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In Solidarity with All Peoples
Celebrating the United Nations’ International Days
EDITOR’S CORNER

“Repairer of the breach,’ they shall call you” (Is 58:12). One of this month’s Daily Bread writers, Paige Byrne Shortal, was caught by this quote from Saturday, March 4. Amelia Kunhardt also chose that same reading in her choice for a photograph and text for this issue.

What would our community look like if we decided, during this season of Lent, to be repairers of the breaches around us? Can we not find a breach almost everywhere we turn?

Synonyms for breach include fissure, crack, rupture, rift, but also included is the word, opening. What perspective will we take on breach this Lent? Will we see it as a rupture so deep and wide that nothing can be done to heal this chasm? Will we throw up our hands and walk away? Will we see it as an opening where a new possibility can be found, a new risk can be taken?

There is much work to be done if we are going to repair anything. There is no time to waste.

The mission is clear from Isaiah: Repair it! Pat Sanchez in her column says this about the Samaritan woman who met Jesus at the well: “Transformed by her encounter with Christ, she called her townspeople to also believe, thus setting a pattern for all sinners to emerge from their transformative encounters with Jesus to be preachers of the good news of salvation.”

Once again it is Lent and we hear the familiar stories of those who encountered Jesus, the Messiah. In those stories, we too, meet Jesus who transforms us; clears away our blindness; unbounds us from the trappings of sin; and sends us out with a clear mission: Go. Preach the good news of salvation!

We are restored, transformed, saved. But are we ready?

Special note: Be sure to read and share the feature article by Ann Garrido highlighting some of the United Nations’ International Days. She offers concrete suggestions for ways that parishes and communities can actively stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters across the globe.

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Solidarity with All Peoples

Ideas for celebrating the United Nations’ International Days

By ANN GARRIDO

In recent months, a chill wind has travelled the globe, cooling efforts at collaboration both between and within nations. Talk of white supremacy, isolationism, national “walls,” and religious barriers once thought to belong to a past era are now again front page news. Longstanding alliances are showing cracks; newly budding agreements suffer frost.

“The word ‘solidarity’ is a little worn and at times poorly understood,” admits Pope Francis. In the present moment, this concept — elevated to such prominence in the papacy of John Paul II only thirty years ago — seems dated. But as Francis goes on to remind us, solidarity is the virtue that most needs to be stirred into action as a form of resistance to the current winds. “[I]t refers to something more than a few sporadic acts of generosity. It presumes the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few” (Evangelii Gaudium, “The Joy of the Gospel” #188).

What can the parish do? Certainly many parishes are already involved in acts of social justice and charitable outreach in their immediate community. Such activities are constitutive of what it means to be a Christian community and should never be undervalued in terms of the ways that they build solidarity among neighbors who might never otherwise encounter one another. Yet, the current times call for more than local involvement. They call for a greater awareness of international issues and concerns. They call for a heightened sense of how the choices we make in our own countries impact others. They call for a much more robust understanding of global solidarity.

The United Nations, founded in 1945 immediately following the devastation of World War II, is an international inter-governmental organization of 193 member states. The four central purposes of the UN — as described in the founding charter — are to keep peace throughout the world; to develop friendly relations among nations; to promote social progress, better living standards and human rights; and to be a center for harmonizing the actions of nations to achieve these goals.

Many religious communities of both men and women have established a presence within the UN as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to both lobby and learn from UN representatives regarding issues of global significance. UNANIMA International, for example, is an NGO which is sponsored by 20 congregations of women religious whose 20,000 sisters serve in over 80 countries (www.unanima-international.org).

Grounded in the wisdom gained through international ministry experience and consonant with other religious communities, UNANIMA has identified eight core issues as global concerns demanding greater awareness and coordinated effort by people of good will at this moment in history: women and children; climate change; human trafficking; migration and refugees; water; social development (poverty eradication); financing for development; and indigenous issues.

Historically, one of the ways that the United Nations and its NGOs have raised awareness of important global issues is through the annual celebration of International Days. Currently, there are approximately 130 designated International Days each year. Drawing upon the inspiration of our religious sisters and brothers in the field, parish communities might consider highlighting several International Days each year as a means of practicing global solidarity.

Here I identify nine potential days of particular relevance to Christians. For each of these days, it would be fitting to include the cause in the petitions of the day (during the Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours). In an effort to educate and promote activism, the parish bulletin or website could provide resources with more information and how to become involved. More substantive engagement of the topic might occur through a parish book study, movie night or a special prayer service. Specific suggestions for parish engagement are embedded below.

Please note: Online resources related to the following “feasts” are indicated by an asterisk and are located in the box at the end of this article.

International Women’s Day — March 8

International Women’s Day has its roots in the women’s suffrage movement for women in the U.S., Russia and Europe in the early 1900’s. The March 8th date was established in 1917 when Russian women, against the backdrop of World War I, chose to protest and strike for “Bread and Peace.” The day
was first observed by the United Nations in 1975 during the International Women’s Year. Its purpose is to draw attention to the gender inequalities that persist between men and women in terms of educational access, working conditions, pay and fundamental human rights, while at the same time celebrating the contributions women have made.

**Suggestion:** Consider a parish book study or sponsoring a viewing of the documentary, “Half the Sky.”*

**World Water Day – March 22**

The United Nations first began marking March 22nd as World Water Day in 1993 as a way of raising awareness on the necessity of water for all aspects of our life on earth: producing food, energy and manufactured goods. Only a small percentage of the world’s water is fresh water, and that percentage is gravely endangered by climate change, poor waste management, and industrial abuse. With an estimated 663 million people lacking access to clean water; 800,000 deaths every year are attributable to unsafe water supply and poor sanitation. World Water Day raises awareness of water concerns and encourages sustainable management of the earth’s fresh water supply.

**Suggestion:** During the seasons of Lent and Easter, when we focus so heavily on the sacrament of baptism, consider offering a prayer service specifically on the gift of water. Visit the Catholic Relief Service website* for stories and ideas.

**International Mother Earth Day – April 22**

Earth Day began in 1970 as the brainchild of Wisconsin senator Gaylord Nelson who wanted to launch a “national teach-in on the environment” in response to the devastating 1969 oil spill in Santa Clara, California. The event led to the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency in the U.S. In 1972, the United Nations organized the first UN Conference on the Environment in Stockholm, Sweden. In 2009, the United Nations designated April 22nd as International Mother Earth Day to coordinate with the efforts of the Earth Day Network. On this day in 2016, the historic Paris Agreement on Climate Change was signed at the UN Headquarters in New York.

**Suggestion:** The Catholic Relief Services website* has a plethora of prayer services and activities available to parishes wanting to be attentive to climate change. Relatedly, the Catholics Confront Global Poverty site* makes it easy for parishioners to write their representatives on climate related issues.

**World Refugee Day – June 20**

The United Nations first hosted a convention on refugees in 1951, establishing the UN Refugee Agency. A protocol to protect refugees was agreed upon in 1967. In 2000, the UN decided to designate June 20th as World Refugee Day. The most recent statistics from the UN Refugee Agency indicate that 65.3 million people are currently displaced either from their country-of-origin or within their country-of-origin — the highest number ever recorded since the agency began tracking. Approximately 1 out of every 113 persons globally is either an asylum-seeker, refugee or internally displaced. As reported by the World Economic Forum, approximately half of all refugees come from three countries: Syria, Afghanistan or Somalia.

**Suggestion:** Of particularly grave concern at present is the Syrian refugee crisis. Catholic Relief Services provides helpful resources* for parishioners to become more informed and to encourage action on this issue. The aligned Catholics Confront Global Poverty site* makes it easy to write local representatives on this issue.

**International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples – August 9**

According to UN statistics, there are approximately 370 million indigenous people in the world spread across 90 countries. They represent less than 5 percent of the world’s population, yet they speak the majority of the world’s remaining 7,000 languages and represent 5,000 different cultures. They also represent a disproportionate percentage of the world’s poorest citizens — approximately 15 percent. The United Nations designated 1993 as the International Year of the World’s Indigenous People and in 1994 decided that henceforth August 9th would be marked in their honor. The day is intended to bolster international cooperation on issues that particularly impact indigenous communities including their human rights, education, health, economic development, loss of native language, and the particular way they are negatively impacted by climate change.

**Suggestion:** Consider hosting a parish viewing of the five-part PBS Series “We Shall Remain”* featuring the experience of indigenous peoples in the United States.

**International Eradication of Poverty Day – October 17**

The International Eradication of Poverty Day traces its roots back to Fr. Joseph Wresinski, a French Catholic priest and founder of the ATD-Fourth World movement (see: 4thworldmovement.org), who led a gathering of over 100,000 people at the Human Rights Plaza in Paris on October 17, 1987 to unveil a large
commemorative stone. The stone reads, “Wherever men and women are condemned to live in poverty, human rights are violated. To come together to ensure that these rights be protected is our solemn duty.” Since that time, persons in a number of countries have committed to gathering on the 17th of each month as a way of remembering those in destitution and renewing promises to eradicate extreme poverty. In 1992, the United Nations joined the movement. Since that time replicas of Wresinski’s commemorative stone have been placed in public gathering spaces in 44 cities around the world, including the garden of the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

Suggestion: The website Overcoming Extreme Poverty* offers a variety of global ideas for how to mark this day, and an affiliated website (www.unheard-voices.org) enables parishioners to hear the testimony of persons who come from situations of profound poverty yet rarely appear in the daily news. Also, the Catholic Campaign for Human Development’s site* has a plethora of resources for parish communities, including sample presentations on the theme of poverty.

International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women – November 25

UN statistics suggest one in three women will experience some form of violence in her life, most frequently at the hands of someone she knows well. Women suffer a disproportionate percentage of the sexual assault and domestic abuse that takes place globally, as well as forms of violence specific to women — including bride burnings, honor killings, acid throwing and dowry deaths. Latin American activists began to mark November 25th as a day to raise awareness about violence toward women because it marked the assassination of the Mirelba sisters, three women activists in the Dominican Republic who were murdered in 1960 by the government. In 1999, the United Nations added the day to its annual calendar.

Suggestion: The UN Women’s website* includes an action toolkit that could be used to host a fundraiser for anti-violence events.

International Human Solidarity Day – December 20

Solidarity has long been a foundational principle in Catholic social justice teaching. It has also been one of the principles undergirding the United Nations since the organization’s founding. But it was only in 2002 that the General Assembly established a World Solidarity Fund to help eradicate poverty in developing countries. And, it was only in 2005 that solidarity was articulated by the General Assembly as “one of the fundamental and universal values that should underlie relations between peoples in the Twenty-first century.” At that point December 20th was designated as International Human Solidarity Day.* The day invites persons to deepen their commitment to the well-being of all humans, regardless of ethnicity, nationality or creed. It invites us to remember that in many ways, we are called to be “our brother’s keeper.”

Suggestion: The Catholic Health Association has a substantive online prayer library for national and international observances* that includes services for International Human Solidarity Day connecting the day with Advent themes.

In conclusion, solidarity is never an easy task. It places us in uncomfortable situations and forces us to deal with inconvenient truths. In the words of Pope Francis: “Solidarity is a word that frightens the developed world. People try to avoid saying it. Solidarity to them is almost a bad word.” Francis further insists, “But it is our word! Serving means recognizing and accepting requests for justice and hope, and seeking roads together, real paths that lead to liberation” (Address to Jesuit Refugee Service, September 10, 2013). Through marking these International Days with our sisters and brothers around the globe, we can resist the bitter gusts of division and despair and breathe a different sort of spirit into our hurting world.

Online Resources

A complete list of International Days celebrated by the United Nations can be found at www.un.org/en/sections/observances/international-days

Women – www.halftheskymovement.org
Water – www.crs.org/stories/every-day-world-water-day
Earth – www.crs.org/climate-change
www.confrontglobalpoverty.org/issues/climate-change
www.confrontglobalpoverty.org/issues/syrian-migrant-refugees
Trafficking – www.unanima-international.org/what-we-do/campaigns/stop-the-demand
www.confrontglobalpoverty.org/issues/stop-human-trafficking

Indigenous Peoples – http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/weshallremain
Poverty – www.overcomingpoverty.org/toolbox
www.povertyusa.org/poverty-resources
www.usccb.org/about/catholic-campus-program-human-development
www.chausa.org/prayers

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Mirando y escuchando a dios
El culto y la vida para el mes de marzo 2017

PATRICIA DATCHUCK SÁNCHEZ y RAFAEL SÁNCHEZ ALONSO

Jean Vianney, nacido de padres buenos y piadosos en Dardilly, Francia, en 1786, es el santo patrón de los sacerdotes. Aunque tuvo que luchar para sacar adelante sus estudios en el seminario, sus superiores consideraron que su gran piedad y su entrega al pueblo de Dios eran suficientes para ser ordenado.

Internacionalmente conocido por el nombre de “el Curé d'Ars”, más de 20.000 personas al año llegaban hasta él para confesarse durante las 16 a 18 horas diarias que pasaba en el confesionario. Siendo persona humilde, encontraba sabiduría por doquier: Se cuenta que este buen cura preguntó a un viejito: “¿Cómo haces tantas horas ante el tabernáculo?””

El viejito respondió: “Yo lo miro, y Él me mira.” (Citado en la Carta del Papa Benedicto XVI proclamando el año para los sacerdotes en el 150 aniversario de la muerte del Curé d’Ars, 2009). ¿No es eso precisamente a lo que nuestra Cuaresma nos desafía a todos? Mirar verdaderamente a dioses, escuchar a dioses con humildad y permitirle que nos mire.

Cuando nos rendimos a Dios y nos enfocamos total y únicamente en su voluntad, no podemos sino reconocer la bondad, la grandeza y la santidad única de un Dios que nos llamó a existir (el 5 de marzo), que nos amó aún cuando éramos pecadores (el 17 de marzo), que nos bendijo dándonos la capacidad de ser santos (el 12 de marzo), y que nos hace hijos de la luz (el 26 de marzo). Cuando Jesús se nos acerque durante este santo tiempo de cuaresma tengan esperanza y oremos para que ese encuentro nos transforme y, como las miriadas de almas que nos han ido abriendo camino, respondamos con confianza, con fe y un dedicado servicio a los demás.

Otra persona, al parecer poco idónea para la misericordia de Dios, fue una mujer samaritana. Jesús escogió encontrarse con ella junto al pozo de Jacob (el 19 de marzo); le habló al corazón y ella–hay que darle crédito–lo escuchó. Jesús le habló del agua viva y ella expresó tener una gran sed y, aunque no comprendía bien lo que Jesús quería decir con esa agua viva, continuó escuchándolo y eso permitió que la verdad del agua viva la limpiara. Cuando Jesús la confrontó con su pecado, ella no negó ni objeto; antes bien, miró directamente a Jesús y lo reconoció primero como profeta y después como Cristo. Transformada por su encuentro con Cristo, llevó a los de su pueblo a creer también, estableciendo así un patrón para que los pecadores que salen transformados de su encuentro con Jesús sean portadores de la buena nueva de salvación.

Otro testigo en este mes es el hombre ciego de nacimiento a quien Jesús curó (el 26 de marzo). Mientras que unos sudaban y se burlaban de su curación, el ciego no quiso negar a Jesús. Lo llamó profeta y lo defendió: “Si este hombre no fuera de Dios, no habría podido hacer nada bueno.” Lo echaron de la sinagoga pero Jesús se acercó a él y éste profesó su fe: “Creo, Señor.” Y postrándose lo adoró.

Cuando Jesús se nos acerque durante este santo tiempo de cuaresma tengamos esperanza y oremos para que ese encuentro nos transforme y, como las miriadas de almas que nos han ido abriendo camino, respondamos con confianza, con fe y un dedicado servicio a los demás.
Looking at and Listening to God

Lectionary themes for March 2017

PATRICIA DATCHUCK SÁNCHEZ and RAFAEL SÁNCHEZ ALONSO

Born of good and holy parents in Dardilly, France, in 1786, Jean Vianney went on to become the patron saint of parish priests. Although he struggled with his seminary studies, he was deemed worthy of ordination because of his extreme piety and devotion to God’s people. He became known internationally as the “Curé d’Ars” and was sought after by more than 20,000 people annually for whom he spent 16 to 18 hours daily in the confessional. Humble enough to find wisdom in any source, the great Curé is said to have asked a certain peasant who spent hours before the tabernacle each day: “How can you spend so many hours in contemplation?” He answered: “I look at Him, and He looks at me” (“Letter of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI Proclaiming a Year for Priests on the 150th Anniversary of the ‘Dies Natalis’ of the Curé of Ars”). Isn’t this precisely what our annual observance of Lent challenges each of us to do — to look at God in all truth and humility and to allow God to look at us?

When we dare to surrender ourselves to focus fully and solely on God, we cannot but acknowledge the goodness, the greatness and the unique holiness of the God who has called us into being (March 5), loved us while we were still sinners (March 12), and made keenly aware of ourselves as sinners who too frequently choose to ignore God’s overtures of love (March 5) and grumble like Israel in the desert when God doesn’t seem to meld the divine will to our own (March 19).

To help us to turn from our sinful ways and turn again toward God, we are given the examples of Jesus, both tempted (March 5) and transfigured (March 12). Jesus’ perfect acquiescence to his Father’s will has made him strong when the devil tried to weaken his resolve. Jesus was so transparent that God’s goodness and holiness shown through him. But, rather than allow themselves to become bedazzled by Jesus’ glory, the disciples were told, as we too are told, “This is my beloved Son ... listen to him.”

“When Jesus confronted her with her sin, she didn’t argue or object; rather, she looked clearly at Jesus and recognized him as a prophet and then as the Christ. Transformed by her encounter with Christ, she called her townspeople to also believe, thus setting a pattern for all sinners to emerge from their transformative encounters with Jesus to be preachers of the good news of salvation.

One further witness in this month’s liturgies is the man born blind who was healed by Jesus (March 26). While others doubted and sought to deride his cure, the blind man refused to deny Jesus. He called him a prophet and claimed “If this man were not from God, he would not be able to do anything.” Thrown out of the synagogue, the man was approached by Jesus in whom he professed his faith: “I believe, Lord,” — and he worshipped Jesus.

When we too are approached by Jesus during this holy Lenten season, let us hope and pray that ours will be an equally transformative experience. Like those myriad souls who have struck the path for us, may we respond in trusting faith and dedicated service.

Patricia Datchuck Sánchez and Rafael Sánchez Alonso have been collaborating to provide Lectionary commentaries and homilies for Celebration since 1979.
A Time to Re-Orient
Finding our “true north” on the Lenten journey

By TOM SKORUPA

During their journey of conversion fourth century catechumens ritually turned away from their “dark” lives represented by the west and turned toward the east — the Orient — the direction of light and new dawn. During Lent we likewise are called to a radical reorientation toward God’s way. While at times we may simply need a minor course correction, this holy season, as Pope Francis repeatedly says in his Lenten messages and homilies, is “a favourable time to overcome our existential alienation … to God’s word” (October 4, 2015); it “involves and transforms one’s entire existence, starting with the centre of the person” (March 5, 2014).

Lent’s radical whole-person reorientation is portrayed in this accompanying image by Edward Hays. The compass, surrounded by the thistles of sacrifice and dying to self, points toward “true north,” our way home. There are several paths that lead from the compass, but all pass through the desert and climb the mountain of God to meet at the cross, which in turn opens to the promise of resurrection life and joy. The variety of paths suggests the many God-given resources, a whole network of compasses, that help us navigate the way. Ash Wednesday introduces the disciplines of prayer, fasting and almsgiving, while the Lenten Scriptures refine and extend them into the graced exercise of selfless service, care of for the “least,” mercy, forgiveness, listening, deepening faith and trust in God.

The readings of the First Sunday of Lent clarify our understanding of “true north.” The first humans were made in the image and likeness of God and lived in perfect harmony with God’s will, but they soon allowed the serpent to disorient them. After their fall, all of humanity and the whole earth took on an orientation away from God that we call concupiscence. Our highest values of goodness, beauty and truth — “the tree was good for food, pleasing to the eyes and desirable for gaining wisdom” — were skewed into an attraction to pleasure, possessions and power. Just as natural compasses point to magnetic north, which is a distance away from true north, our gravitational pull is toward sensual gratification, fame, power over others, the misuse of money, and many destructive tendencies that can quickly take our lives “south.” The Gospel’s good news is that, using the primary compass of God’s word to respond to his three desert temptations, Jesus reoriented the magnetic needle of our soul’s compass back to true north, to the worship of God alone. It is from this ground of integrity that Jesus reoriented the disciplines of prayer, fasting and almsgiving to be antidotes to the three great temptations.

The story of the transfiguration of Jesus, proclaimed during this season’s second Sunday, gives us a radiant glimpse into Jesus’ true identity as the true compass, always pointing to and embodying true north. The Father’s instruction to “listen to him” — to obey, follow and align ourselves with Jesus — further reorients us to our own truest identity as an image of God. With the elect in their crucible of conversion, we see this reorientation played out in the next three Sunday Gospels. Unlike the Israelites who lacked fidelity during their desert journey, the woman at the well listens attentively to Jesus during their intensely personal conversation. In the process, she turns away from her accommodation to lesser gods such as pleasure, power, prestige and war represented by her five husbands. Her deep thirst quenched, she gains profound self-understanding, and she learns what it means to worship “in spirit and truth.” In Jesus’ highly relational encounter with the man born blind, we too are invited to be healed of our relative blindness by the compass of faith — seeing as God sees, even as we journey through “the dark valley” described in Sunday’s psalm.

The darkness deepens in the fifth week: crowds try to stone Jesus and some begin to plot his death. But Jesus responds to this deep darkness with an even deeper trust in God. Paradoxically, in the midst of this murky resistance, Jesus greatly clarifies his identity as “True North” by articulating a series of “I am” statements, including Sunday’s climax of his consummate conversation with Lazarus’s sister, Martha: “I am the resurrection and the life.” Moreover, there is no room for any artificial light during Holy Week, when “darkness came over the whole land.” As the Lenten journey becomes a via dolorosa — a path of betrayal, shame, suffering and death — Jesus empties himself in solidarity with all of struggling humanity, embracing the darkness of his passion in order to transform it into pure light. On the cross, Jesus’ compass point zeroes in on the mark, and his fullest identity as True North is revealed even to the Roman centurion: “Truly, this was the Son of God.” As we follow Jesus on this paschal way we share in resurrection truth made eternally real.

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The Journey of a Relationship

By DAVID HEIMANN

Journeys are often defined by a song. Whenever that song is recalled, the rich depth of the journey comes rushing back. The psalms, the songs of Israel and the church, evoke this same enchantment.

Viewed together, the psalms of March both recall a journey of a growing relationship between God and humanity as well as make that journey manifest during Lent. The psalms articulate a bond that Christians know well, the movement from separation towards intimacy, from despair to trust in God. At the center of this journey is an understanding of who Christians are and how God fostered the relationship toward maturity. This journey is worth recalling with a renewed voice so as to invoke a deepening of who we are before God.

The Journey Begins

As the church begins the Lenten season we sing Psalm 51: “Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.” The word “mercy” has been richly explored during the previous Year of Mercy. As recipients of mercy and practitioners of it, hopefully we embody a positive connotation of the word. In its ancient usage, “mercy” is the receipt of a gift not deserved and not earned. The recipient is dependent upon the goodness of the gift-bearer who provides the gift.

This is mercy in proper context, and yet we often hear a shadowed message within the word “mercy.” For too often, the words “have mercy” have come to be synonymous with “have pity.” In contrast to mercy, the receipt of pity bears a much deeper dichotomy where the strength of the giver and weakness of recipient are harshly defined. Be aware of how you hear the word “mercy” when you pray and what it indicates about your relationship to the divine.

Regardless of vocabulary, the voice of the psalm is one of wanting and needing. This is indicative of a relationship to God in its infancy. There, the journey to deep relationship with God begins.

Learning to Trust

On the Second Sunday of Lent, the church prays Psalm 33 which reflects a definite movement in the relationship with God. “Mercy” once again pierces the resonsorial, but with a different tone. No longer is the song about wanting, but instead about trust. This marks a change. No longer are the people of God distant untouchables needing pity but are now within God’s loving gaze for “the eyes of the Lord are upon those who fear him.”

This new relationship is one that is predicated upon trust, and is more like the relationship of a child and parent. The child still wants, still makes requests, but does so with a deeper confidence. The journey reflects a relationship that is maturing from infancy into childhood.

Teenage Heartthrob

On the Third Sunday of Lent, the church sings Psalm 95. Hopefully every human person has had an experience of boundless possibility and unfettered energy. For most however, that unsuppressed realm of boundless hope remains hidden in one’s more youthful past. The psalm this week might be seen through the lens of an adolescent relationship when decisions were gleefully heart-sprung, when you would get a phone call that put butterflies in your stomach and left you with electrifying goose-bumps.

No longer distant, nor the object of a mere glance, the psalmist knows that God is calling. God is speaking the name of his beloved, and with enthusiasm the church sings “If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.” What a change from the first week of Lent! The relationship between God and his people is like that of exuberant adolescence now bursting from the heart.

To Want for Nothing

The beloved Psalm 23 is proclaimed during the Fourth Sunday of Lent. “The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want.” There is a stark contrast between this psalm and the first psalm in Lent which revolves around the word “want.”

The Lenten journey began with a psalm that gave a laundry list of needs and petitions. It began with the appearance of God at a distance. Now the journey has arrived in a place where there is no separation. It can be likened to an intimate, trusting and adult friendship.

Certainly, one could point out the disparity present in the analogy: A shepherd is a human and a sheep is an animal. How can they be “friends?” How can they “trust” in the same way? But remember, the analogy relates to us and God. God is God and no human can ever be. There is no direct comparison. What is comparable is the sense of deep trust, like that of friends.

The relationship has moved, developed and grown. Sing the song of the journey, the song that renews and relives the journey, the song that invites us into a deeper confidence with the one whose infinite mercy cares for us, so that we will never want again.

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Wrestling with Hard Questions

Fast, pray, give alms and, above all, READ!

By GABE HUCK

On Lent’s first Sunday this year we’ll hear the tempter quote Psalm 91: “God instructs angels to guard you wherever you go. With their hands they support you, so your foot will not strike a stone.” In the church this psalm has been a prayer at bedtime, its images and words sung like a lullaby or shouted bravely in the darkness. The verses liken God to a mother bird with the chicks safe under her wings: “God will free you from hunters’ snares, will save you from deadly plague, [God] will cover you like a nesting bird. God’s wings will shelter you.” And this verse from that psalm of one who knows, as the poet Dylan Thomas wrote, “whether we last the night or no, I’m sure is always touch and go.” The psalmist knows that, yet claims: “No night time terror shall you fear; no arrows shot by day; no plague that prowls the dark, no wasting scourge at noon.”

Let those verses lead not to arrogance but to poetry, to documentary and to acquainting ourselves with “the fate of the earth.” Everything in our Eucharist, everything in our Gospels, everything in our very baptism, directs us toward careful, constant and communal judgment about making a life of doing good for the world. Lent only intensifies and insists. Those who would renounce evil better know what it is that they do.

We approach this Lent — homilists and assembly — having had yet another year where fear showed up everywhere: the year of fear triumph. The arrows and worse still fly by day, and we had all best recognize what the psalm calls “plagues that prowl the dark”— new diseases, new hysterias, new certainties that “they” hate us. New weapons, new alarms, new protections are always for sale. Those so-called protectors exploit our fears. Some offer walls and deportations, some try to convince us that we should fear the immigrant, the Muslim, the poor.

All these and more serve to distract us from the gradual rising of the oceans and the deserts where once there were crops. How foolish we are, how arrogant too, when we bring down the price of gas and raise the likelihood of a world too warm, a planet that will roast and then go on without us. Who among us, in the U.S. and beyond, challenged would-be leaders to speak of this global warming? What is the life of the third or fourth generation after us worth to us? Who profits from this refusal to live more simply so that coming generations can live at all? Who among us raises a demanding voice to challenge the enormous cost of a military that polices much of the world?

Is it beyond us to solve this, beyond us to face it, beyond us to grapple? So it often seems. Such questions seem not on the agenda of our church leadership right now. Fine. Why should that stop us? This Lent we shall read what we have hesitated to read before. In doing so we shall dig together for our failures and the reason why. The powers-that-be are so confident we won’t try that they don’t bother with censorship here. Why should they? Who has time to read? Who has time to dig into the books and articles that offer studied examinations of such things as living wages; solar energy; single payer; finding and keeping good teachers at every level; a better tax system; the flow of national wealth into fewer and fewer hands; the failure to deal with false witness; lies repeated until we believe them: “It’s those illegal immigrants who cause unemployment.”

Francis, Bishop of Rome, raises these questions and more in his speaking and writing. Deeper questions go further: human rights vs. property rights; equality of women and men; control of the economy; freeing the UN from the Security Council veto power; the new Jim Crow world of prison and poverty; police violence.

If troubling questions were not asked last year about how to turn back from a world without human life, neither were the contestants asked about the cost of U.S. dominance, the weapons industry as a sure profit center; the sale of security equipment and those devices that make sure we’re all watched, heard and tracked. Why do we again and again play the fool to those in politics and press?

Lent is our time and place to find serious and creative ways to involve our preaching and our parishes in such questions. This is not to take Lent as some sort of 40-day punishment, but as a time when we recognize specific things that can, in the 40 days, become part of our lives ever after. It is a rehearsal season when we learn how to play the part the Gospel has for us: seeking after truth, seeking after justice (including justice in the church).

Lent is a rehearsal season when we learn how to play the part the Gospel has for us: seeking after truth, seeking after justice (including justice in the church).

And for you who read this edition of Celebration, figure out how that’s to be done in your community. I offer one urgent idea here. We are making progress when, more and more, we are willing to explore the question: “What can I do to fix what’s broken in our world, church, nation?”
My answer is: Read. Read. Read. It is clear that those who like the status quo don’t worry about Americans starting to read deeply into issues. We’re too busy. Too tired. Too broke. Too easily entertained by the TV or amused by Facebook. Change that. Alone or with others delve into thoughtful writing on the problems we can’t leave to the rich and powerful. How can Lent – first but not only – be a time to set off together on this adventure? Can we challenge ourselves and invite at least one out of three adult parishioners to form groups small enough so all can be heard, large enough to ensure lively discussion.

Make the focus clear. Existing groups can make Lent a time when other business is put aside. But this isn’t for only the faithful few. Other places and times are offered for weekly gatherings. The reading of each week is to be serious and doable, drawn mostly from periodicals and reproduced for all. Ask permission but, frankly, who wouldn’t give permission to show how strong their periodical is — after all, it might even sell subscriptions. Chapters of books are another possibility.

The essentials for the common good include: distribute the article or chapter in time to read, reflect and ponder their questions for each other before the meeting. Some groups may rotate leadership but others won’t. The challenge is to move forward, to discuss what hasn’t been discussed before, to dig in, go beyond, make judgments.

**Lenten Reading Suggestions**

I want to offer readings for the six weeks of Lent.* These examples are the challenging sort of reading we need to engage and discuss. They are not the usual Scripture discussion, nor are they about “church” topics. Instead they focus on the obligation we have to understand our world and then do something. It’s like the “observe, judge, act” initiatives in some parishes before and after Vatican II. (Also consider exploring the resources provided by the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council where theological reflection is explained: [www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/files/Social-Teaching/Reading_the_Signs_of_the_Times.pdf](http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/files/Social-Teaching/Reading_the_Signs_of_the_Times.pdf).)

Encourage people to read on paper if possible (rather than the computer screen) and to make notes for the discussion including questions, clarification, disagreement. All are needed.

*Editor’s Note: As a special feature to the March 2017 issue, the recommended reading list by this author will be posted on the Celebration subscriber page. To view this list, visit www.celebrationpublications.org. This resource featuring weekly readings is an example of how to encourage depth and breadth in your reading and discussion during Lent. The articles can be used in any order. Hopefully, this activity of reading, reflecting and discussing will invite us to think critically, to learn from others and their perspective, and, to engage in topics and issues we often avoid.

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**WORDS**

**Carrion Comfort**

Not, I’ll not, carrion comfort, Despair, not feast on thee; Not untwist — slack they may be — these last strands of man In me ør, most weary, cry I can no more. I can; Can something, hope, wish day come, not choose not to be. But ah, but O thou terrible, why wouldst thou rude on me Thy wring-world right foot rock? lay a lionlimb against me? scan With darksome devouring eyes my bruisèd bones? and fan, O in turns of tempest, me heaped there; me frantic to avoid thee and flee? Why? That my chaff might fly; my grain lie, sheer and clear. Nay in all that toil, that coil, since (seems) I kissed the rod, Hand rather, my heart lo! lapped strength, stole joy, would laugh, chéer. Cheer whom though? the hero whose heaven-handling flung me, fóot tród Me? or me that fought him? O which one? is it each one? That night, that year Of now done darkness I wretch lay wrestling with (my God!) my God.

—Gerard Manley Hopkins

Lent is not tidy. Days grow longer (the word “Lent” comes from “lengthen”), the ground thaws, and the next thing we know, everything is filthy. Our windows need washing, our temples need cleansing, the earth itself needs a good bath. The English names of these months come from ancient words that reflect the need to roll up our sleeves this season: February (“purification”) and March (“the spirit of war”). Good names. Winter doesn’t leave without blustery battles that push things over and mess things up and even break things. Lent, if we honestly face its fury, will leave the landscape littered with bits and pieces of ourselves.

Pope Francis’ Pastoral Revolution

Our mission: Practice the “logic of integration”

By BIAGIO MAZZA

Among the nine chapters of Amoris Laetitia (“The Joy of Love”), Pope Francis’ Apostolic Exhortation (the summing up of the sharing, discussion and insights of the two Synods on the Family in 2014 and 2015), is a section titled, “Accompanying, Discerning and Integrating Weakness.” The chapter is addressed to all people of faith, most especially pastoral leaders who are called upon to accompany, discern with and integrate into community life all those who are in “irregular or imperfect” relationships, married or otherwise. Francis challenges all pastoral leaders, and by extension the entire church, to practice and learn how to implement “the logic of integration” (AL #299).

In this crucial paragraph, Francis quotes the synod bishops in seeing the need to integrate the divorced and civily remarried into the community as much as possible without creating scandal. This would apply not only to those who are divorced and have civily remarried but to all those whose external actions and/or relationships that might put them at odds with church teaching and practice because they are involved in “irregular or imperfect” situations.

When dealing with all people, especially those whose situation is at odds with church teaching and practice, Francis insists that “the logic of integration is key to their pastoral care, a care which would allow them not only to realize that they belong to the church as the body of Christ, but also to know that they can have a joyful and fruitful experience in it” (Ibid.). The logic of integration flows from the realization that no matter what their situation, they are still our brothers and sisters in the Lord, and that the Spirit still “pours into their hearts gifts and talents for the good of all” (Ibid.). By not integrating them into Christian community, we are deprived of their gifts and the grace that the Spirit continues to pour out into their hearts.

Francis has cracked open the shut door of full participation in the church’s life for all those in “irregular or imperfect” situations.

Francis reminds us that the divorced and civily remarried, as well as all others at odds with church teaching and practice, should not be made to feel as if they are excommunicated or no longer considered part of the Christian community. This would violate the logic of integration which, for Francis is at the core of pastoral care. Rather, through a process of pastoral accompaniment and discernment, their participation and gifts can be activated in various ministries. Francis challenges all pastoral leaders to discern “which of the various forms of exclusion currently practiced in the liturgical, pastoral, educational and institutional framework, can be surmounted” (Ibid.). By doing so, we treat all as “living members” of our community and thus experience the church as a welcoming home in which they can live and grow. The church must present herself as “a mother who welcomes them always, who takes care of them with affection and encourages them along the path of life and the Gospel” (Ibid.).

Francis’ logic of integration has been criticized and opposed by those who feel that in so doing, Francis is watering down and diluting church teaching and practice. Francis is aware of the criticism and thus responds:

I understand those who prefer a more rigorous pastoral care which leaves no room for confusion. But I sincerely believe that Jesus wants a Church attentive to the goodness which the Holy Spirit sows in the midst of human weakness, a Mother who, while clearly expressing her objective teaching, always does what good she can, even if in the process, her shoes get soiled by the mud of the street. (AL #308)

Francis continues to defend his logic of integration that is full of mercy and compassion by insisting that:

Because of forms of conditioning and mitigating factors, it is possible that in an objective situation of sin – which may not be subjectively culpable or fully such – a person can be living in God’s grace, can love and can also grow in the life of grace and charity, while receiving the Church’s help to this end. (AL #305)

In the footnote (no. 351) to the quote posted above, Pope Francis references Evangelii Gaudium (“The Joy of the Gospel”). In noting the role of the sacraments, the footnote reminds the reader that “...the confessional must not be a torture chamber but rather an encounter with the Lord’s mercy” (EG #44). Furthermore, it states that the Eucharist “is not a prize for the perfect, but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak” (EG #47).

By insisting that the church practice the logic of integration, Francis has cracked open the shut door of full participation in the church’s life for all those in “irregular or imperfect” situations. Full participation includes not only involvement in the church’s ministerial life, but also its sacramental life, most especially the Eucharist. Let us learn Francis’ logic of integration and practice it with fullness of mercy and compassion.

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Law and Order (and Grace)

The “Gospel of Matthew” edition

By MOIRA BUCCIARELLI

During Lent we contemplate sin in the world and in ourselves. The Gospel of Matthew gives us a way to think about sin by looking at its inverse partner: law. For without law there might be no sin or consequences for it. Matthew can usually be counted on to remind us of this connection in the most unsettling of ways: “If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away” (Matthew 5:29).

Upon hearing these words, one could ask: “Why is Matthew so harsh? What happened to the God of love and mercy?”

Matthew lived with an expectation that the end times were imminent. His community had to get right with God (and with each other) — fast. Or in Matthew’s language they needed to become more righteous. We can relate to this urgency because our physical bodies have their own built-in apocalypse: death. Why not reconcile with God and neighbor before we leave this world?

Similar to the Hebrew prophets, Matthew uses shock value as a rhetorical device. By being extreme and dramatic, Matthew rouses the sleepers nodding off in the back pews. He does not mean that you should literally gouge out your eye. But in the words of our Buddhist friends, he does want you to wake up.

Matthew reminds us how easy it is to focus on the big sins, and write off our smaller ones. To that end, one could say, “Well, I never murdered anyone, or stole anything, so I’m basically okay!” “No,” says Matthew. Even as you call someone an idiot as they fail to signal their lane — you are drawing from the very same well as the one who takes another’s life.

It is poor moral reasoning — to equate murder with a slip of the tongue. But here Jesus calls our attention to the sources of our minor sins: egotism, fear, arrogance, anger, a desire to control. Jesus calls us to honesty, to self-awareness, and more importantly, to reconciling actions.

The British Catholic writer Graham Greene knew this truth. In his novella, The Power and the Glory, an alcoholic Catholic priest in Mexico during the 1930s thinks to himself:

That was another mystery: it sometimes seemed to him that venial sins — impatience, an unimportant lie, pride, a neglected opportunity — cut you off from grace more completely than the worst sins of all.

Martin Luther, the former Catholic monk who became the leader of the Protestant Reformation, was obsessed with sin and law. Why? Because for Luther, sin was connected to justice. If God was just, that meant that evildoers would be punished and the righteous rewarded.

For Luther, the world would make no sense if villains could bully, steal, lie, cheat, oppress, murder and abuse without any consequences. And like Matthew, Luther did not see a question of degree; even a small sin could derail one’s ultimate destiny.

As a result Luther became a compulsive penitent. Luther could never be certain he had confessed all his sins and so could never be sin-free.

Thankfully, Luther had a wise confessor, who told him to read the mysteries for they know a God of love.

Luther didn’t settle on the God of love, but through love, he came to grace — the idea that God fills our gaps. He saw that to dig ourselves out of our self-made holes, we will always need that mystery of grace, that gentle spirit that makes us better than we ever could be on our own.

We tend to think of law in terms of obedience or a measuring stick — or worse, checking boxes. But what if we think of law as a call to conscience, which at its root is a call to self-awareness? Like Luther, Matthew and Greene, we can take seriously those thoughts, actions and impulses that lead us away from God, or that harm ourselves or others. We can do the uncomfortable work that is called an examination of conscience. The Jesuit spiritual master Ignatius of Loyola recommended that we do this every evening before we fall asleep. Perhaps this is a Lenten practice calling out to each one of us.

This practice does not mean beating ourselves up and never feeling good enough. (Sadly, Catholics have been all too good at that.) Rather it is an exercise in self-awareness, in honesty, and a renewal of our desire to be closer to God and to others.

As we journey through this season of Lent we seek an interior repentence. In words of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, that repentance is “a radical reorientation of our whole life, a return, a conversion to God with all our heart ... At the same time it entails the desire and resolution to change one’s life, with hope in God’s mercy and trust in the help of [God’s] grace” (#1431).

May these forty days help each of us discern the careful balance between law, order and grace.

Moira Bucciarelli, M.T.S., has written and edited articles on religion and spirituality for both secular and Catholic publications. She lives in Decatur, Ga., and is currently working on telling stories of forgotten women in the Christian tradition.
BY HERBERT ELY

In the Year of Mercy, the church gave special attention to welcoming people with disabilities. Although the physical conditions of blindness and deafness were highlighted in a recent report from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), the report overlooks a much larger population. (To explore this document, visit www.cara.georgetown.edu/Disabilities.pdf.) While about 2 percent of the population experience deafness, about 15 percent suffer mild to moderate hearing loss. Their need is less noticeable, but real and unspoken. Hearing loss is the invisible disability. Fifty percent of people over age 75 have disabling hearing loss. These numbers should be a concern for parish communities, lectors and homilists.

Parishes make accommodations for the physically handicapped and would never keep a physically disabled person from the Eucharist. Eucharistic ministers carry bread and wine to them. Parishes make provisions for those who are deaf or have profound hearing loss. Yet, many who have mild to moderate hearing loss experience the proclamation of Scripture as garbled, confusing or even misleading. How do we carry the word to them? Since we believe that God is present in both word and sacrament, we should find this disturbing in the extreme. A parish that allows the words of the liturgy to be garbled is not just unwelcoming, it is failing in its mission to preach the Gospel.

For most who are hard of hearing the basic challenge is not volume — it is word recognition. Their pleas are: “You don’t need to speak louder; just slower.” The reason for this is that most hearing loss is for higher frequency sounds. Consonants are higher in frequency than vowels and have similar sounds. As an example, when discussing a medical problem, the speaker might say “pill” yet the listener might hear “bill.” Depending on the context, either meaning could be correct. When the speaker talks rapidly, the listener can easily misconstrue either word for the other.

For a parish that is welcoming, as Pope Francis urges, a ministry to the hearing challenged would be conducted on three levels: liturgical, educational and pastoral. On each level, there are some changes that can be implemented easily while others may require more time and effort.

Since word recognition is the basic problem, we must begin on several levels. Consider the following recommendations.

Train homilists and lectors to speak less rapidly and enunciate clearly.

Use microphones properly. In our travels my wife and I have seen parishes in which the lectors read clearly but the microphone was pointed away from their faces.

The challenge of word recognition is greater when listening to music. Printed lyrics make it much easier to understand words. Whenever possible, hymns should be announced and available in hymnals.

Background noise makes word recognition much more difficult. Parishioners should understand that noise of any kind interferes with the listener’s desire to experience the presence of the Lord in the Scripture as proclaimed and preached.

Parishes could consider installing a hearing loop system. The hearing loop transmits sound wirelessly to properly equipped hearing aids. Separate headphones are supplied to those who do not have them. (While a hearing loop system, homilists who speak loudly may still be garbled, speech louder.) Hearing loop equipment does have additional costs but perhaps a specific pastoral fund can be created.

Closed captioning is an option in some places. Some parishes engage it only for music while others use it for all parts of the Mass including the homily. Some may see it as a distraction but if it aids people to listen, worship and pray it seems appropriate that parish leadership groups could discuss this option where possible and educate parishioners as needed.

Each diocese should assist parishes in engaging qualified sound professionals who can evaluate a parish’s sound system and recommend improvements. In some cases, it may be recommended that the acoustic environment by changed.

Parishes should include those with hearing issues in their health ministry. Since it is gradual, people are unaware that reduced hearing brings emotional, spiritual and medical risks. Health education programs could provide instruction on the danger of hearing loss and its impact on families. Screening programs could provide hearing tests, initial counseling and provide referrals to professionals.

Pastoral care can help people recognize the dangers involved. Often people feel embarrassed or fearful of what they might discover if they pursue testing of any kind. Resentment, fear, anxiety and family disruption can result from people losing some hearing ability. Often people who are aging experience slowly declining levels of ordinary skills and need help in overcoming denial, learning trust in the face of diminishing powers, and developing social skills to cope with difficult situations. Financial help and spiritual counseling might also be needed and welcomed.

As faith communities, we must find a way to be present. In listening to the concerns of our parishioners, we in turn, are compelled to accommodate all so each may fully hear the saving word of God.

Herbert Ely is a member of the Church of the Incarnation in Charlottesville, Va. His parish has a hearing loop system, homilists who speak clearly and proclaimers who know how to use a microphone properly.
Place of Refuge
Offering a #sanctuarycampus to college students

By COLLEEN DUNNE

“I am so afraid for my family and friends. What's going to happen now?”
This was the emotional question a college student asked me on a recent retreat. Anxious about her future and her family, this young woman is among the 7 million people at risk of being deported if promises made in the recent campaign become a reality. She suddenly experienced an unbelievable feeling of uncertainty about the dreams she was pursuing. As I listened to this young woman worry for her friends and family I felt an overwhelming sense of compassion for this emerging population of marginalized people who now find it more necessary than ever to live in isolation. This student feels scared, uncertain about who she can trust to talk about her situation. She feels alone.

Recently after moving to a new state to begin a job serving in a university, I found myself in a community that is culturally and economically diverse, more so than some of my previous experiences. As a university community, there are students from both rural and urban areas, students of many different ethnic descents, both undocumented students and students who come from families with immigrant or refugee status, as well as students whose first language is often one other than English.

With this diversity has come our community’s commitment to raise awareness and serve those living on the margins. The school has a very concentrated effort to educate those who are the first-generation to attend college. This involves preparing not only students but families for all that college involves financially and academically as well as providing very generous financial assistance to ensure success for these students. Many students on this campus, not only in this program, are from families who have come to the United States in search of better opportunities for their children and the chance for education.

During these past months, there has been a lot of dialogue about what it means for persons representing diverse backgrounds to find employment and professional engagement that honors their goals and dreams. Students who do not have legal citizenship status face challenges for what the political climate holds for their education and families even if they have been raised and educated in the United States.

In response to these concerns many are discussing how to support those vulnerable to possible mass deportations. This growing movement identified by the hashtag #sanctuarycampus encourages colleges and universities to “claim space of resistance and protection for our country’s most vulnerable people — including undocumented immigrants, Muslims, black people, and queer folks” (Visit www.lahuelga.com/sanctuarycampus to learn about this nationwide movement). With the fear of enforced deportation looming for millions of people, those who are studying at colleges and universities are asking their schools to protect financial aid and registration files from government inquiry and to continue to support education for students at risk of being affected.

At the request of the students who support this movement, many schools have explored the idea of becoming a “Sanctuary Campus.” Some schools, including Reed College, Wesleyan University, Brown University and the University of Wisconsin at Madison, have explored legal possibilities and limits of actions their campuses could take to provide sanctuary. With some limitations of what a campus could accomplish, the movement — which is largely symbolic at this point — does assure students they seek to protect the opportunity for an education.

Shortly after the U.S. 2016 presidential election, Rev. John Jenkins, president of the University of Notre Dame, addressed students at an ecumenical prayer service: “You accepted our invitation to come to Notre Dame, you are part of our family. We will do everything we can to ensure that you complete your education, and you are supported in every way possible.”

As a campus minister, I am privileged to walk with these vulnerable students and to offer reassurance to those in fear of losing their educational and life goals. I told the young woman at the retreat that I am willing to support her fight to realize her dreams. In the true sense of sanctuary, that is a place of refuge and shelter from harm, I assured her that her school would protect her.

The emerging population of marginalized young people demands a new awareness. It calls us to re-examine who are the fragile and vulnerable in our midst.

The emerging population of marginalized young people demands a new awareness. It calls us to re-examine who are the fragile and vulnerable in our midst. Through this experience, I have come to realize that I no longer need to visit a shelter or an inner-city neighborhood to encounter the abandoned and forgotten. The marginalized and those in need of safety and refuge are right in front of me. All I need to do is visit the classrooms and residence halls where I spent my time.

Could that be true perhaps for many of us?

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Lent is Advent’s poor relation. But its poverty offers Christians great riches. So far, Walmart hasn’t figured out a way to fill the aisles with Lenten merchandise. A plastic Minion figurine peering out of his oversized glasses while holding a plastic image of the crucified Christ doesn’t offer many marketing or spin-off possibilities. “O Sacred Head Surrounded” wafting from the loud-speakers in early spring doesn’t really make anyone want to buy another cell phone or more under eye concealer.

No one has yet figured out a way to create a counterpart to the “Elf on the Shelf” (perhaps “Judas on the Shelf”) to encourage naughty children to be good in hopes of finding a basket filled with goodies on Easter Sunday morning. Even “The Passion of the Christ,” Mel Gibson’s attempt to create a mass-market Lenten movie, won’t be showing up on the massive screens that line the walls of the nation’s electronic departments. Scouring scares away the customers.

So, Christians, rejoice! It’s Lent all March long.

Teachers speak of the “Lenten tripod” of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. I always think of the wooden stools my grandfather built and painted and gave out to the mothers in the family to use in their kitchens. The stools had three legs and they were sturdy and true. I still have and use one, though it’s now probably seventy years old. But if one of the legs were to be cut off, the stool could not hold any weight. It would wobble and tip and anyone trying to stand atop it would fall. Our Lenten practices together hold us up, support us and help us to reach up to Easter and the resurrection.

Our Lenten practices together hold us up, support us and help us to reach up to Easter and the resurrection.

Prayer, fasting and almsgiving — like the Trinity — make a seamless whole. But for me — living as I do in a time and a place where it is never quiet, never not “LED-lit,” where it is never truly dark, except perhaps in our overstuffed souls — the opportunity the church offers for prayer, for stillness, for time in “the watches of the night,” is a gift. Let’s receive it and accept its abundance.

One simple practice is to take the Advent candles, strip away the greenery and place them, unadorned, on a table or shelf where you can sit or stand each day in prayer. A model for our prayer in these days might be found in the so-called cursing psalms, psalms so violent in their cries for vengeance against David’s foes that we recoil, even as they speak to our own vengeful hearts. We are all familiar with the haunting opening lines of Psalm 137:

By the rivers of Babylon there we sat weeping when we remembered Zion.

But few rarely remember how it ends, a cry for the destruction of Babylon:

Blessed the one who seizes your children and smashes them against the rock.

We recoil, in part, because the heads of Babylonian children are, this day, being smashed against the rocks. How then can these words lead us deeper into prayer? David isn’t trying to photoshop his heart, so he comes before God naked, stripped, just as he put off his royal dignity and danced “with all his might” before the Ark of the Covenant. The writer of 2 Samuel tells us that David’s wife, Michal, was angry over his display, telling him: “How well the King of Israel honored himself today, exposing himself to the view of slave girls of his followers, as a commoner might expose himself” (6:20).

Michal wants David to clean it up before God and his subjects, to present a proper image of a proper king, well-dressed and well-behaved. But David, for all his many sins, has the gift of nakedness before God, body and soul, heart and mind. He prays his wants, his needs, his fears, his anger, his hatred and his failure, as well as his praise and thanksgiving.

That David prays for his enemies and their children to be destroyed does not mean that this is God’s will or God’s way. God is not a short-order cook waiting to serve up what we ask. “One serving of smashed children from the king down in Israel?” “Coming right up!”

David’s prayer only shows us the way to a radical openness before God, an honesty that pierces through all the facades we cobble together, and reveals instead our broken hearts. I speak of hearts — ours, mine — too broken to love, too broken to forgive, too broken to do anything but cry out for others to be broken as we are, to be smashed against the rocks.

Lent reminds us that, like the Israel in exile of Psalm 137, we sing our songs in a strange land. But still we sing, still we pray, and our songs and our prayers ring out in truth when we sing and pray with all our might, naked before the Lord.
Preparing Music for Good Friday
The church at prayer during the Paschal Triduum

By J. MICHAEL McMAHON

The Roman Rite is well known for a certain sobriety or “noble simplicity” as it is described in the Second Vatican Council’s document, Sacrosanctum Concilium, “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy” (#34). There is perhaps no occasion during the year that embodies that sobriety more than the when the church observes the Passion of the Lord on Good Friday. Musicians and pastoral leaders should keep this consideration in mind when making musical choices for this day.

One way of expressing “noble simplicity” on Good Friday would be to carry on the long-standing tradition of unaccompanied singing for most if not all of this liturgy. At the very least, musicians should pay attention to the directives within the Roman Missal which states that from the Gloria on Holy Thursday until the Gloria of the Easter Vigil, instruments should be used only to support the singing. Keep it simple!

Gathering in Silence
The Good Friday liturgy is integral to the related to the other major liturgies of the Easter Triduum. Just as the Evening Mass of the Lord’s Supper ends in silence after the transfer of the Blessed Sacrament to its place of repose, so does the Celebration of the Passion of the Lord begin with silence. For musicians this requires the discipline to refrain from prelude music and planning to foster a deep silence in the gathering assembly as people enter the church, especially in communities accustomed to conversation before the liturgy.

Singing the Word
Though longer than usual, the shape of the Liturgy of the Word is the same as on other days, with Psalm 31 sung after the first reading and a Gospel acclamation before the proclamation of the Passion, which on Good Friday is always from the Gospel of John. The Passion may be sung as well, divided among three voices. Well-crafted settings of this text are available from major publishers of Catholic liturgical music.

Singing the Church’s Prayer
Among the distinctive elements of the Good Friday liturgy are the extended solemn intercessions that follow the homily. A deacon or cantor may sing the invitation to each prayer, as well as the invitation for the congregation to make a posture of prayer or to sing a communal response. The presider then sings or recites the prayer. While it is ideal for him to sing the entire prayer, he may sing just the conclusion, followed by a sung Amen by the assembly.

Singing the Cross
The primary ritual action of this liturgy is the showing and adoration (i.e., veneration) of the cross. The showing of the cross is accompanied by a three-fold dialogue, which may be sung by the deacon or priest carrying the cross, or if singing is difficult for the ordained minister, by a cantor.

During the assembly’s procession to venerate the cross, various antiphons, psalms, hymns and choral anthems may be sung. The traditional text for this action, the Reproaches, may be chanted, sung by the choir (e.g., Victoria’s 16th century classic setting) or sung in an updated congregational setting (e.g., Paul Inwood’s version from OCP).

If the assembly is large, it would be wise to plan for a variety of music. Here are some suggestions of appropriate hymns and songs that can be found in widely used hymnals and worship resources:

- Behold the Wood – Schutte (OCP)
- Crux Fidelis – Warner (WLP)
- In the Cross of Christ – Haugen (GIA)
- Lord, We Adore You – Walker (OCP)
- My Song Is Love Unknown
- O Sacred Head Surrounded
- Ours Were the Griefs He Bore – Dean (OCP)
- Sing, My Tongue / Faithful Cross
- Tree of Life – Haugen (GIA)
- We Acclaim the Cross of Jesus – Siwek (WLP)
- Were You There
- When I Survey the Wondrous Cross
- Wood of the Cross – Alstott (OCP)

Singing Communion with the Crucified Lord
Although the Eucharist is not celebrated on Good Friday, Communion is distributed from the reserved sacrament. During Communion, the Roman Missal suggests that a setting of Psalm 22 (“My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”) would be appropriate, but a more familiar hymn may be used.

Dispersing in Silence
The Good Friday liturgy concludes as simply as it began — in silence. The community disperses but continues to pray and watch until they gather again in silence to proclaim the light of Christ at the great Vigil.
March 2017

*Forty Days and Forty Nights (G) W4 466/GC2 411/G3 483/LMGM2 288/JS2 380/JS3 450/OF 421/WC 555/WS 454/BB 134/SS 794
*From Ashes to the Living Font (G) OF 420/W4 463/GC2 402/G3 474/WC 558/WS 453/SS 807
From the Depths of Sin and Sadness (Ps) OF 435/CBW 487/WS 568
Give Me a Clean Heart (Ps) LMGM2 625
God Never Fails (Ps) LMGM2 578
God of Abraham (1, G) JS2 555
God Will Take Care of You (G, C) LMGM2 409
Gracious God (G) BB 117
Guide My Feet (G, C) GC2 684/G3 780/LMGM2 537
*Have Mercy, Lord, on Us (Ps) W4 665/OF 577/CBW 358/WC 706
Hold Me in Life (G) JS2 702
Hold Us in Your Mercy (Ps) 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 509
Jesus, Lead the Way (G) W4 715/GC2 632/G3 732
*Jesus, Tempted in the Desert (G) W4 459/LMGM2 290
Jesus Walked This Lonesome Valley (G) GC2 406/JS2 387/JS3 356/OF 423/WC 566/WS 463
Journeysong (G) JS2 759/JS3 731
*Led by the Spirit (G) JS3 351/BB 122

*Lord Jesus Christ – Browning (Ps) GC2 409/G3 477
*Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days (G) W4 461/GC2 416/G3 479/LMGM2 285/JS2 391/JS3 352/CBW 367/BB 136/SS 800
*Mercy, O God (Ps) GC2 417/G3 480/SS 792
*Not on Bread Alone (C) PSL A-31/SS 372
Now in This Banquet – Lenten ref GC2 825/G3 937
O Christ, Bright Sun of Justice (G) JS2 389
O God, Who Gives Us Life and Breath (1) W4 677
*O Lord, Throughout These Forty Days (G) CBW 367
O Lord, Your Mercy Does Extend (1, Ps, 2, G) OF 428/WC 556/WS 451
O Word of God (G) JS3 645/MI-BB 593
*On Eagle’s Wings (Ps, G, C) JS2 704/JS3 671/W4 690/GC2 593/G3 691/OF 789/WC 889/WS 705/MI-BB 435/SS 930
Out of Darkness – Walker (2) JS2 390/JS3 724/MI-BB 505
Parce Domine (Ps, Lat-Eng) W4 469/GC2 412/G3 473/JS2 376/JS3 344/OF 422/WC 562/WS 455/BB 123/SS 805
Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness (G) G3 625/OF 637/CBW 582/WS 613
Praise to You, O Christ, Our Savior (G) JS2 730/JS3 643/W4 591/GC2 517/G3 596/CBW 442/MI-BB 589
Remember Your Love – Dameans (Ps) GC2 851/G3 961/JS2 561/JS3 533/MI-BB 660
Restore in Us, O God (Ps) W4 476
*Return to God – Angotti (G) OF 427/WC 564/WS 462

1ST SUNDAY OF LENT

March 5, 2017
Psalm of the Day: Ps 51
See also suggestions for Ash Wednesday, March 1.
Be Merciful, O Lord (Alstott) JS3 883
Be Merciful, O Lord (Bedford) OF 979
Be Merciful, O Lord (Craig) W4 1027
Be Merciful, O Lord (Guimont) GC2 904/G3 1016
Be Merciful, O Lord (Hunstiger) SS 539
Be Merciful, O Lord (Louis) LMGM2 816
Be Merciful, O Lord (Schiavone) JS2 903
We Have Sinned, Lord PSL A-30/SS 456
Songs for the Liturgy
Again We Keep This Sollemn Fast (G) W4 474/GC2 407/G3 487/JS2 394/JS3 353/OF 419/CBW 352/WC 560/WS 448/BB 131/SS 793
Anoint Us (Ps) LMGM2 775
Attend Domine (1, Ps, Lat-Eng) W4 473/JS2 378/JS3 346/OF 418/WC 557/WS 452/BB 118/SS 788
*Be with Me, O God (Ps) JS2 667
Before the Fruit Is Ripened by the Sun (G) W4 468
Beyond the Days (G) JS2 384/JS3 360/BB 125
*Blest Be the Lord (G) JS2 708/JS3 677/GC2 585/G3 686/MI-BB 429
Bread of Life, Hope of the World (G) JS2 819/JS3 788/CBW 597/MI-BB 319
Eternal Lord of Love (G) JS2 390/CBW 360

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
CBW=Catholic Book of Worship III (1994)
GIA Publications, Inc. (GIA), www.giamusic.com
BFW=By Flowing Waters (1999); PSL=Psallite, Year A (2007), Year C (2006); SS=Sacred Song (2011) OCP, www.ocp.org
World Library Publications (WLP), www.wlpmusic.com
IH+Introit Hymns for the Church Year (2005); OF=One in Faith (2014); WC=We Celebrate (2014); WS=Word and Song (2017)
PREPARATION: MUSIC

Return to the Lord (Ps) GC2 415/G3 471
Save Your People (G) JS3 364/BB 129
Seek the Lord (Ps) JS2 558/JS3 531/GC2 395/MI-BB 658
Sinner, Please Don’t Let This Harvest Pass (Ps) LGMG2 774
Strength for the Journey (2, G) OF 712/WC 811/WS 657
*The Glory of These Forty Days (G) W4 467/GC2 397/G3 481/LGMG2 284/JS2 379/JS3 347/OF 429/WC 567/WS 460/BB 120/SS 796
The Kingdom of God (G) W4 720/GC2 639/G3 736/OF 883/WC 976
*Yes, I Shall Arise – Deiss (Ps) OF 584/922
*When You Call to the Lord (E) BFW 61/
*When They Call in Tribulation (E) IH 15
When from Bondage (G) SS 791
753
We Will Serve the Lord (G) GC2 652/G3 485
When Bondage (G) SS 791
*When They Call in Tribulation (E) IH 15
*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) OF 584/W4 964/WS 703/WS 579
Yield Not to Temptation (G) LGMG2 770
You Shall Be My People (Ps) OF 666/WC 784

2ND SUNDAY OF LENT

March 12, 2017
Psalm of the Day: Ps 33
Let Your Love Be upon Us PSL A-33/SS 341
Let Your Mercy Be on us, vss 1, 2, 4
(Haugen) W4 45/GC2 32/G3 44/SS 640
Lord, Let Your Mercy Be on Us (Alstott) JS3 886
Lord, Let Your Mercy Be on Us (Arnold) JS2 36
Lord, Let Your Mercy Be on Us (Dufford) JS3 38/MI-BB 755
Lord, Let Your Mercy Be on Us (Hughes) OF 982
Lord, Let Your Mercy Be on Us (Hunstiger) SS 526
Lord, Let Your Mercy Be on Us (Prolx) W4 1030
Lord, Let Your Mercy Be on Us (Schia-vone) JS2 906
Lord, Let Your Mercy Be on Us (Stewart) LGMG2 819
Lord, Let Your Mercy Be on Us (Warner) OF 242/WC 431
May Your Love Be upon Us (Smith/Somerville) CBW 47
Songs for the Liturgy
Adoramus Te Domine (G) W4 609
Again We Keep This Solemn Fast (G) W4 474/GC2 407/G3 487/JS2 394/JS3 353/OF 419/CBW 352/WC 560/WS 448/BB 131/SS 793
Beautiful Savior (2, G) JS2 859/JS3 841/OF 931/WC 1019/WS 806/BB 195
Beyond the Days (JS2) JS2 384/JS3 360/BB 125
Change Our Hearts (Ps, G) JS2 535/GC2 414/G3 493/MI-BB 657
Christ, Our Light (G) JS2 661/JS3 824/W4 584/GC2 512/G3 590/OF 867/WC 962/WS 767/MI-BB 594
Christ Is the World’s Light (G) W4 602/CBW 543
Christ, the Word before Creation (G) SS 1013
Christ, You Are the Fullness (G) CBW 431
*From Ashes to the Living Font (G) OF 420/W4 463/GC2 402/G3 474/WC 558/WS 453/SS 807
Give Me a Clean Heart (1) LGMG2 625
Glorious Is the Name of Jesus (G) LGMG2 374
*Glory and Praise to You (G) OF 627/WC 764/WS 597
God’s Holy Mountain We Ascend (G) OF 807/WC 910/WS 721
*Here Is My Servant (C) PSL A-34/SS 291
I Will Be Your God (1, Ps) JS2 383
I Will Choose Christ (G) JS2 775/JS3 736/GC2 683/G3 802/MI-BB 509
*If God Is for Us (2) JS2 647/JS3 621/MI-BB 602
Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise (G) W4 630/CBW 472/JS2 621/JS3 594/OF 615/CBW 472/WC 738/MI-BB 557/SS 885
Jesus Christ, Inner Light (G) JS2 666/MI-BB 597
Jesus, Lead the Way (1) W4 715/GC2 632/G3 732
Journeysong (JS3) JS2 759/JS3 731
Most Splendid and Resplendent Light (G) JS2 662
*My Heart Declared to You, Lord (E) IH 16
Now We Remain (2) W4 764/GC2 696/G3 785/WS 678/WS 547/MI-BB 507/SS 983
O Christ, Bright Sun of Justice (G) JS2 389
*O Light of Light, Love Given Birth (G) CBW 434
*O Raise Your Eyes on High (G) CBW 366
O Splendor of God’s Glory – Morning Hymn (G) JS2 870
Only Begotten, Word of God Eternal (G) W4 839
Open My Eyes (G) JS2 695/JS3 659/GC2 569/G3 651/MI-BB 390
Praise to You, O Christ, Our Savior (G) JS2 674/JS3 643/W4 591/GC2 517/G3 596/CBW 442/MI-BB 589
Priestly People (G) OF 669/WC 786/WS 626
*Ps 25: Remember Your Mercy (E)
*Remember Your Love, v 1 (G) GC2 851/G3 961/JS2 561/JS3 533/MI-BB 660
Remember Your Mercies (E) GC2 27/G3 38
Seek the Lord (1, Ps) JS2 558/JS3 531/GC2 395/MI-BB 658
*Seek the Lord! Long for the Lord! (E) PSL A-32/SS 403
Speak, Lord (G) MI-BB 590
Stand Firm (2) GC2 673/G3 763/LGMG2 731
*The Glory of These Forty Days (G) W4 467/GC2 397/G3 481/LGMG2 284/JS2 379/JS3 347/OF 429/WC 567/WS 460/BB 120/SS 796
The God of Abraham Praise (1) W4 621/JS2 602
There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy (Ps) W4 645/GC2 603/G3 644/LGMG2 511/JS2 748/JS3 712/OF 585/CBW 559/MI-BB 509

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PREPARATION: MUSIC

If Today You Hear His Voice (Schiavone) JS2 909
If Today You Hear His Voice (Smith) JS3 73
If Today You Hear His Voice (Soper) MI-BB 782
If Today You Hear the Voice of God (Bolduc) OF 272/WS 355
If Today You Hear the Voice of God (Chepponis) W4 71/SS 654
O That Today You Would Listen (Smith/Young) CBW 50
Today If You Hear the Voice (French) W4 72

Songs for the Liturgy

Because the Lord Is My Shepherd (1, G) JS2 725/JS3 697/MI-BB 464
Broken Cisterns Walled in Stone (1, G) JS2 385
*Change Our Hearts, v 3 (1, G) JS3 535/ GC2 414/G3 474/MI-BB 653
Come, Taste and See (1, G) JS2 818
Come to the River (1, G) JS2 538/JS3 242/MI-BB 653
Come to the Water – Foley (1, G) JS2 650/JS3 626/CBW 502/G3 584/MI-BB 601
Come to the Waters (1, G) CBW 359
*Deep Within (E) GC2 419/G3 486
Dust and Ashes (1, G) GC2 392/G3 468/SS 787
Eternal Lord of Love (1, 2, G) JS2 390/CBW 360
*Fill My Cup, Lord (G) MI-BB 396
*Flower River Flow, v 3 (G) JS2 541/JS3 515/MI-BB 645
*From Ashes to the Living Font (G) OF 320, 420/WS 463/GC2 402/G3 474/ WC 216, 558/WS 52, 453/SS 807
Gentle Shepherd/Jesús, Pastor Tan Dulce (1, G) JS2 737/CBW 598
*Give Us Living Water (C) PSL A-37/SS 266
Glory and Praise to Our God, v 4 (1, G) JS2 596/JS3 574/W4 597/GC2 537/G3 600/OF 836/WS 936/WS 746/MI-BB 545
*God Alone May Lead (1, G) JS2 736
Healing River (1, G) GC2 564/G3 643
I Am the Living Bread, v 3 (G) JS2 822/JS3 794/CBW 605/MI-BB 356
*I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say (G) W4 707/GC2 622/G3 724/LMGM2 597,
598/JS2 729/JS3 692/OF 777, 784/ WC 878/WS 701/MI-BB 461/SS 945
I Will Be Your God (1, G) JS2 383
I've Just Come from the Fountain (G) GC2 802/LMGM2 740
*Jesus, Ever-Flowing Fountain (1, G) W4 912
*Leap of the Sprit, v3 (G) JS3 351/BB 122
Lift High the Cross (2) W4 885/GC2 785/G3 881/LMGM2 726/JS2 522/JS3 500/OF 703/CBW 435/VC 792/ WS 680/MI-BB 713/SS 1054
Living Streams (1, G) OF 707
Mercy, O God, v 4 (G) GC2 417/G3 480/ SS 792
*My Eyes Are Always on the Lord (E) BFW 71/SS 682
*My Eyes Are Fixed on God (E) IH 17
My Shepherd Will Supply My Need (1, G) W4 708/JS2 732/OF 785/WS 886
My Soul in Stillness Waits, vss 5-6 (Ps) W4 404/GC2 336/G3 415/SS 726
*O Come and Sing to God, the Lord (Ps) MI-BB 826
O God, for You I Long (1, G) JS2 688
O Jesus, Joy of Loving Hearts, v3 (G) W4 705/JS3 563/CBW 654/SS 1080
*Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness, v2 (1, G) G3 625/OF 637/CBW 582/WS 613
Praise to You, O Christ, Our Savior (2, G) JS2 674/JS3 643/W4 591/GC2 517/ G3 596/CBW 442/MI-BB 589
Ps 23: The Lord Is My Shepherd (1, G)
Ps 42: As the Deer Longs (1, G) JS2 786/OF 737/WS 670/MI-BB 610
Psalm of the Body of Christ, vss 3-4 (1, 2, G) GC2 27/G3 38
Shall We Gather at the River (1, G) W4 866/GC2 761/G3 873/LMGM2 716/ JS2 786/OF 737/WS 845/WS 670/MI-BB 610
*Sing Praise to God (Ps) W4 617/G3 600/JS2 610/JS3 590/OF 859/WS 955/SS 903
Song of the Body of Christ, vss 3-4 (1, 2, G) GC2 807/G3 924/WS 668/WS 723/ MI-BB 332
Sweet Refreshment (1, G) GC2 802/G3 899

3RD SUNDAY OF LENT

March 19, 2017
Psalm of the Day: Ps 95
If Today You Hear/Ojalá Escuchen la Voz (Florián) OF 271
If Today You Hear God’s Voice (Farrell) JS2 73/JS3 72
If Today You Hear God’s Voice (Honoré) OF 273/VC 457/WS 354
If Today You Hear His Voice (Alstott) JS3 889
If Today You Hear His Voice (Guimont) GC2 910/G3 1022
If Today You Hear His Voice (Haas) GC2 51/G3 66/MI-BB 781
If Today You Hear His Voice (Hunstiger) SS 571
If Today You Hear His Voice (Johnson) OF 985
If Today You Hear His Voice (Kreutz) JS2 72
If Today You Hear His Voice (Palmer) LMGM2 822
If Today You Hear His Voice (Proulx) W4 1033

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The Living God My Shepherd Is (1, G) W4 709
The Lord Jesus Christ (G) CBW 436
The Lord’s My Shepherd (1, G) CBW 488
The Thirsty Cry for Water, Lord (1, Ps, G) W4 795/G3 815/SS 790
There Is a River (1, G) JS2 656
There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy (2, G) JS2 656/JS3 748/JS3 712/OF 585/CBW 475/SS 935
*Tree of Life – Haugen (G) GC2 401/G3 475/CBW 373/SS 799
*Turn Our Hearts from Stone to Flesh (E) PSL A-35/SS 450
Wade in the Water (1, G) GC2 793/G3 898/LMGM2 738/JS2 544/JS3 519/MI-BB 651
You Are the Voice (1, G) GC2 538/G3 609/CBW 576

4TH SUNDAY OF LENT

March 26, 2017
Psalm of the Day: Ps 23

My Shepherd Is the Lord PSL A-39/SS 370

My Shepherd Is the Lord (Gelineau) W4 37/GC2 24/G3 34/OF 233/CBW 606/WC 421/WS 318/MI-BB 740/SS 632
Shepherd Me, O God (Haugen) W4 36/GC2 23/G3 35/WC 423/WS 319/MI-BB 457/SS 633
The Lord Is My Shepherd/El Señor Es Mi Pastor (Abeyta) OF 231/WS 321
The Lord Is My Shepherd (Alstott) JS3 892
The Lord Is My Shepherd (Colopy) OF 232/WC 422
The Lord Is My Shepherd (Crandal) JS2 23/JS3 23/MI-BB 738
The Lord Is My Shepherd (della Picca) OF 331, 988
The Lord Is My Shepherd (Guimont) GC2 894/G3 1025
The Lord Is My Shepherd/Tú Vas Conmigo (Hurd) JS2 24
The Lord Is My Shepherd (Keil) JS3 24
The Lord Is My Shepherd/El Señor Es Mi Pastor (Krisman) W4 38/G3 36
The Lord Is My Shepherd (Murray) W4 37/WC 421/WS 318/SS 634
The Lord Is My Shepherd (Proulx) W4 37, 1036/CBW 53
The Lord Is My Shepherd/El Señor Es Mi Pastor (Reza) JS3 25/MI-BB 739
The Lord Is My Shepherd (Roberts) LMGM2 825
The Lord Is My Shepherd (Schiavone) JS2 912
The Lord Is My Shepherd (Somerville) CBW 607
The Lord Is My Shepherd (Vermulst) WS 320
*Awake, Awake, Fling Off the Night (2) CBW 304
*Awake, O Sleeper (2) W4 915/OF 689/WC 827/WS 658
Be Thou My Vision (G) JS3 646/MI-BB 394/SS 954
Beyond the Days (2, G) JS2 384/JS3 360/BB 125
Christ, Be Our Light (2, G) JS2 661/JS3 824/W4 584/GC2 512/G3 590/OF 867/WC 962/WS 767/MI-BB 594/SS 888
Christ Is the World’s Light (G) W4 602
*Come to Me – Norbet (Ps) JS2 728/JS3 695/OF 716/WC 828/WS 708/MI-BB 459
*From Ashes to the Living Font (G) OF 689/OF 641/CBW 429/WC 751/WS 646/MI-BB 394/SS 1087
The Light of Christ (G) CBW 394/MI-BB 600
The Lord Jesus Christ (G) CBW 436
Those Who See Light (2, G) MI-BB 496
*Tree of Life – Haugen (G) GC2 401/G3 690/CBW 373/SS 799
We Are Called (G) W4 940/GC2 812/G3 950/LMGM2 765/CBW 611/WS 686/MI-BB 361/SS 1087
We Are Marching (2) W4 586/GC2 516/G3 594/LMGM2 419/JS2 665/JS3 635/OF 716/WC 826/WS 646/SS 602
We Who Once Were Dead (2, G) CBW 402
Word of God, Come Down on Earth, v 3 (G) W4 590/OF 641/CBW 429/WC 751
*You Are All I Want (Ps) GC2 625/G3 726
*You Are Light (2) PSL A-40/SS 477
You Are the Voice (2, G) GC2 538/G3 609/CBW 576

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Welcome to Lent

Fr. Lawrence E. Mick

Almost everybody, even non-Christians, knows that Lent is about sin. It is a time of repentance and a time for conversion from sin to a more authentic Christian life.

Our readings for the First Sunday of Lent support this view. The story of Adam and Eve reminds us that sin has been part of human existence from the beginning. The second reading starts by recalling Adam’s sin and says that all people have sinned. The Gospel recounts the temptations of the devil that Jesus faced in the wilderness, though he did not sin.

What is often overlooked, however, is the point that Paul is making in that second reading. Though all have sinned, he says, “how much more did the grace of God and the gracious gift of the one person Jesus Christ overflow for the many” (Romans 5:15). Grace abounds even more than sin abounds. God’s grace is even more important, and we need to rely on it as we try to do everything else in Lent.

Rite of Sending: If you have catechumens prepared for baptism, this is the typical day they will celebrate the Rite of Election with the bishop. In preparation for the diocesan celebration with the bishop, the Rite of Sending can be used in the local parish in coordination with the catechetical team.

Daylight Saving Time: Next Sunday marks the beginning of DST in most of the U.S. and many other countries. Remind people this week to set their clocks ahead Saturday night lest they arrive an hour late for Mass next Sunday.

This is not to deny the reality of sin. Sin is real and it marks all of our lives. We need to repent and to change our lives. We need to celebrate reconciliation and start again to live the Gospel fully. We need to recommit ourselves to living according to our baptismal promises. But God’s grace is even more important, and we need to rely on it as we try to do everything else in Lent.

As you choose music, prepare prayer texts and write homilies, keep this central truth in mind. Throughout this season, find ways to remind the assembly of God’s grace and the joy it offers.

1st Sunday of Lent

Joan DeMerchant

INTRODUCTION

The battle between good and evil is writ large in literature, drama and religion. Today’s readings — indeed, all of Scripture — reveal a truth we know all too well. Even the best of us has experienced the powerful attraction of what we should not do. Our tradition tells us even more profoundly that the story is larger than temptation or failure. We hear, instead, what is possible: Grace, justification, obedience, righteousness and life are the real end of the story.

PENITENTIAL ACT

Lord Jesus, you were tempted in the desert: Lord, have mercy.

Christ Jesus, you rejected your tempter: Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you show us that temptation can be overcome: Lord, have mercy.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Gn 2:7-9, 3:1-7 Adam and Eve are tempted
Ps 51 Be merciful, O Lord, for we are sinners
Rom 5:12-19 Jesus’ obedience overcomes sin
Mt 4:1-11 Jesus himself is tempted

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Presider: Let us pray, my friends, for ourselves and for all who are confronted by temptation.
Minister: For the whole church and for all believers who are tempted by evil...as a penitent people, we pray,
❖ For peace in a world tempted to enmity with one another...as a penitent people, we pray,
❖ For those who struggle in a culture that glamorizes temptation...as a penitent people, we pray,
❖ For the courage to acknowledge our own temptations...as a penitent people, we pray,
❖ For the ability to see temptation as a path to grace and goodness...as a penitent people, we pray,
❖ For all who are tempted to despair because of poverty, injustice, violence or any kind of need...as a penitent people, we pray,
❖ For those preparing for the sacraments of initiation...as a penitent people, we pray,
❖ For all in this community who seek physical healing and spiritual wholeness; and for those who have died...(names)...as a penitent people, we pray,

Presider: Ever-faithful God, we ask for the grace to remember that your compassionate presence is always in our midst. Help us to be aware that you accompany us, even in the face of temptation and evil. Infuse us with the same strength and courage you gave Jesus when he was tempted. We ask this in your holy name. Amen.
This first readings for today as well as for the next two Sundays present us with key figures in salvation history: Abraham today, Moses next week, and David the week following. Today’s passage from Genesis recounts God’s call to Abram (later renamed Abraham) to leave his homeland and go to a land that God would show him. Abraham is seen as our father in faith (for Jews, Christians and Muslims) because he responded to God’s call with complete obedience.

All four Scripture passages call us to put our trust in God as did Abram. The psalm refrain proclaims, “Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.” The second reading encourages the early Christians to be faithful to their call and trust God in difficult times. The voice from heaven in the Gospel urges the apostles to listen to Jesus, to trust his words even more than Moses or Elijah.

This suggests a theme of trust to be reflected in the choice of music and the composition of prayers this weekend, as well as the preaching, of course. But another theme is also revealed in the readings, that of pilgrimage or journey. Abram goes to a land he does not know; Jesus is going up to Jerusalem and eventually to his resurrection. We are all called on a journey of faith, a pilgrimage of conversion to a “holy life” (second reading).

So that theme also might be reflected in the music choices and prayer texts this week. Both themes could come together, too, since we need to trust in God as we make the journey. In fact, it is only such trust that enables us to die to self so as to come to a fuller life in Christ. Change always involves some dying, and we can only embrace that if we trust that new life will follow.

Penitential Rite: If you have candidates preparing for full communion with the Catholic Church who will be welcomed at Easter or soon thereafter, this Sunday is a good day to celebrate a penitential rite with them (RCIA #464). Planners should work with those who are preparing them for full communion to prepare this rite. It should fit well with the themes discussed above, since they are also on a journey of deepened conversion. It is important to remember that candidates are not catechumens or the elect. Candidates are part of us already through baptism, and they are traveling a journey that all the baptized are called to take each year in Lent. As you make sure that comments and prayers reflect their proper status, emphasize the call to the entire faith community to deepen their own conversion to Christ.

INTRODUCTION

As we begin the second week of Lent, we encounter Abram moving to a new place, the disciples struggling to understand Jesus, and the early Christians trying to figure out how to live the Gospel. If our own understanding about who Jesus is remains a struggle with ongoing questions, let us not be discouraged. If our hearts are open, we can trust that there will be people and experiences to help us along the way.

PENITENTIAL ACT

Lord Jesus, you gradually taught the apostles who you are: Lord, have mercy.

Christ Jesus, you shared your identity in the Transfiguration: Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you reveal yourself to all whose hearts are open: Lord, have mercy.

PSALM READING

Gn 12:1-4a God’s blessing and promise to Abram
Ps 33 Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you
2 Tim 1:8-10 God gives us strength to live the Gospel
Mt 17:1-9 Jesus is transfigured on the mountain

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Presider: My friends, as we seek to live the Gospel let us now pray for the needs of the whole world.

Minister: For all who profess the Christian faith: that our understanding of Jesus may deepen and grow... as a penitent people, we pray.

For peace in our nation and healing for our planet torn apart by conflicting world views...as a penitent people, we pray.

For those who struggle to understand Jesus and are challenged by living the Gospel...as a penitent people, we pray.

For those who succumb to the vices of abusive power, greed or prejudice...as a penitent people, we pray.

For families, churches or communities disrupted by differing understandings about fidelity to Jesus... as a penitent people, we pray.

For those preparing for reception into the church during the Easter season...as a penitent people, we pray.

For all in need: the sick, the dying; and for those who have died...(names)...as a penitent people, we pray.

Presider: Gracious God, as you shower us with the gifts of knowledge and understanding give us open hearts to receive them. When distracted by the demands of life, help us to continue to understand and follow Jesus. Fortify us with love and compassion especially for those whose understanding is different from our own. We ask this in his holy name. Amen.
Scrubinies Are for Everybody!

Fr. Lawrence E. Mick

The restoration of the catechumenate mandated by the Second Vatican Council and expressed in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults has had significant effects on the process of preparing adults (and children of catechetical age) for baptism. But it has fallen short of its full potential to revitalize our parish communities. One of the major reasons for this failure is the lack of community involvement in both the process and the rituals of the catechumenate. Too often, those preparing for baptism are relegated to their own little group for formation, having little if any regular contact with the larger parish community. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults insists that the initiation process is the business of all the baptized, but many Catholics don’t even know what the rite means or how it is supposed to work.

Since we are using Cycle A of the Lectionary this year, there is no question about what readings will be used for the third, fourth and fifth Sundays when the scrutinies are observed. The Gospels for these three weeks are powerful texts aimed at preparing the elect for baptism, but they are also proclaimed to the whole assembly to call them into a similar journey of deeper conversion. If that is to happen, the assembly must be involved in the rite as more than passive spectators. (It must be noted that this will be of limited success unless the elect have been active members of the community so that they are known and cherished by the larger community, but it is still worth addressing.) For example, the community as a whole can be asked, perhaps on the first and second Sundays of Lent, to suggest issues that we need to confront and virtues we need to improve; these can then be added to a similar list from the elect to craft the intercessions for the three scrutinies. Also consider having the elect positioned at various places among the assembly, so that they are surrounded by the people praying for and with them. If you have multiple Masses, consider rotating the celebration of the scrutiny each week, or if you have many elect, you could celebrate the rite more than once on each Sunday so that more of the parish experiences it.

Even if you have no elect, you can still draw on the readings for these Sundays and invite people to suggest topics for the intercessions, so that the whole parish engages in reflection and prayer and self-examination to see what is “weak, defective, and sinful” in their lives that needs to change and what is “upright, strong and good” that needs to be strengthened (RCIA #141).

It will take more than one year’s effort to make these rites the powerful celebrations they are meant to be. Start now!

3rd Sunday of Lent

Joan DeMerchant

INTRODUCTION

As we enter into the Third Sunday of Lent today’s readings focus on water and on God’s self-revelation to seemingly unworthy people. Those who are in most need of help, who appear to be unworthy, are those to whom life is given: the doubtful, the sinners, the impatient grumblers, the wanderers. We recognize our need for God’s grace and humbly open our hearts toward this transforming love.

PENITENTIAL ACT

Lord Jesus, you encountered the Samaritan woman at the well: Lord, have mercy.

Christ Jesus, you defied tradition by speaking with her: Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you reveal God’s love to all who are open to it: Lord, have mercy.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Ex 17:3-7 God gives Moses life-giving water
Ps 95 If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts
Rom 5:1-2, 5-8 God’s love for us is freely given in Christ
Jn 4:5-42 Jesus reveals himself to the outcast woman

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Presider: Let us pray now for those in need of God’s generous love.

Minister: For the church: May all its members be a profound sign of God’s love...as a penitent people, we pray.

❖ For those who are marginalized in any way...as a penitent people, we pray.
❖ For those whose voices are neither heard nor honored...as a penitent people, we pray.
❖ For places in the world where water is scarce or has become a source of conflict...as a penitent people, we pray.
❖ For those who are judged as unworthy, for whatever reasons...as a penitent people, we pray.
❖ For openness to changing our perception of others...as a penitent people, we pray.
❖ For the elect who are participating in the scrutiny rituals this Lent...as a penitent people, we pray.
❖ For those who are in any kind of need or pain, especially the sick, the dying and the grieving; and for those who have died... (names)...as a penitent people, we pray.

Presider: God of life, we come to you as people seeking wholeness and fullness of life. We pray for ourselves and for those whose lives are fragile. Help us to not judge others and to be open to all you have to teach us. We humbly ask this in Jesus’ holy name. Amen.
March 26, 2017

Laetare Sunday

Fr. Lawrence E. Mick

This Sunday has the traditional name of Laetare Sunday, a day of joy because Lent has reached the halfway point. The church has directives regarding the observance of the third Sunday within this solemn season: “During Lent the altar is not to be decorated with flowers, and the use of musical instruments is allowed only to support the singing. The Fourth Sunday of Lent, called Laetare Sunday, solemnities and feasts are exceptions to this rule. On Laetare Sunday rose vestments may be used.” (Ceremonial of Bishops #252). So this is a day to foreshadow the joy and splendor of Easter.

This is also the day for the second scrutiny. The Gospel focuses on the cure of the man born blind, and the first reading invites us to see as God sees and not as human beings see. The second reading also fits this focus, stressing the importance of living in the light rather than in darkness.

We discussed last week the idea of drawing input from the assembly as well as from the elect for the intercessions during the scrutinies. Once you have all the suggestions in hand, someone should sort them into three lists, looking for ways to link these concerns with the themes of the three scrutinies: thirst, sight, and new life. Then it takes a good wordsmith to compose the petitions in ways that make sense without being too wordy. You might also use a special response to these petitions, for instance, “Lord, teach us to see.” If you use this phrase, make sure the petitions are composed with this consistent theme in mind.

Today’s focus on seeing as God sees lends itself well to the call to deeper conversion that marks the Lenten season. How we see situations and other people strongly affects how we deal with them. Much of our growth in the spiritual life is a matter of learning to see things as God does, especially when in stark contrast to society’s view of things.

This theme of learning to see correctly might also provide a solid basis for a Lenten penance service this week. You could use one or more of the readings from this Sunday and perhaps reuse some of the intercessions.

So often what produces growth through the sacrament of penance is coming to see a situation or a pattern of behavior in a new way. And for many people, learning to properly appreciate this sacrament requires seeing it with new eyes — as a celebration of God’s mercy and love rather than primarily a time for self-recrimination. The scrutinies as well as this sacrament require a willingness to look at ourselves with compassion. These rituals also invite us to see God more clearly as the great lover and merciful healer. That’s a great reason to celebrate!

4th Sunday of Lent

Joan DeMerchant

INTRODUCTION

As we continue our journey through this season of Lent, we are met with the question of who is worthy in God’s eyes. Based on false expectations the Israelites and the Pharisees never thought David would be chosen king or that Jesus would heal the man born blind. Worthiness may be found not in reputation or pedigree or appearance, but in one’s heart.

PENITENTIAL ACT

Lord Jesus, you healed the man born blind: Lord, have mercy.
Christ Jesus, you confronted those who did not believe: Christ, have mercy.
Lord Jesus, you came to give us eyes that truly see: Lord, have mercy.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

1 Sm 16: 1b, 6-7, 10-13a “Not as man sees does God see.”
Ps 23 The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want
Eph 5:8-14 Live as children of the light
Jn 9:1-41 The healing of the man born blind

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Presider: My friends, let us pray now for ourselves and for all who need to be seen with God’s eyes.
Minister: For the church and for all believers: May be open to seeing and witnessing God’s light in others... as a penitent people, we pray,
♦️ For all who make peace with others...as a penitent people, we pray,
♦️ For those who judge others without seeing their inner goodness...as a penitent people, we pray,
♦️ For the courage to challenge false judgement or gossip in our daily lives...as a penitent people, we pray,
♦️ For openness to new ideas, even when it is uncomfortable...as a penitent people, we pray,
♦️ For parents, educators, mediators, counselors and all who work to promote deeper understanding...as a penitent people, we pray,
♦️ For those who have never felt understood or appreciated...as a penitent people, we pray,
♦️ For the candidates preparing for full membership in the church...as a penitent people, we pray,
♦️ For those among us who are sick; for those who gone before us and now see the eternal light of Christ... (names)...as a penitent people, we pray,

Presider: God of surprises, invite us to see your presence in others. Though we may be blind to the good in others, help us to see and love them as you would wish. We ask this in the name of Jesus, the ultimate healer. Amen.
**Loose Change from Church and World**

**March Jokes**

- Going to church doesn't make you a Christian any more than standing in a garage makes you a car.
- Photons have mass? I didn’t even know they were Catholic.
- Don’t be irreplaceable - if you cannot be replaced, you cannot be promoted.
- I changed my password to “incorrect.” So, whenever I forget what it is the computer will say “Your password is incorrect.”
- The wifi went down during family dinner tonight. One kid started talking and I didn’t know who he was.
- Hell is wallpapered with all your deleted selfies.
- We are all time travelers moving at the speed of exactly 60 minutes per hour.
- Retirement is the time in your life when time is no longer money.

Source: www.onelinfun.com

**Visit us online for free seasonal resources.**

Music and prayers for Ash Wednesday along with reflection resources for Lent will be posted on the Celebration website CelebrationPublications.org.

Below is a sample of “Francis the Comic Strip,” created by Pat Marrin. The strip has been appearing regularly at ncronline.org and gocomics.com. Free reprint with acknowledgement.

**Cartoons**

Cartoons printed in Celebration are the property of the artists who created them and are not covered by Celebration’s blanket reprint permission with the exception of the Francis cartoon. For automatic permission to reproduce a cartoon published in this issue, send $5 to the artist listed below whose cartoon you wish to use:

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Harley L. Schwadron
PO Box 1347
Ann Arbor, MI 48106
Mark Bartholomew has been a member of the Holy Family Catholic Worker Community in Kansas City, Mo. for the past six years and now splits his time between Kansas City and Wyoming. These graphics are available on our website for easy downloading for use in bulletins and parish newsletters.
The Breach in Our Midst
When surrounded by confusion, seek to restore and repair

Thus says the Lord:
If you remove from your midst oppression,
false accusation and malicious speech;
If you bestow your bread on the hungry
and satisfy the afflicted;
Then light shall rise for you in the darkness,
and the gloom shall become for you like midday;
Then the Lord will guide you always
and give you plenty even on the parched land.
He will renew your strength,
and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring whose water never fails.
The ancient ruins shall be rebuilt for your sake,
and the foundations from ages past you shall raise up;

“Repairer of the breach,” they shall call you,
“Restorer of ruined homesteads.”

If you hold back your foot on the sabbath
from following your own pursuits on my holy day;
If you call the sabbath a delight,
and the Lord’s holy day honorable;
If you honor it by not following your ways,
seeking your own interests, or speaking with malice
Then you shall delight in the Lord,
and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth;
I will nourish you with the heritage of Jacob, your father;
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

—Saturday after Ash Wednesday, Isaiah 58:9b-14

—Amelia Kunhardt, Photojournalist: kunhardtphoto.com
The Way to Life

Our Lent starts with stories that take us from the garden to the desert — symbolically as well as geographically. We begin with Adam and Eve in God’s good garden. They, like their descendants after them, brought chaos to this garden. The story tells us that Adam and Eve had everything they needed, including a remarkable relationship with God who liked to stroll around the grounds with them.

Suddenly a wily creature suggests that God hasn’t been perfectly straight with the first couple. Painting God as a petty tyrant, the snake asks why people are not allowed to eat from fruit trees. Eve corrected him saying that there was but one forbidden tree. “And why would that be?” asks the serpent. “Don’t you get it? That’s where God’s power is hidden! Eat from that tree and you’ll be just like God — beholden to no one!” So Eve takes a closer look. She decides it’s time to think for herself.

Eve now enters into the first process of discernment. The tree is good for food, so it’s life-giving. The tree is nice to look at — she’s proud to realize that artistic humans can appreciate it in ways the lower creatures can’t. Finally, it’s “desirable for gaining wisdom.” She may not have been sure what that meant, but it sounded good and even sophisticated. So she took it and gave some to her husband who didn’t leave a record of his opinion on the matter.

Adam and Eve got what they sought — but it wasn’t what they were hoping for. Their eyes were opened, and they saw that they were naked. Now it wasn’t as if they hadn’t seen each other before, in fact, throughout their entire lives they had seen one another just exactly as they were: male and female, loving images of God their Creator. But something changed. Now they were standing together with something to hide — they had started trying to be what they were not, and from then on there would be secrets and disguises. Lack of underwear wasn’t the problem; it was their naked ambition. What got exposed was their attempt to be something they weren’t, and suddenly they had to cover that up.

We know that the Genesis myths have been preserved not for any pretense of describing historical or scientific events but because they portray timeless truths. Among other things, this story tells us that rebellion against God’s plan has a long history. The human capacity for creativity and personal growth is susceptible to selfish distortions which bring rivalry with God and one another — and that leads to the lies, murder and mayhem that tragically scar human history. Whether or not we call it original sin, we know that as Vatican II teaches, humanity has drifted from our proper relationship to God as well as our whole relationship with self, others and all created things (Gaudium et Spes, “The Constitution on the Church in the Modern World,” #13).

Today’s readings lead us from the garden to join Jesus in the desert. Once again the tempter shows up — this time there’s no snakeskin costume. Now the devil pretends to be a psychologist and Scripture scholar. As psychologist he twice questions Jesus’ sense of identity: “If you are the Son of God...” But in each case the end of the sentence suggests a way to betray his vocation as Son of God, the first by consecrating his power to his own well-being by magically creating bread and the second by demanding that God prove fatherly love on the absurd, fundamentalist terms of stopping his fall from the temple. These feats would have gone far in manipulating public opinion on Jesus’ behalf — even if only to win him fame as a powerful magician. In response Jesus quotes Scripture right back at the tempter, thereby refusing to be the devil’s brand of messiah.
In a world where there is bread enough for everyone if only we would share, a world where OSHA regulations make it impossible to get near the edge of a parapet and emergency rooms must treat every foolhardy showoff, the third temptation might be the most contemporary — the temptation to power. Now the devil tells the truth. Getting the power of the kingdoms of the world demands turning one’s back on God and the human vocation to love.

Pope Francis has described the devil’s kingdoms as the places where “everything comes under the laws of competition ... where the powerful feed upon the powerless” (Evangelii Gaudium, “The Joy of the Gospel,” #53). But Jesus offers an unequivocal “no” to idolatry of power and to the spiritual sloth that asks for miracles and refuses personal responsibility. He declines the devil’s invitation to a life dedicated to self-service. Jesus’ entire ministry is summed up in the yes to his vocation as Son implied in his rejection of the tempter’s enticements.

GN 2:7-9; 3:1-7

The delightful myths of the first chapters of Genesis offer profound meditations on the meaning of human life and its travails. To start us off on our forty-day journey, the readings for the First Sunday of Lent deliberately feature the part of the creation story with “the Fall.” The tragedy of this story’s disobedience finds its reversal in the Gospel’s depiction of Jesus, the obedient Son of God in the desert.

Before we analyze the story, it may be important to clarify that “myth” is a genre of literature which depicts a truth that goes deeper than mere facts. Myth uses story to illuminate timeless meaning. Thus, while it is highly unlikely that Adam and Eve and the serpent wandered around Eden talking to each other, the story’s depiction of human vulnerability to temptation and deception, our tendency to rebel and wreak havoc in relationships, tells us profound truths about who we are.

March 5, 2017

Lent

1st Sunday

The Way to Life

As the story opens, we see life as it was intended to be. God had created the world with delightful and nourishing plants and had blown divine breath into human creatures so that they share the very life of God. All relationships moved in harmony: people with one another, human beings with creation and creatures with their life-giving God. Adam and Eve knew and could thoroughly enjoy where they fit in relation to everything.

Enter doubt in the guise of the questioning serpent. “Isn’t God a bit arbitrary? Why aren’t you allowed to eat the fruit of the trees?” Eve passes the first test admirably as she contradicts the deceitful exaggeration: “We can eat fruit ... it’s only about the tree in the middle that God said you shall not eat it or even touch it.” Imitating the serpent, Eve added that last phrase on her own. God hadn’t said anything about not touching the tree. Was that what let the serpent know how gullible she was? If she could believe that touching the tree would lead to death, perhaps she’d believe something even more fantastic! So the snake went on sowing distrust: “God is afraid of you, jealous that you might become just as powerful! Eat it and you’ll see.”

Eve took the bait and shared it with her mate. Forgetting that she and Adam were already created in the divine image, they took God for their rival instead of their source of life. They abandoned the dance of creature with Creator for a wrestling match they could never win. They exposed themselves as trying to be what they were not and were suddenly so ashamed that they had to hide. The myth of the Fall explores human rebellion against “creatureliness,” the self-destructive drive for autonomy that infects history and wreaks havoc throughout God’s creation.

ROM 5:12-19

If we ever wanted an example of Paul’s sense of community and how the life of each individual affects the whole, his comparison of Adam and Christ more than fills the bill. Paul uses Adam as a symbol of everything thought of as the human condition and Christ as the alternative. It may be tempting to take this passage as a tract on original sin or the origin of death, but that would be to miss Paul’s key point. Paul is talking about the power of the grace unleashed by Christ.

When Paul speaks of Adam’s sin he’s explaining that since our beginning, humanity has known alienation from God, a condition which ultimately entails alienation from our true selves and thus death in the sense of a dead-end existence. That’s a life which can go nowhere in the sense of a dead-end existence. Paul calls us to look at our situation of estrangement from God and one another because he wants us to see that there is an option. Almost as if he were addressing citizens of the most contaminated cities in the world and trying to describe the alternative of breathing fresh air, Paul is saying, “You live in a situation of death, but there’s another possibility!”

Paul’s whole point here is to focus on Christ, but in order to get his message across he has to describe in detail the situation of sin his people consider as normal and inevitable.
and tell them it doesn’t have to be this way. Paul tells people who simply accept corruption in the political, interpersonal and physical realm to see all of that as a distortion that has been overcome in Christ. In the process, Paul explains that each person’s actions have cosmic consequences. Yes, Adam’s disobedience unleashed disorder in the universe. On the other hand, Christ’s obedience opened the way to fidelity to God’s plan for all creation.

If Paul had been preaching at a political rally he probably would have talked about all the problems and then presented the life of Christ asking, “Can we follow this? Can we accept this grace?” The chant he would have waited for is a resounding and ongoing “Yes! We can! Yes! We can!”

The Genesis story of the Fall ended by saying that Adam and Eve’s eyes were opened and they came to know shame and the need to hide from one another and from God. Paul is asking us to open our eyes to something else. Paul wants us to see the possibility that Christ offers, the restoration of our relationship with God and the ability to live in the righteousness of loving rapport with God, neighbor and all of creation.

**MT 4:1-11**

The account of Jesus’ temptations in the desert can be interpreted from multiple vantage points, all of which converge on his faithfulness as Son of God. In the light of Matthew’s penchant for including the traditions of the Hebrew Scriptures in his Gospel, we can read Jesus’ testing as the redemption of Israel’s desert unfaithfulness to her vocation as people of God. Or, recognizing that the only times Matthew depicts Jesus undergoing temptations like this are in these 40 days and in the garden of Gethsemane, we can understand that these temptations framed his entire ministry.

Using the temptations in the desert as his point of departure, the Russian author Fyodor Dostoyevsky offered a stinging critique of Christianity in his poem “The Grand Inquisitor.”

In this classic, a representative of the Spanish Inquisition encounters Christ who has returned to earth and tells him why he was wrong to reject the devil’s offers in the desert. The inquisitor cynically explains that people will always follow the one who gives them bread, that Jesus could have cemented his popularity with the people by having angels rescue him from jumping off the temple and that if he had really loved humanity, he would have forced them to be good rather than allow them to wallow in mediocrity and fear of freedom, eventually risking eternal damnation.

Dostoyevsky understood that the question underneath the story of the temptations was how to be a faithful son or daughter of God, a question that was as real for Jesus as for each of his followers. Dostoyevsky knew the strength of the temptations to choose security over all else, to beg for miracles over faith or responsibility and to use coercive power to structure a society supposedly good for everyone. He might have gained that last insight from Napoleon who reversed the French Revolution’s abolition of the church because he believed that religion with its promise of recompense in eternity was the way to keep peace in a society in which some enjoyed wealth while others starved.

All these interpretations recognize that Jesus’ temptation in the desert was the temptation to pervert his vocation, to avoid being the one “who emptied himself” and “humbled himself becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:7-8).

The key concept tying these three readings together is obedience. In this context, obedience is the attitude that initiates right relationships between God and human beings, or we might say obedience is the only way for human beings to relate to God as Father. The story of the Fall in Genesis explains the seeming inevitability of disobedience and the disorder that rebellion creates. When human beings enter into rivalry with God, rivalry and every manner of discord characterize the entire human milieu. Once that has happened, everyone is born into the chaos of a sinful world.

The story of Jesus in the desert presents the alternative. Only because Jesus chose the word of God over bread could he later ask his disciples to go out on mission unarmed and unprovided. When Jesus refused to jump off the parapet of the temple he refused to use miracles to prove God’s love for him and to prove himself to the public. By doing that he demonstrated the faith he asked his disciples to share with him. Finally, in refusing to worship the tempter and the military, economic and political control he offered, Jesus affirmed that love is the only power that can build a future. As Paul tells us, one man’s obedience opened the way of life to all.

### Sermon Starters

**Deacon Dick Folger**

Today’s Gospel speaks to us about Jesus’ temptation in the desert. We are all plagued with temptations. If you are on a diet, your temptation may be to pour more chocolate syrup on your ice cream. If you struggle with personal discipline your temptation may be to yield to sinful actions.

From 1952 to 1957 at a time when television was replacing radio, Bishop Fulton J. Sheen burst into the living rooms of America with his “Life Is Worth Living” program. Bishop Sheen was a sensation, somewhat like Pope Francis is today.

Bishop Sheen gave us this helpful thought on temptation: “Why is it that any time we speak of temptation we always speak of temptation as something that inclines us to wrong. We have more temptations to become good than we do to become bad.”
**Preaching to Youth**

*Jim Auer*

KEY VERSE(S) (Gn) “Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized that they were naked.”

THEME Sin harms and potentially destroys relationships.

HOW YOUTH MIGHT INITIALLY RESPOND Some may correctly suspect that the Starter deliberately features two erroneous approaches to sin, but might be reluctant to admit that their view is much like the second one.

STARTER (Offer two approaches.)

Our readings concern sin. #1: Today, unfortunately, people dismiss sin as an outdated idea, except for murder and child abuse. That’s a huge mistake that may be deeply regretted at the final judgment. #2: When sin is mentioned in Scripture, we need to remember that it was written hundreds of years ago when people were afraid of God. Times have changed. We know now that there’s no need to think about sin in our lives. No matter what, God understands and forgives — that’s all we need to remember.

LEADING QUESTIONS * Which of the above is the realistic view of sin — or is neither one realistic? * Which is closer to our culture’s view?

DIRECTIONS TO EXPLORE * Adam and Eve’s shame has nothing to do with their private parts, which are really symbols. They begin to realize what they have done and are scared God will find out. They agonize about the damage to the relationship and the trust that would be shattered. Today’s counterpart: A young person who has violated a parent’s legitimate rule or cheated on a girlfriend/boyfriend. Regardless of the circumstances, the period immediately following this rupture is agonizing much like what Adam and Eve experienced. * Sin is an assault on a relationship between oneself and others or God.

MEDIA LINK(S) * What shows or movies present sin as something serious, something wrong? * Which ones can you think of that mock the idea of sin and play it for laughs?

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**HOMILY**

*Ted Wolgamot*

**Testing What is in Your Heart**

Temptation. Even the word itself is alluring, glamorous, enticing. And that’s because, if there’s one thing you and I understand about life, it’s the reality of being tempted. Whether it’s our diets or our struggles with greed or vengeance, we’ve all experienced temptation.

This is possibly why the story of Jesus being tempted has always been compelling. At its core, it is essentially a battle story, a contest between the two great monumental forces of good versus evil.

To properly understand what’s happening in this Gospel story, we have to step back and remember the account of the Israelites being saved by God from the horrors of slavery. After escaping the slavery imposed by the Egyptians, Israel’s experience in the wilderness is expressed in terms of a test from God: “And you shall remember ... the Lord your God had led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments, or not” [emphasis added].

The whole idea of being tested, of being led by God, of traveling through the “wilderness,” of the symbolic number forty, and even of fasting, all comes from this original account to see if God’s chosen people would be able to love in return thereby testing to know what was in their heart.

On a human level, the same is asked of Jesus. And notice what his temptations involve: they all have to do with the issue of power, and how it is used or abused.

God the Father is about to hand over to Jesus an enormous amount of power — the power to be God’s face in the world, the power to build a kingdom of love, peace and mercy.

Jesus, then, on a purely human level, must be tested to see if, unlike the ancient Israelites who flunked the test, he can remain utterly faithful to Abba, his father.

This test is essentially the very same one that we all have to pass if we are to assume a position of power in our own lives whether as a husband or wife, a parent, a leader of any kind.

The test given Jesus and to us is threefold:

* Jesus is asked to deny who he truly is: the Son of God. Will we claim our identity as God’s very own, acknowledging our true identity as human beings who are made in the image of God?
* Jesus is told he can be the source of great signs and wonders. Will we forsake our desire for fame and adulation, and instead live a life of humility focused on service?
* Jesus is told he will be given all the power and glory of the world’s kingdoms. Will we be able to resist the power inherent in greed, lust, vengeance and all the glamour the world offers?

Temptations are powerfully seductive and alluring. In the example of Jesus, we are invited to resist them as did Jesus. On this First Sunday of Lent, our Gospel challenges us to do the same. Among the central themes of this season is the recognition that we all have to do battle against temptation — especially the temptation to misuse power.

To assist us in this conversion process, the church asks us to remember and to practice the message found in Deuteronomy: Go into your own wilderness for forty days. Pray, fast, become contrite, increase our service to others — all of this testing to know what was in your heart, and to remind us once again: “The Lord, your God shall you worship and him alone shall you serve” (Dt 8:2).
Listen to Him

“Behold!” That’s a key word in today’s story of the Transfiguration. It means more than “Look!” or “OMG!” It’s more like “Take a very good look, and then look again, because there is more here than you can grasp.” Interestingly, that word wasn’t used for the description of the change in Jesus’ appearance, as if an intensely bright face and dazzling clothes were not so unusual for the itinerant preacher from Nazareth. Instead, the word was used for the arrival of Moses and Elijah, for the cloud that overshadowed them and the voice that spoke.

“Behold! Moses and Elijah appeared to them, conversing with him.” What an interesting description. The disciples receive a vision of the ancient prophets conversing with Jesus. It’s as if to tell the disciples, “Behold, this Jesus whom you know is rooted in the best, the deepest of your tradition.”

Moses and Elijah “were conversing with him,” making it seem as if they were consulting, as if he were the revelation they had been awaiting. Their presence is all the more mysterious because they are two whose fame includes the fact that nobody saw them die — and they were conversing with the one who would overcome death.

“Behold! A bright cloud cast a shadow over them.” The “bright cloud” might seem like a wonderful oxymoron, but it’s not such an unusual biblical image. In the Hebrew Scriptures God’s glory frequently became visible as a cloud, and in Exodus 13 we hear that God led the people with a cloud by day and fire by night, symbolically confusing their certainty and lighting their darkness. “Behold the bright cloud,” seems to be the ultimate invitation to risk stepping into mystery.

“Behold! From the cloud came a voice.” This final call heralded some clarity. From that moment on, the disciples were empowered to speak like prophets, with all the certainty of Jeremiah they could say, “The word of God came to me and declared that Jesus is God’s beloved Son. We must listen to him.”

What the disciples beheld on the mountaintop was what psychologists of religion call a “peak experience.” It was a moment when they understood the truth of who Jesus was for them in a way that was deeper than words could express. No miracle, no preaching, no philosophical argument can produce the interior conviction that such an encounter brings. A bit like falling in love, it’s a life-changing experience that can’t be pinned down any more than Jesus, Moses and Elijah could be housed in tents on the hill. In the truest sense of the phrase, you had to be there.

Most people have at least a few mountaintop moments in their life, times when they know that God is near, that love is the ultimate value, that faith is worth the risk, and in fact, that faith is a promise that demands that we risk all.

Abraham had a mountaintop moment when God called him from his homeland to go off into a most improbable future, a future in which he and his elderly childless wife would become the parents of a people of God too numerous to count. Paul had such a moment when he was stopped short in his persecution of the body of Christ.

We know their stories because those moments changed their lives and although the intensity of the experience was fleeting, it changed them and they remembered it forever.
Behold! That's the vital word. As Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote in her poem, *Aurora Leigh*,

Earth is crammed with heaven,
And every bush is a flame with
God,
But only those who see take off
their shoes,
The rest sit around and pluck
blackberries.

We can only see what we are open to seeing. There's more of God around us than we can take in, but we can also miss it all. Jesus took Peter, James and John up the mountain after they had been with him, after they had been enthralled with the force of his goodness and repelled by his prediction that he would suffer rejection and a shameful death. They loved him and that was enough to open them to more. They were ready to begin to behold who he was in the sight of God. All that was left was to learn to listen to him.

This second week of Lent invites us to behold the Christ of our tradition, to remember our peak moments of faith, and most of all, to listen to him.

**GN 12:1-4a**

The call of Abraham is a pivotal point in salvation history. If we haven't recently studied Genesis we may not be aware that God spoke to Abraham after ten generations of divine silence. It wasn't that God hadn't been active, but the last time God had actually spoken to humanity was after “the Flood.” Then God gave the word of promise that humanity would never again suffer such devastating waters (Genesis 9:8-17).

When God addresses Abraham, the plot of Genesis takes a great, unexpected turn. Until this moment, we had been reading the story of God’s interaction with humanity and all of creation. It was a universal story. Now out of all of humanity, God addresses one particular man and calls him to take part in a new chapter in history. It was time for a particular people to become more intimately involved with God.

God's call to Abraham was a revelation in the sense that God was letting Abraham in on the divine plan. As would happen later with the young Mary of Nazareth, God’s invitation came without warning and enticed Abraham to become part of a wholly unanticipated future. There is no doubt that the call was costly. The author makes a point of that by emphasizing that God summoned Abraham to leave the land of his kinsfolk and his father's house, that is, the place where he was known and enjoyed the benefits of “citizenship” as well as the relationship that gave him a name and an inheritance. In brief, God invited Abraham to let go of everything except his barren wife for the sake of a future rich in descendants and renown.

This is not the story of a refugee, Abraham's trek was a going forward, not a running away. To what was he going? A promise. A promise that must have seemed absurd – perhaps so absurd that it could only have come from the Creator God. That intuition — the belief that God was actually calling him, together with the unearthly immensity of the promise — led Abraham to pack up.

As we enter the second week of Lent, the Church offers us Abraham as an example and a patron. Unlike the prophets who protested their call on the grounds of being too young, too unimportant or too tongue-tied, Abraham was old and settled and he had everything he could want except descendants — and having spent his younger years in the attempt to produce progeny, he surely had no reason to expect them at his age.

God invited Abraham to a new identity. Instead of being identified with a particular place, a family of origin, a nation and its tribal god, Abraham accepted the summons that would change him and salvation history. Now his primary identification would be through his relationship to the one God. His future, including his descendants as numerous as the sands, depended on nothing except the power of the divine plan.

2 TM 1:8b-10

Paul wrote to Timothy as to his protégé, a younger disciple expected to follow in Paul's steps. Paul had just told him not to be ashamed of the apparent disgrace of the cross or persecution for the sake of the Gospel. The suffering entailed in being a disciple and the ill-repute of Christians was a serious source of inner conflict for many. This is obvious from the number of times the Christian Scriptures reminded them that Jesus’ true followers will suffer the same as he did.

The sentence which opens our reading can be understood in two different but complementary ways. First, following the translation we have, the implication is that preaching the Gospel necessarily implies suffering, but the strength to bear it will come from God. That partakes of Paul’s idea that “when I am weak, I am strong,” meaning that when we reach the end of our strength we are finally able to allow God’s power to work in and through us (2 Corinthians 2:10).

Secondly, the alternative translation is more like “bear your share of hardship for the gospel which is the strength that comes from God.” This implies that as one preaches the Gospel, the Gospel itself becomes an
evermore powerful source of strength in their lives. Both interpretations imply that the preaching is a life-style and not simply an oratorical activity.

The rest of this reading, one long sentence, may well have come from a hymn known to the Christians of Paul’s day. It is a quick summary of the Gospel message presented in Pauline fashion. The hymn proclaims that salvation is ours and makes demands: it’s not just a free pass, but the call to live as a holy people. At the same time, we must remember that salvation and holiness are profound experiences of grace. God gives us the ability to live as a holy people, people who have glimpsed God’s design and for whom grace functions to allow that design to work itself out in our lives.

When we read this in the light of our reading from Genesis, we might hear Paul calling us to become like Abraham whose life revolved around God’s call and promise. The crucial distinction is, of course, that the promise to Abraham, miraculous as it was, remained earth-bound, promising a land and succession of posterity, all the true blessings of this world. Life in Christ adds universality and eternity: a never-ending promise for all people.

MT 17:1-9

The Gospels situate the story of the Transfiguration just after the incident in which Jesus invited his disciples to tell him who they thought he was and his explanation that as God’s anointed one, he was going to suffer. Now, six days later, Jesus brings his three core disciples to a new experience of him, one that counterbalances any dread they might have had, given what he taught them about his fate.

Matthew and Mark specify that the Transfiguration happened six days after the above mentioned events. Among the possible explanations for underlining the time, one train of thought suggests that it may reflect on the seven days of creation so that this experience was a Sabbath encounter with God par-excellence. Other obvious allusions to the six days and other details of the story are Moses’ six-day experience on the mountain of God, the cloud of God’s glory which covered the mountain and how Moses’ face glowed from his encounter with God (Exodus 24 and 34). While many things can be inferred from all of that, at the very least we are aware that the evangelists wanted to be sure that their listeners could see Jesus’ transfiguration in the light of their salvation history.

The Transfiguration recalled God’s previous visits. Moses and Elijah as Jesus’ companions placed him firmly in the line of the Hebrew Scriptures with two of the greatest prophets, two whose demise was mysterious, to say the least. (According to Deuteronomy 34:6, Moses was buried by unknown people in an unknown place and according to 2 Kings, 2:11, Elijah departed from earth in a fiery chariot.) In other places Matthew has said specifically this was to fulfill the prophecy, in this case, the details speak for themselves.

More than showing Jesus’ roots in Israel’s tradition, the Transfiguration was a new revelation of Jesus’ identity. The three men with whom Jesus chose to share this experience had been with him for some time. They had seen his deeds of power and had heard his preaching. They had walked with him and presumably tried to imitate him in his relationship with God and his way of being with others. They had allowed Peter to speak for them in naming him the Messiah, the Son of the living God, and they had heard Jesus’ corrective to Peter’s rejection of his coming suffering. Understood in the light of Jesus’ passion predictions, the Transfiguration was a revelation that divine glory didn’t mean what the disciples thought it did in terms of worldly success. Jesus was going to suffer shamefully. At the same time, suffering and death were not, as they thought, signs of failure and lack of divine blessing. The Transfiguration, an event described in Matthew, Mark and Luke, might well be understood as a demonstration of what John’s Gospel described as Jesus’ glory on the cross.

Obviously, the disciples didn’t comprehend their mountaintop experience. Peter offered to build shelters. But before he could make a move, God’s voice pierced the clouds saying everything they needed to know: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” That was exactly the same message the heavenly voice had spoken at the time of Jesus’ baptism — then directly to him, now to the disciples, except for the three additional words: “Listen to him.”

Sermon Starters

Deacon Dick Folger

The transfiguration of Jesus confirmed to the disciples that Jesus was not just a mortal man. They saw his divinity in the dazzling light. This truth was confirmed by the voice of God which caused the disciples to fall to the ground, overcome with fear.

There is a story which confirmed the harsh truth to a bishop whose vanity deceived him. He thought he was a great preacher. The bishop was on a campaign to preach at every parish. It was an ambitious undertaking as there were 88 parishes in his diocese. After visiting about ten parishes, he noticed that Saint Mary’s, the largest parish in the diocese, was next on the list.

Expecting to find a packed church when he arrived for the 11 a.m. Mass, the bishop was dismayed to find less than a dozen parishioners sitting in the pews.

“Didn’t you give notice to your congregation that I was coming today?” he asked the pastor.

“I am sorry but I guess I did fail to give notice.” he answered. “But I think the news seemed to have gotten out anyway.”
Preaching to Youth

Jim Auer

KEY VERSE(S) (Gn) “The Lord said to Abram, ‘Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk and from your father’s house to a land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you.’ ”

THEME Faith sustains us on our many journeys.

HOW YOUTH MIGHT INITIALLY RESPOND Surprised that they have much in common with this ancient biblical figure.

STARTER There’s a new product coming out called Fix-All. It’s a smooth, mint-flavored liquid. Four ounces of it each day fixes anything that’s wrong with your body’s metabolism. It increases energy, sharpens the brain, gives radiant complexion, builds muscle, fosters athletic ability and wards off tooth decay. Best of all, Fix-All makes being dumped by a boyfriend or girlfriend impossible — unless you secretly want that. Then Fix-All makes it happen!

LEADING QUESTIONS* Does anyone here believe there is, or even could be, such a thing as Fix-All? * How extreme were the directions Abram received? What was he asked to do? * The promises made to him (“I will make of you a great nation!”) must have seemed almost as bizarre as Fix-All’s claims. Why do you think Abram followed the radical directions anyway?

DIRECTIONS TO EXPLORE Like Abram, we too are called to leave familiar, comfortable places and journey to new, sometimes scary places: * From childhood to adolescence to young adulthood. * Into a career and new responsibilities. * Into and through marriage and parenthood. * The scary journey of aging. * Like Abram, we have no way of fully knowing how to deal with the stages ahead until we get there.

MEDIA LINK(S) “Kyrie eleison down the road that I must travel / Kyrie eleison through the darkness of the night / Kyrie eleison where I’m going will you follow / Kyrie eleison on a highway in the night.” This song from 80’s is still often used at retreats.

HOMILY

Pat Marrin

The Big Picture

Lent focuses on the journey from baptism to glory. The baptized receive the promise of glory when they are incorporated into Christ, but that promise must develop, be lived and nourished by the Eucharist and come to maturity in the life of each disciple. We cannot pass from promise to glory without passing through the paradox of Jesus’ suffering and death.

Today’s Gospel account of the Transfiguration tells us how this was accomplished for Jesus, and how it will also take place for us. As Jesus travels to Jerusalem his disciples are clueless about what will happen there. To their limited view, Jesus is surely on the cusp of victory. Glory is within their grasp. What they have not grasped yet is that to get to glory Jesus will have to suffer rejection and death.

He takes Peter, James and John up a mountain to pray. What they witness is like the end of the story appearing in the middle. The paradox of his apparent defeat and death is illuminated to reveal its hidden meaning. Moses and Elijah frame Jesus in glory to affirm that by his death he is fulfilling the law and the prophets. As God’s Son, he is leading the exodus from the slavery of sin to the freedom of new life.

This profound theology lies at the heart of the Gospels. By his sacrificial death, Jesus saves us while we were still sinners and loves us when we were unlovable. In essence, by his life, death and resurrection Jesus reveals that the face of divine mercy is greater than any evil and more powerful than death itself. It cannot be otherwise, because God is love. No one, even the greatest sinner, can escape the fire of divine love, because it is the source of everything God has created and sustains in existence. Even if we turn away from God, God never ceases to love us and pursue us.

Peter, James and John will not grasp this mystery until they themselves need it. They will fail Jesus in his hour of need, denying and abandoning him when he is seized, tortured and executed. Their sin is the greatest sin of all, to turn away from an intimate friend to save themselves. In the abject misery of their guilt and grief, they will finally understand the depth of Jesus’ love for them. When the risen Christ restores them to his love, they will become apostles, able to tell others the good news they themselves have received in full measure.

We, too, must learn by experience the shocking secret of God’s unconditional love, a mystery so deep it defies our own limited understanding of mercy. Glory is the capacity to love not just our friends, but also our enemies.

Our limited standards of justice and love must be thrown open to encompass the limitless patience and compassion of God. The logic of the law cannot define God’s love for sinners. Therefore, our baptismal journey, to be complete, must break our hearts and expand our minds again and again until we are as generous as the heavenly Father Jesus revealed.

As we continue our Lenten journey, Jesus is eager to teach us. Even when we grasp the cost of discipleship and falter, he touches us and says, “Rise, and do not be afraid.” He is always with us, for we belong to him in baptism and we are on our way with him to the glory of his resurrection.
Nobody would be surprised to hear that the account of the Samaritan woman at the well is called a conversion story. Some will compare her to the woman caught in adultery or other famous women in Scripture. In reality there are many similarities among them all, but they don’t necessarily lead to traditional themes of repentance and penance.

If we start by looking at the Samaritan woman as an apostle in her hometown, we might ask about the message she took to her people. After all, she had engaged in quite a theological discussion with Jesus, going from questions about whether he had something better than Jacob’s well (tradition) to where people should really worship (liturgy) and ending with hearing Jesus identify himself as the Christ (theology). So, what was her message? “He told me everything I have done.” That is all that we hear from her. In discussion with Jesus she had said that the coming Messiah would “tell us everything,” but there was no hint that “everything” would be primarily personal information.

What we have in this story is a rather complex encounter in which Jesus first approaches this woman on the level of human need. He asks her for water. But oh, how the simplest things can be complicated! The Samaritans now owned Jacob’s well, a symbol of the common roots and tradition they shared with the Jews. But how could a Jew ask a Samaritan for anything? The Jews had destroyed the Samaritans’ temple on Mount Gerizim, they disdained the Samaritans for being backwoods idolaters whose intermarriage with non-chosen people had contaminated the bloodlines. In short, they were antagonistic peoples inextricably related to one another at the deepest level of their religious history. Jesus was taking on all of that with his simple request for a drink.

As the exchange progressed there was great theological discussion about living water, Jacob’s importance, correct worship, prophets and the coming Messiah. But what really counted was that Jesus revealed himself to the woman and revealed her to herself. We don’t know the extent of their dialogue, we only know that she came to believe he had come from God and proclaimed, “He told me everything I have done.”

What’s interesting about this in the context of Lent is that we have a conversion story that doesn’t focus at all on sinfulness or even traditional repentance but rather on being known and accepted. When the conversation about husbands began, the woman said she had none, and Jesus replied that she had known at least five. But there is no follow-up on the topic. No talk about straightening out her life, no discussion about laws concerning divorce and remarriage, nor about whether she could commune with him in her current state.

She told her people, “He told me everything I have done.” One gets the sense that Jesus explained her to herself. The symbolism of five husbands speaks to a person seeking something on a human level. Her discussion about where to worship, about prophets and the coming Messiah showed that she was well versed in the tradition and had real theological questions and religious hopes. But the message she took home spoke of none of that. She had been accepted for everything she was, just as she was. That fulfilled a need that no affair of the flesh or the mind could ever satisfy.
This story is about thirst, about God seeking and finding beloved humanity. Whatever her social status, whether she was the town reject or a popular figure, the Samaritan became an apostle, an evangelizer. In Evangelii Gaudium (“The Joy of the Gospel”), Pope Francis writes, “Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that she or he has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus.” That is exactly what happened to the Samaritan woman. Theology, liturgical correctness and the question of who has the better tradition are no more than distractions in the face of an encounter with Christ. Her interaction with Jesus filled her with the living water (the Spirit) that made her an apostle, one who enticed others into a similar encounter.

The church offers us this story in this third week of Lent and invites us to meditate on the woman and her transformation. It reminds us that our faith is based on a personal encounter with Christ, the one whose effect on us is like cascading water: Water filling us and bubbling over into joyful expressions of being so loved just as we are, that we are impelled to continue the relationship and share it. The conversion revealed here is about focusing on Jesus and God’s love, nothing more and nothing less.

After all is said and done, the reading does leave us with a blaringly unanswered question: Did she ever give Jesus that drink of water?

EX 17:3-7

The people grumbled against Moses. Grumbling. Murmuring is another word for it. It’s the proliferation of indirect complaints that aim more at socializing discontent than finding a solution to the problem. Now granted, a truly thirsty crowd is going to be touchy. But did they think Moses was hiding a fountain behind his tent for his own use? We might note how they were playing a game of “pin the blame on the leader” rather than addressing God with complaint or petition.

“Why did you make us leave Egypt?” People who talk like that are still thinking like slaves. Moses didn’t round them up and drive them with whips across the Red Sea. Instead he led their escape from servitude! And he got them out with pretty good booty. Exodus 12:34-36 tells us that they took the stuff that was theirs, their unleavened dough and kneading bowls, along with “contributions” from the Egyptians which included articles of silver and gold and clothing. We also hear they had animals. They must have looked a lot more like a caravan than a gang of fugitives.

Moses was caught in the middle. God had chosen him to lead the people, yet every time they got mad, they took it out on Moses. Poor Moses had nobody to complain to except God — everyone else was ready to stone him.

The route of the Exodus was not just a journey from one country to another. That trip could have been accomplished in a rather straight line in much less than forty years. The Exodus pilgrimage was a passage from slavery to freedom, from being no-one to being the people of God. They were moving toward faith, a journey that began in those forty years and would be repeated somehow by every succeeding generation — a fact sacramentalized in every Passover celebration.

March 19, 2017

Lent
3rd Sunday

A Samaritan Apostle

The desert was a testing ground where the people faced the question of whether or not they could learn to trust God and God’s providence. In the process, the people tested God, demanding that God act on their terms to prove that they had not been abandoned or duped in their acceptance of the offer of freedom. Their grumbling about thirst expressed a murmuring doubt about God’s care. It was a lack of faith as much as a need for hydration. Moses understood that and rather than send out scouts looking for wadis or wells he turned to God, being sure to mention that the dearth of water was about to have disastrous consequences for himself.

Using his staff, the symbol of his vocation as a shepherd of the people, Moses struck the rock where God promised to be present. From that very place water flowed and God saved the frightened people. God the thirst-quencher passed this round of testing with flying colors. The people however were still in process.

ROM 5:1-2, 5-8

Justification by faith is the major theme of the first four chapters of Paul’s Letter to the Romans and is at the heart of Lutheran theology. Perhaps for that latter reason the phrase doesn’t figure large in Catholic preaching and teaching. The Catechism of the Catholic Church has but two mentions of the phrase “justified by faith,” (#818, 1271) both of which refer to incorporation into Christ through baptism. So what do we do with the opening statement of today’s selection from Romans?

One way to understand justification is through considering its effects. Paul tells us that justification gives us peace with God, access to grace and a sure hope because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts. Justification, it turns out, was exactly what the Samaritan woman experienced in her encounter with Jesus. His grace, symbolized by living water, was poured into her heart and flowed over into apostleship. Paul says the same of the patriarch Abraham: He was justified by faith.
In other words, Abraham’s faith in God’s promise made him “righteous,” putting him in right relationship with God. It also made him fearless. From there, nothing was impossible. That was a lesson Abraham’s descendants forgot as they wandered from Egypt to the promised land.

Justification by faith begins with and depends completely on our receptivity to and our willing dependence on God. Rewording Micah we might say “This is what God requires, only this, that you be open to God’s great love.” Accepting God’s offer of love is what justifies us. It is also what will inspire and spur us to every sort of mercy in relation to others as well as to ourselves. With nothing to prove we will have nothing to fear.

**JN 4:5-42**

We know that the discourses in John’s Gospel have multiple layers of meaning, each building on the other. The same is true for his active scenes. During Lent we might approach the incident with the woman at the well as a screen play depicting conversion and salvation through interactions around food and drink and personal and theological discussions. Every line of dialogue and every movement has a rationale and a message — all are open to multiple interpretations.

The opening scene presents Jesus sitting alongside the well. The scene is more suggestive than 21st century people may realize as the well could be a place of wooing (Genesis 29, Exodus 2), a gathering place for women and a symbol of God’s gifts of water and therefore of life itself. According to Scripture scholar Juan Mateos (El Evangelio de Juan), when Jesus sat down at Jacob’s well he was doing more than resting: He was symbolically putting himself in the place of the ancient well as source of life. His posture was the first sign of all that was to come.

The time? The sixth hour, the same time of day at which he would eventually be crucified, indicating that this is his hour, the hour of salvation.

Enter the woman with her jug. Jesus addresses her with a familiar tone, asking for a drink. Lacking stage instructions, all we know is that the woman replied ironically, asking why a member of a group who considered themselves superior and too pure to mix with Samaritans would stoop to ask her for a favor — especially one that demanded touching the same things.

Jesus disregarded any hostility in her tone of voice just as he ignored the taboos that should have prevented him from speaking to a woman alone, much less a Samaritan. Ignoring the tradition of enmity, his two-pronged reply challenged her to recognize God’s gifts and who it was that spoke to her. That recognition held out the promise of living water.

That led to the first theological discussion about what Jacob — in other words, their shared tradition — offered. According to Jesus, their tradition offered sustenance for the body, like water in the desert, but fell short of fulfilling the human spirit. Missing the point, she asked him to give her freedom from thirst.

In a very odd turn of plot, Jesus told her to go get her husband. When she stated quite simply that she had no husband, he replied that she had had five and was with one now who was not a husband to her. The explanations of this interchange include the simple suggestion that the woman was a serial adulteress and therefore a known sinner to the idea that she represented Samaria as a whole who had historically worshipped multiple deities along with the God of Israel.

Recognizing him as a prophet, her response led to the theological question underneath their peoples’ mutual animosity. She asked about the place of true worship: Was it where the Israelites destroyed the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim or in Jerusalem’s still standing Temple? In reply, Jesus went right back to what he had originally said, but presented it in a new way. He wasn’t concerned about water or temples, but “Spirit and truth.” The hour was coming, in fact had arrived, when outward manifestations would lose their meaning and God’s Spirit would well up inside believers.

So far, she had gone from animosity to curiosity, to genuine questioning. Now, having heard more, she explained her belief: “When the Messiah comes, he will tell us everything.” Jesus simply replied, “I am he, the one speaking to you.”

The arrival of the disciples gave her the motive to return to town to tell her people what she had encountered. When it came time to put it into words, she didn’t talk about temples or wells or even the Spirit and truth. She said “He told me everything I have done.”

Like the first disciples who went to tell their friends about Jesus (John 1:40-48), what she told her people sparked enough faith to get them to go see for themselves.

**Sermon Starters**

*Deacon Dick Folger*

The Samaritan woman who encountered Jesus at the well declared: “Sir, I can see you are a prophet.” After her lengthy conversation with Jesus, she said to her townspeople: “Come and see someone who told me everything I ever did!”

The world seems to have always known people who claim clairvoyance. Today if you type “fortune teller” into the browser of your computer you can find hundreds of psychics listed.

For $3.99 a minute you can talk to one who claims to be “a gifted, honest, caring psychic who can help you with all issues.” Also available are astrologers, mediums, palm readers and tarot card readers.

It costs nothing to visit Jesus in prayer. He is the only one who can really tell you everything you ever did. He is the long-anticipated Messiah who said to the Samaritan woman: “I, who speak to you, am he.”
Preaching to Youth

Jim Auer

KEY VERSE(S) (Rom) “God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Jn) “We no longer believe because of your word; for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the savior of the world.”

THEMES God’s unconditional love and its ramifications. Making faith truly our own by growing into it.

STARTER There was a kid named John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt. If you never heard of him, it’s because you haven’t had enough summer camp experience. Don’t worry about it because he went by Joe Jones or simply J.J. His parents played chess and taught it to J.J. For a while, he enjoyed it and liked learning more about it. Then he took a break from it. He grew older, but his chess knowledge and skills stayed where they were years before. Now when he thinks about chess at all, he finds it boring, and of course he can’t play competitively.

LEADING QUESTIONS * How would you describe “unconditional love?” * Which people probably have the most difficult time believing God loves them unconditionally? * What events of your life cannot be explained by anything other than God’s love? * If we do not and cannot earn God’s love through good actions, why be good? Are there any suitable reasons for being good? If so, what are they?

DIRECTIONS TO EXPLORE * Apply the Starter chess example to someone who does not grow into an adult faith that is capable of responding to life’s more complex situations. * Good actions are the appropriate response to God’s gift of unconditional love. * If we believe God created us, then the very fact that we still exist is proof of his love. * For most people, becoming an independent adult means growing into maturity and leaving behind childish faith.

QUOTATIONS * “God loves each of us as if there were only one of us” (St. Augustine). * “Faith is not something to grasp; it is a state to grow into” (Mahatma Gandhi).

HOMILY

Deacon Doug Myler

Listen

Water is life. We have to have water to live. A person can live up to three weeks without food but only three days without water. Water is all around us; seventy-one percent of the earth is covered with water. However, safe, clean, running water in homes throughout the world is not readily available to all.

Millions of families live without it. The not for profit organization, water.org, works to bring sustainable clean water projects to those in need in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. They report that worldwide one in ten people do not have access to safe, clean water. That number is equal to twice the population of the United States, approximately seven hundred million people. For those millions, it means spending many hours each day carrying water from sources with no assurance that it is safe for drinking, cooking and bathing. Often the heavy physical work of carrying water for the home is done by women today.

A woman encounters Jesus at Jacob’s well while drawing water for her household. Their thirst brings them together. They both need water. Jesus’ thirst is physical. After walking in the heat of the day and at a considerable distance his body is hot, tired and thirsty. The woman, too, thirsts. She longs to have the burdensome work of hauling water completed for another day. Given the strict rules of public decorum regarding encounters between men and women not of the same family this chance meeting could have been over before it began. Women and men that were not related did not talk or have any association with one another in public. Add to this that Jews and Samaritans had been the bitterest of enemies for centuries. Their hatred for one another and hostility toward the other knew few if any equals.

But yet, the two sit, talk and listen to one another. Through their mutual acceptance of the other, the walls, boundaries, hostilities and hatreds, which had long separated Samaritans and Jews, melt away and disappear. The Samaritan woman comes to understand who Jesus is. Initially he is a Jew, the despised and hated other. As he candidly speaks of her marital history, she comes to believe that he is a prophet. As Jesus teaches her and reveals more of his identity the woman says, “I know that the Messiah is coming, the one called the Christ; when he comes he will tell us everything.” Jesus replies, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.” The woman then hurries away excitedly, to tell others in the town about this extraordinary man at the well. She asks, “Could he possibly be the Christ?” After listening to the woman and then listening to Jesus, the townspeople come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah.

The author of John’s Gospel says, “The woman left her water jar and went into the town.” Perhaps, knowing she was coming back, she knew she could retrieve it later. Or, did the author intend another meaning? Could the jar left behind serve as a metaphor for the life she had been living?

As she came to know more fully the person of Jesus, by talking with him and listening to him, was her life changed? Had she come to believe that by drinking of the water he gives, that she would never thirst again? Leaving water jars behind can be risky. Perhaps she was willing to take the risk. Maybe we should ask ourselves: What is our water jar? Would we be willing to take the risk and leave it behind?
God’s Unruly Works

Doesn’t it seem strange that the man who was transformed in today’s Gospel passage said nary a word until after he was healed? He didn’t ask Jesus for a cure nor did he tell his tale of being relegated to begging as the odd-one-out in a world he had never seen. In the beginning, he was just there, the object of other people’s judgment. He was just there for Jesus to see.

Jesus saw in him the potential of carrying God’s works forward. Thus, continuing the work of the Creator he molded clay and touched the man. Using the mud as if it were the oil of anointing he smeared it on the man’s useless eyes. This scriptural account bursts with images of creation, reminding the reader that everything begins with God’s loving initiative. God always takes the first step.

The second step, acceptance, depends on humanity. The man who could not see was receptive to Jesus’ word. He accepted Jesus’ command although he had no clue as to the outcome of his obedience. He came back transformed.

That was when his troubles began. It’s not easy for people to learn to see someone in a new way. The neighbors had adjusted quite well to the man’s physical incapacity. When they encountered him with his faculties intact they doubted their own eyes and wondered about justice, about sin and just punishment. In the light of their confusion the man did the unthinkable: He identified himself not only as the one they had known but also as someone recreated in the image of the man who had brought about his transformation. He said, “I am.”

They asked the question that solidified the controversy: “How were your eyes opened?” Although he repeated the six-part formula of his astonishing healing (Jesus made clay, anointed my eyes, told me go and wash, I went, I washed, and now I see), the short answer was “The man called Jesus.”

Because they couldn’t understand that, they took him to the Pharisees. The man called Jesus, the source of transformation, became the center of confusion and discord. The religious leaders, self-assured arbiters of true faith, found a quick and easy answer: “This work can’t be from God because it was done on the Sabbath. Everyone knows that neither God nor man are allowed to work on that day.”

Even some of the religious leaders choked on that answer. If the man called Jesus had brought about a great good, how could he be a sinner? So the authorities again questioned the man. Insisting that he tell the truth, they prefaced their question with their own certainty: “We know that he is a sinner.” The man-who-saw refused to go along with that description. He simply repeated what had happened to him: “I was blind, and now I see.” He then took the liberty of offering his own theological commentary: “Never, ever, has anyone healed someone born blind! How could he do it without God’s help?” His challenge to their rigid, dogmatic logic proved intolerable. To back up their unassailable orthodoxy they reminded the healed man that his condition was obvious — he was born blind, he was immersed in sin. How dare he instruct them? They then did the only thing that made sense to them: They excommunicated him, presumably for having been healed and for saying that the person who did it must be on God’s side.

The first time that Jesus approached this man it had been to offer him sight. Now, having heard that he was suffering for his sake, Jesus came...
to offer him solidarity and insight. As in their first encounter, Jesus took the initiative. He now asked if the seeing man believed in “the Son of Man,” the one who was to come. In a scene that parallels the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, the man asks who that might be and Jesus identifies himself. Jesus’ self-identification ratified what the man had told the leaders: Jesus had come from God. He could now wholeheartedly say “I do believe,” a statement that could be translated as a profound and joyful shout, “I see!”

The man-who-saw was never named. The word used to describe him was “anthropos” the Greek word designating a human being without specifying gender, ethnicity or historical context. The man born blind is everyone. When we hear this Gospel we are challenged to figure out which part we are playing in the drama and which we wish to play. We may be people definitively bound by our unshakeable convictions. We may be people who wonder what God might be up to. We may choose to allow authorities to give us the answers. Regardless, we are invited to be anthropos, people who realize we are somehow blind and are willing to be given sight.

1 SM 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a

The story of Samuel’s search for God’s chosen king offers an interesting companion piece to John’s account of Jesus and the man born blind. While the blind man didn’t know Jesus or what it meant to see, the Lord gave Samuel half the instructions he needed for his task. He was to go to Bethlehem and find God’s chosen one among the sons of Jesse. Little did he know that there would be eight candidates. Of course, only seven were important enough to worry about. Seven was the perfect number, and each of Jesse’s older sons presented himself well leaving no need to even consider the “spare,” that is, son number eight. David was so young and insignificant that his father didn’t even call him home from the field to participate in the sacrificial meal. But the prophet wouldn’t let anybody even sit down for the feast until the shepherd kid arrived.

Today’s readings reflect on how one sees, whether with a vision bound to culture, to self-aggrandizement, or one susceptible to the disruptive force of revelation. This is not simply a question of consulting the sacred sources but of discernment and obedience to inspiration that goes beyond our preconceptions. As the encounter between Jesus and the tempter in the desert made clear, Scripture can be interpreted to justify any point we want to prove, but God’s will has its own surprising trajectory. Therefore, after he’d seen seven fine specimens of manhood, all with leadership qualities, the Lord told Samuel to keep looking. Why? Because as Isaiah pointed out, God’s ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8).

Another subtle aspect between the stories of David and the blind man is the connection to creation. The blind man, “anthropos,” represented humanity. People who heard the story in a biblical language would have noted that the name, David (which means “ruddy”), refers to the dust of the earth, recalling Adam, the original man made of clay.

Of course, most important in the story of David was that the spirit of the Lord “rushed” upon him enabling him to be open to God’s will. Wounded hero that he would turn out to be, God had chosen him. Like his ancestor Adam, he would turn back to God after his momentary, sinful desires caused him to stray from following the will of the one who called him. Finally, neither the shepherd boy nor the man born blind fit the bill for being special characters — except in the mind of God. David, the youngest, was the one through whom God chose to work and the outcast blind man was the one to whom Jesus reached out in order to manifest God’s works on earth.

**EPH 5:8-14**

The Letter to the Ephesians is understood as a “circular letter,” written to multiple churches but originally presumed to be written by Paul and directed to the citizens of Ephesus. We can approach it as if addressed to us today and call the unknown author Paul.

What ties this reading to the first is the question of discernment. Samuel had to discern which man God had chosen. David, under the life-long influence of God’s Spirit, was called to discern how to be the sort of king God had chosen him to be. In this reading, Paul calls us to discern how to walk in the light, how to be pleasing to God. Comparing these passages, we will note that God spoke rather directly to Samuel — even telling him, “This is the one!” We, like David, have a much harder time deciphering the will of God in our everyday lives.

Obviously, the theme of light versus darkness connects this reading with today’s Gospel. What we may not immediately grasp is that for Paul there was an immense difference between people’s state before and after knowing Christ. Although they may have thought of themselves as ethical people, Paul claimed that they had truly lived in darkness — they had been as good as dead. As in the symbolic situation of the man born blind, they did not know what life was all about until Christ gave them light.
Now, like that man who learned to see Jesus for who he was, their task was to learn to live as children of the light. This idea is meant to challenge us to reflect on how profoundly different our lives are because of Christ.

This question leads us to the apostolic and prophetic dimension of the vocation to discern and live in the light. Not only does Paul call us to perceive and do what is pleasing to the Lord, but also to actively denounce the works of darkness. Christians must face and discern both facets as they respond to a vocational call.

First, we must determine what works reflect God’s light and carry them out. Secondly, we must pay attention to the culture around us and evangelize it by avoiding participation in the works of darkness and by the dangerous work of exposing them for what they are. Paul insists that because we have been brought out of darkness into light, we are now inevitably involved in the struggle between light and dark.

The last line of today’s reading is both a call and a promise: We are to wake up to our vocation assured that Christ will give us the necessary light.

**JN 9:1-41**

Although his contemporaries were probably little impressed with the unnamed blind beggar of this story, John presents him as the archetypical human being: “anthropos.” In typical Johannine fashion, he represents blind anthropos, a designation that implies a statement about humankind in general. John makes it clear that many of Jesus’ listeners considered themselves special, people with unique insight into God’s ways. It’s little wonder that Jesus chose the blind beggar to help him reveal the works of God, everyone else knew too much.

Just as God didn’t consult Eve and Adam about the potential benefits of creating them, Jesus approached the blind man with the earth-ointment of healing without asking him if he wanted to see. But once Jesus offered him the possibility of sight, mysterious as is must have sounded, the man did what Jesus told him to do and that led to transformation.

All might have been well if it hadn’t been for the onlookers. They represent a special brand of anthropos, people whose world goes out of whack when things go too well for others. Their cosmos had been settled and stable and they knew the necessary number of poor, blind and lame people around to assure them that they themselves were God’s blessed, whole-bodied favorites. But when the unchosen one was transformed everything went up for grabs. There’s a particular type of anthropos that need underdogs to prop up their identity: when there’s nobody under them, how can they feel important? Who could remain sure of being chosen when conditions could change with just a little mud and water? So they took the man-who-saw to the authorities, the Pharisee guardians of law and order.

After two interviews with the once-blind man the Pharisees lost their composure. The man-who-saw was incorrigible. He refused to appreciate their logic: that what had happened to him could not come from God because it was accomplished by someone who did not abide by the law. The man-who-saw had become identified with Jesus; he would have to be judged as the same kind of sinner as the healer.

Pope Francis has described the devil’s kingdoms as the places where “everything comes under the laws of competition ... where the powerful feed upon the powerless” (Evangelii Gaudium, “The Joy of the Gospel,” #53). The Pharisees about whom John wrote had become stuck in a dogmatic prison of their own making. They may or may not have understood how self-serving it was, and they surely would have denied that they had undermined the word of God, but they had assumed the authority to close revelation. Discernment was no longer necessary because all the answers had been given.

As Jesus tried to tell them, blindness is no sin, but choosing blindness, refusing to believe in God’s ongoing self-revelation and activity in the world is unforgivable because those who do so close themselves off from God.

Today’s readings call us to the discernment that is based upon openness to the unruliness of God’s word. We must accept that we are all blind when it comes to seeing the range of God’s possibilities. As we learn to do that, we may just be surprised by a brand new vision.

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**Sermon Starters**

_By Deacon Dick Folger_

In the 1992 movie, “Leap of Faith,” Steve Martin played the role of an evangelist named Jonah. He and his accomplices performed bogus faith-healing revivals to hoodwink the faithful and fleece them of their money.

Over the years many television faith healers have come and gone. Through dramatic gestures and intense prayer, they claim to heal others by commanding God to come down and remove the illness or infirmity.

Although many Christians believe in miracles, often we are skeptical just like the Pharisees and townspeople who could not believe their own eyes at the miracle of the man born blind. How could he suddenly be able to see? The Pharisees called Jesus a sinner and said he could not be from God because he did not keep the Sabbath.

Because we tend to believe what is comfortable and see only what we want to see, Jesus leaves us with a challenging thought: “I came into this world to divide it, to make the sightless see and the seeing blind.”
Preaching to Youth

**Jim Auer**

**KEY VERSE(S)** Psalms 23 and 88.

**THEME** All of life — ups, downs and in betweens — is material for relating to God.

**SPECIAL NOTE** The nearly universal familiarity of Psalm 23, today’s responsorial begs for treatment in a homily other than at funerals. The following suggestions include using the starkly contrasting Psalm 88 as well, and applying both to the life of David and the lives of the assembly present. At some early point, selections from Psalm 88 will need to be presented.

**STARTER/MEDIA LINK** (Offer one of these two options.) 

1. Descriptions of times in the homilist’s life during which Psalm 23 and Psalm 88 felt like perfect prayers, relating to events experienced at the time.

2. Singer and actress Jennifer Hudson has won an Academy Award, a Grammy Award, and a Screen Actors Guild Award. Six years ago, her mother, brother and nephew were murdered. Working through overwhelming pain and grief, Hudson learned to forgive the families of slain victims.

**LEADING QUESTIONS** When is it easier for you to pray — during dark times or sunny ones? Or do you find each one invites prayer about equally?

**DIRECTIONS TO EXPLORE** * Ups and downs in the life of David: * His defeat of the Philistine warrior Goliath. * The anointing by Samuel (happy but probably also intimidating). * David’s flight from Saul’s murderous pursuit. * David’s mouring over the death of Saul and especially David’s best friend, Saul’s son Jonathan. * His remorse over the affair with Bathsheba and the indirect killing of her husband Uriah.

**MEDIA LINK** “I laid in bed that night and thought about the day / And how my life is like a roller coaster ride / The ups and downs and crazy turns along the way / It’ll throw you off if you don’t hold on tight / I love this crazy, tragic / Sometimes almost magic / Awful, beautiful life” (Darryl Worley).

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**HOMILY**

**Loretta Pehanich**

**You Are Sent**

A couple crosses the street to welcome a new neighbor. Knocking on the door, they feel awkward. What if they appear foolish? Mindful of their mission, they proceed with the goal of making their neighborhood a welcoming place.

Today’s readings remind us of times when we are sent and invited to go beyond what is seen.

We may not carry a horn of oil, or stumble toward a distant pool. But God sends us to visit a sick relative, comfort a grieving friend, or help someone with homework. Regardless of the task, we may sometimes feel awkward or even afraid.

In the spirit of Samuel who, in today’s first reading, is being sent for a mission, we can ask ourselves: “What is my mission?” or “How is God calling me to serve?”

Samuel’s motives are to follow God’s call, and that means going beyond what he sees. Additionally, Samuel was invited to experience the unexpected. David, seemingly the weakest, is God’s choice.

The theme of seeing carries through to the Gospel. Imagine being blind and overhearing Jesus say that your blindness is because “the works of God might be made visible” — seen — in you. God will use you. God sees something special when God looks at you.

Jesus doesn’t heal you instantly. You must journey to wash. You are sent. Does your faith allow you to expect healing?

Remember Naaman, the leper from Syria, who, in another story from the Hebrew Scriptures, goes to see Elisha (2 Kings 5) for a cure. Instead of meeting him, the prophet sends Naaman a message, telling him to wash seven times in the Jordan. Naaman gets angry. He expected Elisha to see him personally, and do something extraordinary.

Naaman’s servant must convince him to go and wash, saying, “If the prophet told you to do something extraordinary, would you not do it?”

Naaman’s healing, David’s selection as king, and the blind beggar’s healing all involve people being sent, and taking steps to go beyond hesitations, first impressions and expectations.

I wonder if the person healed of blindness in today’s Gospel was excited to have mud put on his eyes, or did he feel foolish stumbling to the pool?

God wants action from us. Samuel steps up to God’s challenge, despite fear. The person healed risks looking foolish yet acts nevertheless. Am I willing to imitate them?

I may avoid accepting my mission, and have many excuses. Today’s Gospel is full of them: “It’s not really the blind beggar.” “He really wasn’t blind from birth.” “Jesus can’t be God because he cured on the Sabbath.” “Ask our son — I’m not going to commit myself to an answer.”

Forget the excuses. Rather, ask yourself: “What would I see and do, if I were not afraid?”

The second reading briefly touches on things seen: “Everything exposed by the light becomes visible.” Do I submit my decisions to the light that is Christ, so I can see situations with new eyes?

I wonder if the man born blind expected the consequences of seeing. Could he foresee being grilled by the Pharisees, ridiculed, mistreated and thrown out of his faith community? Once your eyes are open, it’s difficult to ignore what is seen.

In being sent, we exercise faith. We hope. Things may not turn out as we expect. Anything is possible when God sends us forth.
Season of Lent

Wed., Mar. 1 | Jl 2:12-18; 2 Cor 5:20-6:2; Mt 6:1-6, 6-18
Ash Wednesday

Be\thold, now is a very acceptable time. I get caught between conflicting self-assessments: “I can do that anytime,” and “It’s too late for me.” Learn to speak Spanish, practice Tai Chi, write that novel. I procrastinate as if I can do it anytime while also fearing to start because it seems too late. These attitudes are reflections of the sins against the Holy Spirit which are part of traditional Catholic piety: presumption (anytime) and despair (too late). Why are they called sins against the Holy Spirit? Because they exclude the possibility of grace. And when do we encounter grace? Now. Our family takes these first days of Lent to talk about our Lenten discipline and then we start on Sunday. This year mine may have something to do with “living in the now.” Gracious God, open my eyes to your grace all around me. PBS

Thurs., Mar. 2 | Dt 30:15-20; Lk 9:22-25

Choose life that you and your descendants may live. When someone dies whose death seems “timely,” there may be sadness, but also joy. But when someone dies in the prime of life or even before that prime is reached, it can be a struggle to reconcile one’s feelings. And when a person dies by suicide, the mourning never stops. In forty years of pastoral work I’ve seen this many times. I’ve felt it. One mourns all the “descendants” that are never to be, whether children or friends never known, or good works never completed. My witness of this painful reality has led me to embark on a new initiative: www.LifeAroundTheCorner.com. I invite you to take a walk around the site and stop in at Paige’s Corner to post a comment. Lord, give us the courage to trust in your plan for us. PBS

Fri., Mar. 3 | Is 58:1-9a; Mt 9:14-15

This, rather, is the fasting that I wish … I have counseled cantors about their nervousness when singing at Mass. What I advise is to think of leading song as an act of love and when you’re loving someone else, you’re less likely to think about yourself. Self-interest is normal, but along comes Lent with the words of Isaiah reminding us that the sacrifice God desires is to let go of our self-interest and think of others, especially those who are most vulnerable and easily overlooked as we rush through our daily lives. What if part of our Lenten discipline would be to reach out once a day to someone we normally fail to notice? That practice might change us. It might even change the world. Loving God, bless us and all those you put on our path as we enter this Lenten season. PBS

Sat., Mar. 4 | Is 58:9b-14; Lk 5:27-32

“Repairer of the breach,” they shall call you … It’s not the most melodious of titles, but it’s one I would be proud to have inscribed on my tombstone. Breach repairers are much needed. The divisions among us are painful, and many of good heart are wondering how to bring people together. Isaiah gives us a hint: “Remove from your midst oppression, false accusation and malicious speech … ” Living what we believe without succumbing to the temptation to present ourselves as better than the other would be a most worthy discipline to attempt this Lent. Tomorrow is the First Sunday of Lent when our family finally begins our chosen Lenten discipline. Let us pray for each other, that we may live Lent so as to find at Easter a world that is a little bit nicer. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a steadfast spirit within me. PBS

First Week of Lent

Mon., March 6 | Lv 19:1-2,11-18; Mt 25:31-46

Be holy, for I, the Lord, your God, am holy. The book of Leviticus is a collection of religious, civil, liturgical and moral laws that the Hebrew people were commanded to observe. Why? The answer is in the second verse: “Be holy, for I, the Lord, your God, am holy.” Of course God is holy, but us? Well, yes. And the instructions for doing this
should be quite familiar: do not steal, do not defraud your neighbor, do not insult the deaf or trick the blind, do not stand by when your neighbor’s life is at stake, do not hold grudges. What’s interesting and equally important is that these instructions were given to the community. We are not expected to be holy on our own; we are expected to live out God’s holiness in our relationships with each other. You have chosen us and called us to be holy, O God. JL

Tues., March 7 | Is 55:10-11; Mt 6:7-15
In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words. There are probably as many kinds of prayer as there are people. You can pray while kneeling, running, standing or sitting still. You can pray by yourself or with others. You can pray while singing, dancing or walking a labyrinth. Prayers can be silent or spoken. There is centering prayer, meditation, the rosary. Prayers can be memorized or spontaneous. Bottom line: there is no one way to pray. And on those occasions when there are no words, when all we can do is sigh and take a deep breath, even that is a prayer. Lord, hear our prayers, spoken and unspoken. JL

Wed., March 8 | Jon 3:1-10; Lk 11:29-32
Set out for the city of Nineveh, and announce to it the message that I will tell you. The short story of Jonah packs a big message. It is much more than a fish tale. It’s even more than the story of a man of faith who spends most of his time running away from God. It’s a story about being called to do things we don’t want to do. And it’s a story about second and third and fourth chances. The story of Jonah also raises important questions: Is there any person or place that is beyond the reach of God’s love? And is there anyone to whom God will not give a second chance? Remind us again, O God, of the width and breadth of your love and care. JL

Thurs., March 9 | Est C:12, 14-16, 23-25; Mt 7:7-12
Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. Sometimes we read this verse as Jesus’ promise that we will get anything we pray for, but I think it’s a gentle reminder that we do not have to beg God for wisdom or hope or guidance or patience. Whenever we’re facing struggles or temptations, all we have to do is ask — and trust that when we turn to God, our prayers will be heard. We look to you, O God, seeking your sustaining presence. JL

Fri., March 10 | Ez 18:21-28; Mt 5:20-26
You have heard it said ... but I say to you ... In today’s reading, Jesus takes a few laws from the Hebrew Scriptures, which are already difficult enough to obey, and makes them even tougher. After all, who among us has not been angry? Who among us is on good terms with everyone? Who has no relationship that needs to be reconciled? Who among us has not lusted? Far from lowering the standards for human behavior, Jesus raises the bar. Is it too high? Is he pushing an unrealistic standard that makes it impossible to be obedient and faithful? Or, does Jesus believe in us more than we believe in ourselves? Are we more capable of faithful discipleship than we think? Help us live up to your intentions for us, Divine Love. JL

Sat., March 11 | Dt 26:16-19; Mt 5:43-48
Love your enemies. Of all the hard teachings of Jesus, this is surely the most difficult. Throughout the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus has set a standard so high that following his commandments may seem impossible: Don’t be angry. Turn the other cheek. Treat others the way you want to be treated. Lent to those who ask. Now we receive an additional charge: Love and pray for your enemies. Jesus calls us to a different life, a life of peace and love, not anger or retaliation or revenge. Jesus calls us to make no distinction between “neighbor” and “enemy” — and in so doing, we build God’s kingdom. God of love, hear our prayers for our neighbors and enemies. JL

Second Week of Lent

Mon., Mar. 13 | Dn 9:4b-10; Lk 6:36-38
Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. When our faults (real or perceived) have been thrown back at us in the midst of a heated exchange, few have the grace to receive the unsolicited feedback with calm objectivity. More often, our own ire is ignited and our minds reach for faults that we can then throw back at our accusers. Anger usually begets anger, just as condemnation usually leads us to condemn in retaliation. It is, unfortunately, part of our human instinct to protect ourselves. Jesus reminds us that the human reaction of mirroring what is presented to us, is also true for more positive interactions. When we speak with attitudes of forgiveness, non-judgement and generosity, we are more likely to promote a similar response. Your words, Lord, are [and promote] spirit and life. MJ

Tues., Mar. 14 | Is 1:10, 16-20; Mt 23:1-12
The scribes and Pharisees’ works are performed to be seen. Our daughter, needing a change from her studies, decided to volunteer at a nearby soup kitchen. She’d envisioned herself preparing food or serving meals for grateful clients. When she arrived and offered her help, a frazzled cook/manager growled, “Those pots need cleaning!” Afraid to ask more questions, she tried to comply. After the two-hour long pot cleaning, her hands were raw, her clothes ruined, she angrily vowed to quit. Later, she asked herself, “Was I doing it for me or do I actually want to be of help?” Armed with an apron and rubber gloves, she returned to the kitchen — as a grateful cook — every Wednesday afternoon for two years. Thank you, Lord, for those who do the work of the kingdom unnoticed except by you. MJ

Wed., Mar. 15 | Jer 18:18-20; Mt 20:17-28
Hear me, O Lord, and listen to what my adversaries say. To stay updated in his profession, my husband periodically attends conferences. These events usually include a formal dinner to which spouses are also invited. The question most often asked as an “ice-breaker” among strangers is, “What do you do?” Being asked this question makes me a bit anxious in such secular crowds. Although I am proud of my work within the church, I also know that “working in religion” (any religion) can evoke misconceptions and stereotypical images with which I do not identify. Defending my beliefs and life choices often demands a delicate balance between diplomacy and my baptismal call to evangelize by example. Give us the words
and courage we need to reflect the body of Christ within the secular world. MJ

Thurs., Mar. 16 | Jer 17:5-10; Lk 16:19-31

My child, remember that you received what was good during your lifetime. When a friend lost her 21-year-old son in a car accident, she agonized over all the things she’d never told him, especially of how proud she was of him. We seem to have little difficulty in voicing criticisms, yet we hesitate to tell people with the same fervor: “Thank you!” “I’m sorry!” “I forgive you!” “I love you!” Like the rich man condemned to the nether world, regret and guilt can create a torment not easily assuaged. Life is too short and unpredictable to take the appreciation and responsibility of God’s many gifts for granted, or to postpone our expressions of gratitude. Lord, help us to see each day as an opportunity to live gratefully and generously. MJ

Fri., Mar. 17 | Gn 37:3-4, 12-13a, 17b-28a; Mt 21:33-44, 45-46

They sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. Consider Reuben. Like his brothers, he was jealous of Jacob’s preferential treatment of Joseph, but perhaps because he was the eldest, he also felt the responsibility of “doing the right thing.” While he used his influence to prevent Joseph’s murder, his intention to return Joseph to his father failed. When his brothers sold Joseph into slavery, Reuben was distraught, but did nothing to bring about justice. There are still “Reubens” in our world (myself included) who see injustices being committed, but through lack of courage or energy make only a half-hearted attempt to speak out against popular sentiment. Give us the courage, Lord, to join our voices to those who speak out against injustice. MJ

Sat., Mar. 18 | Mi 7:14-15, 18-20; Lk 15:1-3, 11-32

Not once did I disobey your orders. The wisdom of the prodigal son parable never grows old. I have been the prodigal son, hurting my parents through selfish and thoughtless actions. I have been the father who waited and prayed for a prodigal child to return home. Most often, however, I have been the eldest son who did all the right things for reasons other than love or gratitude, and condemned those who lost their way with a sense of self-righteous smugness. Discipleship is about more than following the letter of the law. It calls us to act with a sense of love and mercy while doing the right thing and leaving little room for ego. Forgive us, Lord, when we choose not to see others through the eyes of our merciful Father. MJ

Third Week of Lent

Mon., Mar. 20 | 2 Sm 7:4-5a, 12-14a, 16; Rom 4:13, 16-18; Mt 1:16, 18-2, 24a

Joseph, spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. Even Joseph, the patron of more “good works” than anyone, could not bump a Sunday in Lent, so we honor him one day after his March 19th feast. But such is his humility! Along with the Annunciation later this week, we get two “Christmassy” celebrations to brighten the solemn season of Lent. Maybe some day the church will celebrate Joseph because he must have been as fully graced as Mary from the get-go, to be so wise and faithful. Unlike Mary, Joseph never had a dialog with an angel; his obedience was assumed. The promises of the Lord I will sing forever! MD

Tues., Mar. 21 | Dn 3:25, 34-43; Mt 18:21-35

Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him? The Jubilee Year of Mercy ended some months ago, but Lent serves as a sort of mini-jubilee: a time of almsgiving, fasting and prayer. And nobody ever prayed better than Azariah! Of course, there’s nothing like a fiery furnace to concentrate the mind, don’t you know! He makes a long, honest confession and concludes: “And now we follow you with our whole heart.” The heart is the key to Jesus’ parable, too, where you will be “handed over to the torturers, unless each of you forgives your brother from the heart.” Not a lot of wiggle-room there — only enough space for mercy. Guide me in your truth and teach me, Lord, for you are God, my Savior. MD

Wed., Mar. 22 | Dt 4:1, 5-9; Mt 5:17-19

I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. Jesus does not want to abolish the law. Well, who would, if Moses’ description of the law in Deuteronomy is true? As noted in this passage, the law makes us wise and intelligent; its statutes and decrees are just, making us a great nation. In a word, the law proves how close God is to us, whenever we call upon the Lord. Of course, nowadays we might not regard any law — or law-enforcement, for that matter — as user-friendly. But during Lent, let me follow Jesus’ advice to teach his commandments proclaimed during the Sermon on the Mount, not just with words but above all with deeds, especially the simple loving act of staying close to someone yearning to be wise. O Lord, you send forth your command to the earth. MD

Thurs., Mar. 23 | Jer 7:23-28; Lk 11:14-23

But if it is by the finger of God that I drive out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you. It’s called Facebook, but we hide behind canned announcements rather than speak for ourselves. Imagine Jesus’ disgust when his enemies accuse him of hiding behind Beelzebul. He might have agreed with Jeremiah: “Faithfulness has disappeared; the word itself is banished from their speech.” Lent is a great time for sorting out whose side I am on. Every day, readings from this season form the bridge we need to cross to achieve a full conversion of heart. So let me pay heed to those whom God has sent to gather with Jesus instead of scattering. Oh, that today we would hear your voice: “Harden not your hearts!” MD

Fri., Mar. 24 | Hos 14:2-10; Mk 12:28-34

I will heal their defection, says the Lord, I will love them freely. Is anybody still fasting on Fridays in Lent? Well, fish fry dinners are more popular than ever. Of course, I’m not sure how “penitential” the practice is. Are we hypocrites for enjoying some tasty cod and great side dishes like mac and cheese, not to mention the dessert table? Maybe Lent doesn’t have to hurt after all. Maybe sharing and celebrating can also remind us of
our Lenten goal. Hosea is certainly in a happy mood: “I will be like dew for Israel, says the Lord. He shall blossom like the lily.” Jesus gushes on, too, about his favorite combo — love of God and its “side,” love of neighbor. Dear Lord, you feed us with the best of wheat, and with honey from the rock you fill us. MD

Sat., Mar. 25 | Is 7:10-14, 8:10; Heb 10:4-10; Lk 1:26-38
Annunciation of the Lord
The child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. Falling on a Saturday this year, this feast gets little time to shine before we celebrate the Fourth Sunday of Lent. Now, someone’s going to say, “That’s fine, we get a lot of Mary already, with at least one feast a month, not to mention Saturdays!” But, someone else could respond that too much is just about right. As the mother of Jesus, Mary is the best reminder of why we love him, and why he loves us. She helps make Lent a special time for any of us who “birth” Jesus in our service to others. Be on the watch for Gabriel’s approach! To do your will, O my God, is my delight. MD

Fourth Week of Lent

Mon., March 27 | Is 65:17-21; Jn 4:43-54
... and he and his whole household came to believe. A royal official invited Jesus to come to his home to heal his son. Jesus didn’t need to go. The man’s belief was enough, not only for himself and his son’s health, but for his entire household. The church, formed partly from new believers, desired salvation for entire families. They met in houses, which served as the heart of their communities. The Christian home provides an environment of love, support, prayer and moral teaching. John Paul II called the Catholic family “the domestic church.” Ideally, our homes provide structure and model faith for our children. It isn’t easy. We may feel our family life resembles a circus more than a church. Don’t let the messiness of life keep you from welcoming Jesus into the chaos. Loving Father, assist us in making our homes places of healing and stability. PR

Tues., Mar 28 | Ez 47:1-9, 12; Jn 5:1-16
“Do you want to be well?” This question posed by Jesus may seem odd when addressed to one having suffered for 38 years. Jesus, however, sees beyond the physical ailment. The man is stuck. He’s defeated. He complains that no one helps him. He bemoans others finding healing at the pool of Bethesda. Now, he no longer tries. If the man’s condition doesn’t hold him back, his attitude certainly will. He wastes each precious day expecting disappointment. Jesus gets him back on his feet. Illness, depression and disappointment can overwhelm us, especially when we give in to the despair of facing our pain alone. We make it worse by clinging to our mats and cursing our situations. Embracing Jesus may not heal our physical condition, but it will change our mindset. The Lord wants us to be well. Let’s reach out to him in our brokenness. Heal me, Lord; make me whole. PR

I say to you, the Son cannot do anything on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing. To be perfectly clear, Jesus can do whatever he wants; what he wants is to do the Father’s will. Obedient and dependent, he knows the Father’s desires and acts accordingly. He doesn’t shift responsibility when the Pharisees question his actions. Instead, he exalts the Father as the source of his power. Jesus claims his role as the Son of God, despite the backlash, and acknowledges his authority and divine mission. It’s a risky move; he cannot turn back. It’s the Pharisees’ turn to be courageous, but rather than accepting the Messiah, they charge him with blasphemy. Help me, Lord, boldly profess your power and glory no matter the consequences. PR

Thurs., Mar 30 | Ex 32:7-14; Jn 5:31-47
For if you had believed Moses, you would have believed me, because he wrote about me. Jesus emphasizes his presence in the Torah. Philip tells Nathanael, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law.” Jesus repeatedly shows his relationship to the ancient Hebrew text. He explains that the anticipation of the Messiah leads to him. The people, however, still lack understanding. Jesus tells them that if they listened to the prophecies, they would recognize and receive him. No matter how obvious the truth is, some people refuse to see the facts. Acceptance comes from being receptive to the Word. Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant; embracing the Hebrew Scriptures broadens our knowledge of him. Open our understanding, Lord. PR

Fri., Mar 31 | Wis 2:1a, 12-22; Jn 7:1-2, 10, 25-30
I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me. The doubters think they have it all figured out. They claim that since they know Jesus and where he came from, he can’t be the Christ. Jesus points out the error in their thinking by asserting that God isn’t the source of his origin. In doing so, he challenges their mindset and questions the depth of their knowledge. Since God, indeed, sent him as a fulfillment of the ancient promises, it is clear they don’t know God. This harsh truth disturbs their thinking and gives them momentary pause, but does little in the end to change their hearts. How often does our stubbornness and pride keep us from listening to and accepting the truth? Help us to know you, Lord. PR

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