why have so many Catholic refugees — the divorced and the disenchanting — found their way to these communities? A good deal of research has been done on exactly these questions, and the overall an-



— Julie Lonneman

Former Catholics make up the largest demographic of the growing number of evangelical churches in the United States and a large segment of the new megachurches. What have they discovered that Catholics have yet to learn? Is it that church is about life and not only about rituals?

swer, put very simply, is that they are longing for worship and community that touch their hearts.

What is living liturgy?

Liturgy and ritual are not the same

thing. The rite of the Mass begins at 10 a.m. and ends at 11 a.m. But liturgy turns the whole of life into prayer. St. Paul understood this; he gave us the categories that describe how believers become a “living liturgy”: They are the temple of God (2 Cor 6:16), the dwelling place for God (Eph 2:22), people who put on Christ so that whatever they do, they do in the name of the Lord Jesus (Col 3:17). They live in and for Christ (2 Cor 5:15).

Since the Council of Trent, Roman Catholics have had a tendency to treat the Eucharist more as a divine icon than as a living communion with God. Catholics have over-privileged the consecrated bread and wine by neglecting the sacrament of the mystical body. The faithful become “one body, one spirit in Christ.” *They* are the realized fullness of the Eucharist.

Many Catholics are moved more deeply by benediction of the Blessed Sacrament than by going to Communion, and ignore altogether their missionary mandate. But Christ’s words, repeated in the eucharistic prayer, are not “take and gaze” but “take and eat.” Jesus says: This is my body for you: to touch your needs, to enter your life.

The megachurches have neither an apostolic tradition of holy orders nor a theology of a living Eucharist. But they do have a tender respect for the members of the body of Christ. They recognize that commitment comes from being charged to undertake an apostolic mission for the kingdom of God. They express well a graced solidarity, but with less emphasis on the Incarnation. The incarnation of God’s Son was first of all his Father’s loving gift to a people he wanted to become his own (John 3:16). The humanity of the divine Son was anointed by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me” (Luke 4:18, 21). Christ’s entire mission pointed to the moment of his return to the Father, when together they poured out their Spirit upon those who believe in him. We celebrate that in every Eucharist.

Reborn and remade in the Spirit

In every Eucharist there are two critical invocations of the Holy Spirit: “O Lord, we humbly implore you: by the same Spirit graciously make holy these gifts we have brought to you for consecration, that they may become the Body and Blood of your Son our Lord Jesus Christ”; and after Christ’s words of institution, “Grant that we who are nourished by the Body and Blood of your Son and filled with his Holy Spirit, may become one body, one spirit in Christ.”

The Holy Spirit unites the wounded members of the body of Christ on earth with the risen body of Christ in heaven. In his broken body, death is overcome, life is restored and meaning returns to those whose lives are painful, broken or empty.

The Second Vatican Council, in addition to clearly articulating the common priesthood of all the baptized (“Constitution on the Church” 10), also developed the biblical theme of “spiritual sacrifices” (1 Peter 2:5). That refers to the self-offering of the life, work, suffering and service of God’s people precisely as they are moved by the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The “Constitution on the Church” (34) says of the laity: “Their prayers and apostolic undertakings, family and married life, daily work, relaxation of mind and body, even the hardships of life patiently borne” become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God and are “offered to the Father in all piety along with the body of the Lord.”

This teaching explains that “worshiping everywhere by their holy actions, the laity consecrate the world itself to God.” The Spirit who changes bread and wine into the eucharistic body of Christ, and who transforms those who eat and drink into the mystical body of Christ, is poured out as well on the missionary lives of those gathered at the Eucharist. When scattered again to transform the ethos of their homes, their neighborhoods, their work and their society, they carry the Spirit’s energy to renew the face of the earth. The full power of the Eucharist does not detonate under the rafters of the parish church but “out there” wherever grace makes ordinary



The Holy Spirit unites the wounded members of the body of Christ on earth with the risen body of Christ in heaven. In his broken body, death is overcome, life is restored and meaning returns to those whose lives are painful, broken or empty.

life incandescent with faith and love.

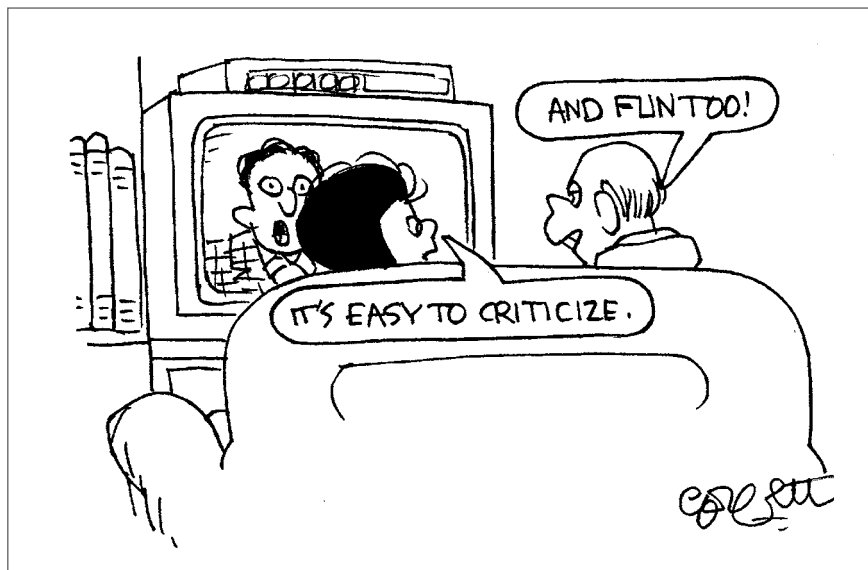
Vatican II’s theology of the Eucharist moved us beyond a unique focus upon the consecrated bread and wine (immense gift of God that it is) to the transformation of the world through the changed lives of those who become *one body, one spirit in Christ*. The previous fixation upon the consecrated bread and wine was also obsessed with ritual nicety and

canonical propriety. Our grandparents remember the requirement to fast from midnight before receiving holy Communion, abstaining even from drinking water. The council’s missionary theology (new to us, but ancient and seminal) has other preoccupations: the synergy — the mutual self-gift — of the faithful people and the Holy Spirit, the transformation of the lives of those who enter into communion with Christ, and their epiphany of the saving power of the risen Lord.

Through the outpouring of the Spirit, the Eucharist plunges our sinful selves into the abyss of God’s mercy. We dare to say, “Lord, I am unfinished — have mercy.” “Lord, my world is a mess — have mercy.” “Lord, I am awakening to my true destiny, letting go of mistakes; I am poor, selfish, and hungry for you — have mercy.” This is each one of us. We pray, with circumstances different in each case, but truly: “Have mercy,” and God gives himself and mercy is received.

Who belongs at the Table?

Who can fail to think these days of the challenge brought to the Synod on the Family of the pastoral care for divorced Catholics — some remarried, some not? The aloofness with which some commentators spoke of the problem as a deviation from Christian life fails to grasp that 50 percent of





marriages today end in divorce. Are we going to treat half of the people of God as misfits? Pastors can't approach this question with categories of ritual purity and canonical requirements as their checklist. They need to become Christ to their people.

They need to think about the lives of persons who sincerely waded their whole selves in a gift to another and lost. Persons who had hoped for fulfillment and joy in place of loneliness, and were deceived. Persons who searched for transforming intimacy and, in place of enduring love, met with fear and failure.

Those deep wounds, that enduring pain, belong *to*, belong *in* the body of Christ. These are people who have learned their need for Christ and his mercy in the crucible of suffering and failure. Doesn't Christ say to them: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest" (Matt 11:28)?

The theological challenge

There is no question that the church will continue to honor Christ's proclamation of the sanctity of mutual self-giving in marriage, to honor Paul's claim that marital love is a symbol of Christ's love for the church. What is in question is neither Christ's demand for fidelity from those who have truly joined themselves to one another, nor Paul's insistence on the manifestly sacramental power of true love among spouses.

The real question is: Does the *ritual* of marriage bring about this unity? Does the power of the sacramental sign happen automatically—or does it grow patiently into a substantial reality? Indissolubility rests upon fidelity, but fidelity is a subjective quality that must be reciprocal. It must be true if it is going to be an authentic sign.

The sacrament of matrimony embodies one of the highest human values: mutual love. While the institution of marriage is juridical and objective, its human motivation is subjective and genetic. It grows only gradually. When we institutionalize the subjective call of two persons who take the risk to bind their lives together, we offer them a powerful possibility for good. But we also risk perpetuating an



This is about the theological rightness of bringing to the table of the Lord the lives, hopes, sufferings and service of those who have been wounded by separation and divorce, both those who remain in painful isolation and those who have found a new love in their life.

obligation for couples who fail to find their potential for enduring mutual commitment and genuine enduring love. Who fail, in other words, to arrive at "what God has joined" (*is joining*) together. And this — about half the time, it appears.

My focus here is not on canonical requirements or the theology of matrimony. It is about facing the fact that there are hundreds of thousands of divorced Catholics who tried to create homes of enduring love, and failed. How or whether the church will decide theologically to give them a second chance is something we are all vitally interested in, and some of the world's best theologians are working on it. But this article is about Eucharist and spiritual sacrifices. It is about the theological rightness of bringing to the table of the Lord the lives, hopes, sufferings and service of those who have been wounded by separation and divorce, both those who remain in painful isolation and

those who have found a new love in their life.

What is the right perspective?

Here is the motto of the megachurch I spoke about above: "We are imperfect people striving to live a life for God."² What is the special contribution of the once-broken, the imperfect, to a Christian community coming together to witness to God's forgiving love? Pope Francis summed it up at his *Angelus* teaching in St. Peter's Square:

We celebrate the Eucharist not because we are worthy, but because we recognize our need for God's mercy, incarnate in Jesus Christ. In the Eucharist, we renew the gift of the Body and Blood of Christ for the remission of sins, and our hearts are enlarged to receive and show mercy.³

Finding mercy in the body of Christ, we celebrate "the blood of the new and eternal covenant poured out for the forgiveness of sins." "Yes, Lord," we go on to pray, "by your cross and resurrection you have set us free."

Endnotes

1. Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), esp. Ch. 5; cf. religions.pewforum.org/reports.
2. See www.southeastchristian.org.
3. See en.radiovaticana.va/storico/2014/02/12/pope_francois_eucharist.

Paul Philibert, a Dominican friar, is promoter for permanent formation for the Southern Dominican Province in the United States. With Thomas O'Meara, he recently published *Scanning the Signs of the Times: French Dominicans in the Twentieth Century*.

Un Jesús Emergente

El culto y la vida para el mes de febrero 2015

PATRICIA DATCHUCK SÁNCHEZ
y RAFAEL SÁNCHEZ ALONSO

Cualquier persona que haya seguido el progreso el año litúrgico se habrá dado cuenta de que hace dos meses celebrábamos el misterio de la Palabra de Dios encarnada; ahora nos hemos saltado tres décadas de su vida para recordarla y celebrar la persona y misión del Jesús adulto. Sin recurrir a fatuas especulaciones, ¿qué podemos saber de aquellos años intermedios de la vida de Jesús? Echemos una ojeada a ese periodo de Jesús y veamos qué nos dice el gran erudito John P. Meier en su obra tripartita *Un Judío Marginal* (Editorial Verbo Divino, Navarra, España: 1998, 1999, 2003).

Meier afirma que Jesús, por ser el primogénito de la familia, habría recibido de sus padres una atención especial. Entrenado por José como carpintero, tendría asegurado un porvenir y estándar de vida modestos. Su nivel socioeconómico, así como su condición de judío piadoso, por ser hijo de padres piadosos, le aseguraría un nivel de honor en una sociedad de honor-vergüenza, en la que se valoraba altamente el honor y se aborrecía la vergüenza. El hecho de que Jesús no se casara era algo atípico y, en ese respecto, marginado. Pero no era un caso único, como vemos en los casos de Juan el Bautista, algunos de los Esenios, etc. Siendo la época de la Paz Romana y viviendo durante el largo y tranquilo reinado de Herodes Antipas tetrarca de Galilea (entre 4 a.C. y 30 d.C.), Jesús habría podido llevar una vida tranquila en Nazaret. Pero Jesús prefirió tomar un camino alternativo.

Hacia el año 28 d.C. y cuando tenía unos 34 años, dejó su vida confortable de Nazaret y se convirtió en un maestro itinerante para proclamar el reino de Dios. Señala Meier (Vol. 2) que “el ministerio público del judío marginal llamado Jesús tiene su inicio en el ministerio público de otro judío marginal de nombre Juan y apodado ‘el Bautista.’ Sin tener en cuenta el

Jesús prefirió tomar un camino alternativo.

papel desempeñado por Juan como mentor de Jesús y como origen de su ministerio público, éste resulta poco inteligible.” Después de ser bautizado y habiendo abrazado plenamente en su corazón el mensaje de arrepentimiento sincero predicado por Juan, Jesús emergió del movimiento de Juan para iniciar su propia misión, viajando extensamente y tendiendo la mano a todos con quienes se encontraba, especialmente a pobres, pecadores y marginados. A todos predicó el reino de Dios, un término y una realidad que encarnan toda la historia de la salvación, desde cuando Dios mandó a los refugiados esclavos que salieran de Egipto para ser su propio pueblo hasta el presente. Dios protegería, curaría y perdonaría a todos los pecadores en preparación para el juicio final y la salvación eterna. Mientras Jesús predicaba, iba sanando, perdonando y desafiando a sus oyentes a vivir según la ley del reino de Dios: Ama a Dios, y ama a todos como a ti mismo. Jesús, cada vez más consciente de que era el Hijo del Hombre y el Hijo de Dios, pudo afirmar sin reparos: “el tiempo se ha cumplido y el reino de Dios está cerca” (BJ, Marcos 1:15).

Como inaugurador de ese reino, Jesús chocó directamente con las fuerzas del mal que militaban contra Dios y contra el bien. Por esa razón, y como ilustra San Marcos en los evangelios de este mes, Jesús estaba determinado a luchar para que el reino de Dios prevaleciera. Por esa razón San Marcos presenta un exorcismo como primer milagro de Jesús (1 de febrero): Reconocido y aclamado como “el Santo de Dios” (v. 24) por los espíritus inmundos que poseían a un hombre, Jesús actuó rápidamente para hacer impotentes a esos espíritus inmundos. Después de este desafío a

los espíritus del mal, Jesús continuó su misión contra el mal, tocando y curando a leprosos (15 de febrero), a la suegra de Pedro (8 de febrero), y a otros enfermos y endemoniados.

En la época de Jesús, se pensaba que las enfermedades eran causadas por los demonios y no por bacterias o virus; por tanto, la curación requería expulsar al demonio. Los eruditos citan este concepto para indicar que Jesús, como verdadero hombre, sólo tenía los conocimientos que provenían de las ideas de su tiempo y no de un conocimiento supra-humano. ¿Hace eso que Jesús sea menos para nosotros? Como Raymond E. Brown ha explicado, un Jesús que pasase por la vida sabiendo exactamente lo que el futuro le traería, que supiese con seguridad que tres días después de morir resucitaría, sería un Jesús que tal vez admiraríamos pero sería para nosotros un Jesús lejano (*Jesus: God and Man*, MacMillan, New York: 1967). Por otra parte, un Jesús para quien el futuro era un misterio, como lo es para nosotros, y que, al mismo tiempo, decía a Dios, “Hágase tu voluntad y no la mía” (Marcos 14:36), sería un Jesús que nos enseña concretamente cómo vivir y responder al amor de Dios, tanto en tiempos fáciles como cuando enfrentamos luchas difíciles inherentes a la condición humana. Éste es el Jesús que nos revela San Marcos este mes y los próximos meses. Éste es el Jesús que el Concilio de Nicea (325) declaró ser verdadero Dios, y verdadero hombre por el de Calcedonia (451). Siendo en todo como nosotros, menos en el pecado, Jesús, Hijo, Palabra y Sabiduría de Dios, se hizo hombre porque, sin su encarnación, no habríamos conocido cuán profundo es el amor de Dios. Éstas no son meras palabras sino un misterio vivo que debemos ponderar a diario para que nuestra respuesta sea auténtica y amorosa.

Patricia Datchuck Sánchez y Rafael Sánchez Alonso han provisto de comentarios y homilías a *Celebración* desde 1979.

An Emerging Jesus

Lectionary themes for February 2015

PATRICIA DATCHUCK SÁNCHEZ
and RAFAEL SÁNCHEZ ALONSO

In the past two months, our liturgical year has celebrated the mystery of the Word of God made flesh and has leapt forward a little over three decades to remember the person and mission of the adult Jesus. Without resorting to senseless speculation, what can we know about those interim years of Jesus' life? For a glimpse into that period, we look to the excellent scholarship of John P. Meier (*A Marginal Jew*, Vols. 1-3, Doubleday, New York: 1991, 1994, 2001).

As the firstborn of his family, says Meier, Jesus would have received special attention from his parents. Trained by Joseph as a woodworker, he was assured of a modest but average standard of living. His socioeconomic status, as well as his status as a pious Jew from a pious family, also assured him a measure of honor in a society that valued honor highly and abhorred shame. The fact that Jesus did not marry made him atypical and, to an extent, marginal, but not unique (recall John the Baptizer, some of the Essenes, etc.). Given the Pax Romana and the relatively peaceful and long reign of Herod Antipas (ca. 4 B.C.E. to 30 C.E.), who was tetrarch of Galilee, Jesus could have lived out his days in tranquility in Nazareth.

However, Jesus chose an alternative path. In about 28 C.E., when he was in his early 30s, he left his comfortable life in Nazareth to become an itinerant teacher and proclaimer of the kingdom of God. But, as Meier has pointed out, "the public ministry of the marginal Jew named Jesus takes its beginning from the public ministry of another marginal Jew, John the Baptist. Without John as his mentor and matrix, the Jesus of the public ministry is hardly intelligible." After his baptism, and having taken John's message of authentic repentance to heart, Jesus emerged from John's movement to begin his



own mission, traveling extensively, reaching out to all he encountered, especially the poor, sinners and the disenfranchised. To all, he preached the kingdom of God, a term and a reality that embodied the entire story of salvation from the time God called the enslaved refugees out of Egypt to be God's own people, to the present time when God would gather, heal and forgive all sinners in preparation for final judgment and eternal salvation. As he preached, Jesus also healed, forgave and challenged his listeners to live by the law of God's kingdom. Love God; love all others as yourself. Because of his growing awareness of himself as a Son of Man and Son of God, he could readily say, "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near" (RSV, Mark 1:15).

As the inaugurator of that kingdom, Jesus found himself in direct opposition to the forces of evil that militated against God and goodness. Mark will illustrate in each of the Gospels for this month that Jesus was determined God's reign should prevail. This is why Mark chose to feature an exorcism as the first of the wonders worked by Jesus (Feb. 1). Recognized as "the Holy One of God" (v. 24) by the unclean spirits possessing a man, Jesus acted quickly to render the spirits powerless. Having thrown

down the gauntlet, Jesus proceeded with his mission against evil. He touched and healed lepers (Feb. 15), Peter's ailing mother-in-law (Feb. 8), and all who were ill or possessed by demons.

Recall that in Jesus' day, all maladies were thought to be caused not by bacteria or viruses, but by the demons. Hence, the cure required the casting-out of the demon. Scholars note this as an indication that Jesus, as true man, had only the knowledge afforded him by the ideas of his day and not super-human knowledge. Does that make Jesus any less to us? As Raymond E. Brown has explained, a Jesus who went through life knowing exactly what the morrow would bring, knowing for sure that three days after his death he would rise, is a Jesus we can admire but still a Jesus far from us (*Jesus: God and Man*, MacMillan, New York: 1967). On the other hand, a Jesus for whom the future was as much a mystery as it is for us and yet, at the same time, a Jesus who could say to God, "Let it be as you would have it" (Mark 14:36) — this is a Jesus who can effectively teach us how to live and respond to the love of God through all the good times and difficult struggles that constitute the human condition. This is the Jesus who will be revealed to us by Mark this month and through the coming months. This is the Jesus pronounced true God at Nicaea in 325 and true man at Chalcedon in 451. Like us in all things but sin, Jesus, God's Son, Word and Wisdom, became truly human, without which action we could not know the depth of God's love. These are not mere words, but a living mystery that invites our daily reflection and authentic, loving response.

Patricia Datchuck Sánchez and Rafael Sánchez Alonso have been collaborating to provide Lectionary commentaries and homilies for *Celebration* since 1979.

Lent 2015: How Far Have We Come?

Oscar Romero haunts our history in Latin America

By GABE HUCK

These reflections seek to address the question: Should the Gospel we profess and the liturgy we do raise in us some great unease with the political, economic, military and environmental conditions that are our responsibility as U.S. citizens and residents? If so, how do we grapple with the apparent absence of such unease in our churches?

Last summer Pope Francis said he was taking the file for Oscar Romero's beatification out of the "forget about it" drawer. According to a BBC report:

"For me Romero is a man of God," the pontiff told journalists on the plane bringing him back from a trip to South Korea. "There are no doctrinal problems and it is very important that [the beatification] is done quickly."

Romero was shot and killed while celebrating the Eucharist on Monday, March 24, 1980, the week between the Fifth Sunday of Lent and Palm Sunday. So this archbishop joined the thousands of Salvadorans to die by the will and hand of the Salvadoran government. A few weeks before his assassination, Romero wrote a letter to President Carter asking that the United States stop arming the oppressors of the people. The day before his death, he ended his Sunday homily with words now well known.

I would like to make a special appeal to the men of the army, and specifically to the ranks of the National Guard, the police and the military. Brothers, you come from our own people. You are killing your own brother peasants when any human order to kill must be subordinate to the law of God, which says, "Thou shalt not kill." No soldier is obliged to obey an order contrary to the law of God. No one has to obey an immoral law. It is high time you recovered your consciences and

obeyed your consciences rather than a sinful order.

The church, the defender of the rights of God, of the law of God, of human dignity, of the person, cannot remain silent before such an abomination. We want the government to face the fact that reforms are valueless if they are to be carried out at the cost of so much blood. In the name of God, in the name of this suffering people whose cries rise to heaven more loudly each day, I implore you, I beg you, I order you in the name of God: Stop the repression.

The church preaches your liberation just as we have studied it in the holy Bible today. It is a liberation that has, above all else, respect for the dignity of the person, hope for humanity's common good, and the transcendence that looks before all to God and only from God derives its hope and its strength.

The whole sermon, and even the whole of Romero's last two years of preaching, are there for us to read.¹ Why us? As Romero knew, we in the United States were paying for the weapons and training of the death squads. Why didn't we stop? Among our goals in funding and supplying the oppressive government of El Salvador was our determination to prevent the military oligarchy in El Salvador from being replaced by leftists, as was happening in Nicaragua.

Kathy Kelly recently wrote of what Romero's last preaching might mean to us now:

But facing the bloody mess that has developed in Iraq and Syria, I think Archbishop Romero's exhortation to the Salvadoran soldiers pertains directly to U.S. people. Suppose these words were slightly rewritten: I want to make a special appeal to the people of the United States. Each of you is one of us. The peoples you kill are

your own brothers and sisters. When you hear a person telling you to kill, remember God's words, "Thou shalt not kill." No soldier is obliged to obey a law contrary to the law of God. In the name of God, in the name of our tormented people, I beseech you, I implore you ... I command you to stop the repression.

The war on the Islamic State will distract us from what the U.S. has done and is doing to create further despair in Iraq, and much also to enlist new recruits for the Islamic State. The Islamic State is the echo of the last war the U.S. waged in Iraq, the so-called "Shock and Awe" bombing and invasion. The emergency is not the Islamic State but war.

Romero would be important for us even had he not been killed. He would be important for us even if his file were to remain forever in that vast "forget about it" drawer. Why? Remember that this preacher was a prayerful, kind intellectual. Harmless. Cautious. Just what was needed in a Salvadoran archbishop in 1977. Romero, it seemed to both church and state authority, would not cross those invisible but real lines: This far and no further can the church go and still depend on the favor and the favors of the political system. Tend the wounded, bury the dead, trust the president's assurance that the government was only protecting the citizens from the likes of — fill in the blank.

But somehow, Romero's path of prayer and study prepared him to ask what the Gospel demanded. Was it enough to comfort the families of victims, or must one ask why these deaths? Who benefited from El Salvador's centuries of division between the many poor and the few of wealth and power? The regime blamed outside agitators for the conflict, but whence came their own new weapons except from outside? Romero knew well that the government and church



authorities intended for him to put aside what his eyes saw and his study told him. The bargain was ancient.

Are we part of such a bargain? The 35 years since Romero's death have only made the stakes more vast and frightening. For Roman Catholics in the United States, the bargain — and we've created much of it ourselves — is this: Individually and institutionally, we can speak out all we want to on a certain number of predictable issues. In some cases, for example, immigration policy, the stance taken by the institutional church does express the personal stance of most Catholics; in other cases it clearly does not. And that's well known. Think of the institutional church's opposition to gay marriage.

But issues abound where the institution is silent or barely whispering. Many of these are matters of great importance. Some have been named and discussed in these essays over the past 15 months: how our country uses imprisonment (including what's now called "the new Jim Crow"); the continuing support of the U.S. government for Israel despite that nation's ongoing violations of U.N. resolutions and international law; the imbalance of wealth within the United States and the damage unbridled capitalism inflicts on the poor here and throughout the world; fostering perpetual fear (e.g., "If you see something, say something") to create a 1984-like acquiescence to corporate and government intrusions on basic rights; our failure to take responsibility for the suffering we inflict, sometimes with weapons, sometimes with cash; still-existing nuclear arsenals now being modernized; putting immediately behind us the physical, economic and cultural destruction we cause, e.g., in Iraq. So far, lacking in these essays has been attention to the climate crisis and much else. That multiplying of troubles can defeat those who try to keep their eyes wide open.

I expect little of the institutional leadership in the United States. Maybe later it will come. But what do we expect of ourselves?

Several times in these discussions, sometimes explicitly, I have wondered about two attitudes that may keep us

from plunging into the world's terrors and troubles. As individuals, we feel that these troubles, evils really, are not "*mea culpa*," my fault, and we aren't quite sure how evil could be "*nostra culpa*," our fault. "I didn't kill those civilians in Falluja. I have nothing against the people in Gaza. And I'm not running any of those large banks!" Where do we go from there?

And why have we so seldom pondered together what it means to confess "what I have failed to do"? That is so often, in our times and in this rich and powerful society, how our sins are committed: by failing to do what we could do. Are *we* responsible? What then is to be done?

We're mostly unaware that it would still be possible to do good, exciting things like ban the bomb and slash military spending or to change — but let's name the biggest elephants now in the world's huts and living rooms: the need to change the way wealth is distributed and ownership is understood; and, just as important, to stop the abuse of the only earth we have. What will we leave to the next generations?

Maybe some of us have never plunged in like this. Welcome to Lent 2015! Could the coming Forty Days find us giving attention in preaching, parish study and various forms of alms (money, time, study, action) to these areas where we observe much suffering being inflicted or much greed being practiced? Such observing, studying, pondering leads us to make judgments. This is a pattern that has served well. But when we reach that stage of taking action, we will likely discover others have arrived before us and will welcome us. Often they will not be our usual partners. We might find ourselves in the company of, for starters, Ralph Nader's Public Citizen organization, or Jewish Voices for Peace, or those folks who talk about climate justice in Bill McKibben's 350.org movement. But this isn't going to be only a matter of signing letters to legislators or sending checks to "good causes." The parish Peace and Justice committee may already be in place. Good. But how are peace and justice and a critical Gospel eye to be the work of all this assembly?

Come to the world with open eyes. See how so much is awry, but see also how so many, even here and for all sorts of reasons, are set on learning how things work, are crying out and pointing out. They are there waiting for us to find our place. What we do with Lent is not ever to be put aside after the Forty Days. We are seeking this Lent and every Lent for a way to be, for all the days beyond the Forty. Here's the brief version of a good Lent together:

Now we pray by day and night,
Keep the fast to clear our sight,
Share our goods to set things right.²

Perhaps Oscar Romero, when he came to Lent in 1980, didn't go so willingly. Perhaps he grasped what was taking place in El Salvador and, like Jeremiah and many others, moaned and cried out, "If I say, 'I will not speak any more in God's name,' then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones" (20:9). So Romero did speak and cry out. For us, living in the nation Romero called on to stop providing the weapons, what is gobbling up all our energy and time and keeping us from seeing political and economic reality? Name it!

How will we make Lent in our preaching and conversation, in reading and reflecting? How will we deal with stories of flood and wild beasts, of Abraham's unsettling obedience, of the strange way we all carve idols and bow down to them, of the foolishness of God, an angry Jesus cracking a whip? What might it mean that "God so loved the world," yet loving your life leads to losing it?

Endnotes

1. Romero's homilies are found in *The Violence of Love*, translated by James Brockman, published by Orbis Books. Also published by Orbis: *The Word Remains: A Life of Oscar Romero* by James Brockman.
2. Lent song for the Communion procession (v. 6), from *By Heart: Seasonal Songs for Gathering, Interceding, and Communion* by Tony Alonso and Gabe Huck, published by GIA Publications.

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The Casablanca Prize?

Sometimes Sunday preaching is just off

By MELISSA MUSICK NUSSBAUM

I have daily writing deadlines, so I know the fear of having nothing interesting left to say. I know the temptation to riff as I write — Funny Things My Grandchildren Say or The Day the Dog Died — all the while hoping there will be some nugget of wisdom among the fluff.

This makes me sympathetic to parish priests, who must write a homily week after week. Still, I heard a homily last fall that was so wildly off-kilter that it has inspired me to propose a new liturgical award: The Casablanca Prize for Homiletics. It is named in honor of the famous line from the movie: “Of all the gin joints in all the towns in all the world, she walks into mine.” Because as we wandered deeper into the homily, that’s the line that popped into my head, albeit with some slight alterations: Of all the Masses in all the towns in all the world, he walks into mine. Sigh.

It was the Twenty-Sixth Sunday of the Year. I was far from home, attending a Sacred Harp singing. Sunday morning began with a rousing four-part a capella rendition of “Old Hundred,” a 17th-century shape note hymn with this single stirring verse:

O come, loud anthems let us sing
Loud thanks to our Almighty King.

For we our voices high should raise,
When our salvation’s Rock we praise.

Notice the repetition of the word “loud.” Sacred Harp singing is lively and strong. The walls and floors of the wooden buildings where we gather vibrate with the sound. On a fast fugue, singers’ feet keep time and add a percussive accompaniment to the voices. The old saying comes to life as the rafters, indeed, ring.

I slipped out in time to make a nearby 11:30 Mass. As I walked in the church, a lone pianist was playing a

Of all the Masses in all the towns in all the world, he walks into mine. Sigh.

soft version of “Morning Has Broken.” It sounded like the music in an assisted living facility dining room or in an upscale department store, designed to encourage the puckish to eat and the reluctant to buy shoes. I gave a wistful glance back up the hill where I knew singers were belting out, at a brisk pace,

Jesus rose, brethren; Jesus rose,
brethren;
Jesus rose, brethren; He has risen
from the dead,
Through the earth and through
the sky.

Still, I was hoping we’d get the long form of the epistle, Philippians 2:1-11, and I was not disappointed. For a woman devoted to hymnody, there is none finer than the one Paul quotes in his letter to the Christians he loves so well in Philippi.

So that at Jesus’ name
Every knee must bend
In the heavens and on the earth,
And under the earth,
And every tongue proclaim
To the glory of God the Father:
Jesus Christ is Lord.

Of course, it’s the antecedent of that “so” that cannot be ignored, that Jesus “did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at; rather, he emptied himself and took the form of a slave.” The lyrics pierce. “Grasp at,” which is the way we sweat and strive and take whatever we want. “Emptied himself,” which is as strange and disturbing a notion to us as “grasped at” is familiar.

Then came the homily, for which the priest decided to recite “Invictus,” William Ernest Henley’s 19th-century hymn to self-reliance. I rather like the idea of a poem for a poem, but I’m

still wondering how (to keep with the “Casablanca” theme), of all the poems in all the books in all the world, he walked into this one. The poem was written as Henley recuperated following the amputation of one leg, and extensive surgery on the remaining foot in order to save the other leg. The priest focused on the two most famous stanzas, pausing, as I was taught to do when I memorized this poem — a great favorite in Texas — as a child, before delivering the last two lines solemnly and slow:

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul. ...

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments
the scroll,
I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.

Of course, being the master of one’s fate and the captain of one’s soul is pretty much the opposite of taking the form of a slave. Masters and captains command and own and trade and sell slaves; they aren’t slaves.

But no sooner had I begun to wade in those waters than the priest asked us to gaze up at the crucifix, where he told us, locker-room style, that “There’s no ‘I’ up there.” I’m guessing he meant there’s no “I” in crucifix — or in team — though, and here’s the problem, there are two “I’s” in crucifix, unless one removes the corpus, in which case the spelling works, though the analogy no longer does.

Which brought to mind another line from “Casablanca,” the one I’m proposing be engraved on the winner’s statuette. It’s Rick Blaine’s line, and mine, too, as the homily continued: “Go ahead and shoot. You’ll be doing me a favor.”

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God Invites Our Response

The Psalms of February

By DENISE SIMEONE

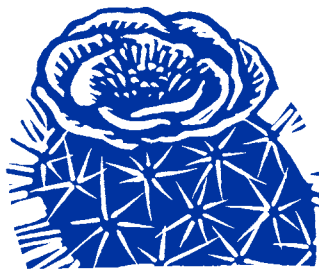
During the first three Sundays of February, we hear just a little more than 20 verses from the first chapter of Mark's Gospel. We heard about 10 verses from the same chapter in January. Not unexpected, since these months are the beginning of our liturgical year before Lent starts on the last Sunday in February.

What happens during those 20 verses? Jesus enters the synagogues and drives out demons. He heals Simon's mother-in-law, who begins to wait on Jesus and his company. Subsequently, the townspeople bring all those who are ill or possessed by devils, and, the account tells us, "The whole town was gathered at the door" (v.33). Finally he touches and cleanses a leper, who — despite Jesus' warning — publicizes the whole story.

There are a few subtleties during all this action. After meeting Simon's whole town, Jesus goes off at dawn to a deserted place to pray. When his followers press him, he says they must go to the nearby villages to preach and drive out demons. "For this purpose have I come" (v. 38). Then, after the leper's report, Jesus cannot go into a town openly, so he stays outside in deserted places; yet people still keep coming to him from everywhere.

We know the response to Jesus' ministry and preaching was both acceptance and rejection. What do we say today? The psalms of these weeks invite our response. Psalm 95, on the **Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Feb. 1)**, is full of words of entreaty: come sing joyfully, acclaim our salvation, bow down in worship, and kneel before the Lord. This is our God, the shepherd who guides us. The responsorial reminds us how essential it is to keep our hearts open to recognize God's actions: "If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts" (v. 8).

Psalm 147 proclaims, "Praise the Lord, who heals the brokenhearted" (v. 3), on the **Fifth Sunday in Ord-**



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nary Time (Feb. 8). Over and over, the psalm reminds us of the ways of the Lord: God is good, gracious, rebuilds Jerusalem, gathers the lost, heals the brokenhearted, binds the wounded, calls each by name, sustains the lowly. In the response of Simon's mother-in-law (not known by name in the Gospel), we see how one who has been healed from brokenness responds to this gift. She rises from her sickbed to serve and ministers to others. She seems to demonstrate her understanding of Jesus' response to the Lord as he sets out on mission.

Psalm 32, sung on the **Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Feb. 15)**, is one of seven penitential psalms in which the psalmist declares God's forgiveness after he confesses his sin and guilt. This experience of forgiveness is met with joy and gladness, as we hear in the response: "I turn to you, Lord, in time of trouble, and you fill me with the joy of salvation" (v. 7). In the context of the full psalm, this verse is always translated as "You are my shelter; you guard me from distress; with joyful shouts of deliverance you surround me." We can almost imagine these words on the lips of the leper who now finds himself cleansed. That cleansing began

when Jesus touched him, something that was forbidden by Jewish law since the leper was an outcast to be avoided. How long might it have been since he felt a human touch? In that touch, possibly, the leper found shelter and the joy of salvation from his pain of being ostracized and turned away from his own community.

We go backward in Mark's first chapter on the **First Sunday of Lent (Feb. 22)** as we hear what precedes Jesus' mission. "The Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert, and he remained in the desert for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was among wild beasts, and the angels ministered to him" (1:12-13). Jesus emerges from that experience proclaiming clearly, "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel" (v. 15). From the desert, he sets forth.

With the beginning verses of Psalm 25 on this Sunday, we ask the Lord: Make your ways known, guide me and teach me your paths. That is what happened to Jesus in the desert. Driven there by the Spirit of God, he had an encounter that strengthened his resolve to continue to preach the good news of the Gospel despite what he had to imagine might be the cost. Despite the arrest of John, he continued his mission. This Sunday readies us for our Lenten experience and also invites us to ask the Spirit to be taught. While we might not be driven into the desert, we might be driven deeper into our relationship with God so that our commitment to the mission that is laid before us is strengthened. Like Peter's mother-in-law, we rise from our brokenness and dare to pray our responsorial: "Your ways, O Lord, are love and truth to those who keep your covenant" (v. 10).

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Echoes of Vatican II

The Extraordinary Synod on the Family

By **BIAGIO MAZZA**

Last October's Extraordinary Synod on the Family under the leadership of Pope Francis was for many observers one of the most exciting, stimulating, energizing and frustrating experiences of being church since the Second Vatican Council.

Several factors, all related to Vatican II, made this synod truly extraordinary: the teaching on collegiality, or synodality; the attention to the signs of the times and to every believer's sense of the faith. Briefly unpacking each of these teachings will shed light on Pope Francis and the remarkable quality of this synodal experience.

Synodality literally means "walking" or "journeying together," the essence of collegiality affirmed by Vatican II in "The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," *Lumen Gentium* (#18-29). Shared decision-making among God's people — arrived at through speaking frankly, openly and honestly with one another, while listening attentively and humbly — is the backbone of collegiality. Francis, as the pope and as a Jesuit, incarnates Vatican II teachings in his whole being, allowing those teachings to permeate his thoughts, actions and manner of operating.

By gathering not only ordained church leadership but also 14 married couples, Francis wanted to make certain that in discussing key aspects of family life, all would listen to the experience of those living family life in today's world. Only by paying attention to everyone's lived experience do we attune ourselves to how God is speaking not just to the ordained, but to all of God's people.

If we are to discern what God is saying to us today, we have to be in touch with the wisdom of all God's people by paying attention to the signs of the times. *Gaudium et Spes* #4 states: "In every age, the church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and of interpreting them in



The synod was extraordinary on many levels, marking the beginning of a year-long process of listening, discussing and discerning the Spirit's voice regarding the give and take of today's family life. This October 2015, a wider representation of the church will gather for the Ordinary Synod on the Family, after having spent 12 months listening and gathering the sense of the faith of all believers.

light of the Gospel." Attunement to the Spirit present and active among us demands that all believers listen to the various voices speaking in the world and read them in light of Gospel values.

Complementing Vatican II's teaching on reading the signs of the times is its teaching on the sense of the faith that all the people of God possess. *Lumen Gentium* #12 states:

The whole body of the faithful who have received an anointing which comes from the holy one cannot be mistaken in belief. By this sense of the faith, aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth, the people of God, guided by the sacred magisterium ... receives not the word of human beings but truly the Word of God. ... The people unflinchingly adhere to this faith, penetrate it more deeply through right judgment and apply it more fully in daily life.

We are called to trust that sense of the faith that each believer pos-

sesses by virtue of their baptismal call and commitment. *Sensus Fidei*, the recent document issued by the Vatican's International Theological Commission, strongly asserts that baptized believers possess a "spiritual instinct" (#49) about the faith. *Sensus Fidei* #59 stresses:

Putting the faith into practice in the concrete reality of the existential situations in which he or she is placed ... enables him or her to see more precisely the value and the limits of a given doctrine, and to propose ways of refining its formulation. That is why those who teach in the name of the Church should give full attention to the experience of believers, especially lay people, who strive to put the Church's teaching into practice.

Thanks to Francis' Vatican II vision of church and his attunement to the faith wisdom of all believers, this retrieval of official church teachings from Vatican II will once again energize a church immersed in the world.

The synod was extraordinary on many levels, marking the beginning of a year-long process of listening, discussing and discerning the Spirit's voice regarding the give and take of today's family life. This October 2015, a wider representation of the church will gather for the Ordinary Synod on the Family, after having spent 12 months listening and gathering the sense of the faith of all believers. Together, the people of God will listen, discuss and discern how to carry on the mission and ministry of Jesus as it pertains to family life. Given the Vatican II direction that Pope Francis has set, the next synod promises to be anything but ordinary.

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The Persistence of Memory

Lent is a time to hear God calling us by name

By ERIN RYAN

The persistence of memory is a mystery to me.

I just came back from a trip to Minnesota to visit a good friend. While I waited for her to pick me up outside baggage claim, I hoped I wouldn't have any trouble recognizing her. I hadn't seen her in seven years and had no idea what her car looked like.

But as she approached, I saw her profile through the windshield and waved. She smiled.

My friend lives in St. Joseph, a tiny town about four miles from where I went to graduate school. For the first few days of my trip, I got reacquainted with my friend and with St. Ben's, the women's college and community of nuns who are the main reason St. Joseph is on the map. I had spent a few weeks living on that campus back in the late '90s during my grad school years. I was amazed when a few of the nuns recognized me at Mass, on the first day of my visit, after all that time.

While my friend was at work that week, I sat at her dining room table, working on a book I've been writing for seven years. Finally, after a few days, I went to visit my old graduate school campus. I was almost afraid to go back. It was a pretty intense time in my life. I was only 22 when I started school there, I loved it there, the whole course of my life changed there. Would I be seized with regret or nostalgia? Would I be seized with no emotion at all? That would be the worst, to feel nothing.

The first thing I did when I got to campus was go to morning prayer. I remembered how to set up the prayer books and sing the psalm tones. The monk who was reading the intercessions, I recognized his voice, knew his name, even though I couldn't see him.

I was not disappointed by my visit. I was humbled and surprised when I ran into people I had known—former professors, people I'd worked with at the library—and they instantly



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recognized me. I hadn't seen them in over a decade. I had told no one I was coming, had no reason to think they would remember me, but: "Hi! How have you been? Good to see you!" We all looked a little older, maybe, but we were still unmistakably ourselves.

My parents came to pick me up at the Charlotte airport on my return to North Carolina. We drove back to their house, and their little dog came running out of the garage, straight to me, wagging her tail. Even this tiny creature hardly bigger than a cat, I thought, has the power to remember individuals and to say hello.

I don't know why it seemed so astonishing to me, this capacity for memory that can bridge a leap of years in an instant. Usually I take it for granted.

Yet on this trip, I marveled. When I went back to Minnesota it was almost like slipping back into an old identity. Somehow, the visit unstuck something in me, and the final two scenes of my book began to flow.

In the second and third weeks of February, before Lent begins, we hear the Creation story from Genesis, where we are reminded that all our individual faces are reflections of the

One Face. We humans are in the image of God, connected to one another and even to all other good creatures made by the same Hand.

As Lent starts, we hear the first lines of the Joel reading on Ash Wednesday:

Even now, says the Lord,
return to me with your whole
heart, with fasting, and weep-
ing, and mourning.

"Turn to me, O turn, and be saved, says the Lord, for I am God. There is no other, none beside me. I call your name," goes a familiar lovely song by John Foley (based on lines from Isaiah). OCP recommends using the song for services during Lent—which is usually when I hear and sing it—though it is also appropriate for other occasions: "Comfort," "Commandments," "Courage," "Meditation," "Obedience," "Salvation." I was the cantor recently on a Sunday where the theme was "Commandments." My voice almost broke on the last verse:

Lift up your eyes to the heavens,
and look at the earth down below.
The heavens will vanish like
smoke, and the earth will wear
out like a garment.

"I can hardly sing that final verse without crying," I said to the organist after Mass.

"It sends chills up my spine," she agreed. "And it's true." The earth *will* wear out.

How wonderful that we are made of something else, something more, something that will survive the wear.

This February as the world is frozen and still, we ponder what it is we are made of, and we wait to recognize that Voice we know, calling our name.

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Formed in Faith

Families create holy stories from ordinary life

By PEG EKERDT

It was the summer before my senior year in high school. I was leaving the house to get to work at the local swimming pool when my dad asked me to join him and my mom in their bedroom. The conversation and its setting remain vivid in memory: I am standing in the doorway of the bedroom wearing a swimsuit, lifeguard whistle around my neck, as I look at my mom, who is lying on the bed. And then I hear my father say, “Your mother is going to need your help. She is going to have a baby.”

I went to work, but 20 kids could have drowned beneath my lifeguard chair that afternoon. Incredibly, to my way of thinking, my mother was pregnant. I was going to have a sibling 18 years my junior. It was a profound moment in my young life as I heard in my father’s words a testament to his love for my mother; his concern for her health; his expectation that, as family, we support one another first and foremost — and from them both, at age 43, a deep and abiding openness to life.

The celebration of first reconciliation for our parish children comes upon us each year, and each year we invite the parents of our prospective first penitents to an evening of adult formation. Through many years, I have taken a variety of pedagogical approaches, presenting the history of the sacrament, discussing pertinent paragraphs of the catechism and explaining the “new” rite.

On some occasions, we have explored images of God and read aloud Margaret Wise Brown’s children’s story *Runaway Bunny*. We have put together a massive floor puzzle as a lead-in to conversations about brokenness and the nature of grace to heal and make whole what separates us from God’s love. We have created a communal examination of conscience. And we have explored the reasons why we go — and do not



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go — to celebrate this sacrament. We who minister know we should never stop trying to engage and nourish the faith of parents, the primary religious educators of children. Thus we recreate these lessons each year:

This past fall’s Synod on the Family has put the family front and center in the life of the church. As this year’s parent meeting approached, I wanted to do something different with these second-graders’ parents.

I would answer any questions and give each family a copy of Fr. Paul Turner’s booklet *Preparing for Confession*. But this year, rather than focusing on sacramental history or ritual, I wanted to focus on the dynamics of family life and the presence of God in the ordinary. I wanted to thank them for showing up for this night when it would be so much easier to stay home with the kids. I wanted to affirm what parents do, day in and day out, as the best thing that they do. And I wanted to get their take on the love of parent and child as imitative of God’s own.

With the firsthand experience of 100 parents sitting before me, it was easy to list the things that keep families busy, day after day. In parallel fashion, we talked about the noise of daily life

and the very real need to clear the chatter occasionally, shut down social media, computers and phones and enter a world of silence. Amazingly, many among them knew that need for contemplative silence and have found it in such ordinary activities as mowing the grass, driving alone, exercising, folding clothes, arising early in a quiet house or sitting by a sleeping child’s bed.

Moving from silence to sacred, the group easily named myriad things that draw them into the presence of God: a child’s smile, a walk by the ocean, a sunrise, a rainbow, a seeming coincidence, a quiet hug, a song, a genuine “I’m sorry” given and received, or a funeral of a loved one.

But it wasn’t until I talked about the family stories that had formed me in faith that they began to recite their own stories of grandparents, parents, deaths, births, lives spared and returns from war that have given them enduring legacies of love. More significantly, they instinctively knew that the stories they are now creating with their children — how they respond to a job loss, what they do for their neighbor who is sick, how they counsel a child who is bullied, what they do with their time on Sunday mornings, how they talk about God and pray with their children and, yes, how they welcome a new baby — all of these things are creating the family stories of faith that their children will one day claim as their own.

As the penitential season of Lent comes upon us later this month, may stories of faith, those we make and those that have made us, make holy the ordinary and inspire us to live as instruments of that great Love.

Peg Ekerdt is a pastoral associate at Visitation Church, Kansas City, Mo., where her work includes pastoral care, adult formation, marriage preparation and spiritual direction. Email her at peg@church.visitation.org.

God Loves Us to the Bone

Joint replacement reveals grace at work in community

By PATTY McCARTY

A year ago I had my first hip replacement surgery. Now I've had the other hip replaced. I think I am brave and tough as a boot.

After a couple of days at the medical center, I fussed at the physical therapist about the pain caused when I did what he asked, putting weight on my newly replaced hip. He said, "There is nothing gentle about this surgery. Some surgeries I will watch. Not this one." Dislocating the hip is a part of the replacement procedure. So you see why I think I am tough as a boot.

Three days after surgery I went to a rehab center with a big exercise room and lots of therapists, the same place I went to a year ago. I worked hard every chance I got and I got two one-hour sessions a day, Monday through Friday.

Many people at the rehab center were coping with fierce physical problems, struggling to get stronger so they could go home and cope some more. The woman who shared a hallway and bathroom with me had lost her hair to chemotherapy. She was trying to get strong enough to undergo a double mastectomy. She kept her TV on low all night long. Strangely, it didn't bother me.

The man whose room was across the hall from mine, George, was a forensic physician, but that was long ago. He sometimes got lonesome in his room and would call, "Hello, hello, hello." Sometimes he called, "Help!" Mostly, he called, "Mary, Mary, Mary."

One morning I saw him at breakfast and asked, "Are you the man that calls for Mary?" He responded, slowly, seriously, "They say that I am." Mary, his wife, died three years ago. I said, "When you call her, I always hope she will come."

On the day I went home, George and I wished each other well. The staff was trying to find a place in the facility where George would be more comfortable, perhaps in the

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It lists the names of
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"gone before us with a
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It's part of what I can
assemble around myself
to keep me tough
as a boot.*

Alzheimer's unit.

Our meals were at square tables with places for four. Usually two of my three tablemates ate very little. One day one of my tablemates said, "You ate all of that. But then you usually like everything." I'm not a picky eater and, thank God, neither were the people I cooked for as a wife and mother. But at the rehab center it wasn't a question of liking everything. We found paper menus at our places before every meal, so I could usually find something to my taste. More important, I wanted to go home as soon as possible and it seemed to me that I had to eat three good meals a day if I were to get strong enough for the therapists to say, "She can go."

After three weeks, they did say those magic words. One of my daughters came to get me. I walked with my cane to her car. Her two daughters carried my suitcase, brought my little red walker and my other stuff. Away we went. I was the one in the front passenger seat with the big smile.

Six weeks after surgery a friend drove me to see my hip doctor. When his assistant called my name, I said, "I hope you say I can drive." He said, "I can see you're OK on part of it, walking with a cane instead of a walker." The other part was not using pain relieving drugs that contain

narcotics. But this time the pain was never so bad as it was the first time, so I was able to get by with Tylenol. And that meant I could drive and grocery shop and go to the library and act like regular folks.

The technician x-rayed my hip and my doctor showed me the x-ray. The new mechanism looked just like a Tootsie Pop, a little stick that extends into the top of my thigh and a little ball that fits into the hip socket. The doctor asked me to walk and said I was holding my pelvis nice and level. I was glad I was doing it right because I have no idea what I would do to correct it if I needed to.

When I first came home from the rehab center, a physical therapist came to see me twice a week for several weeks. Now my son, who is a trainer at a fitness center, works with me. Today he placed a low plastic step in the middle of my living room and instructed me to step up on it and down, up and down. He tells me to place more of my weight on my legs and hips, which he says are strong, and less on my hand that holds my cane. I find this hard to do, but I suppose with practice I will improve.

At the rehab center a year ago, the woman who shared the hallway and bathroom with me was Leona, who was 102. I called her daughter recently to see if she was still with us. She passed away in March. I added her name to my personal litany of the saints.

That litany gives me some comfort. It lists the names of relatives and friends and people I admire who have "gone before us with a sign" of Christ's love. It's part of what I can assemble around myself to keep me tough as a boot.

Patty McCarty, a former NCR staff member, lives with her son and her 82-year-old bones in Kansas City, Mo.

Unencumbered Journey

The sound of Lent

By J. MICHAEL McMAHON

What does Lent *sound* like? Most of us bring to each year's Lenten celebration the memory of the sounds in Lents past, perhaps most powerfully the Lents of our childhood.

The sounds we remember are likely not triumphant and festive, but reflective and sober or even somber, dark and gloomy. While the sounds of past Lenten celebrations may be a helpful starting point in music planning, the key to the sound of Lent — or any season, for that matter — is located in the liturgical action itself and in the community that gathers to celebrate.

Approaching the sound of Lent from these vantage points requires musicians and other pastoral leaders to move beyond initial assumptions and allow for unexpected or overlooked aspects of the season. Here are some considerations for musicians and liturgy planners as they begin to shape the sound of Lent.

Rites. Music serves the rituals that are particular to this season, beginning with the imposition of ashes on Ash Wednesday. The liturgy of the First Sunday of Lent may begin with a Lenten procession and the singing of the Litany of the Saints. The Gloria is omitted on the Sundays of Lent, placing greater emphasis on the Penitential Act and/or Kyrie.

There are a number of Lenten rituals related to the celebration of initiation, such as the diocesan rite of election; the parish rite of sending (for election); the scrutinies; the optional penitential rite for baptized candidates; the presentations of the creed and the Lord's Prayer.

Masses on Palm Sunday open with a commemoration of the Lord's entrance into Jerusalem, including the blessing of palms and either a full-blown procession of the whole assembly or a solemn entrance of the ministers.

Pastoral musicians and liturgy planners should study these rites



Music planners might begin by recalling Lent's twofold focus on baptism and penance. It is a time of intense preparation of the elect for the sacraments of initiation, a period of deeper reflection on our own baptism, and an opportunity to hear God's call to continuing conversion and to embrace a spirit of penance through prayer, fasting and works of charity.

with an eye to providing music and evoking the sounds that are appropriate for the various elements that are meant to be sung.

Scripture. Before preparing for the Sundays of Lent, be sure to check with the parish liturgy team on the selection of readings. The readings for the first two Sundays will be taken from the current year of the three-year Lectionary. If there are catechumens preparing to be initiated at the Easter Vigil, the scrutinies are celebrated on the Third, Fourth and Fifth Sundays, and the readings for those Masses are always drawn from Year A. The Lec-

tionary for Mass extends the freedom to use the readings of Year A at any Mass on those three Sundays, even in Years B and C.

The spirit of the season. Music planners might begin by recalling Lent's twofold focus on baptism and penance. It is a time of intense preparation of the elect for the sacraments of initiation, a period of deeper reflection on our own baptism, and an opportunity to hear God's call to continuing conversion and to embrace a spirit of penance through prayer, fasting and works of charity.

The twofold focus is a helpful platform from which to hear the scriptures of the season. Planners might reflect on some of the words found in the readings, such as return, mercy, reconciliation, fasting, prayer, giving, covenant, test, light, kindness. These themes suggest a sound that expresses a penitential stance while at the same time giving voice to our hope and confidence in a God who is always ready to save, redeem and reconcile.

Singing and instruments. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal directs that, except on the Fourth Sunday (Laetare Sunday), the organ and other instruments should be used only to lead and support the singing, which implies a spirit of modesty and reflection. It also suggests that Lent may be an appropriate time for some unaccompanied singing, perhaps making use of simple Gregorian settings of the Kyrie, Sanctus and Agnus Dei.

All of the considerations above point to a spirit of simplicity, the sounds of music that allow the liturgy to be as unencumbered as the Lenten journey itself.

J. Michael McMahon is *Celebration's* music editor and former president of the National Association of Pastoral Musicians. Contact him at jmichael.mcmahon@gmail.com.

By J. MICHAEL McMAHON

4TH SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME

February
2015

February 1, 2015

Psalm of the Day: Ps 95

If Today You Hear God's Voice (Farrell) JS2 73/JS3 72

If Today You Hear God's Voice (Haas) RS 129/GC2 51/G3 66/MI-BB 795

If Today You Hear God's Voice (Honore) WC 457/R-WS 390

If Today You Hear God's Voice (Willcock) PFS 50

If Today You Hear His Voice (Alstott) JS3 938/BB p. 67

If Today You Hear His Voice (Guimont) RS 127/GC2 960/G3 1102/LPMG 94

If Today You Hear His Voice (Honore) PMB 160/PRM B74

If Today You Hear His Voice (Huntiger) SS 571

If Today You Hear His Voice (Kreutz) JS2 72/PSC 49

If Today You Hear His Voice (Proulx) W4 1119/LPGG 46

If Today You Hear His Voice (Schiaivone) JS2 958/LP 102

If Today You Hear His Voice (J. Smith) LMGM2 36

If Today You Hear His Voice (T. Smith) JS3 73

If Today You Hear His Voice (Soper) JS3 71/MI-BB 796

If Today You Hear His Voice (Stewart) RS 128/LMGM2 890/LPLM 112

If Today You Hear the Voice of God (Bolduc) R-WS 391

If Today You Hear the Voice of God (Chepponis) W4 71/SS 654

Let Not Your Hearts Be Hardened (Warner) PST 27

Listen! Listen! Open Your Hearts! PSL B-37/SS 347

Listen Today to God's Voice/Escuchen Hoy la Voz del Señor (Cortés) JS2 71

O That Today You Would Listen to His Voice (Young/Black) CBW 122

Today If You Hear (French) W4 72

Songs for the Liturgy

A Mighty Fortress/God Is Our Fortress (G) W4 688/RS 741/GC2 594//G3 687/LMGM2 556/JS2 709/JS3 674/PMB 420/WC 843/R-WS 708/MI-BB 434

A Year of God's Favor (1, G) W4 594

As a Fire Is Meant for Burning (G) W4 734/RS 779/GC2 643/G3 744

*Beatitudes (C) JS2 657/MI-BB 642

*Blest Are They (C) W4 721/RS 774/GC2 636/G3 735/LMGM2 602/CBW 522/WC 973/R-WS 810/MI-BB 640/SS 950

Christ's Church Shall Glory in His Power (G) RS 777/SS 960

*Come and Sing to God Our Savior (Ps) CBW 646

*Come, Let Us Sing for Joy (Ps) SS 1012

*Come, Let Us Sing with Joy to the Lord (Ps) GC2 739/R-WS 794

Come, Lord, to Our Souls Come Down (G) CBW 440

*Come, Worship the Lord (Ps) MI-BB 306

God Has Chosen Me (1, G) JS2 831/JS3 815/GC2 669/G3 761/MI-BB 379

God Has Spoken by His Prophets (1) W4 592/RS 654/JS2 678/PMB 419/WC 800

God, Whose Almighty Word (G) CBW 513

God Sends Us Forth (1, G) W4 786

Good News (G) LMGM2 718/RS 797/GC2 672/G3 768

Healer of Our Every Ill (G) W4 9655/RS 958/GC2 854/G3 960/CBW 363/WC 713/R-WS 616

Is There a Word from the Lord? (1, G) LMGM2 422

Jesus Christ, by Faith Revealed (G) PMB 369/WC 759/R-WS 640

*Lead Me, Lord (C) JS2 659/JS3 733/MI-BB 641

Let All Things Now Living (1, G) W4 636/RS 707/GC2 551/G3 635/LMGM2 486/CBW 534/PMB 516/JS2 641/JS3 608/WC 984/R-WS 814/MI-BB 596/SS 918

*Let Searching Hearts Rejoice in God (E) IH 39

Lord, We Hear Your Word with Gladness (1, G) CBW 444

Make Us Worthy (G) GC2 557/G3 662

*My Soul in Stillness Waits, vss 5-6 (Ps) W4 404/RS 495/GC2 336/G3 415/SS 726

*O Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit (C) W4 738

*O Come and Sing to God the Lord (Ps) MI-BB 840

*Praise Him! Praise Him! (Ps) LMGM2 441

Praise to You, O Christ Our Savior (G) JS2 674/JS3 643/W4 591/RS 652/GC2 517/G3 596/CBW 442/MI-BB 605

Rejoice, the Lord Is King (Ps) W4 564/RS 627/GC2 493/G3 568/LMGM2 349/JS2 478/JS3 459/PMB 355/WC

KEY: * = Quotes or makes direct reference to one of the scripture readings or antiphons. E = Related to entrance antiphon. 1 = Related to first reading. Ps = Related to responsorial psalm. 2 = Related to second reading. G = Related to Gospel. C = Related to Communion antiphon.

RESOURCES: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, Publications Service, 90 Parent Ave., Ottawa, Ontario K1N 7B1: CBW=Catholic Book of Worship III (1994). G.I.A. Publications, Inc. (GIA), 7404 S. Mason Ave., Chicago, IL 60638: G3=Gather, Third Edition (2011); GC2=Gather Comprehensive, Second Edition (2004); LMGM2=Lead Me, Guide Me, Second Edition (2012); LPGG=Lectionary Psalms: Gelineau/Guimont (2012); LPLM=Lectionary Psalms as Found in Lead me, Guide Me, Second Edition (2012); LPMG=Lectionary Psalms: Michel Guimont (2012); PST=Psalter (1990); RS=Ritual Song (1996); SI=Songs of Israel (1971, 1983); W4=Worship-Fourth Edition (2011). Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN: BFW=By Flowing Waters (1999); PFS=Psalms for Feasts and Seasons (1990); PSL=Psallite, Year C (2006); PJ=Psalms for the Journey (1991); SS=Sacred Song (2011). OCP, 5536 N.E. Hassalo, Portland, OR 97213: BB=Breaking Bread (2015); JS2=Journeysongs-Second Edition (2003); JS3=Journeysongs-Third Edition (2012); LP=A Lectionary Psalter: John Schiaivone (2003); MI=Music Issue (2015); PSC=Psalms and Selected Canticles (1983). World Library Publications (WLP), 3708 River Road, Suite 400, Franklin Park, IL 60131-2158: LPGA=Lectionary Psalms and Gospel Acclamations, Year B; PMB=Peoples Mass Book (2003); PRM=Psalms and Ritual Music, Year B; R=Rejoice! (2015); SO=Sing Out (1994); WC=We Celebrate (2014); WS=Word and Song (2015).

PREPARATION: MUSIC



762/R-WS 635/MI-BB 733/SS 877
*Shine Out, O Lord (C) PSL B-106/SS 406
*Silence! Frenzied, Unclean Spirit (G) W4 666
*Sing Praise to God (Ps) W4 617/RS 683/G3 600/JS2 610/JS3 590/PMB 498/WC 955/SS 903
Song of Good News (1, G) CBW 561/WC 801/R-WS 670
The King of Glory (G) W4 565/RS 628/GC2 494/G3 572/LMGM2 341/JS2 487/JS3 470/WC 763/R-WS 636/MI-BB 738
The Kingdom of God (G) W4 720/RS 775/GC2 639/G3 736/PMB 511/WC 976
*The Song of Beatitudes (C) CBW 523
Thy Word – Gill (1, Ps, G) LMGM2 421
*To God with Gladness Sing (Ps) RS 666
*We Are the Light of the World (C) GC2 515/G3 592/JS2 660/JS3 629/PMB 506/WC 970/R-WS 799/MI-BB 608
We Remember, v 1 (G) W4 938/RS 724/GC2 578/G3 681/WC 691/R-WS 561/MI-BB 502/SS 922
When John Baptized by Jordan's River (G) W4 458//RS 538/GC2 390/G3 467/CBW 325/JS2 373/JS3 338/WC 553/SS 786
Word of God, Come Down on Earth (G) W4 590/CBW 429/RS 653/JS2 449/PMB 367/WC 751
Your Hands, O Lord, in Days of Old (G) W4 972/RS 949/JS2 579/PMB 332/WC 712/R-WS 615
Your Word Went Forth (1, G) RS 655

5TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

February 8, 2015

Psalm of the Day: Ps 147
Bless the Lord (Haugen) GC2 77/SS 672
Praise the Lord, Alleluia! PSL B-108/SS 622
Praise the Lord, Who Heals (Alstott) JS3 941/BB p. 69
Praise the Lord, Who Heals (Black) CBW 125
Praise the Lord, Who Heals (Guimont) RS 198/GC2 1014/G3 1105/LPMG 97
Praise the Lord, Who Heals (Hansen) PSS 36
Praise the Lord, Who Heals (Holland)

LMGM2 893/LPLM 117
Praise the Lord, Who Heals (Hunstiger) SS 622
Praise the Lord, Who Heals (Joncas) PMB 655/PRM B75/LPGA B64
Praise the Lord, Who Heals (Krisman) W4 1122/LPGG 108
Praise the Lord, Who Heals (Schia-vone) JS2 961/LP 105
Praise the Lord, Who Heals (Willcock) PJ 43
Suggested Common Psalm: Ps (62) 63
My Soul Is Thirsting for You, O Lord, My God
Songs for the Liturgy
As a Fire Is Meant for Burning (2) W4 734/RS 779/GC2 643/G3 744
Beatitudes (C) JS2 657/MI-BB 642
Blest Are the Pure in Heart (C) CBW 471
Blest Are They (C) W4 721/RS 774/GC2 636/G3 735/LMGM2 602/CBW 522/RS 774/WC 973/R-WS 810/MI-BB 640/SS 950
*Bow Down before the Lord (E) IH 40/WC 940
Bring Forth the Kingdom (2, G) RS 772/GC2 640/G3 734
Celtic Alleluia: Sending Forth (2, G) JS2 834/JS3 821/MI-BB 384
Christ, Be Our Light (G) JS2 661/JS3 824/GC2 512/G3 590/W4 584/R-WS 803/MI-BB 606
Christ Has Promised to Be Present, v 3 (G) G3 851
*Come and Sing to God Our Savior (E) CBW 646
*Come, Let Us Sing for Joy (E) SS 1012
*Come, Let Us Sing with Joy to the Lord (E) GC2 739/R-WS 794
*Come, Worship the Lord (E) JS2 790/MI-BB 306
Come, Ye Disconsolate (1, Ps, G) LMGM2 590
Eye Has Not Seen (G) W4 713/RS 758/GC2 616/G3 728/CBW 482/WC 881/R-WS 736/MI-BB 463/SS 940
Forth in the Peace of Christ (2) CBW 514
Go (2) LMGM2 320/RS 604/PMB 478/WC 919/R-WS 770
God Has Chosen Me (G) JS2 831/JS3 815/W4 781/GC2 669/G3 761/MI-BB 379
God Heals the Broken (G) PSL B-109/SS 273
God Sends Us Forth (G) W4 786/G3 759
God Will Take Care of You (1, G) LMGM2

409
Good News (G) LMGM2 718/GC2 672/G3 768
Hail to the Lord's Anointed (G) PMB 225/LMGM2 232/WC 546/R-WS 477/SS 736
Hands of Healing (G) GC2 845/G3 954/SS 978
Healer of Our Every Ill (G) W4 965/RS 958/GC2 854/G3 960/CBW 363/WC 713/R-WS 616
Healing River (G) GC2 564/G3 643/RS 715
How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds (Ps, G) W4 714
Is There a Word from the Lord? (Ps, G) LMGM2 422
Jesus Christ, by Faith Revealed (2, G) PMB 369/WC 759/R-WS 640
Jesus, Heal Us (G) GC2 846/G3 952
Lead Me, Lord (C) JS2 659/JS3 733/MI-BB 641
*Let Us Come before the Lord (E) W4 71/SS 654
Lord, You Give the Great Commission (2) W4 790/RS 607/GC2 466/G3 544/CBW 691/JS2 452/JS3 431/PMB 382/WC 788/R-WS 663/MI-BB 375/SS 852
Now Let Us from This Table Rise (2) CBW 521/PMB 472/WC 963
O Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit (C) W4 738
O Christ, the Healer (G) W4 978/RS 950/JS2 577/JS3 546/PMB 330/WC 714
O Christ, Your Heart Compassionate (G) W4 559
*O Come and Sing to God (E) MI-BB 840
O God, Whose Healing Power (Ps, G) W4 789
O Word of God (G) JS3 645
Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven, v 3 (1, G) W4 610/GC2 531/G3 613/RS 684/LMGM2 464/JS2 612/JS3 586/CBW 565/PMB 492/WC 957/R-WS 777/MI-BB 568/SS 893
Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness (G) G3 625/CBW 582
Praise to You, O Christ Our Savior (G) JS2 674/JS3 643/W4 591/RS 652/GC2 517/G3 596/CBW 442/MI-BB 605
Sing Praise to God Who Reigns Above (E, 1, Ps, G) W4 617/RS 683/PMB 498/JS2 610/JS3 590/WC 955/SS 903
Take Christ to the World (2, G) JS2 836
Tell the Gospel's Boundless Riches (G) W4 558

PREPARATION: MUSIC



The Cry of the Poor (1) JS2 847/JS3 829/W4 46/RS 69/GC2 33/G3 47/MI-BB 627
*The Joy of the Lord (Ps) LMGM2 590
The King of Glory (G) W4 565/RS 628/GC2 494/G3 572/LMGM2 341/JS2 487/JS3 470/WC 763/R-WS 636/MI-BB 738
*The Lord Will Heal the Broken Heart (Ps, G) G3 730
The Song of the Beatitudes (C) CBW 523
The Spirit of God (2) PMB 399/WC 832/R-WS 687
The Voice of God (2) CBW 433
There Is a Balm in Gilead (1, G) LMGM2 502/W4 646/RS 764/GC2 617/G3 640/PMB 331/JS2 723/JS3 688/WC 715/R-WS 614/MI-BB 477/SS 946
There Is a Longing (1, G) JS2 692/JS3 649/G3 653/MI-BB 406
To God with Gladness Sing (E) RS 666
*Venite Adoremus (E) PSL B-107/SS 454
We Are the Light of the World (C) PMB 506/WGC2 515/G3 592/JS2 660/JS3 629/WC 970/R-WS 799/MI-BB 608
We Bring God's Holy Love (2) PMB 469/WC 923/R-WS 764
We Cannot Measure How You Heal (G) W4 664/G3 657
We Come to You for Healing, Lord (G) W4 981
We Remember, v 1 (G) W4 938/RS 724/GC2 578/G3 681/WC 691/R-WS 561/MI-BB 502/SS 922
Word of God, Come Down on Earth (G) W4 590/RS 653/CBW 429/PMB 367/WC 751
You Are Called to Tell the Story (2, G) W4 784/RS 800/GC2 675/G3 774
You Are Mine (1, G) W4 704/RS 762/GC2 627/G3 721/W4 704/WC 893/R-WS 743/MI-BB 460/SS 943
You Are the Healing (G) MI-BB 399
You Have Anointed Me (2, G) RS 795/GC2 662/G3 773
Your Hands, O Lord, in Days of Old (G) W4 972/RS 949/JS2 579/PMB 332/WC 712/R-WS 615

6TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

February 15, 2015

Psalm of the Day: Ps 32

I Turn to You (Alstott) JS3 944/BB p. 71
I Turn to You (Guimont) GC2 912/G3

1108/PMB 658/PRM B76/LPMG 100
I Turn to You (Hunstiger) SS 523
I Turn to You (Krzystofczyk) LPGA B65
I Turn to You (LeBlanc) W4 1125/LPGG 111
I Turn to You (Schiavone) JS2 964/LP 108
I Turn to You (Somerville) CBW 128
I Turn to You (Stewart) RS 64/LMGM2 896/LPLM 122
Turn to the Lord B-111/SS 452
Suggested Common Psalm: Ps 130
With the Lord There Is Mercy
Songs for the Liturgy
All the Way My Savior Leads Me (Ps, G) LMGM2 410
Amazing Grace (Ps, G) W4 650/GC2 586/G3 645/RS 737/LMGM2 495, 496/JS2 713/JS3 680/CBW 480/PMB 323/WC 707/R-WS 609/MI-BB 432/SS 927
Be Light for Our Eyes (G) GC2 511/CBW 305
*Be My Protecting, Saving God (E) IH 41
Bless That Wonderful Name of Jesus (G) LMGM2 373
Can't Nobody Do Me Like Jesus (G) LMGM2 505
Eye Has Not Seen (Ps, G) W4 713/RS 758/GC2 616/G3 728/CBW 482/WC 881/R-WS 736/MI-BB 463/SS 940
*For God So Loved the World (C) G3 580/LMGM2 416
*God So Loved the World (C) PMB 418/WC 846/R-WS 707
God, Whose Almighty Word (Ps, G) RS 619/CBW 513
God, Whose Glory Reigns Eternal (G) CBW 475
Good News (G) GC2 672/G3 768/RS 797/LMGM2 718
Great God of Mercy (Ps, G) CBW 361
Halleluya! We Sing Your Praises (2, G) RS 692/GC2 529/G3 626/LMGM2 452/PMB 482/JS3 599/MI-BB 567
Hands of Healing (G) GC2 845/G3 954/SS 978
He Has Done Great Things for Me (G) LMGM2 635
He Touched Me (G) LMGM2 779
Heal Me in Your Mercy (1, G) PSL B-112/SS 286
Healer of Our Every Ill (1, G) W4 965/GC2 854/G3 960/RS 958/CBW 363/WC 713/R-WS 616
Healing River (1, G) GC2 564/G3 643/RS 715
Healing Waters (1, G) JS3 526/MI-BB

695
I Am for You (G) GC2 676/G3 794
Jesus Christ, by Faith Revealed (G) PMB 369/WC 759/R-WS 640
Jesus, Heal Us (1, G) GC2 846/G3 952
Lead Me, Guide Me (E) LMGM2 538/W4 657/GC2 555/G3 656/RS 712/JS3 654/PMB 397/WC 816/R-WS 677/MI-BB 396
*Lead Me, Guide Me, Be True (E) B-110/SS 334
O Christ, the Healer (G) RS 950/W4 978/PMB 330/JS2 577/JS3 546/WC 714/HG 33
O God, Whose Healing Power (G) W4 789
O Word of God (G) JS3 645
Only in God (Ps) JS2 712/JS3 679/GC2 591/MI-BB 444
Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness (G) G3 625/CBW 582
Pues Si Vivimos/If We Are Living (2) W4 754/GC2 650/G3 756/RS 727/PMB 408/WC 835/R-WS 701/SS 966
Savior, Lead Me, Lest I Stray (1, Ps, G) LMGM2 575
Shelter Me, O God (Ps) JS2 724/JS3 689/GC2 634/G3 717/CBW 372/MI-BB 474
Sing Praise to God Who Reigns Above (G) W4 617/RS 683/JS2 610/JS3 590/PMB 498/WC 955/SS 903
Tell the Gospel's Boundless Riches (G) W4 558
The King of Glory (G) W4 565/GC2 494/G3 572/RS 628/LMGM2 341/JS2 487/JS3 470/WC 763/R-WS 636/MI-BB 738
There Is a Balm in Gilead (G) LMGM2 502/W4 646/GC2 617/G3 640/RS 764/JS2 723/JS3 688/PMB 331/WC 715/R-WS 614/MI-BB 477/SS 946
There Is a Longing (1, Ps, G) JS2 692/JS3 649/G3 653/MI-BB 406
We Cannot Measure How You Heal (G) W4 664/G3 657
We Come to You for Healing, Lord (1, G) W4 981
We Give God Thanks for Those Who Knew (G) HG 128
With a Shepherd's Care (1, Ps, G) W4 710/GC2 628/G3 725/RS 738
Word of God, Come Down on Earth (G) W4 590/RS 653/CBW 429/PMB 367/WC 751
You Are All We Have (Ps, 2, G) RS 643/GC2 508/G3 586/SS 1017
You Are Called to Tell the Story (2) W4 784/RS 800/GC2 675/G3 774

PREPARATION: MUSIC



You Are the Healing (G) MI-BB 399
*Your Hands, O Lord, in Days of Old (G)
W4 972/RS 949/JS2 579/PMB 332/
WC 712/R-WS 615

**Find music for Ash Wednesday
on the Celebration website.**

1ST SUNDAY OF LENT

February 22, 2015

Psalm of the Day: Ps 25

Teach Me Your Path PSL B-30/SS 416

Teach Me Your Ways (Artman) SO 6

Teach Me Your Ways (Hunstiger) SS 514

Your Ways, O Lord (Duncan) W4 1028/
LPGG 39

Your Ways, O Lord (Guimont) GC2
901/G3 1017/LPMG 32

Your Ways, O Lord (Haugen) RS 53

Your Ways, O Lord (Kreutz) PMB 581/
PRM B18/LPGA B18

Your Ways, O Lord (Louis) LMGM2 817/
LPLM 39

Your Ways, O Lord (Schivone) JS2
904/LP 35

Rite of Election and Rite of Sending

The Rite of Election is celebrated today for those catechumens who will receive the sacraments of initiation at Easter. Some dioceses and parishes also celebrate the Call to Continuing Conversion for baptized candidates and/or the Rite of Sending. Appropriate musical settings for the Rite of Election (diocesan) or Rite of Sending (parish) may be found at SS 806.

Songs for the Liturgy

Again We Keep This Solemn Fast (G) W4
474/RS 559/GC2 407/G3 487/JS2
394/JS3 353/PMB 233/CBW 352/WC
560/R-WS 487/BB 127/SS 793

Attende Domine (1, Ps, Lat-Eng) W4
473/RS 552/JS2 378/JS3 346/PMB
239/WC 557/R-WS 491/BB 120/SS
788

*Be with Me, O God (G) JS2 667

Before the Fruit Is Ripened by the Sun
(G) W4 468

Beyond the Days (G) JS2 384/JS3
360/BB 137

*Blest Be the Lord (G) JS2 708/JS3
677/GC2 585/G3 686/MI-BB 433

Bread of Life, Hope of the World (G) JS2
819/JS3 788/CBW 597D

Eternal Lord of Love (2, G) JS2 390/
CBW 360/RS 554

*Forty Days and Forty Nights (G) W4
466/GC2 411/G3 483/LMGM2 288/
JS2 380/JS3 450/PMB 232/WC 555/
R-WS 483/BB 133/SS 794

*From Ashes to the Living Font (G) PMB
236/W4 463/RS 561/GC2 402/G3
474/WC 558/R-WS 492/SS 807

Guide My Feet (G, C) GC2 684/G3
780/LMGM2 537

*Have Mercy, Lord, on Us (Ps) W4
966/CBW 358/PMB 328/WC 706/R-
WS 613

Hold Me in Life (G) JS2 702

Hold Us in Your Mercy GC2 398/G3
494

I Will Be Your God (1, Ps, 2) JS2 383

I Will Choose Christ (G) JS2 775/JS3
736/GC2 683/G3 802/MI-BB 520

Jesus, Lead the Way (G) W4 715/RS
755/GC2 632/G3 732

*Jesus, Tempted in the Desert (G) W4
459/RS 548/LMGM2 290

Jesus Walked This Lonesome Valley
(G) RS 557/GC2 406/JS2 387/JS3
356/PMB 242/WC 566/R-WS 498

Journeysong (G) JS2 759/JS3 731

Lead Me, Guide Me (Ps, G) LMGM2
538/W4 657/GC2 555/G3 656/RS
712/JS3 654/PMB 397/WC 816/R-WS
677/MI-BB 396/SS 334

*Led by the Spirit (G) JS3 351/BB 124

Listen, O Lord, to My Prayer (Ps) WC
702/R-WS 572

*Lord Jesus Christ (Ps) W4 587/GC2
409/G3 477

*Lord, Who Throughout These Forty
Days (G) W4 461/GC2 416/G3 479/
RS 553/LMGM2 285/JS2 391/JS3
352/CBW 367/BB 132/SS 800

Merciful God (1, G) W4 478/G3 489

*Mercy, O God (Ps) GC2 417/G3 480/
SS 792

*My Refuge (G) RS 122

*Not on Bread Alone (C) PSL A-31/SS
372

Now in This Banquet – Lenten ref GC2
825/G3 937/RS 933

O God, Who Gives Us Life and Breath
(1) W4 677

*O Lord, Throughout These Forty Days
(G) CBW 367

*On Eagle's Wings (G, C) JS2 704/
JS3 671/W4 690/GC2 593/G3 691/RS
740/PMB 453/WC 889/R-WS 741/MI-
BB 438/SS 930

O Word of God (Ps, G) JS3 645/MI-BB
604

Parce Domine (Ps, Lat-Eng) W4 469/
GC2 412/G3 473/RS 549/JS2 376/
JS3 344/PMB 228/WC 562/R-WS 484/
BB 125//SS 805

Praise the One Who Breaks the Dark-
ness (G) G3 625/CBW 582

Praise to You, O Christ, Our Savior
(G) JS2 730/JS3 643/RS 652/GC2
517/G3 596/W4 591/CBW 442/MI-BB
605

Remember Your Love – Dameans
(Ps) GC2 851/G3 961/RS 550/JS2
561/JS3 533/MI-BB 671

*Return to God (Ps) W4 475/GC2 410/
G3 478/RS 555/WC 564/R-WS 497/SS
798

Save Your People (G) JS3 364/BB 131

Seek the Lord (Ps) JS2 558/JS3 531/
RS 540/GC2 395/MI-BB 669

Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God
(G) W4 663/RS 728/GC2 600/G3
658/JS2 720/JS3 685/PMB 433/CBW
704/WC 862/R-WS 724/MI-BB 437

*The Glory of These Forty Days (G) W4
467/GC2 397/G3 481/RS 545/LMGM2
284/JS2 379/JS3 347/PMB 237/WC
567/R-WS 495/BB 122/SS 796

The Lord Is Near – Dameans (G) GC2
599/G3 692

*These Forty Days of Lent (G) PMB
240/WC 571/R-WS 496

This Is Our Accepted Time (Ps) PMB
231/WC 565

*This Is the Time (G) W4 472/RS 556/
SS 803

This Season Calls Us (G) JS2 382/JS3
348

*Those Who Love Me (E) PSL B-29/
SS 446

Though the Mountains May Fall (1,
Ps) JS2 715/JS3 682/GC2 595/G3
689/MI-BB 429

Ty Way, O Lord (G) LMGM2 518

*Tree of Life (G) GC2 401/G3 475/CBW
373/RS 541/SS 799

Turn to the Living God (Ps) GC2 408/
G3 485

We Will Serve the Lord (G) GC2 652/
G3 753

*When You Call to the Lord (E) BFW
61/SS 680

Without Seeing You (Ps) GC2 842/G3
922

*Yes, I Shall Arise – Deiss (Ps) PMB
325/W4 964/WC 703/R-WS 612

You Shall Be My People (Ps) WC 784

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February 1, 2015

Purification and St. Blaise

Fr. Lawrence Mick

Monday of this week is the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, also known as Candlemas Day. It was once called the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary, but the current missal sees it more as a feast of Jesus than of Mary, though her role is still important.

This feast was also once the final day of the Christmas season, coming 40 days after Christmas itself. The timing of the feast is based on the event related in the Gospel, which Jewish law required on the 40th day after birth. It offers explicit reference to Christ's incarnation and birth in the second reading and the Gospel. Hebrews says, "Since the children share in blood and flesh, Jesus likewise shared in them," and the Gospel shows us the infant being presented in the temple and then growing up in Nazareth. Like Epiphany, this feast celebrates Christ's manifestation and his mission.

This link to Christmas and Epiphany is reflected in the theme of light that suffuses the Presentation. Simeon calls the child "a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel." This led to the custom of blessing and using candles on this feast, which gave rise to its nickname.

Texts for the Mass are found in the Proper of the Saints section of the missal under February 2. Planners should carefully read the rubrics for the two different forms of the entrance, both

of which involve the use of candles by the assembly. Decide which is appropriate for your situation and prepare accordingly.

Tuesday is the optional memorial of St. Blaise or of St. Ansgar. If you celebrate St. Blaise, then the blessing of throats can be used after the homily. The blessing is found in Chapter 51 of the *Book of Blessings*. It is usually given with the use of two candles, blessed the day before and bound together in the form of a cross. The blessing may be given during Mass or during a Celebration of the Word. It may be conferred by a priest or a deacon or a lay minister. Since it is intimately connected with the memorial of St. Blaise, it is not really appropriate to use on other days. There is a natural pastoral impulse to offer it on Sunday to make it convenient for people, but this separates it from the feast from which it originates and runs the risk of having people see it as a magical amulet rather than a blessing linked to the life of St. Blaise.

Since both of these observances occur on weekdays this year, planners might consider an evening Mass or Celebration of the Word for those who have to work during the day.



4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Joan DeMerchant

INTRODUCTION

Today's readings tell of the ancient desire for God. God promises to send a prophet to speak in God's name. That promise is fulfilled in Jesus, who enters the synagogue and speaks with authority. Paul knew that adhering to Jesus is the way to be free of anxiety about the things of the world. Listening to that voice is our baptismal challenge.

PENITENTIAL ACT

Lord Jesus, you were sent to speak in God's name: Lord, have mercy.

Christ Jesus, you spoke and taught with authority: Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you free us from anxiety and distraction: Lord, have mercy.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Deut 18:15-20 God will raise up a prophet.

Psalms 95 If today you hear God's voice, harden not your hearts.

1 Cor 7:32-35 Do not be anxious about material needs.

Mark 1:21-28 Jesus entered the synagogue and taught with authority.

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Presider Brothers and sisters: Let us pray that we and the world may be open to hear God's authoritative voice — however it may come to us.

Minister For all in the church who speak with authority: that their words may be grounded in humility, respect and love ... we pray,

❖ For all political, civic and military leaders whose authority can pursue peace and justice for many people ... we pray,

❖ For parents and teachers, coaches, counselors and mentors, and all who are responsible for exercising authority with young people ... we pray,

❖ For discernment when we are confronted with conflicting voices claiming authority ... we pray,

❖ For those burdened by heavy-handed or destructive authority, especially when it is asserted as God-given ... we pray,

❖ For hearts that are open to hear and act upon the life-giving authority of the Gospel ... we pray,

❖ For all who are in any kind of need; for the sick and dying; and for those who have died ... (*names*) ... we pray,

Presider Loving God, you tell us everything we need to know to live in peace. Grant us the wisdom to discern your word to us in every age and time and circumstance, so that we may be one with you and with each other. We pray in the name of Jesus, your Son, who became your Word on our behalf. Amen.

February 8, 2015

Healing the Brokenhearted

Fr. Lawrence Mick

Today's responsorial psalm plays a key role in the proclamation of the word this Sunday. While the responsorial often echoes the theme of the first reading, this Sunday it really provides a contrast, an answer; to the reading from the Book of Job. Those who proclaim and hear that first reading might well wonder how it can be called "the Word of the Lord." It is all gloom and doom and ends without a single word of hope.

The psalm provides the good news. No matter how difficult life becomes, "the Lord heals the brokenhearted." If, for some reason, musicians choose a different psalm this Sunday, they should make sure that it responds in a similar way to the text from Job.

This first reading also suggests a focus for today's preaching and prayers. While the Gospel story of the healing of Peter's mother-in-law directs our attention toward physical illness and healing, the passage from Job and the end of the Gospel remind us that illness can also be mental and emotional. Depression is all too common in our society and sometimes leads people to commit suicide. In the midst of all the problems of contemporary life, hope is a precious commodity.

One of the continuing challenges of depression and other mental illness is that our society still tends to view them as moral weaknesses rather than true illnesses. This leads many to avoid talking about

their mental and emotional struggles, which only compounds the problem and often causes despair. Parishes can play a key role in fostering healing simply by acknowledging mental and emotional problems as true illnesses and offering the hope that faith can provide.

Preachers might focus on this topic today. Planners can compose prayers that lift up the needs and hopes of those suffering with mental and emotional problems. It would also be helpful to provide, in the bulletin or in a handout, a list of local counselors and agencies that offer help for these illnesses.

Beyond this Sunday, planners should periodically include petitions for those suffering from these conditions. Even those who are not comfortable letting others know of their troubles can be eased by knowing that the community holds them in prayer.

If you plan to celebrate anointing of the sick next Sunday (see the column for Feb. 15), make sure today that the assembly understands who is eligible for the sacrament and that those with emotional illness are included.

Palms: If you plan to burn palms to create the ashes for Ash Wednesday, remind people today to bring their palms next week. Consider planning a brief prayer for burning the palms after one of the Masses, and invite the people to take part.

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Joan DeMerchant

INTRODUCTION

At times, we are overwhelmed by life's burdens. Job speaks for all of us. It's not surprising that people flocked to Jesus, who responded to them by healing them and driving out demons. We know there is not always a quick fix for what burdens us. We are called to follow Jesus' life and words closely, confident that ultimately he will, indeed, heal our broken hearts and bind up our wounds.

PENITENTIAL ACT

Lord Jesus, you were sent to heal the weak and brokenhearted: Lord, have mercy.

Christ Jesus, you responded to those in need of healing: Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you continue to heal us and bind our wounds: Lord, have mercy.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Job 7:1-4, 6-7 Job laments his life on earth.

Psalm 147 The Lord heals the brokenhearted.

1 Cor 9:16-19, 22-23 I have become all things to all for the sake of the Gospel.

Mark 1:29-39 Jesus preached, healed, and drove out demons.

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Presider Like Job, we all suffer and need healing and consolation. Let us pray for ourselves, our neighbors and the whole community, for we are all burdened.

Minister For the church: that it may be open to its own need for healing and be a worthy instrument of Jesus' healing power ... we pray,

❖ For healing wherever people are torn apart by religion, politics, race, ethnicity, gender, lifestyle or economics ... we pray,

❖ For adequate health care, health care policies and funding to meet the basic needs of every person ... we pray,

❖ For those who are most in need of healing: the seriously ill, the neglected, those whose diseases marginalize them ... we pray,

❖ For faith, hope and courage among those who are overwhelmed by life's burdens ... we pray,

❖ For AA, Al-Anon and other 12-step programs that offer support to those who struggle with addictions ... we pray,

❖ For the most needy among us; for our sick friends or family members; for those who have died ... *(names)* ... we pray,

Presider Compassionate God: You call us each by name and bind up our wounds. Listen to the deepest concerns of our hearts and heal all that is broken within or between us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

February 15, 2015

Anointing the Sick

Fr. Lawrence Mick

Today's readings again focus our attention on those who need healing. Both the first reading and the Gospel deal with leprosy. This is likely not Hansen's disease, what we know as leprosy today. Many kinds of skin disorder were called leprosy in ancient times.

If you talked about emotional and mental illness last week, these readings might suggest a focus on physical illness. This could be a good Sunday to celebrate the anointing of the sick, either at a main parish Mass or at a later time in the day. This requires preparation in the weeks before, but it can be a good opportunity to celebrate God's healing love.

Even if you don't celebrate the anointing in a communal service today, this is a good Sunday to offer some solid catechesis about this sacrament, which is still often seriously misunderstood. Almost a half-century after the name of the sacrament was changed to reflect its proper meaning—shifting from extreme unction to anointing of the sick—many Catholics (and non-Catholic doctors and nurses and chaplains) still call parishes asking for the “last rites” for someone who is at death's door.

Anointing is to be used whenever a person is experiencing a serious illness, not normally at the moment of death. Emergency situations may require condensing the usual pattern of sacramental celebration, but often a family member

or health care professional does not ask for the anointing until long after it should have been celebrated.

The proper sacrament for the dying is not anointing but Viaticum, Communion given as food for the journey to eternal life. If a sick person is anointed at the start of their illness, and perhaps anointed again at various stages of their struggle, then there is no need for anointing at the point of death. It is important for the whole community to understand this, especially since the decreasing numbers of priests make it unlikely that one will be available at the time of death for every Catholic. A deacon or lay minister can provide Communion, so Viaticum can be offered even if a priest is not available.

Preachers might devote the homily today to catechesis on the sacrament, linked to the readings of the day. Planners might create a printed catechesis that could be included in the bulletin. Celebrating the anointing communally also catechizes, since it makes it clear that this sacrament is not intended solely, or even primarily, for the moment of death.

Parish leaders may also consider whether to provide some catechesis for the staffs of local nursing homes and hospitals so that the anointing can be requested at the proper time and families can be appropriately supported at the moment of death.

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Joan DeMerchant

INTRODUCTION

We explore the theme of healing in today's readings, with a focus on those who are made outcasts by illness. We may be shocked as we listen to the treatment of lepers, but the fear of illness is alive and well today in the response to AIDS or Ebola as social media spreads fear. How does Jesus call us to respond to these challenges?

PENITENTIAL ACT

Lord Jesus, you were moved to pity for those who suffered: Lord, have mercy.

Christ Jesus, you stretched out your hand to the untouchables: Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you show us how to treat those in trouble: Lord, have mercy.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Lev 13:1-2, 44-46 The lepers and unclean shall be brought to the priest.

Psalms 32 I turn to you, O Lord, in time of trouble.

1 Cor 10:31-11:1 Do everything for the glory of God.

Mark 1:40-45 Jesus healed the leper, who spread the word.

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Presider Brothers and sisters, let us pray with compassionate hearts for all who are in need in the world, in our communities and in our families.

Minister For the church: that it may be a living sign of Jesus, the compassionate healer, especially for those most ostracized in their suffering ... we pray,

❖ For commitment among the world's nations to resolve crises that contribute to human suffering, injustice or war ... we pray,

❖ For those who risk their lives or safety to serve the suffering: in foreign countries, on the battlefield, in dangerous areas, in our own hospitals; for all caretakers ... we pray,

❖ For those who are insensitive to or fearful of others' suffering ... we pray,

❖ For a compassionate attitude toward the suffering of all people, and for the courage to touch those who are in need ... we pray,

❖ For those who suffer from hunger, homelessness, lack of adequate education or health care; for those who cannot support themselves or their families ... we pray,

❖ For the sick and suffering in this community; for those who have died ... (names) ... we pray,

Presider Compassionate God, we turn to you in time of trouble. Help us with our own needs, and grant us the generosity and courage to reach out to others in need. Hear us, we pray, in the name of your Son, Jesus, who healed the suffering. Amen.

February 18, 2015

Who We Really Are

Pat Marrin

“The Secret Sharer,” a short story written in 1909 by Joseph Conrad, tells of a young captain assigned to his first ship. Alone on deck during the night watch, he rescues a stranger from the sea and harbors him in his cabin. The story takes on a mysterious multi-level power as we are left to wonder if the rescued man, an accused murderer fleeing another ship, is real or only the psychic double of the captain — his “secret sharer.”

The interior work of coming to terms with our true self is the key to inner peace and integrity. It is a lifelong process that requires honest introspection and the stripping away of the masks all people fashion to project their desires, justify their faults or hide their deepest feelings.

In the Gospel from Matthew for Ash Wednesday, Jesus adds to the three Jewish practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving the challenge to do them from the hidden depths of our soul, where only God sees us. When you pray, go to your secret place. When you fast, do it secretly. When you give alms, do it anonymously, so it is known only to you and God. In this way, these disciplines will forge in you a unique encounter with God.

In that encounter you will come to know yourself as God knows you, without the human mirrors that often distort our motives or tempt us to act only to gain human approval rather than true virtue.

We are invited to go into our secret self to find God, who also dwells in secret, the immense Mystery that is the source of all things, the very source of our own existence. This is the wilderness Jesus retreated to in order to prepare for his ministry. There, at the very compass of the world, he set his trajectory toward Galilee and then Jerusalem. Despite Satan’s attempts to seduce him, Jesus emerged from his time of prayer and fasting ready to empty himself for the salvation of the world.

Lent invites us to make Jesus our “Secret Sharer,” that other self who is the authentic model for all human maturity. Our prayer to see the face of God will lead us invariably to look for Jesus among the poor, the outcast and suffering people we meet on life’s journey.

Our fasting will keep us fit and lean, free of the the illusions or false desires that weigh us down and slow our progress. Our almsgiving will enable us to travel light on the road of self-surrender, which alone promises genuine fulfillment.

We have 40 days and nights to journey with Jesus to Holy Week, where he will complete his mission on the cross and in the tomb. As he emerges triumphant on Easter Sunday, he will ask us to continue that mission in his name and in the power of the Holy Spirit. May we use the days of Lent wisely, to listen to the same Spirit that drove Jesus into the wilderness. The God of Jesus is eager to teach us who we really are.

Ash Wednesday

Joan DeMerchant

INTRODUCTION

It is hard to enter into a penitential spirit when excess is everywhere. But Paul tells us that “now is a very acceptable time.” Many religions propose prayer, fasting and good deeds to counter excess with simplicity. Now is our acceptable time to focus on what really matters in life, our time to be grateful that we can be reconciled to God and to one another.

PENITENTIAL ACT

Lord Jesus, you call us to pray, fast and give alms: Lord, have mercy.

Christ Jesus, you call us to act for God alone to see: Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you show us how to be reconciled to God; Lord, have mercy.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Joel 2:12-18 Return to the Lord with fasting, weeping and mourning.

Psalms 51 Be merciful, O God, for we have sinned.

2 Cor 5:20-6:2 Now is the acceptable time.

Matt 6:1-6, 16-18 Give alms, pray and fast for God alone to see.

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Presider We begin Lent praying for the grace to embrace the disciplines and practices of holy people. We pray for reconciliation for ourselves and for the world.

Minister For the grace to be a penitential church — a community of people with clean hearts and steadfast spirits. *In this time of reconciliation ... we pray,*

❖ For a world that focuses on the deeper meaning of life and promotes peace and justice for all. *In this time of reconciliation ... we pray,*

❖ For the ability to see beyond the distractions of the newest, the latest, the best. *In this time of reconciliation ... we pray,*

❖ For all who are in need of reconciliation in our families, our communities, our nation and our world. *In this time of reconciliation ... we pray,*

❖ For those who most need our prayers and almsgiving, especially the poor, the sick, the alienated and all who suffer. *In this time of reconciliation ... we pray,*

❖ For those who have died ... (*names*) ... and those who grieve. For the grace to enter fully and joyfully into this holy season. *In this time of reconciliation ... we pray,*

Presider Loving and forgiving God, you have called us to this acceptable time, inviting us to turn to you. Grant us the willingness to accept your invitation with joyful hearts, for we yearn to be reconciled to you and to one another. We pray in the name of Jesus, the Great Reconciler. Amen.



February 22, 2015

First Sunday of Lent

Fr. Lawrence Mick

If you are looking for a special theme to focus parish attention for Lent, take time to read the first readings for the next five Sundays. Year B of the Lectionary offers a strong emphasis on the theme of covenant in those selections. Today's text recounts the covenant God made with Noah. Next week centers on the covenant with Abraham. The Third Sunday of Lent recounts the giving of the commandments, which are some of the terms of the covenant with Moses. The Fourth Sunday is less clear, recalling the return from the Babylonian exile, but this affirms God's faithfulness to the covenant even when the people were unfaithful. The Fifth Sunday foretells the new covenant that God will establish. The Sixth Sunday is Passion (Palm) Sunday, which recalls the establishment of the new covenant in Christ's blood.

Now, this continuity only works if you do not have catechumens who are ready to become the elect today. In that case, the Cycle A readings will be used for the Third, Fourth and Fifth Sundays of Lent, at least at the Masses where you celebrate the scrutinies. This would not necessarily eliminate the covenant focus, however, since preparing for initiation is preparing to enter into covenant with God through the church.

If you have elect this year, then decisions need to be made about the readings for those three Sundays.

Will you use the Cycle A readings for all the Masses or only for those where the scrutinies are celebrated? If you opt to use Cycle B at the other Masses, be sure to check with the preachers, since it will mean preparing two homilies those weeks. Then let everyone who needs to know be informed well in advance: lectors, musicians, etc.

If you do have catechumens ready for the sacraments, today is the day for celebrating the Rite of Sending to the Bishop. Work with the RCIA team and consider what you can do to involve the assembly more fully in this moment. A critical question is whether the assembly knows these catechumens. If the assembly has embraced them on their journey through the catechumenate, then this rite should be a joyful occasion for everyone. If they are still strangers to most of the assembly, some people will likely find the rite an intrusion rather than a celebration. If that is the case, planners might discuss with the RCIA team what can be done throughout the year to more fully connect the catechumens and candidates with the larger assembly. Good rituals build on human relationships, especially rituals in the initiation process.



1st Sunday of Lent

Joan DeMerchant

INTRODUCTION

Lent confronts us with contrasting images of water and desert. Both are powerful signs of God's covenant with us. Jesus began his ministry by being baptized in the Jordan and driven into the desert. We, too, have passed through the waters of baptism and our own deserts of struggle and discernment. When God makes a covenant with people, things happen! What is God's covenant with us calling us to do?

PENITENTIAL ACT

Lord Jesus, you came out of the desert prepared to preach the Gospel: Lord, have mercy.

Christ Jesus, you suffered and died for us: Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you are now at the right hand of God: Lord, have mercy.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Gen 9:8-15 God establishes a covenant with Noah.

Psalm 25 Make your ways known to me.

1 Pet 3:18-22 Christ suffered to lead us to God.

Matt 1:12-15 Jesus is tempted in the desert.

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Presider Lent can be a time of growth. We embark on this journey aware of our needs and the needs of the world. Let us pray for ourselves and for each other.

Minister For the church and for all believers who understand themselves as people of God's covenant: Jews, Christians and Muslims. *In this time of reflection ... we pray,*

❖ For peace among all God's covenanted people, especially in the war-torn regions of the world. *In this time of reflection ... we pray,*

❖ For the cooperation of all people — believers and non-believers — to bring about justice for the poor. *In this time of reflection ... we pray,*

❖ For those for whom daily living consumes all their energy: the poor, the marginalized, the overworked and underpaid, the worried and frightened. *In this time of reflection ... we pray,*

❖ For those who will be preparing for baptism and membership in the church. *In this time of reflection ... we pray,*

❖ For those who are struggling with physical or mental illness; for the dying and their caregivers; for those who have died ... (names). *In this time of reflection ... we pray,*

Presider Patient and loving God, out of love you have called us, an imperfect people, to be in covenant with you. Help us during this Lenten season to ponder your ways and follow your paths so that we may be worthy of this calling. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Loose Change from Church and World

Internet Etymologies

A shot of whiskey: In the Old West, a .45 cartridge for a six-gun cost 12 cents, and so did a glass of whiskey. If a cowhand was low on cash, he would often give the bartender a cartridge in exchange for a drink. This became known as a “shot” of whiskey.

The whole nine yards: American fighter planes in WWII had machine guns that were fed by a belt of cartridges. The average plane held belts that were 27 feet (9 yards) long. If the pilot used up all his ammo, he was said to have given it the “whole nine yards.”

Buying the farm: This is synonymous with dying. During WWI, soldiers were given life insurance policies worth \$5,000. This was about the price of an average farm, so if you died, you “bought the farm” for your survivors.

Ironclad contract: This came about from the ironclad ships of the Civil War. It meant something so strong it could not be broken.

Passing the buck or The buck stops here: Most men in the early West carried a jackknife made by the Buck Knife Company. When playing poker, it was common to place one of these Buck knives in front of the dealer so that everyone knew who he was. When it was time for a new dealer, the deck of cards and the knife were given to the new dealer. If this person didn’t want to deal, he would “pass the buck” to the next player. If that player accepted, then “the buck stopped there.”

Riffraff: The Mississippi River was the main way of traveling from north to south. Riverboats carried passengers and freight, but they were expensive, so most people used rafts. Everything had the right of way over rafts, which were considered cheap. The steering oar on the rafts was called a “riff,” and this transposed into “riff-raff,” meaning low-class.

Ship staterooms: Traveling by steamboat was considered the height of comfort. Passenger cabins on the boats were not numbered. Instead, they were named after states. To this day, cabins on ships are called “staterooms.”

Sleep tight: Early beds were made with wooden frames. Ropes were tied across the frame in a criss-cross pattern. A straw mattress was then put on top of the ropes. Over time, the ropes stretched, causing the bed to sag. The owner would then tighten the ropes to get a better night’s sleep.

Over a barrel: In the days before CPR, a drowning victim would be placed face-down over a barrel, and the barrel would be rolled back and forth in an effort to empty the lungs of water. It was rarely effective. If you are over a barrel, you are in deep trouble.

Cobweb: The Old English word for spider was *cob*.



“I believe someone has taken my name in vain!”

Cartoons

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February 1
Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

The people were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes.
Mark 1:22



February 8
Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

He approached, grasped her hand, and helped her up.
Mark 1:31



February 15
Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

“If you wish, you can make me clean.”
Mark 1:40



February 22
First Sunday of Lent

“This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand.”
Mark 1:15

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Mark Bartholomew is a member of the Holy Family Catholic Worker Community in Kansas City, Mo. These same graphics are available on our website for easy downloading for use in bulletins and parish newsletters. To access *Celebration* online, go to www.celebrationpublications.org. Register by clicking on the link REGISTER NOW and filling in the required fields. A username and password for your account will be sent immediately by email. Use this to enter the site through the Administrator Panel on the same web page.



A Sign in the Heavens

God has formed an everlasting covenant with us



— Amelia Kunhardt, Photojournalist
Visit kunhardtphoto.com for her biography and a gallery of her work.

God said to Noah and to his sons with him:
“See, I am now establishing my covenant
with you and your descendants after you
and with every living creature that was with you:
all the birds, and the various tame and wild animals
that were with you and came out of the ark.

I will establish my covenant with you,
that never again shall all bodily creatures
be destroyed by the waters of a flood;
there shall not be another flood
to devastate the earth.”

God added: “This is the sign
that I am giving for all ages to come,
of the covenant between me and you
and every living creature with you:
I set my bow in the clouds to serve as a sign
of the covenant between me and the earth.

When I bring clouds over the earth,
and the bow appears in the clouds,
I will recall the covenant I have made
between me and you and all living beings,
so that the waters shall never again become a flood.”

—Genesis 9:8-15

First Reading for February 22, 2015,
First Sunday of Lent

Celebration

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Ordinary Time

Breaking News



Preaching Resources

CELEBRATION:
A Comprehensive
Worship Resource
CelebrationPublications.org

**ROMAN
LECTIONARY**
4th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Deut 18:15-20
Psalms 95
1 Cor 7:32-35
Mark 1:21-28

**REVISED COMMON
LECTIONARY**
4th Sunday after Epiphany
Deut 18:15-20
1 Cor 8:1-13
Mark 1:21-28

**ANGLICAN
LECTIONARY**
4th Sunday after Epiphany
Deut 18:15-20
1 Cor 8:1b-13
Mark 1:21-28

Patricia Sánchez has been contributing to *Celebration* for over 35 years. She holds a master's degree in literature and religion of the Bible from a joint degree program at Columbia University and Union Theological Seminary in New York.

“**W**e interrupt our regular programming for this very important news.” Some version of this familiar phrase has become the routine segue to inform the public of world events. When the “breaking news” announcement indicates that a leader will be speaking shortly, the ambience may be all the more charged. Often this atmosphere of expectation is rooted in the fact that notable persons about to speak enjoy some form of authority, and so we can trust their words to be true.

In the process of growing into mature human beings, most of us will have developed a sense of authentic authority. This begins at an early age. I recall telling my younger brother to come in from playing and get ready for supper. He often objected until I called on the authority of one of my parents. As soon as he heard, “Mom said so” or “Dad said so,” he said his goodbyes to his friends and came running.

During our school years, teachers and school administrators become the recognized authorities. In our faith lives, it is the priest or minister whose voice commands respect. Occasionally, during the course of the liturgical year, a letter may arrive from the bishop, whose words carry the authority of that office.

In the workplace, our boss or supervisor has authority ... and so it goes. Wherever people willingly participate in an organization of any kind, those who have accepted the responsibility for leading others are the recognized authorities, and by virtue of that status, respect is due them.

With these ideas in mind, we turn to the sacred texts for today — and we find there “breaking news.” Writing in the late seventh century B.C.E., the Deuteronomist called upon the authority of the people’s late, great leader Moses to promise the people of Judah that God would send them a prophet. The coming prophet, one like Moses, should be carefully heeded, for his words would be from God. Given the tenuous political climate of his day, the Deuteronomist’s promise was probably a source of hope for his people. Someone would be sent by God to lead them in the ways of truth, justice and peace.

In today’s Gospel, Mark takes special care to portray Jesus as one who spoke and acted with authority. But Jesus’ authority was not derived from something else. Unlike the scribes, who called upon scripture or upon famed rabbis or knowledgeable scholars, Jesus possessed authority that was his own, by virtue of who he was.

Indeed, Mark made Jesus’ identity clear to his readers from the beginning. In Mark 1:1, we read, “Here begins the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” While Jesus’ contemporaries and disciples often appeared to be uncertain about his identity; and although Jesus’ identity was fully revealed in Mark’s Gospel only as he hung on the cross (“Clearly, this man was the Son of God,” Mark 15:39) — Mark kept his readers in the know by including in his Gospel little glimpses at Jesus, Son of God. The first glimpse came at Jesus’ baptism. Another glimpse is offered in today’s Gospel reading, where Jesus is recognized and acclaimed as “the Holy One of God” (v. 24). Besides teaching with authority, Jesus also acted authoritatively, proving that he, as Son of God, was more powerful than any evil spirit.

We who have been called to follow Jesus are also called to enjoy a share in his authority. When we speak and act and do all things in his name, ours

Jesus was offering them “a new teaching with authority.”

February 1, 2015

Ordinary Time

4th Sunday

Breaking News

is an authority authentically derived from his. But if we use that authority unworthily to press for power, wealth and control over others, then our authority is not true, nor does it reflect our belonging to Jesus. But how do we strike the proper balance?

Perhaps we might take a cue from the people in the synagogue at Capernaum so long ago. They were open to listening to Jesus. They recognized he was offering them “a new teaching with authority.” They were simple and humble enough to be astonished — some translations say “spellbound!” In their amazement at what they had seen and heard, they also acknowledged Jesus’ power over evil or unclean spirits. And, in the aftermath of that event, they talked about Jesus; they were his witnesses throughout all of Galilee.

What the people experienced that day in Capernaum is also available to each of us. Each time the Gospel is proclaimed, it is “breaking news” deserving of our attention and respect. But that news also comes with a challenge. Will we listen and then go away unchanged, or will we listen, learn and be transformed by its power, grace and authority?

DEUT 18:15-20

While Josiah reigned as king of Judah, he instituted sweeping religious reforms in an effort to quash detours into idolatry and put an end to deviant liturgical practices. Josiah centralized the liturgy in Jerusalem and urged his people to renew faithfulness to their covenant with God. In the 18th year of Josiah’s reign (ca. 621 B.C.E.), the high priest Hilkiah “discovered” in the temple an early form of the book of Deuteronomy, which contained some ancient Mosaic traditions. In the spirit of the reform, a group of scholars in Jerusalem collected and ordered those traditions, all the while offering the *deuteronomos*, or second law or second version of the law, as guide and mentor. The book, as we know it, was further ordered and redacted during or shortly after the exile, and additions were included regarding the theological

interpretation of the exile.

Today’s first reading is part of a longer section (12:2-18:22) concerned with Judah’s liturgy, its theocratic government and officials. Having treated the offices of the judges, the king and the priests, the Deuteronomist then turned to the role of the prophet as an authoritative interpreter of the law and mediator between God and humankind. In order to offer the strongest possible assurance to the people, the Deuteronomist placed on Moses’ lips the promise that prophetic utterance would not be interrupted: “A prophet like me will God raise up for you” (v. 15). Moses, as the foremost mediator between God and the Israelites, was also regarded as the prototype of the true prophet.

Through the difficult years of the exile and then the challenging reconstruction of Judah, the promise of “a prophet like me” kept hope alive. Gradually this hope and the promise that prompted it took on an eschatological character. Among the Essenes at Qumran, there grew a hope that God would send one final prophet whose mission it would be to announce the end-time. That same hope was present among Jesus’ contemporaries, as is revealed in com-

ments they made concerning him, e.g., “This is surely the prophet who is come into the world” (John 6:14); “Surely, he must be the prophet” (John 7:40). As Jesus grew into a deeper understanding of his role, it is clear that he regarded himself as the proclaimer of the kingdom and a prophet like Moses who would speak the words God gave him to speak. He also accepted his role as a Moses-like mediator who would offer a new law of love, and he would live according to that law to his death.

After Jesus’ resurrection, and with the light of Easter faith, the first followers of Jesus preached about him in terms of the promise made in this Deuteronomic text (Acts 2:22ff). For all who will listen and learn, Jesus continues to be God’s prophet, speaking God’s words and bringing to light God’s will and God’s ways. We are called to take his words to heart and live accordingly. To that end, the psalmist for today implores us, “O that today you would hear his voice and harden not your hearts” (Psalm 95).

1 COR 7:32-35

In order to fully understand and appreciate Paul’s ideas on sex and marriage, Richard B. Hays suggests that we keep the following in mind: (1) Paul was not offering a treatise on marriage. Rather, he was responding to an issue raised by the Corinthians in their letter to him; (2) The saying “It is well for a man not to touch a woman” (1 Cor 7:2) comes not from Paul but from the Corinthians; (3) There is no trace in 1 Corinthians 7 of contempt for women or of the notion that sexual intercourse within marriage is sinful; (4) Paul demonstrates a remarkable vision of mutuality between woman and man in the marriage relationship; (5) Paul’s advice on sex, celibacy and marriage is strongly influenced by his belief that Jesus’ return was imminent (*First Corinthians*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Ky.: 1997).

Lest anyone be tempted to absolutize Paul’s remarks, it is also necessary to recall what Paul said



earlier in his letter to the church in Corinth: “About remaining celibate, I have no directions from the Lord, but give my opinion as one who, by the Lord’s mercy, has stayed faithful” (1 Cor 7:25). While we do not know for certain if Paul ever married, it is clear that, at some point in his life, he gave himself completely to his mission of preaching the Gospel to the gentiles. He did so with such urgency that he had time for little else.

As mentioned in #5 above, Paul expected the end time, and his teaching might best be regarded as “crisis advice.” Such advice would be radical. All else pales into insignificance before eternal realities. What purpose could be served, reasoned Paul, by entering into a temporal union with all of its obligations and responsibilities, when before you know it, the end will be upon us? A practical man, with his priorities well-ordered, Paul thought it would be wiser for people to get busy preparing for an eternal relationship with Christ.

But, some may ask, what do we do with Paul’s advice in this ever-lengthening interim between the comings of Christ? Richard Hays (*op. cit.*) suggests that Paul’s teachings about eschatology are timeless and valuable in that they enable us to look to the future with hope and trust, fully aware that our salvation depends not on our efforts at restructuring the world but on the loving mercy of God. Paul’s ideas also encourage us to find our identity in Christ rather than in whatever roles society assigns us. If we make the effort to grasp these truths, we will be ready to make our way more gracefully through all the exigencies of life in this world. “Furthermore,” says Hays, “we may even be empowered to act more boldly and confidently to represent God’s truth in a recalcitrant world.” Paul did this, as did Jesus before him.

MARK 1:21-28

Mark, the originator of the literary form we call gospel, chose to portray Jesus’ initial act of power as one of teaching with authority and exorcising an unclean spirit. Jesus came to

call people to repent so they could welcome the kingdom of God. This initial act underscored his identity and purpose. Filled with the Spirit of God at his baptism, Jesus, as Son of God, would continue to wage war on evil or unclean spirits throughout his ministry. The fact that the Marcan Jesus began his ministry in Capernaum carries some significance. Located between Ptolemais and Damascus, at the north end of the Sea of Galilee, Capernaum was an important town. An outpost of Rome, it was a center of customs and had a tax office. Because of its importance, Capernaum was the center of Jesus’ Galilee ministry, and many have suggested that Jesus stayed in Peter’s house when he was in town (Mark 1:29-31).

There is intended irony in the fact that although the people who heard Jesus teach that day in Capernaum were amazed at his authority, it was the unclean spirit who identified him as “the Holy One of God.” This title also reflects the faith of Mark and his community, who had accepted Jesus as the long-awaited Savior and the “prophet like Moses” who had come to inaugurate the reign of God on earth.

After such a display of power and authority, we might wonder why everyone who witnessed Jesus that day did not believe in him. Why only some? In the course of his Gospel, Mark recorded some of the varied reactions to Jesus. Some regarded Jesus’ acts of power as magic or sorcery because they had seen similar deeds by others, such as Rabbi Hanina

ben Dosa or Rabbi Honi. Others, like the scribes and Pharisees, dismissed Jesus’ power as demonic. Still others thought Jesus to be “out of his mind” (3:21). Even Jesus’ disciples were confused at times, and Mark allowed his readers to see their struggle to believe.

All of these varied responses attest to the fact that Jesus’ acts of power (or miracles or signs, as John called them) did not coerce those who witnessed them. On the contrary, each act of power, when combined with the authority of his teaching, constituted a challenge to believe. Jesus’ words and works were mutually clarifying prophetic phenomena that announced God’s reign, effected its presence and then invited a response in the form of committed faith.

As Mark tells us, those who witnessed Jesus’ words and works that long-ago day in Capernaum’s synagogue were prompted to ask, “What does this mean?” (NAB). Today, as the praying assembly listens to what Jesus did and said, that same question may arise in us. What does this mean to us who are Jesus’ disciples in the world? If we are true to him and to our calling, then Jesus can continue to teach with authority and overcome evil through the church, as it works and serves in his name. Our efforts can become a challenge, inviting others to recognize, accept and believe in Jesus. The believing community’s response to Christ can become, in itself, an authoritative teaching and an act of power that makes present the reign of God.

Sermon Starters

Deacon Dick Folger

Six blind men encountered an elephant for the first time, and they began to feel it in order to learn what it was. Each had his own description: The leg felt like a pillar, the tail felt like a rope, the trunk like a tree limb, the ear like a fan, the belly felt like a wall and the tusk like a pipe. They argued about whose description was correct until a wise man passing by explained that they had all touched different parts of the elephant. Putting them all together would reveal the truth.

In today’s Gospel, the healing of the possessed man revealed the truth of Jesus to those in the synagogue. Like blind people, they could not see the reality of Jesus in their midst. But from that day forward, they saw through new lenses, and Jesus’ reputation began to spread throughout the land.

Preaching to Youth

Jim Auer

KEY VERSE(S) / MAIN IDEA (Deut)

“A prophet like me will the Lord, your God, raise up for you from among your own kin; to him you shall listen.” (Mark) “The people were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority.” Searching for teaching that’s the real thing.

STARTER/MEDIA LINK In the film “The Giver,” Jonas and Fiona realize “there’s something missing in our life.” What’s missing is the truth: reality. In their utopian society, everything seems harmonious on the surface, but it’s also tightly controlled, with little room for individuality. The real world contains hardship and misfortune — but also strength to overcome them, and opportunity for personal decisions, family, growth and true joy. Our do-whatever-you-want-it-doesn’t-matter culture is really the artificial one today. In the end, it does not offer true happiness, only the illusion of satisfaction.

LEADING QUESTIONS * What’s your first reaction to the phrase “Catholic church teaching”? Is it more like “You have to follow every word on every topic” or “It’s just a bunch of stuff churned out by old men who are out of touch with the real world”? Whichever, what influences you to think that way? * Why do so many people (adults as well as youth) take the words, advice and example of almost any celebrity as “the real thing,” though many of these people have no authority on which to preach?

DIRECTIONS TO EXPLORE * What does it mean to “follow your conscience”? A well-formed conscience will always be open to instruction, even if, in the end, you must decide. * Yet, some people act destructively because they have “decided for themselves” what is right. * Numerous celebrities and athletes express gratitude to their parents or grandparents for teaching them right and wrong. * Church teaching is much broader and richer than simple lists of dos and don’ts. * Who do you model yourself after?

HOMILY

Paige Byrne Shortal

Still Speaking

If today you hear God’s voice, harden not your hearts. (Response: Psalm 95)

I was driving past a local church and noticed a red banner with nothing on it but a large white comma. I asked the pastor, a friend and also one of the Daily Bread writers for this publication, “What’s with the comma?”

She explained that it’s part of the “God Is Still Speaking” campaign of the United Church of Christ. The comma is inspired by a quote attributed to Gracie Allen. It seems that after her death, her grieving husband, George Burns, found among her papers this quote: “Never place a period where God has placed a comma.”

We often define ourselves, as a people or an organization, by documents or dogmas or doctrines that we consider unchangeable — the constitution, the scriptures, the catechism. And so when we sing, “If today you hear God’s voice ...,” we don’t worry much about hardening our hearts because most of us think we know what God is going to say, and — no surprise — God’s message fits perfectly with our own little comfortable worldview.

God promised to raise up prophets, but, like experts on talk shows, people who speak in God’s name are legion. And they don’t agree. To whom do we listen?

If we are at all open-minded, we listen to one, then another, then another until our heads swim. No wonder we are fond of certainty — just not always the other guy’s certainty. We like definitive statements (even if we define ourselves with the words “Live and let live; there are no definitive statements!”). Whatever our particular present moment, it feels like it is for always: our happiness, our sorrow; our hunger, our satiety; our anger, our affection;

our good health, our sickness; our material well-being, our losses; our loneliness, our loved ones’ presence.

God is still speaking. Take strength from the good times and be strong during the bad, as we know that nothing is forever except those virtues St. Paul promised would always be around: faith, hope and love.

I’m guessing that most of us who work for the church number among our friends and family many who call themselves “Ex” and many more who are still within the church “kinda sorta.” The authoritative teaching of Jesus has been drowned out — by the world, perhaps; or, sadly, by the noise of the very community where we go to hear the word. I get it. There are many, many days when, if I didn’t have a choir to direct or children to take to Mass, I might wonder if this church is where I want to be. And I’ve “heard the confessions” of enough priests and other professional church types to know I’m not alone.

Some do well with the clarity of staying without questioning. Some do well with the clarity of questioning and leaving. But just as many live with ambiguity — living and worshiping in the midst of the community, fully aware of its imperfection, of its apparent inconsistency, even hypocrisy. For us, the church is our home and we would no more leave than we would petition to become citizens of another country (I’ve thought about it) or say, “So long!” to our family (who hasn’t thought about it?).

It seems that this is where God placed us: in this family, this country, this church. Finding meaning, listening for God’s voice within that context, seems like the best thing we can do, even as we acknowledge that some hear God saying, “Go ahead and leave ... it’s OK ... I’ll be wherever you go ... still speaking.”

Ordinary Time

Good News for All



Preaching Resources

CELEBRATION:
A Comprehensive
Worship Resource
CelebrationPublications.org

ROMAN LECTIONARY

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Job 7:1-4, 6-7

Psalms 147

1 Cor 9:16-19, 22-23

Mark 1:29-39

REVISED COMMON LECTIONARY

5th Sunday after Epiphany

Isa 40:21-31

1 Cor 9:16-23

Mark 1:29-39

ANGLICAN LECTIONARY

5th Sunday after Epiphany

2 Kings 4:(8-17)18-21(22-31)32-37

1 Cor 9:16-23

Mark 1:29-39

Patricia Sánchez has been contributing to *Celebration* for over 35 years. She holds a master's degree in literature and religion of the Bible from a joint degree program at Columbia University and Union Theological Seminary in New York.

More often than not, the first reading for the liturgy correlates to the Gospel, and today's texts are no exception. The motif is suffering — first bemoaned by Job, and then faced head-on by Jesus. Job's litany of misery stands in sharp contrast to the healing power of God made manifest in Jesus. Without hesitation, Jesus reached out to Simon's mother-in-law, healed her and helped her up. He spent the evening healing all who came to him. The next day, Jesus went off to pray, and then continued his mission of alleviating the suffering of others. Later, by his own innocent suffering and death, Jesus gave suffering a whole new meaning.

Suffering for the sake of others; death endured by a just one for the purpose of redeeming the unjust — in this we find a profound, almost inscrutable mystery. It is a mystery into which those who follow Jesus must let themselves be led. Suffering is not an end in itself.

In their experience of suffering, contemporary believers should be able to confess, as did Job: "I know that my redeemer lives" (19:25) and "My footsteps have followed close in [God's] ... I have walked in his way without swerving" (Job 23:11). Through this truthful confession, the suffering that inevitably shapes our lives will find both meaning and purpose in the redemptive action of Jesus Christ.

Finding a segue between the Job text, the Marcan Gospel and the excerpt from Paul's letter to the Corinthians is challenging, to say the least. But Paul's conviction regarding his preaching of the Gospel commands our attention. Like Jeremiah, who could not help but speak God's word, Paul felt a compulsion to preach the good news of salvation. As Charles Cousar has explained, the compulsion Paul speaks of here does not refer to an irresistible impulse of the psyche or an irrational drive that coerces him into preaching against his better judgment (*Texts for Preaching*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Ky: 1993). Paul's compulsion was derived from the nature of the Gospel and from his sense of his own responsibility as one called by God. The Gospel is not only to be heard and enjoyed, but also lived and preached in word and in deed.

Because of its revelatory character and its salvific message, the Gospel, Paul insisted, is for everyone. For that reason, he, by his own admission, made himself a slave to all, so as to win over to God as many as possible. He did not select those whom he thought worthy of his message. I can almost hear the words of Pope Francis on Paul's lips: "Who am I to judge?" I can also hear him say, "If God made you, then you — regardless of your race, gender, ethnicity, social status or checkered past — are someone I have been sent to tend and to evangelize."

Centuries after Paul the apostle and evangelist, Pope Paul VI defined evangelization as the "process of bringing Good News into all the strata of humankind and, through its influence, transforming from within and making it new." The purpose of evangelization is the "interior change of the personal and collective consciousness of people, the activities in which they engage and the concrete milieu which are theirs" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*).

Both Pauls understood that salvation is both existential and eschatological. The Gospel must speak to the here and now as well as the world to come. For that reason, those who preach, teach and witness to the Gospel are to be concerned with human advancement, justice and liberation,

The Gospel must speak to the here and now as well as the world to come.

as well as the future participation of all of humankind in the reign of God. In the daily process of evangelization, disciples of Jesus will meet many Jobs and ailing mothers-in-law. Human suffering and unspeakable horrors are everywhere, and must be addressed. We could become overwhelmed by the enormity of the human situation and the seeming depravity of so many people. But instead of being discouraged, believers might take a cue from Mother Teresa, Peter Maurin, Dorothy Day and others like them. These good people tended to the Lazaruses at their gate. With great generosity, they fed the hungry, clothed the naked and eased the suffering in their respective neighborhoods. So convinced were they of the Gospel's promise of salvation for all, they turned away no one who came to them in need. Like Paul, they were compelled to do what they did, and, as with Paul, their goodness and enthusiastic service were contagious, inspiring many to follow their lead.

JOB 7:1-4, 6-7

From time immemorial, humankind has struggled with the meaning of human suffering — and, in particular, the suffering of innocents. The Book of Job is such an excellent literary and theological treatment of this subject that the name “Job” has become synonymous with the entire phenomenon of suffering and retributive justice, good and evil.

The figure of the “suffering innocent” was a legendary hero, featured in the literature of several cultures of the ancient Near Eastern world. The ancient author of Job produced a far superior account, made all the more remarkable by his poetic genius and monotheistic insightfulness.

In the story, Job is presented as a good and holy man, blessed with an abundance of wealth and a fine, large family. With God's permission, Satan unleashes every sort of affliction on Job. Although he suffers the loss of all he has, Job never loses his faith in God.

Today's excerpted text is part of Job's response to one of his friends who came offering advice. Eliphaz

February 8, 2015

Ordinary Time

5th Sunday

Good News for All



believed that suffering was prompted by sin. Therefore, Job should examine himself and his family members to find the source of sin and repent of it. Job made it clear that he had not sinned and stated unequivocally, as did Jeremiah and Ezekiel, that the sin of another did not precipitate his problems. Job also underscored the fact that the good and the innocent do indeed suffer, and not as a punishment for sin.

As Job's story unfolds, and as his friends offer more well-meaning but erroneous explanations for his suffering, the author's point becomes clear. Human suffering is not to be understood or endured as retributive justice for sin. Suffering is an inherent aspect of the human condition. We may never find an adequate explanation for suffering, but it can serve as a pathway or an opportunity for cultivating a deeper, truer relationship with God and with our fellow human beings. After many frank and eloquent dialogues with God, Job accepted that God was with him regardless of his circumstances. At the end of the book, he says to God: “I know you are all powerful; what you conceive, you can perform. ... I have been holding forth on matters I cannot understand, on marvels beyond

me and my knowledge. ... I retract all I have said and in dust and ashes, I repent” (Job 42:2, 3, 6).

We cannot leave Job today without acknowledging that the book reflects a time in Israelite history when belief in an afterlife had yet to evolve. Hence, the sufferings of Job were all the more lamentable. Wealth, family, friends and long life were regarded as God's blessings. The loss of all these blessings was tantamount to being dead, hence Job's lament, “My life is like the wind; I shall not see happiness again” (v. 7). When belief in an afterlife did eventually evolve among the Israelites, so did their attitude toward suffering.

With the appearance of Jesus, and through his salvific suffering, believers have learned to rely on God and on grace and to be confident in the belief that their suffering can be united with his for the redemption of the world.

1 COR 9:16-19, 22-23

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was martyred for his faith in 1945, was fond of referring to Jesus as “a man for others.” In all he did, in all he said, Jesus had the well-being of others uppermost in his mind and heart. Paul, who met the risen Jesus on the Damascus road and believed in him, strove to live his life in a similar manner — for others, so that they, too, might come to know and believe in Jesus. As part of his service to God, to Jesus and to all people, Paul preached the Gospel.

In this excerpted text, Paul defended his authority to preach the Gospel and his rights as a minister of God's word. These included the right to get married as well as the right to receive recompense for his service. Although he affirmed his right to these privileges by virtue of his vocation as an apostle, Paul chose, for reasons of his own, to forego them.

With the exception of “a gift” he accepted from the Philippians, Paul refused to accept pay for his preaching. Some scholars suggest that he did not want to be likened to other itinerant teachers and preachers who lived well on the wages they received. Others are of the mind that



Paul did not wish to be influenced by monetary gifts or indebted to anyone. Paul regarded his work as the result of a vocation from God, and not as an occupation he chose for himself and for which he had been trained. Paul contended that his qualifications, like his calling, were God-given. Therefore he accepted no recompense save that of knowing he was doing God's will. As Richard B. Hays has put it, Paul's renunciation of his rights allowed him to share in the pattern of Jesus' own sacrificial action and to share in the life-giving blessings of God (*First Corinthians*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Ky.: 1997).

In order to serve as well as possible, Paul was willing to adapt his presentation and his behavior, but never his message. Though free, he made himself a slave; though strong, he became weak. That is, he met people where they lived, and communicated to them in ways and amid circumstances they could understand. He was willing to become "all things to all, so as to save at least some."

Readers will recall the persistent conflict Paul had to contend with, in Corinth and elsewhere; Paul described it in terms of the "weak" and the "strong."

There were some in Corinth who regarded themselves as liberated in Christ and therefore under no obligation to observe Jewish dietary laws. Without constraint of conscience, they ate meat that had been sacrificed to idols. They washed their hands for health reasons, not because a rule of purity demanded it. These, Paul called the "strong," and he considered himself one of them.

Then there were others whose consciences did not permit them such freedom. Out of respect for these others, whom Paul called "weak," and in order to maintain unity around the dinner and eucharistic tables, Paul willingly became "weak." That is, he did nothing to offend or scandalize the weak. He respected their sensibilities. To explain his choices and adaptations, Paul said he did it all for the sake of the Gospel so that they, too, might have a share in it. His is an example to emulate.

MARK 1:29-39

Comprised of three related but distinct scenes, today's Marcan Gospel includes a briefly told miracle story, a summary of Jesus' ministry of healing and exorcism, and a discussion between Jesus and Peter as to the scope of Jesus' continuing ministry. Along with last Sunday's Gospel, the text purports to describe a typical day in Jesus' missionary efforts on behalf of God's kingdom. No doubt the activities here were intended to recall similar actions that were associated with the appearance of the Messiah. Isaiah (35:5-6), in the eighth century B.C.E., and Trito-Isaiah (61:1-2), in the sixth century B.C.E., offered visions of a time of hope and healing. Were Jesus' healing actions a sign that the messianic era had begun? Many thought so and believed in him.

In today's Gospel, Mark makes it clear that while Jesus' words and actions may have been regarded as messianic, Jesus was interpreting the character of his messiahship in a new and unexpected way. For this reason, readers will detect in Mark's Gospel a tendency to tell of Jesus' acts of power quite simply. He did not come to be a military hero or even the king whom many of his contemporaries expected. He came to be Jesus, Son of Man, Son of God, with healing and forgiveness for sinners. Simon's remonstrance shows that Jesus' "version" of his messiahship was not immediately understood by his disciples or the people in general. "Everyone is looking for you," Simon told Jesus, who had gone off

to pray. By this use of a particular verb — *zetein* (v. 37), which means a misguided or even hostile sort of seeking—Mark underscored the fact that Jesus' purpose had yet to be truly appreciated.

Jesus healed Simon's mother-in-law in the privacy of her home, away from the excitement and adulation of the crowds. Besides the cure itself, told simply and without drama, this particular healing story includes a lesson on discipleship. Once healed by Jesus, the woman got up and offered hospitality to those in her home. So should every disciple respond to Jesus' action in their life with faithful service to Jesus and to all those he puts on our way.

After the evening cures and exorcisms, Jesus rose early the next day to go and pray. Mark mentions Jesus at prayer several times throughout his Gospel (6:46; 14:35, 39). A good teacher, Jesus offered this example for all who would follow him. Times of quiet prayer, away from the exigencies of the apostolate, enable disciples to be in the presence of God, to evaluate, reassess and focus anew on their direction and goals.

From that prayerful interlude in a deserted place, Jesus emerged with a firm resolve to move beyond his home base in Capernaum and minister to all of Galilee. This "man for others" had come not to bask in the adulation of a few, but to give himself and his message to everyone. His itinerant ministry continues to challenge and inspire the church to be less institutional and more mobile, more available and accessible to all.

Sermon Starters

Deacon Dick Folger

Recent concerns over the Ebola epidemic in West Africa prompted an urgent search for a possible vaccine to address the crisis. The world's response to provide better health care systems there offers some hope.

For the people living in the first century, Jesus was the miracle vaccine; he was the only hope, the one with the ability to heal. For those who had lived in hopelessness, suddenly there was this hope. No wonder scripture says, "The whole town was gathered outside the door." No wonder there were crowds following him wherever he went. No wonder Jesus often asked those he cured to "tell no one."



Preaching to Youth

Jim Auer

KEY VERSE(S) / MAIN IDEA (Job)

“Is not man’s life on earth a drudgery? ... I have been assigned months of misery, and troubled nights have been allotted to me. ... My days ... come to an end without hope ... I shall not see happiness again.” Undeserved suffering.

STARTER/MEDIA LINK In last summer’s film “When the Game Stands Tall,” teacher and football coach Bob “Lad” Ladouceur has several opportunities to coach his players through the reality of suffering. One student says that you reap what you sow, but others don’t buy that. Tayshon protests that his aunt was a good Christian woman who didn’t deserve her struggles. Cam, whose father is dead and his mother sickly, says he’s holding on to faith, but privately questions and wrestles with it, especially when his close friend is murdered. At the funeral, Coach Lad admits he, too, is struggling with this, and that suffering just is.

LEADING QUESTIONS * Is it always true that you reap what you sow? Have you ever witnessed good come out of suffering? * Is there a simple explanation for undeserved suffering? * If undeserved misfortune strikes you, your family or a friend, what’s your initial reaction? * Does it change after some time and thought?

DIRECTIONS TO EXPLORE * What is the Book of Job about? * Deserved misfortune and suffering is at least understandable; undeserved, not so much or not at all. * Do we expect that life will always be pleasant, even exciting? * Is our faith a “feel good” variety?

MEDIA LINK Carly Simon’s 1974 hit “Haven’t Got Time for the Pain” still gets considerable radio time and can be adapted well to a discussion about suffering. The second stanza goes: “You showed me how, how to leave myself behind / How to turn down the noise in my mind / Now I haven’t got time for the pain / I haven’t got room for the pain / I haven’t the need for the pain / Not since I’ve known you.”

HOMILY

Paige Byrne Shortal

Pay It Forward

Then the fever left her and she waited on them. (Mark 1:31)

The little story of Jesus healing the mother of Peter’s wife appears in all three synoptic Gospels, and each includes this detail: After she was cured, she got up and waited on them. It seems that the appropriate response to grace is to “pay it forward.”

I’m reminded of the movie by that name. The premise is simple. A young boy, looking for a way to fulfill a class assignment — which was to change the world — did something extraordinarily nice for three strangers with the admonition that they should go and do likewise. It’s a pretty amazing idea, not to mention a great lesson in the power of exponents, which I am relearning as I help my sixth-grade child with her math homework. Even a single act of kindness, if it impacts others exponentially, could conceivably reach the entire globe.

Humor me. One person serves three, who each serve three more (nine), who each serve three more (27), and so on to 81, 243, 729, 2187. Maybe it is a way to change the world, or at least the part of the world we live in. In just seven stages, every member of our parish community might receive — and pass on — extraordinary kindness. This could be an idea for Lent.

But ... do we believe that people would really cooperate? We lack faith in people. Or perhaps we lack hope.

Today’s first reading gives a clear glimpse of life without hope as Job utters: “I shall not see happiness again” (Job 7:7).

A lector once told me that she almost choked as she had to end

that reading with the phrase “The Word of the Lord.” And Job was wrong. He didn’t know the end of his story. After listening to pages of poetic chastisement about how much he doesn’t know God and God’s ways, Job is blessed by God with more happiness than he could have imagined.

Perhaps we have known what it is like to recover from a serious illness — miraculously, as Peter’s mother-in-law experienced; or in a way that only seems like a miracle, at least to me, as I take antibiotics or lots of my husband’s chicken soup. Perhaps we are in the midst of an illness that won’t go away, but still there are those days of less pain, when the sun feels warm on our face and food tastes good again.

Or perhaps we’ve known another experience of grace. We find the right work, reconcile with a friend, a wayward child finds the way home, or we fall in love. Grace is that experience of going from loss to gain, eyes opened to what we did not see before.

What do we do next? Do we pay it forward? Good times and bad visit everyone. Believers are wise not to succumb to despair during the bad times or allow the good times to make them smug or selfish. Believers strive to bear all, knowing that the end of the story will be revealed in God’s own time.

Meanwhile, grace is to be shared, and, if we are willing, each one of us may become a vessel of grace, a Christ-bearer to those on our path in this waiting, needy world.

Ordinary Time

Radical Freedom

My brother Tom was always better with his hands than the rest of us — an important characteristic for a surgeon. One day, a few years into his career, I asked him, “How can you get up in the morning, go to work, wash your hands, dress up and then pick up a knife and slice someone open?” He replied that he was not “slicing someone open,” but removing something that was hurting someone. His profession is science that strives to do the greatest good and the least harm. It is, in vocational terms, a continuation of the healing ministry of Jesus.

Our reading from Leviticus 13 reflects a time when medicine was a cultic matter, not a scientific one. Beginning with the belief that everything God created was good, Israel interpreted death as the punishment for sin (Gen 3:19), and following that interpretation, anything that did not reflect the goodness of creation was ungodly and unclean, a threat to the well-being of a community that had to be protected from evil. In the case of “leprosy,” protection was needed from the physical blemish as well as the evil believed to be behind its outward manifestations. Although we think we are free from our ancestors’ pre-scientific fears, we still experience disease, and particularly disfiguring disease, as dreadful. If you’re not sure, just ask adolescents about the plague of acne!

When we come to today’s Gospel, we can read it as a simple healing story, a manifestation of Jesus’ power to transform the condition of a person who sought his help. That is a true reading of the story, but it only touches the surface. The interaction between Jesus and the man afflicted by leprosy can also be read as a brilliant proclamation of Gospel freedom.

When Jesus reached out and touched the man with leprosy, he displayed the unconditional freedom he knew as God’s Son. In his society, the law’s demands, promulgated to help people maintain their closeness to God, had become distorted; strict obedience had taken center stage, overshadowing the law’s true goal of unity. Interpretation of the law had become a fine art that too often obscured rather than promoted love of God and neighbor. In the case of a person with leprosy, the strictures designed to protect the community from contagion had taken on moral implications deviating from their original purpose and fostering the belief that a disfiguring ailment signaled interior corruption — thereby justifying the utter marginalization of the victim. The law had been transformed. It was no longer a road but a prison. It divided the sick from the well, isolating the afflicted and feeding the fear of the community. Healthy people’s contact with someone designated as a leper identified them with the afflicted, leaving both as untouchable.

When the suffering man called out, “You can heal me!” it was a cry of faith. Because everyone believed that only God could heal leprosy, that plea proclaimed his faith in Jesus’ unique power. Assuming that this was their first encounter, it’s unlikely that the man knew or believed anything more about Jesus than that God’s power worked through him.

Then Jesus touched the man, and everything changed. Jesus’ touch broke down the wall of separation, changing the man’s identity from “leper” to “the healed one.” That was salvation: restoring the man to community, enlarging the possibilities for communion.

When Jesus touched the man, he not only healed him, but acted out the very meaning of the Incarnation. With that touch, he identified himself with the man; he stood before God and the community as one with the



Preaching Resources

CELEBRATION:

A Comprehensive
Worship Resource
CelebrationPublications.org

ROMAN LECTIONARY

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Lev 13:1-2, 44-46
Psalms 32
1 Cor 10:31-11:1
Mark 1:40-45

REVISED COMMON LECTIONARY

6th Sunday after Epiphany
2 Kings 5:1-14
1 Cor 9:24-27
Mark 1:40-45

ANGLICAN LECTIONARY

6th Sunday after Epiphany
2 Kings 5:1-15b
1 Cor 9:24-27
Mark 1:40-45

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*When Jesus
broke the taboo,
he stripped it of
its unquestioned
omnipotence.*

February 15, 2015

Ordinary Time

6th Sunday

Radical Freedom



outcast. Jesus offered vivid testimony to his divine freedom, the freedom to identify with anyone in need with no fear of repercussions.

An old Kris Kristofferson song proclaims, “Freedom’s just another word for nothing left to lose.” Jesus’ evangelical freedom sprang not from poverty, but from the wealth of having everything he needed. What mattered to him lay beyond the realm of ordinary gain and loss. The message of his life, from birth to resurrection, was that living in love is all that matters. To the extent we believe that, we, too, are free, free to love anyone and everyone.

The Gospel tells us that the healed man became an evangelizer. Today’s readings call us to be the same. Not everyone is good enough with their hands to be a surgeon, but all of us are capable of extending a healing touch to the outcast. In today’s second reading, Paul calls us to do everything we do for the glory of God. That is our vocation, and we are offered the freedom to live it to the full, following Jesus, who showed us that to love is to live in the freedom of God’s own.

LEV 13:1-2, 44-46

This selection from Leviticus is not recommended for after-Mass discussion at Sunday brunch. Of all the texts available from the Hebrew scriptures, this one, with its specific references to yucky conditions, deserves repeating only because it sets the scene for Jesus’ dealings with people affected by the worst disease imaginable.

Although Moses and his friends lived eons before the discovery of bacteria and germ theory, they could not but have an inkling that some diseases were contagious. While it is one thing to share the sniffles or even the stomach flu for a few days, the evidence that someone horribly disfigured could share that condition with others inspired drastic preventative measures. Unsurprisingly, in ancient times, leprosy, like so many other conditions, was understood more in cultic-religious terms than as a medical problem, and “leprosy” was a broad term referring to many skin

problems. Thus, the leper — someone who might have had something as simple as eczema or serious acne — was not so much considered ill, but unclean in a religious sense: contaminating and repulsive to others. Anything “unclean” was considered unworthy of being in the presence of God, allowing the concept to spill over into the moral realm. The Old Testament frequently interpreted suffering as a result of sin, and thus, the person with a disease was obviously, if not explicitly, a sinner.

That background can prepare us for our reading from Leviticus. Our selection is part of a larger treatment of “leprosy,” a term that could describe any condition that appears to herald decay. (Leviticus 13-14 talks of “leprosy” of the skin, of clothing and even of a house.) To contract the disease made one like the dead, and anyone who touched the leper was as unclean as one who had dealt with a corpse. When “leprosy” seemed to be an incurable condition, the community felt the need to ostracize the victims due to their contagious impurity.

The laws of Leviticus were designed to protect the community and to deal with a problem that had no known human solution. Only God

could cure someone of the impurity of “leprosy,” and until the priest certified that the healing had taken place, the victim had to be isolated lest others be contaminated. Such was the situation of the leper of whom we hear in Mark’s Gospel.

1 COR 10:31-11:1

“Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.” That line makes Paul sound like the forerunner of the Jesuits. In fact, the holistic approach of his reasoning fits right in with the 17th-century Jesuit masters who taught moral theology on the basis of case studies, convinced that the morality of an action had to do with a living context as well as with the specifics of the law. In the preceding verses (1 Cor 10:21-28), Paul taught that a free person should voluntarily curtail the expression of her or his freedom if it would scandalize others. That is the difference between the rule of law and the law of love.

These verses sum up Paul’s teaching about what is lawful to do and what one is called to do in prudent, loving concern for others. While the question at hand has been about foods offered to idols, Paul’s argument goes much further, pointing out, as he has before, that Christians’ every moment and every action reverberates in their relationship with God and one another. He will say that everything is permitted (6:12, 10:23) while stipulating that not all things are beneficial. His point is that every action should build up both the person and the community. If it does not do so, then the freedom to do it has no value.

Paul says that everything he does is part of his mission to bring others to God. That is what he means by the imitation of Christ; his imitation of Christ is the vocation he wants the community to share with him. In this passage, Paul calls the community to remember that their very lives are consecrated to God. We use the word “consecrate” in a very specific sense when we speak of the Eucharist, proclaiming that the elements of earth become God-bearing, the



real presence of Christ among us. Paul is saying no less about the life of baptized Christians: They are to be the real presence of Christ in the world. (See 1 Corinthians 12.)

Of course, Paul does not expect perfection. He knows that everyone is moving toward a goal, or as he says, running a race (1 Cor 9:24-26, Acts 20:24). That's the point of ongoing imitation. Paul is talking about practices to be cultivated, not an achievement after which one graduates with honors and holds the title for the rest of his or her life. Paul knows that he and the community are "in the world" with all its opportunities for growth; his goal is to keep everyone aware of why they are here and how to proceed. Each day will bring new opportunities and challenges. All he is asking is that they, and we, do whatever we do for the glory of God.

MARK 1:40-45

In the action-packed Gospel of Mark, the first chapter ends with a fourth account of Jesus' healing activity. This time, after the stories of freeing a demoniac, restoring Peter's mother-in-law and healing people sick "with various diseases," we hear the precise and interesting words of a man's request for healing and unusually emotional language on the part of Jesus.

The man approached Jesus and said, "If you wish, you can make me clean."

First of all, those words were a proclamation of faith. The people of that time knew that while there were treatments for many ailments, curing leprosy required divine intervention. Thus, when the leper spoke to Jesus, he expressed belief that Jesus could choose to wield divine power.

We might ask why this man seemed to raise a question about Jesus' desire to heal. When we hear him say, "If you wish," we hear the cry of someone who, it seems, has prayed and not heard an answer. The leper calls on Jesus in a way that both asks for compassion and recognizes his own powerlessness—a depressing powerlessness that can be understood only

by someone as stricken and marginalized as he was.

While our translation says that Jesus was "moved with pity," other reliable manuscripts say he was "moved by anger." Following the principle of interpretation that posits that the more difficult saying is more likely the original, this portrays Jesus the healer as someone fiercely affected by the suffering he sees before him: both by the ailment and its social results.

In response to that suffering, he violates society's taboos regarding leprosy. Jesus reaches out and touches the man and says, "Be made clean."

The great father of the church John Chrysostom saw in this a wonderful reversal. Whereas the wisdom of the day knew that such a touch would make Jesus unclean, in reality, the opposite was true: That touch cleansed. In social terms, the touch symbolized as much as it accomplished. By touching the man, Jesus broke the barrier of isolation that had trapped him. He very really brought him back to the land of the living, the world of social relationships. Not only that, but by his touch, Jesus stripped the taboo of its power. A taboo functions subtly and maintains its force through fear. It is not reasoned, but almost reflexive. When Jesus flaunted the taboo against touching the person with leprosy he subverted the conventional wisdom of his day. His touch made a public statement that the one standing before him was a person who had leprosy,

not a leprous creature. When Jesus broke the taboo, he stripped it of its unquestioned omnipotence. As in all of his dealings with people in need, he demonstrated the primacy of the person over any considerations of physical condition, nationality or gender. In the long run, Jesus not only healed the man, but gave people a vision of evangelical freedom: the freedom to live St. Augustine's advice to "love and do what you will."

As he touched the man, Jesus acted out a living parable of the Incarnation. Philippians 2 describes Christ as the one who emptied himself, coming in human likeness. In this incident, as in so many others, Jesus emptied himself of false dignity and self-protection, all on behalf of someone in need. That touch identified Jesus with the victim; it made him one with the sufferer. That was the freedom Jesus had, and simply by expressing it, he invited others to do likewise. Thus, this healing miracle not only brought a person to daily life but extended the offer of freedom to any who would accept it.

In the end, Jesus and Paul are telling us the same thing. We are called to live our Christian vocation in the radical freedom that springs only from love. Jesus touched the man with leprosy. Likewise, we can claim the freedom to reach out to everyone our society treats as an outcast, doing it always for the greater honor and glory of God.

Sermon Starters

Deacon Dick Folger

A nun had just gotten a letter from her family with a \$100 bill in the envelope. Glancing out her window, she saw a shabbily dressed stranger on the street below. Moved with compassion, she wrote "Don't despair" on a piece of paper, wrapped it around the \$100 bill and tossed it out the window. The next day, she answered a knock on the convent door and the same man handed her a fat wad of \$100 bills. "What's this?" she asked. He said, "Don't Despair paid 80-to-1."

Today's Gospel is about faith. There is no need to despair if you believe with all your heart that God always wants what is best for you. Like the leper who knelt before Jesus and asked to be healed, we should always go to God trusting that our prayers will be answered.

Preaching to Youth

Jim Auer

KEY VERSE(S) / MAIN IDEA (Mark)

“A leper came to Jesus and kneeling down begged him and said, ‘If you wish, you can make me clean.’” Sinfulness and what to do about it.

STARTER Review the symptoms and development of leprosy without becoming excessively graphic. In biblical times (and long afterward), leprosy was a terrifying scourge. Although it is not easily transmitted, this was not known until relatively recently. In most societies, lepers were forced to live apart from the community. It was often considered a punishment from God for misdeeds.

LEADING QUESTIONS * The leper realized that he did indeed have leprosy; its symptoms could not be covered or disguised. * He had to want to be cured — not as easy as it first seems. If cured, he would have to re-enter the mainstream of life and fulfill responsibilities. * He had to believe that Jesus could make him clean. * So what did he have to do? Abandon denial, swallow pride, approach Jesus and sincerely ask for help. * What kind of disease is sinfulness? * How are sinfulness and leprosy similar? How are they different?

DIRECTIONS TO EXPLORE * Leprosy develops slowly and can be tuned out, hidden or ignored for some time, just like gradually developing sinfulness. * Some sins are obvious and glaring, such as murder or theft. Others are more easily ignored or disguised — e.g., selfishness; greed; prejudice; unwillingness or outright refusal to help the poor, victims of injustice and others in need; unwillingness to consider the common good; passive participation in bullying by being aware but remaining silent; ignoring God. * Lepers do not enjoy their leprosy or want to keep it. Sinners may enjoy and want to keep their sins. * Approaching Lent, can we connect today’s theme with Lenten observance? In Lent, we do not only attend to glaring sins, but also try to work positively to improve our relationships with others.

HOMILY

Ted Wolgamot

Be Made Clean

“If you wish, you can make me clean.” Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said to him, “I do will it. Be made clean.” (Mark 1:40-41)

The Gospel of Mark, the shortest of the four Gospels, is often portrayed as the the red-headed stepchild of the New Testament. For centuries, scholars regarded Mark as being of little significance.

There are many reasons for this, such as the fact that it doesn’t contain the gorgeous infancy narratives that make up our present-day Christmas story, or the magnificent drama of the final judgment scene, or the dazzling parable of the Prodigal Son, or the miraculous story of Lazarus exiting a tomb.

And so, for a long time, Mark was a neglected Gospel.

Until now.

Now we recognize what wasn’t so well understood before. Now we see the historical context in which this Gospel was written and how Mark’s Gospel, unlike the other three, takes us straight into a world inhabited by demons and evil forces with which Jesus is constantly in conflict.

The evil forces were those of the Roman Empire. In fact, scholars believe that this Gospel was written in Rome for the purpose of strengthening the faith of early Christians who were facing persecution.

People at that time also believed demonic spirits under Satan ruled the world.

One of the main strategies of Mark’s Gospel, then, was to demonstrate two convictions: 1. The Emperor of Rome was not the Lord of the Universe. Jesus was. 2. Satan was undeniably strong, but Jesus was the “Stronger One.”

From the beginning of Mark’s Gospel to the end, Jesus is presented as the Lord of the entire natural

world: the wind, the seas, the skies — they are all under his power. He is also the Lord, the Stronger One, when it comes to the ability to heal all diseases and all illnesses that the world at the time had no answer for, especially leprosy.

This plunges us headlong into today’s Gospel story. Leprosy was the most dreaded of all diseases at that time because it separated people from their family and their community, and thus constituted a “living death.”

It’s remarkable that the leper, desperate to be healed, does three things, none of which were allowed by Jewish law: He approaches Jesus, kneels down in front of him, and begs for him to “make me clean.” The leper treats Jesus as someone with divine power — a power much greater than Satan and the emperor combined!

What happens next is heart-rending, one of the most vivid portrayals in all the Gospels of Jesus’ humanity joined with his divinity. “Moved with pity,” Jesus does three things: He stretches out his hand, touches him, and speaks directly to the leper: “Be made clean.”

Jesus, the Stronger One, has ultimate power, even over the most feared diseases that no one before has ever been able to conquer. And yet he does it with the greatest sense of compassion and tenderness, and does it for the “least of these,” the human outcast.

This is why Mark closes this stunning story of healing power with these words: “and people kept coming to him from everywhere.”

And they still do, especially when we Jesus followers do the same as our Lord: With deep compassion, we stretch out our hands to the disadvantaged, touch them, and lead them to a place of hope and healing and great joy.

Lent

Our Covenant in Christ



Preaching Resources

CELEBRATION:
A Comprehensive
Worship Resource
CelebrationPublications.org

**ROMAN
LECTIONARY**
1st Sunday of Lent
Gen 9:8-15
Psalms 25
1 Peter 3:18-22
Mark 1:12-15

**REVISED COMMON
LECTIONARY**
1st Sunday of Lent
Gen 9:8-17
1 Peter 3:18-22
Mark 1:9-15

**ANGLICAN
LECTIONARY**
1st Sunday of Lent
Gen 9:8-17
1 Peter 3:18-22
Mark 1:9-13

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Some years ago I was part of a faculty committee charged with rewriting the mission statement of our high school. Except for changing one preposition, I contributed little to the project. Where the original document stated that one of our school's main goals was to "convey faith in Jesus," I was able to convince the committee to change that statement to read "convey the faith of Jesus." The former principal of the school initially thought the switch from "in" to "of" was a typo, but I eventually brought him over to my point of view.

I never tire of reminding my students and readers of one of spiritual writer Fr. Ed Hays' most life-changing insights: "The original followers of Jesus imitated him long before they worshiped him." Jesus' first disciples didn't drastically change their lifestyles and follow him town to town, synagogue to synagogue because they believed he was God, but because they saw the value in imitating the way he thought and lived. He not only focused on things and people they had never before noticed, he also showed them how to change the world in which they lived. And he did this not by creating a new religion, but by showing them how to integrate his unique insights into the faith they already professed.

That's why it is essential for us to understand the importance of covenants in Jesus' faith.

"This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the good news."

GEN 9:8-15

As we hear in today's Genesis reading, the ancient Israelites saw their relationship with Yahweh as a covenant relationship. Unlike their pagan contemporaries, these chosen people understood that they had signed a contract with their God. There were specific things they were obligated to do; specific things Yahweh had to do. God couldn't one day act on a whim and run roughshod over them, nor could they do what they pleased. The Israelites had responsibilities. Yahweh had responsibilities. Their relationship revolved around each side carrying out their mutual obligations.

In this first of the biblical covenants, Yahweh does all the committing. And since Abraham and Sarah — the first Jews — have yet to make an appearance, this particular covenant is with all people and all creation, not just with Jews. God specifically promises, "Never again shall all bodily creatures be destroyed by the waters of a flood."

Just as a marriage covenant often employs a wedding ring as a sign of that agreement, so Yahweh provides a sign for this covenant. "I set my bow in the clouds to serve as a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When ... the bow appears in the clouds, I will recall the covenant I have made between me and you and all living beings."

Other covenants will follow. Abraham and Sarah, for instance, will commit themselves simply to have "faith in Yahweh" in Genesis 15. And all Israelites will accept the responsibility of keeping the 613 Moses-mediated Sinai regulations in Exodus 24. (With the concept of covenant in mind, many scripture scholars contend we should stop speaking about the "Ten Commandments"; instead we should refer to them as the "Ten Responsibilities.")

MARK 1:12-15

We presume that as a practicing Jew, Jesus of Nazareth was also committed to the covenants his faith ancestors entered with Yahweh. He not only shared Abraham and Sarah's faith in Yahweh; to the best of his abil-

ity, he also adhered to the 613 Mosaic regulations. He never ate pork. His carpenter shop was always closed on the Sabbath.

We also believe Jesus was committed to the concept of covenant *hesed* (lovingkindness).

In many ancient treaties and covenants, the parties not only swore to adhere to the responsibilities they had accepted, but also promised to give *hesed* to one another. Biblical *hesed* revolves around doing more for your covenant partner than you're obligated to do. Such actions aren't specifically included in either one's responsibilities. But if you don't go beyond those responsibilities, history shows that eventually you'll start fudging on them.

Most happily married couples live fulfilling lives because they go beyond the vows they took on their wedding day. They're not only faithful to one another in good times and bad, in sickness and in health, intending to stay married until death. They also constantly do little or big things for one another that step beyond their vowed faithfulness, things they don't "have" to do, which make all the difference in the quality of their daily lives. Such acts of *hesed* add the element of freedom to a covenant relationship. Though we're not free to ignore the terms of the contract that apply to us, we're always free to act beyond those obligations. It's those *hesed* actions that create a unique relationship. No two marriages dominated by *hesed* are ever alike. And it's those actions that develop our individual personalities.

It is precisely in his covenant acts of *hesed* that the Gospel personality of Jesus steps out of the evangelists' narratives. Story after story, saying after saying, parable after parable, we're told that Jesus has taken his covenant with Yahweh beyond just the regulations to which most of his fellow Jews (sometimes slavishly) adhered. His faith in God, demonstrated in his commitment to others, led him to experience God working effectively in the people and situations that filled his everyday life. This experience, then, led him to

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Lent

1st Sunday

Our Covenant in Christ



shutter his shop and hit the road. He morphed into an itinerant preacher, committed to sharing his experience of God's kingdom among us with all he encountered.

His message was short and simple. He didn't need a catechism to convey it. Just one verse of today's four-verse Gospel contains the whole message: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the good news."

Jesus inevitably encountered obstacles when he proclaimed God's kingdom among us. Mark says, "The Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert, and he remained in the desert for forty days, tempted by Satan." Any movement from God's Spirit always runs head-on into a movement from Satan. Matthew and Luke, borrowing from the lost "Q" document, will later provide us with three specific temptations Jesus faced in the desert. Mark, on the other hand, leaves it up to his readers to fill in the blanks. Each of us will face different and unique roadblocks when we commit ourselves to carrying out God's plan for us.

The evangelist also mentions that Jesus only began to deliver his message publicly "after John had been arrested." Many scripture scholars hold that the Baptist's message resonated

with Jesus' own insights, convincing him to become one of his followers. John's arrest by Herod seems to have forced Jesus to "go public." He not only took over the mantle of his mentor, he carried John's ministry to a depth and breadth the Baptist could never have envisioned.

I remember an experiment my high school chemistry teacher once conducted. I don't remember all the details, but it had to do with chlorine. Though he assured us it was safe, something went drastically wrong. It exploded, spewing chlorine all over the place. Though no one was seriously hurt, they didn't repaint the lab's ceiling for a long time. So whenever the same teacher announced another experiment, many of us looked up at the green blotches above our heads and moved back an extra foot or two from the table on which this experiment was about to be conducted.

When Jesus began to proclaim God's kingdom among us, I can imagine that many in his audience remembered what had happened to the last person foolish enough to deliver such a radical message. No doubt Jesus never forgot John's fate. He had stepped into the same crosshairs that once focused on the Baptist.

We traditionally credit Jesus with a three-year public ministry based on John the Evangelist's mention of three feasts of Passover occurring during that ministry. Today most experts on the fourth Gospel regard those three feasts as being more theological than historical. Jesus' actual ministry may have been much shorter. It wouldn't have taken the powers-that-be three years to eradicate such a threat to their power.

Yet, unlike John the Baptist's ministry and message, Jesus' message and ministry carried on long after they "got rid" of him.

1 PETER 3:18-22

It seems clear from our 1 Peter pericope that the risen Jesus was still having an effect on people more than 30 or 40 years after his crucifixion. The unknown author grounds



much of his theological imagery on a non-canonical book, 1 Enoch, a text familiar to the people in his community. For instance, 1 Enoch speaks about the fallen angels having been imprisoned by God because of their disobedience. The author of 1 Peter says that Jesus, in his risen form, also delivered his message of God's kingdom among us to those "spirits in prison."

We can't miss the author's emphasis on baptism. Some commentators say that 1 Peter was originally a baptismal homily that someone changed into a letter format for wider circulation. Just as Noah and his family were saved through the waters of the flood, so the followers of Jesus are saved through the waters of baptism. It's through baptism that we formally make a commitment to share in the "righteousness" of Jesus, make his frame of mind our frame of mind, and make his faith our faith.

This makes sense as long as we're talking about adult baptism, when one makes a conscious decision to become another Christ. Most Catholics today were baptized as infants. At that age, we were unable actually to "repent," to change our value systems as the historical Jesus demanded his followers to do. Jesus and those first disciples were convinced that unless repentance takes place — unless we make people and their needs the most important part of our existence — we'll never experience God working effectively among us.

This has led some cradle Christians to ask, "Why can't we have a special eighth sacrament for those who were baptized as infants, an outward sign that would show our adult commitment to the faith of Jesus?" If this question were put to our ancestors who first professed that faith, their response would be a simple, "We already have such a sacrament: the Eucharist." Ideally, every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we are expected to take part in an outward sign demonstrating our commitment to carry on the ministry and faith of Jesus of Nazareth, a sign in which many Catholics fail to participate: receiving from the cup.

It is regretful that when reception from the cup was restored for everyone after Vatican II, many of us somehow came to regard the cup as something we did for "extra credit." Older Catholics had been taught back in second grade that whenever one receives the body of Christ, his blood is already in it. The cup was something only the priest was privileged to receive. (Even then, I wondered why Jesus went through all the trouble of specifically changing the wine into his blood. Didn't he know what my teachers knew?)

As we'll hear during the Eucharist on Holy Thursday, Jesus never put receiving from the cup in the "optional" category. It was an action in which he expected all his followers to share.

The earliest account of what Jesus said and did isn't in one of the four Gospels; it's in Chapter 11 of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, composed more than 10 years before the first Gospel (Mark) was composed. Notice that Jesus doesn't say what the priest will later say over the cup: "This is my blood." Instead, Paul's Jesus says, "This is the cup of the covenant in my blood." Quite a difference. Somehow, taking from the cup has to do with the covenant Jesus made with Yahweh, a covenant that included the hesed that enabled him to reveal God's kingdom around us. He demands his followers commit to that same covenant. Receiving from the cup is the outward sign that those followers are making, a sign of their public commitment to carry on the

faith and ministry of Jesus.

No doubt during the Last Supper Jesus had in mind the Sinai covenant-making ceremony in Exodus 24. When the people are sprinkled with the blood of the animals they have sacrificed, Moses proclaims, "This is the blood of the covenant which Yahweh has made with you in accordance with all these words of his." The blotches of blood on the people's clothes and skin are the outward sign of their covenant commitment — like a wedding ring or a rainbow. Receiving from the eucharistic cup perfectly fits into that sacred category.

Mark tells us that Jesus actually passed his own cup around that night, even though everyone would have had his or her own cup in front of them. I'm sure that if someone sitting around the Last Supper table had said, "I'm a little worried about germs, so I'll pass on the cup," Jesus would have emphatically shown that person the door. The only way he could go through the next day's pain and death was because he believed at least some of his followers would carry on his work. They had demonstrated their commitment by drinking from his cup.

Someone suggested that we receive the body of Christ first to strengthen us to take a few steps to the side and receive from the cup of Christ. Our decision to receive from the cup of his blood is what declares to the world that Jesus' covenant is our covenant and his faith is our faith.

Sermon Starters

Deacon Dick Folger

Lent is upon us, and once again we follow Jesus into the desert for 40 days of fasting and prayer. Our Lenten journey helps teach us much-needed spiritual discipline. Most of the religions of the world observe fasting. In Islam, it is an entire month, Ramadan, when they take nothing during the daylight hours. Some Buddhists take no food after noon. For Hindus, it may be a certain day of the week. Jews fast six days of the year. Mormons observe Fast Sunday each month, and members of the Bahai faith fast for one month. Fasting and hunger strikes are also powerful political tools. India's Mohandas Gandhi undertook several long fasts. Cesar Chavez went on a fast for 25 days. It takes real discipline to follow our faith. Fasting — and Lent — help us to be stronger.

Preaching to Youth

Jim Auer

KEY VERSE(S) / MAIN IDEA (Mark)

“The Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert, and he remained in the desert for forty days.” Lent: Let’s do something.

SPECIAL NOTE Young people’s understanding of Lent may need refreshing. Also, explain that the Palestinian “desert” is not a vast expanse of sand but a rocky territory of low mountains.

STARTER Let’s say you have a thousand apples, and you have an opportunity to give someone seven of them. Would you? Some faces are saying, “I’d give the whole thousand. I don’t like apples.” OK, let’s make it dollars. Same opportunity. Shouldn’t be too difficult, right? What’s seven dollars? You’d have \$993 left. Remember those figures. We’ll get back to them.

LEADING QUESTIONS *Remember the Toyota slogan “Let’s go places”? How could that apply to Lent? *How about “Lent: Let’s do something”? *Where did Jesus go for 40 days? Why? *What do you think he accomplished there? *Do you ever go somewhere just to think about yourself, your life, your future? *Where is it (or, if you could design it yourself, where would it be)? *Why is it said that many of us are too plugged in, connected with too many things and too many people? Do you agree?

DIRECTIONS TO EXPLORE *OK: giving up desserts. Better: giving up excessive TV, social media, smartphone time, etc. Best: giving up rudeness, excessive acquisition, shirking duties, looking down on others, disrespect at home, etc. *Establish a Lenten “desert” of your own, a time of unplugged quiet for meditation, scripture, prayer. Set your phone alarm to alert and remind you. *How much time? Ten minutes is good to start with. By the way, that’s seven one-thousandths of the day. You’d still have 993 left.

QUOTATION “The most effective way to do it is to do it” (Amelia Earhart).

HOMILY

Pat Marrin

Deeper into Identity

Mark gives us the most concise description of Jesus’ time in the desert after his baptism. The first lines are layered with significance and imagery. Jesus is “driven” into the wilderness by the Spirit. We are reminded of 2 Samuel 16, the story of God’s choice of David from among all his brothers. “This is the one,” God tells Samuel. Then the text says, “From that day on the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David.”

Jesus, Son of David, in the flush of his messianic identity revealed at the Jordan, is driven out into the desert to undergo the purging of his human ambitions, represented by the temptations Satan puts before him to bend his vocation toward self-aggrandizement. The wild beasts, representing Jesus’ human desires, must be overcome by his better angels. He is God’s anointed, but unlike David, who was seduced by lust and power, Jesus will be God’s obedient suffering servant.

Jesus comes out of the desert only to hear that John the Baptist, his mentor, has been arrested. The good news he is to proclaim will meet stiff resistance from those who cling to power: King Herod, the religious leaders in Jerusalem, the Roman occupation. He slips north to Galilee of the gentiles, his own people and hill country villages, the towns near the lake. There is where he will begin his ministry of preaching and healing. The Spirit eases up, giving him a joyful start, a chance to gather followers, to work out the details of his ministry before Jesus is again driven south to the centers of power.

What he learns in the desert will be played out in the longer narrative of his messianic call. Baptism, deep discernment, full ministry, confrontation, suffering and death. This is

God’s plan, and he will carry it out.

Lent is our time to work out the narrative of our own call to discipleship. Where are we in the story of our own salvation? What stage of growth and awareness are we in as we pursue our human ambitions, use our gifts to succeed? Has the Spirit disturbed our lives yet, taken us deeper into the identity that will give meaning and purpose to our lives? Has our baptism made a difference? Have we calculated the cost of discipleship? Has suffering touched us sufficiently to force our priorities into view, made us choose the narrow path that leads to life in relationship with others, responsibility for others?

This is the ordinary drama of every Christian life, the quiet, daily sorting-out of options that define us and direct us first inward, then outward, teaching us to feel the graces at work, the strength of good habits, the value of honesty and dependability. It slowly adds up to a holiness that exceeds our own efforts. It is the Holy Spirit with us, within us, whispering, “This way.” “That way.” “Be patient.” “Act now.”

Jesus begins his public ministry with the words, “Now is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.”

Perhaps we heard these words when we received ashes in the sign of the cross on our foreheads this past week. Jesus’ words are meant for us. Now is our time to renew our baptism and commit to some quiet time with Jesus in the desert. Who is to say that this Lent might not be our last? Or, more likely, that it won’t be the start of a new chapter in our personal story that will bring us closer to God and more true to who we really are?



Daily Bread

*Homiletic starters
and scriptural
reflection points for
each day of the month*

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The Lectionary provides a kind of spiritual script for the universal church that keeps us, literally, all on the same page as we journey through the liturgical seasons. These short reflections, written by four authors who meet regularly to share the readings, are intended to help daily preachers and others who pray from the assigned scriptures each day to orient themselves to the Living Word addressed to the church in the world. Authors are identified by their initials, with short bios provided on the last page.

February 2015

Fourth Week in Ordinary Time

Mon., Feb. 2: Mal 3:1-4; Heb 2:14-18; Luke 2:22-40

Presentation of the Lord

*Like the refiner's fire, or like the fuller's lye ... he will purify the descendants of Levi. Our children once asked if they could frame a 1000-piece jigsaw puzzle they had completed. It was, for them, tangible proof of what their patience and perseverance could accomplish. We often give more value to skills and knowledge we've struggled to acquire than to those we have gained easily. Like the refiner's fire, the trials of life and painful soul-searching can alter and redefine our beliefs. The result becomes an even greater treasure: a deeper understanding of God and ourselves. *May I come to see the trials of my life, O Lord, as opportunities to grow in faith and love.* MJ*

Tues., Feb. 3: Heb 12:1-4; Mark 5:21-43

*Let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us. I once heard a speaker tell a high school audience, "Don't let your past failures define who you are today, or who you can become tomorrow!" These are words that for many of us are easier said than done. In our attempts to change ingrained habits or move on from past failures, we can often be weighed down by the doubts and fears that cling to us. Today Jesus tells us, "Don't be afraid; just have faith." To change, even as we know God's presence through our struggles, takes practice, practice, practice. *Lord, may we never doubt your love for us or your confidence in our goodness.* MJ*

Wed., Feb. 4: Heb 12:4-7, 11-15; Mark 6:1-6

*Endure your trials as "discipline." I lament that my children went through their initial school years when a "no fail" policy was prevalent. As a result, they had learned few coping skills when inevitable failures challenged them later in life, and the consequences seemed more profound. We often pray to God to protect us from difficulties and pain, yet we would be radically different people had we suffered no trials. Failure and pain in our own life has the potential to make us more forgiving and compassionate when encountering the weakness and pain of others. It unites us in our mutual humanity. *May my response to the struggles of others be rooted in the empathy, compassion and mercy you first showed to us through your Paschal sacrifice.* MJ*

Thurs., Feb. 5: Heb 12:18-19, 21-24; Mark 6:7-13

Agatha, virgin and martyr

*They were to wear sandals but not a second tunic. On any given garbage pick-up day, I am struck by how much waste our neighborhood produces. If this is what we throw out, how much more do we still possess in our homes? As Jesus sent out his disciples to spread his message, he reminded them to carry only the bare minimum, as possessions would distract from their mission. I, too, need to be reminded that if I am to live out my Christian mission with authenticity, my own lifestyle must embody the message more closely. I cannot speak about feeding the poor, and live as if the world's resources are mine alone to use and waste. Christian responsibility begins at home — my home. *Give me the courage to live more simply and more mindful of the world beyond my door.* MJ*

Fri., Feb. 6: Heb 13:1-8; Mark 6:14-29

Paul Miki and companions, martyrs

Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels. As I write these words, our country is trying to make sense of senseless acts of violence that were meant to instill fear. Our initial instinct is to lock our doors and to view anything unknown with suspicion. Sweeping accusations



quickly create a world of “them and us.” St. Paul reminds us that there are “angels” among us of every stripe, color and creed if we but look from the heart. Opening avenues of dialogue and seeking common ground will ultimately do more to restore a sense of security and community than exclusion or retaliation. *O Lord, may fear never prevent me from seeking your face in those I encounter daily.* MJ

Sat., Feb. 7: Heb 13:15-17, 20-21; Psalm 23; Mark 6:30-34

Beside restful waters he leads me; he refreshes my soul. When people discover how much time I spend on church-related ministries, sometimes they ask, “How can you believe in that religious stuff in this day and age?” My instinct is to answer, “Read Psalm 23,” but I know that anyone who asks this type of question would never understand my answer. For a world of spiritual skeptics who seek only “photo” proof to form an opinion, faith is indeed a difficult concept to understand. Faith is felt, experienced and believed with the heart. When we possess it, we find living evidence everywhere. My words may not provide the proof skeptics seek, but observing how my faith provides meaning, solace and purpose to my life, just may. *The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.* MJ

Fifth Week in Ordinary Time

Mon., Feb. 9: Gen 1:1-19; Mark 6:53-56

God saw how good it was. God made every living thing, and made it all good — the heavens, the earth, the sea and every kind of plant. Abuse of the earth and its resources devastates the poor and robs future generations. As God’s special creatures, we’re called to cooperate with him and to be faithful stewards of his precious gifts. We show our respect and our gratitude for our Creator in how we honor God’s works. We have an obligation to cultivate and bring harmony to all living things. Our respect for life should include reverence and care for all of God’s creation. We’re interdependent. When we abuse the environment, we abuse ourselves. *In gratitude for the precious gifts of creation, we pray.* PR

Tues., Feb. 10: Gen 1:20-2:4a; Mark 7:1-13
St. Scholastica, virgin

God created man in his image ... male and female he created them. Humans are not just another of God’s many creations. We have a special relationship with God as his crowning achievement. It is through God’s own physical action, forming dust from the ground and breathing life into our nostrils, that we came into being — not merely willed, but carefully made. Just as a child resembles a parent, we share our Father’s traits and have a connection that allows us to be uniquely one with him. We were made to be like God and to have life with him. We need to recognize the image of God in ourselves and others, and treat all with the dignity and respect that demands. *To see the face of God in all we encounter, we pray.* PR

Wed., Feb. 11: Gen 2:4b-9, 15-17; Mark 7:14-23

The moment you eat from it you are surely doomed to die. God gives us everything we need to flourish, including the freedom to make our own choices, but also sets limitations for our own good. We must fight the temptation to disregard God’s commands. Freedom and responsibility go hand in hand; just because we can do something doesn’t mean we should. We are accountable for our actions. There are consequences to them, potentially long-term and serious. In deviating from God’s wise and loving plan, Adam and Eve made life a lot more difficult for everyone and introduced suffering into the world. When we choose a destructive path, we hurt more people than ourselves. *May we have the grace to listen to our loving God, who has our best interests at heart.* PR

Thurs., Feb. 12: Gen 2:18-25; Mark 7:24-30

This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. Even among all God’s marvelous creatures, man was incomplete until the creation of woman. He lacked a partner. The woman was distinctly different, yet perfectly complementary to him. God made both to be in special relationship to him and to each other. It is therefore unfathomable that so many women in the world today are still regarded as disposable possessions. Women are fundamentally equal with men as persons created in God’s image. Christians have an obligation to advance the well-being of girls worldwide, to protect their fundamental human rights and improve their status. Violence and enslavement and exploitation of women and girls can never be justified. If men and women are of one flesh, we cannot tolerate the mistreatment of any person, anywhere, anytime. *For the safety, dignity and equality of women, we pray.* PR

Fri., Feb. 13: Gen 3:1-8; Mark 7:31-37

Did God really tell you not to eat from any of the trees in the garden? Temptation and sin love technicalities. How often do we try to convince ourselves that it’s just a little lie, everyone is doing it or it’s really not that bad? It’s easy to follow the serpent’s lead and say that whatever dire consequence we fear will never happen. It’s easy to get in the habit of believing that nothing disastrous will result from our selfish choices — until it does. After Adam and Eve willfully disobey God, their eyes are opened to how naked, frail and vulnerable they are without him. Instead of hiding from God, we must turn back and trust in his mercy. *For the grace to accept God’s plan for us, we pray.* PR

Sat., Feb. 14: Gen 3:9-24; Mark 8:1-10
Saints Cyril, monk, and Methodius, bishop

The serpent tricked me into it, so I ate it. It’s a familiar excuse: “It wasn’t my fault.” No matter how we come to our bad choices, we suffer the consequences. Lies and rationalizations don’t erase the harm already done. As Adam and Eve show us, sin distorts us from what God intended. It damages our relationships and alienates us not only from God but from others, ourselves and God’s good creation. Luckily, sin does not get the last word. God’s mercy



and grace are more powerful than sin. Instead of covering up what we've done, we need to admit our weakness and failings. We must turn to God rather than hide or make excuses. *For the grace to confess our imperfections, we pray.*
PR

Sixth Week in Ordinary Time

Mon., Feb. 16: Gen 4:1-15, 25; Mark 8:11-13

No sign will be given to this generation. In Mark, Jesus is nothing if not blunt. But if we don't get a sign, we're even worse off than Cain, who, in the first reading, at least gets his "mark" of God's mercy after receiving his punishment — a mark that warns people not to kill him. *No one* ever again may kill his brother. How's that working out for us? Not too well. Maybe that's why Jesus was so short with the Pharisees, who liked to test him. Lent is about to begin. Maybe we feel as if we deserve some kind of favor from Jesus, to help us through the season. Let us be a sign for others, that we all are brothers and sisters. Maybe this or that crime or situation is not my fault, but it's my responsibility. Get into the boat. *Jesus, let me go with you.* MD

Tues., Feb. 17: Gen 6:5-8; 7:1-5, 10; Mark 8:14-21

Do you still not understand? Today's readings sure don't sound like Mardi Gras! The Deluge cleanses the world of sin in Genesis; and in the Gospel, Jesus, still mad at the Pharisees from yesterday when they demanded a "sign," now takes it out on the apostles. Talk about spoiling a party. The apostles can't read even the signs they are given. After the multiplication of the loaves, Jesus directs their attention to the leftovers, the super-abundance, the "senseless waste" of God's grace, as Hans Urs von Balthasar calls it. It beats Fat Tuesday by a mile! What about our own abundance, our closets and hoarding and holding, useless for the most part, just dead weight, not likely to float any boat? Well, we've got 40 days to unpack — actually, three months before we follow Mark again in Ordinary Time. *Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.*

Season of Lent

Wed. Feb. 18: Joel 2:12-18; Psalm 51; 2 Cor 5:20-6:2; Matt 6:1-6, 16-18

Ash Wednesday

Rend your hearts, not your garments. Today we begin the great retreat of the church year, "this joyful season," as the liturgy calls it. Joyful because, like Joel, we can see where we're going: The Lord "will again relent." In Psalm 51, we ask God to "give me back the joy of your salvation"; the regimen of alms, prayer and fasting will brighten our faces with the "reward" denied to "the hypocrites." And perhaps almost unnoticed on this busy day is St. Paul's astonishing statement about Jesus: "For our sake God made him to be sin who did not know sin." Lent reminds me daily that I am a sinner; but Jesus *became sin!*? Give me 40 days to think about that. *O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.* MD

Thurs., Feb. 19: Deut 30:15-20; Psalm 1; Luke 9:22-25

Thursday after Ash Wednesday

He is like a tree planted near running water. Where is everybody today? Ash Wednesday, wow. Churches overflowing, extra services added. But very rapidly we seem to disperse to our daily concerns. Let us stay by the running waters of Lent. There's such a richness here. As Moses urges the people in our first reading, "Choose life," not death. Jesus bumps it up to an existential choice: Take up your cross daily, lest you "gain the whole world" and lose your very self. If 40 days seems too much, take a hint from Alcoholics Anonymous and make your commitment anew every 24 hours. The readings will not disappoint. Nowhere else in the liturgical year is there such a fascinating feast of scripture, both Testaments annotating each other like a game of tag. *Keep me faithful, O Lord, to your Word.* MD

Fri., Feb. 20: Isa 58:1-9a; Matt 9:14-15

Friday after Ash Wednesday

Do you call this a fast? If you came in late, we're reading the Old Testament, though it sure sounds like Jesus! Isaiah didn't have to wait for the Messiah to know how he would think, because "the Lord God," who says these words, thought the same way. Please do not confuse "fasting" with dieting, much less with mere penitence, and above all not with short-tempered one-upmanship. We fast especially from indifference, from inaction, from, shall we say, subsidies. Get out there and untie the oppressed, break their heavy yoke, feed the hungry, house the homeless, clothe the naked, look the poor in the face. We fast in anticipation of the return of Jesus, the bridegroom. Even without the bridegroom among us, our fasting is a feast. *Here I am! says the Lord.* MD

Sat., Feb. 21: Isa 58:9b-14; Luke 5:27-32

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

Hold back your foot on the Sabbath from following your own pursuits. May I call this season the "Torah" of Lent, since we are so steeped in what scholars call the First Testament? Readings like the ones today are as challenging as they are unrelenting. We may feel that we are trudging through "the parched land" buried under "ancient ruins," longing for "the spring whose water never fails." But we make the journey so much lighter if we throw off our own pursuits, interests and "malice." Then we can "ride the heights." We can be like Levi, who, at one command from Jesus — "Follow me" — walked away from a career of collaboration with Roman oppression to host a banquet for Jesus and all the other "sinners." *Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth.* MD

First Week of Lent

Mon., Feb. 23: Lev 19:1-2, 11-18; Matt 25:31-46

Whatever you did for one of these least of mine, you did for me. In this parable about the final judgment, Matthew presents Jesus as the king who will judge humankind. No



one is asked what they believe or where they worship. No one has to answer questions about their education, profession, income or marital status. Instead, Jesus makes it very clear that we will be judged by the way we have lived. The season of Lent is a good time to remember that someday we'll be called to account for our choices. Someday we will be asked, "What have you been doing with yourself? What did you do with all the gifts I gave you?" *Open our eyes, Lord Jesus, that we may recognize you in our midst, in each other and in all for whom you died.* JL

Tues., Feb. 24: Isa 55:10-11; Matt 6:7-15

This is how you are to pray. The Lord's Prayer stands at the heart and center of all his teachings. In just a few words, we learn of God's parental characteristics, God's holiness, the hope for God's kingdom, the pervasiveness of sin and our need for God's forgiveness, and the reality of trial and temptation and God's guidance through those times. But I think what I appreciate most about this prayer is that it is a communal prayer. We do not pray to "My Father" but to "Our Father." We do not pray for "my daily bread" but for "our daily bread." We do not pray "Forgive me" but "Forgive us." The life of faith is never just "me and God." Through this prayer, we are connected to everyone, everywhere, who prays these words. *Holy God in heaven, you alone are God. We are your people.* JL

Wed., Feb. 25: Jonah 3:1-10; Luke 11:29-32

So Jonah made ready and went to Nineveh, according to the Lord's bidding. This is the second time God has called Jonah; the first time, Jonah ran away and ended up in the belly of a big fish. This time Jonah doesn't run away. He goes to Nineveh even though he doesn't really want to. In Jonah's day, Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian empire — and Assyria was one of Israel's enemies. Jonah wanted to see the Ninevites destroyed, not saved, so I doubt that he preached with much conviction. Despite his half-hearted efforts, the entire city of Nineveh repented, and God decided not to destroy the city after all. Instead of being pleased and satisfied, Jonah was angry. Jonah wanted those Ninevites to get what he thought they deserved. Jonah couldn't bear to think of God's love being extended to *those* people! *Your love, O God, knows no limits, no boundaries.* JL

Thurs., Feb. 26: Esth C:12, 14-16, 23-25; Matt 7:7-12

Do to others whatever you would have them do to you. We learn the Golden Rule when we're very young: Treat others the way you want to be treated. Perhaps during this season of Lent, we can take time to reflect on our interactions with others — with family, friends and strangers. Were we kind, respectful, loving? Or were we impatient, angry, uninterested? Our faith means little unless it is lived out in our relationships to God and each other. Our discipleship cannot be kept within church walls; Jesus makes it clear that how we treat

others matters. *Guide us as we seek to put our faith into action, O God.* JL

Fri., Feb. 27: Ezek 18:21-28; Matt 5:20-26

You have heard that it was said to your ancestors ... But I say to you ... In this section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus takes familiar laws from the Torah and gives them new meaning. We are challenged to pay attention not just to the letter of the law, but also to the *spirit* of the law. Jesus makes it clear that our choices are always made in relationship to other people. Those who claim to love God but "kill" others with hate, prejudice or insults will be called to account. We cannot make up for broken relationships by bringing an offering to God. *For wisdom and compassion in all relationships, we pray, O God, so that others may see your love.* JL

Sat., Feb. 28: Deut 26:16-19; Matt 5:43-48

Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you. These verses come at the end of this section of Matthew's Gospel, the last of several hard sayings of Jesus. Turn the other cheek. Give your cloak as well. Go the extra mile. Give and lend to those who ask. Love and pray for your enemies. Following these laws may seem virtually impossible; Jesus sets a very high standard for his disciples. For Jesus, the priority always is love: Love God and love neighbor as we love ourselves. This means rejecting violence and recognizing the dignity and worth of each person. Why? Because to God we are all beloved children. God loves us — and God loves them, too. *We have known your love, Holy God, and so we respond by loving others.* JL

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