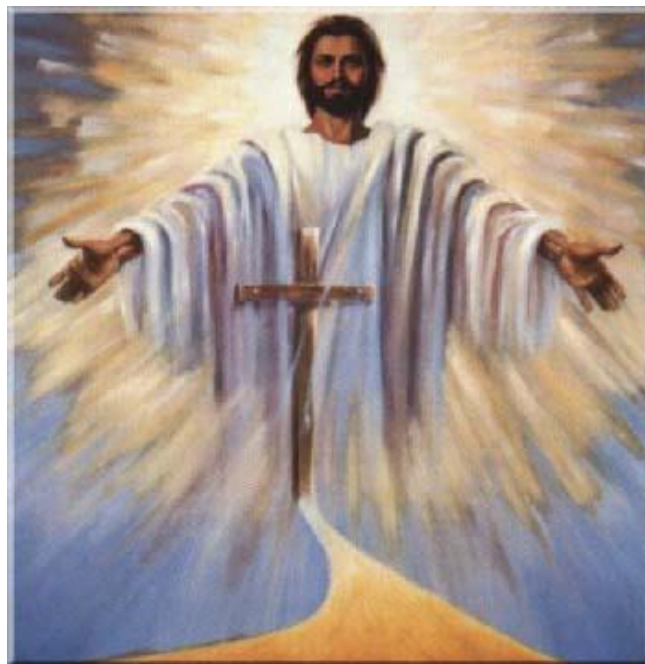


ARCHDIOCESE OF DURBAN



Lenten Reflections 2022

*Come back to me
with all your heart*



WEEK ONE

SUNDAY 6 MARCH

Scripture: *Joel 2: 12 - 18*

Reflection

Our Lenten Season began on Ash Wednesday with the call of God, through the Prophet Joel, “Come back to me with all your heart.” What an extraordinary invitation to: a) come back, and b) with all your heart.

a) Come back: You may (rightfully) argue “but I haven’t been away!” The truth is that because of Covid during the past two years of Lent and Advent, many have not been able to go to Mass. Even for those who have, our faith has taken quite a knock and honestly, it isn’t what it could be and should be. There are some (you may know them), who haven’t returned to Mass at all. Whatever situation you find yourself in, I am sure you can relate to God’s call and invitation as we begin this Lenten journey. Take it to heart and make it a personal invitation to you – to pray more, to be more spiritually focused, to read scripture, to go to Mass more often, to be serious about your fast and abstinence, to repent and believe in the Gospel as you heard when the ashes were signed on your forehead on Ash Wednesday. Now is the time to come back!

b) With all your heart: We all know what it means to be ‘half-hearted.’ We have done that when we lacked motivation, were not really convinced, not enthusiastic and simply following instructions. But we also know what it is to do something whole-heartedly. This is what God calls us to: to put our whole heart, soul and being into this Lent. Jesus did this when he resisted the temptations he experienced in the wilderness. The Gospels bear strong testimony to the *total commitment* of Jesus. Can you embrace this Lent with *total commitment*? Lent calls us to *metanoia* – a genuine and sincere change of heart.

Jesus strengthened himself through fasting, prayer, scripture and his intimacy with the Father. Similarly, you can strengthen yourself through increased daily prayer, reading scripture (especially the Gospels), and your intimacy with Jesus through the Eucharist.

Practical Suggestion

In a spirit of complete faith, hope and trust, choose today to embrace whole-heartedly the call of God to “Come back to me with all your heart.”

Prayer

Father, I place myself in your hands at the beginning of this first week of Lent. Strengthen my resolve to embrace your call and to follow Jesus with a lively faith. Guide my Lenten Journey and help me to resist temptation. Amen

Listen to this song: Come back to me.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SJ20I-UhTec>

MONDAY 7 MARCH

Scripture: *Matthew 25 : 31 - 46*

Reflection

Just in case we lull ourselves into complacency regarding our faith, we have the words and instructions of Jesus to wake us up today! Most of us consider regard ourselves as loyal, good, faithful Christians, but (and it is a huge BUT) is that enough? Are we satisfied with going to Mass faithfully, praying the rosary and other prayers, reading the Bible – or is there something more that is asked of us who are good, loyal and faithful Christians? Oh yes there is! Jesus makes this abundantly clear in today's Gospel: Feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, visit the sick and those in prison.

The hungry, thirsty, naked, homeless, strangers and sick are all around us! They drag us out of our comfort zone and complacency. We encounter them every day and, truth be told, they make us feel uncomfortable!

Jesus wants us to do something, not just feel guilty about our apparent inability to do anything for the homelessness, hunger and poverty that surrounds us.

Faith, like the Word of God, *is something alive and active* (Hebrews 4:12). Our faith is lived through our willingness to '*do whatever he tells you*' as Mary said to the servants at the wedding in Cana (John 2:5) and pharaoh to the people in Genesis 41:55, in regard to Joseph.

Today Jesus himself tells us what we must do in order to attain salvation, and to enter into God's kingdom. Knowing what is required should spur us into action, and definitely not not cause us to react out of fear. When we reach out from within ourselves to do for others, and to give to others, something wonderful happens to us: we begin to share in the goodness of our God!

Practical Suggestion

Look through your cupboards this week and take out the items of clothing which you haven't worn for a while. Parcel them up and either take them to church to be given to the poor, or find a needy person and give the parcel to them. If you are accustomed to eating special treats with your tea and coffee or fancy desserts after your meal, try to cut them out during this week or throughout Lent as an exercise in self-denial.

Volunteer to have a hands-on experience of helping the needy by joining the St. Vincent de Paul Society who are always in need of an extra pair of hands for the wonderful work they do. Contact the parish office to get details about how you can assist them.

Prayer: Father, each day I implore you to 'give us this day our daily bread' which you do with an abundant generosity. Help me to give others their daily bread and to be an answer to their prayers in their need. Amen.

TUESDAY 8 MARCH

Scripture:

Matthew 6: 7 – 15

"Your father knows what you need before you ask him"

Reflection

If you read Luke's gospel you hear that this 'prayer' was taught by Jesus in answer to a request of one of the disciples who said, "Lord, teach us to pray". Jesus says that God our Father 'knows what you need before you ask him', so then you may well ask yourself, 'What is the point of praying? If God already knows what I need, why do I have to ask?'

The answer to that is that God wants to be 'connected' to each of His children – He wants to hear us – our voice, and to have confirmation of our dependence upon Him. It's precisely the same as having any meaningful relationship in your life – if you don't keep up the connection, the relationship will falter and soon come to an end!

It has been said that the 'Lord's Prayer' can only be prayed by someone who knows what he/she is saying, and has actually decided to be a disciple!

The order of the petitions in the prayer are important – the first three have to do with God and His glory, and it is fitting that we should put Him above all other people and things – He is our Creator!

The second three deal with our needs and necessities, and even there there is order: we ask for 'bread' – the necessity for the present time; we ask for 'forgiveness', which brings in the past; and we ask for 'help in avoiding temptation', which puts the future in His hands!

So, this Lenten journey, let us make this prayer really meaningful in our lives!

Practical suggestion

Set aside 10 – 15 minutes each day as a time when you will renew your connection with God the Father – time to talk to, listen to, and just to be with Him. Make this prayer part of your 'conversation'!

Prayer

Jesus, thank You for teaching us how to pray. May the Holy Spirit open my heart and mind to hear the voice of the Father as I talk with Him each day. I pray this in Your name. Amen.

WEDNESDAY 9 MARCH

Scripture: *Luke 11: 29 - 32*

Reflection: Yom Kippur is the holiest day in the Jewish calendar where Jews atone and repent through prayer, fasting and confession. In the afternoon, Scripture is proclaimed from the prophet Jonah to whom our Lord refers in today's Gospel.

As children we were all fascinated by Jonah because he tried to run away from his God-given task of getting the people of Nineveh to repent. Long story short, he was thrown overboard, swallowed by a whale and vomited onto the beach three days later, after which he rallied the whole nation to repent, and they did. God spared them from disaster.

Jesus faced a huge crowd who had witnessed His miracles, but instead of increasing their faith, they created more unbelief because some thought that the real power behind his healing was really Satan. They doubted his authenticity and authority. He knew that they wanted a sign to reverse their thinking. He told them that the only sign that he would give was the sign of Jonah. In other words He would lead all people to repentance and, unlike Jonah, he would do it willingly. Like Johan he was destined to enter the tomb for three days and then to emerge in the resurrection. This is how they would come to know that he is the Son of God, the Messiah. Obviously this sign was to be given at the end of His earthly life. They had no idea what He was talking about at the time. Only in hindsight would they – and we – come to understand.

What we do with this sign will determine our own eternity. There will never be another sign so powerful as the passion, death and resurrection of the Lord.

This is what Lent is all about. During this sacred time we also remember to pray for those who have yet to believe in this sign and become instruments of leading them to faith and belief.

Practical Suggestion

We are called to embrace the sign of the Holy Week Triduum (Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday) to acknowledge that Jesus as the One who will determine our eternal destiny. We have to internalise this sign to produce the change in ourselves that the Holy Spirit is so desperately waiting to bring to fulfilment in us. Plan ahead now to participate in the Triduum during Holy Week.

Prayer

Holy Spirit of God, you were sent by the Father in the name of Jesus to help me. During this Lenten season guide my mind and guard my heart so that the greatest sign ever given may become a sign illuminating my life. Amen.

THURSDAY 10 MARCH

Scripture: *Matthew 7: 7 - 12*

Reflection

During Lent we are called to make a special effort to pray. Prayer takes many forms. There are people who struggle with the concept of prayer and question whether they are “doing it right,” but there is really no wrong way to pray. Prayer is our inner-most spirit communing with God.

When we see the beauty and perfection of nature we may spontaneously glorify God for His wonderful creation. We may praise God for our safe arrival after travelling or for the gift of a new life which has come into the world. At other times when we are angry, hurt or in despair we may shout out to (at) God in our frustration. When we are grief-stricken we may sob our way through our prayers to God. God hears every prayer.

It is very easy to attempt to limit God when we pray, especially when we petition Him for His help and assistance. We may think we need to be very specific with our request and tell Him exactly how we want Him to answer our prayer. In truth, God sees the bigger picture and He knows what the best outcome for our particular circumstance would be. There is no need to barter with God or to tell God precisely how we want Him to handle our problem or in what way we think He should work in and through our life. Our prayer should be *“Thy will be done”* in every situation, believing in faith that He will answer our prayer in His time and in His way.

Never stop asking according to His will for your Life. Continue seeking His guidance in your life. Always knock and be ready to receive the richness of God’s blessing which He freely gives to you.

“For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.” (Matthew 7:8)

There are times when we feel far from God. It is not God who has drawn away from us but rather we who have distanced ourselves from Him. He is always waiting and longing for us to return to Him. He is only one prayer away!

Practical Suggestion

Create a Prayer Journal for Lent. Each day make a note on at least one thing that “I praise God for today” one thing “I thank God for today” and one thing “I ask God for today”. As you go about your day, try to notice things that you can praise and thank God for or that you could petition God to help or guide you with. You may just catch yourself praying more than you ever knew was possible.

Listen to this song: In his time <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aJeNUlNY7lw>

Prayer: Father, not my will, but Thy will be done. Amen.

FRIDAY 11 MARCH

Scripture: *Ezekiel 18: 21 - 28*

Reflection: *If the wicked man renounces all the sins he has committed, respects my laws and is law-abiding and honest, he will certainly live; he will not die.* You have probably heard people say, 'God is a God of second chances'. This statement unsettles me because people might be under the impression that God counts the number of times he forgives us. I prefer to believe that God not only gives us second chances, but rather that He is a God of *another chance*. As many times as the wicked person genuinely repents and asks for forgiveness from God, they are forgiven.

Today's scripture from the prophet Ezekiel coincides with the theme of Lent: repentance (to come back to God with our hearts). On Ash Wednesday we were signed on our forehead with ashes and we heard these words, '*Repent, and believe in the Gospel*'. During this season of Lent, we seek reconciliation with God and with each other. God does everything possible to draw us to repentance, offering forgiveness and another chance. In the Catholic Church, we have the Sacrament of Reconciliation which was given to us by Jesus to help us reconcile with God and his Church. This sacrament can be repeated as often as we need and it helps us to overcome our sins.

God is not just a God of second chances because if it were so we would be in trouble. Knowing that God gives us ample chances to repent is good news, because most of us mess up the second chance fairly quickly.

The book of Proverbs says, "*Though the just fall seven times, they rise again, but the wicked stumble from only one mishap.*" (24:16). This verse attests to and reassures us that failure is not the end of the road. A fall does not have to be the end. We rise as better persons with the help of God. In this first week of Lent, we are reminded to be patient with ourselves as God is patient with us. When we fall into sin, we cannot sit in the dust of sin. We choose to get up as many times as we fall. Even with good intentions, we might find ourselves down and disheartened but remember that God is always merciful and gracious.

Practical Suggestion

Patience with oneself is hope, and patience with God is faith. Many people struggle with patience especially when they fall over and over again into sin. Today try to maintain a right attitude and don't be too hard on yourself. Conversion may take time. Always remind yourself that God is patient with you.

Prayer

Eternal Father, turn our hearts to you. Enlighten us with your word, that we may find the way to your glory. During the season of Lent, may you teach us to find new life through repentance and help us live by your commandment of love. Through Jesus Christ your Son. **Amen.**

SATURDAY 12 MARCH

Scripture: *Matthew 5: 43 -48*

Reflection: Today's extract from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is very challenging and very stark, making our Lenten Theme, "Come back to me with all your heart" seem tough. If we come back to Jesus, we must follow his lead! But can we ever be completely comfortable with Jesus' command to love our enemies? It seems to go against every human instinct. We can be tempted to dismiss it as unreasonable and impractical.

Jesus was envisaging a situation where his own followers would be persecuted and would have many enemies. He was teaching them in advance how they were to relate to those who would inflict suffering on them because of who they were and what they were doing in spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Saint Paul echoes this teaching of Jesus in his letter to the Romans, when he exhorts the members of the church in Rome, *'Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought of what is noble in the sight of all... Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good'*. That last exhortation of Paul captures the essence of Jesus' teaching in our gospel reading. If your enemy does evil to you, do not add to the store of evil in the world by responding in kind. Rather, love your enemy, pray for those who persecute you. Overcome evil with good. Pope St John Paul II said that to love someone with truly benevolent love is to will God for them since God is the supreme good of each human person.

'Be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect'. God is constantly at work to overcome evil with good. Jesus' life, death and resurrection were God's supreme effort to overcome evil with good. In calling on us to be God-like, some might say that Jesus is asking too much of us. Yet Jesus knows the good of which we are capable with God's help, even against all the odds and in the face of great provocation.

Practical Suggestion

Call to mind those people who have offended you or those whom you have come to distrust. Place them before God in your prayers, asking God to Bless them. Offer up a prayer for the end of violence in the Ukraine and the rest of the world.

Prayer

Lord, you present a message that is not easy for my fallen nature to accept. However, I believe in your words, and I trust you because you alone have the words of eternal life. I turn to you as one in need. Lord, help me to love my enemies and pray for those who persecute me. I want only to please you in all I do. Amen

These Daily Reflections for Lent 2022 are written by Fr. Desmond Nair, Irene Helsdon, George Cominos, Veronica Donnelly Fr. Wandile Cagwe, and Mike Montocchio. Please acknowledge the authors when copying and distributing. We wish you a fruitful and blessed Lenten Season as you respond to God's call to come back to him with all your heart.

Archdiocese of Durban



Lenten Reflections 2022

**Come back to me
with all your heart.**



WEEK TWO

SUNDAY 13 MARCH

Scripture: *Luke 9: 28 - 36*

Reflection

Much like Peter, every time I have been on Mt. Tabor, traditionally the site of the Transfiguration of Jesus, I say the words "Lord it is wonderful for us to be here." When on pilgrimage in the Holy Land, we travel from Nazareth, where Mass is celebrated in the Basilica of the Annunciation, to Mt. Tabor. From atop the mountail (a high hill actually) we are able to look back towards Nazareth and then in the direction of Jerusalem ahead. The top of a mountain or hill gives us perspective as we look around.

Today we begin the second week of Lent and in order that we may not lose our perspective, the Church invites us to join Jesus, Peter, James and John so that we may be able to look back to where we have come from on our Lenten journey - Ash Wednesday to where we are going to at the end of this Lenten journey - the Passion, Death and Glorious Resurrection of Jesus.

There, while at prayer, Jesus was transfigured and Moses and Elijah appeared with him. God the Father was offering his Son a perspective on his mission and ministry: he was truly the fulfillment of the Law (Moses) and the Prophets (Elijah). His transfigured being was a sign of what awaited him in Jerusalem, after his passion and death.

There is a further perspective we are given today. In addition to our Lenten journey, is our journey through life - from birth and Baptism, to death and Eternal Life! We know where we have come from, where we are today, and where we are going to!

Despite Peter's suggestion to make three tents, Jesus knew that he had to leave the top of the mountain and set his face to Jerusalem. This is what the Father strengthened him to do, as difficult as it would be. The Lenten journey is not an easy one for those who take it seriously. It is fraught with temptations, hesitations and the desire to abandon the journey. Like Jesus, we are strengthened by our faith, the Word of God and the Holy Eucharist. We set our face to Easter, and Eternal Life, and we choose live and walk with Jesus.

Practical Suggestion

The Gospels record that Jesus, on quite a few occasions, took with him Peter, James and John. He needed the companionship of these three apostles. In the same way, we need companions to help and support us in our Lenten journey. Think of two or three people whom you can invite to be your companions this Lent.

Prayer: Walk with me O my Lord. Help and guide me on my journey through Lent so that I may come to the joy and renewal of my faith at Easter; on my journey through life, so that I may come to the joy of Eternal Life. Amen.

MONDAY 14 MARCH

Scripture: *Luke 6: 36 - 38*

Reflection

Compassion alludes to kindness and sympathy, but there is something deeper, something even more profoundly powerful, in its meaning. The origin of the word helps us grasp the true breadth and significance of compassion. In Latin, 'compati' means "suffer with." Compassion means that someone else's heartbreak becomes your heartbreak. Another's suffering becomes your suffering. True compassion changes the way we live.

Compassion motivates people to go out of their way to help the physical, mental, or emotional pains of another and themselves. Compassion is often regarded as having sensitivity, which is an emotional aspect of suffering.

This is what Jesus is calling us to. He wants us to be more than sympathetic, but to enter into the hardships, struggles and difficulties of others. What an extraordinary challenge! Are you up to it? Of course we can do it – with his help we can be genuinely compassionate people – if we want to be!

Do not judge, do not condemn, grant pardon! Are you ready for this? Are you open to this?

Today's Gospel contains the very essence of what Lent is all about. Its one thing to give up sweets and chocolates, alcohol, smoking and other such things, but completely another to undergo a genuine *metanoia* – a change of heart! This is what lies at the heart of Lent as we return to the Lord **with all our heart!** To be a better person, which is the goal of Lent, we need to become more like Jesus; to show and demonstrate his compassion for the poor, the sinner, the weak and the oppressed, to reach out and touch others as St. Francis did with the lepers and as Pope Francis does with people – the young and the old, the sick and the healthy, the poor and the downtrodden, the homeless and the hungry. In addition to these, there are many who are in need of compassion. Just look around you!

We are quick to judge, to condemn with our own sense of self-righteousness, and we are frequently unwilling to forgive. We almost appear to take delight in holding grudges – it gives us something to fuel our indignation. Are you willing to change, to refrain from judging others? Are you willing to grant pardon?

Practical Suggestion

Find one person who is in need of your compassion. Make a decision to not to be judgemental. It is not our place to judge and neither do we have any right to.

Prayer:

Father, help me to be like Jesus. Give me the strength to live as he calls me to, the courage to change my judgemental attitude towards and the compassion to embrace others with love. Amen.

TUESDAY 15 MARCH

Scripture:

Matthew 23: 1 – 12

“Anyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and anyone who humbles himself will be exalted

Reflection

The all-important ‘Law’ which controlled the lives of the Jewish people, originated with the Ten Commandments given to Moses. Moses passed them on to Joshua, Joshua to the elders; from the elders they were given to the prophets and the prophets passed them to the Pharisees and Scribes. At that point they were ‘analysed and broken down’ into hundreds of laws which regulated every aspect of life.

Two great principles underscored the ‘Law’: REVERENCE for God, His name and His day, and RESPECT for oneself, for others, for life, for possessions, for property and for a person’s reputation. These principles are eternal – they never change, and, in so far as the Pharisees and scribes taught and upheld these principles, they were to be ‘listened to’ and obeyed.

The problem however, was that the religion practised by the Pharisees was one of ostentation – it was all about ‘show’. Everything they did, from the way they dressed to the way they wanted to be greeted, was ostentatious – designed to draw attention to themselves.

Christians, on the other hand, should desire to ‘obliterate’ themselves; so that any glory goes to God in heaven where it belongs. Lent is a good time to examine ourselves, our deeds and our motives. Are they as God would have them?

Practical suggestion

Take time to reflect on the following: “Have I created a ‘burden’ for anyone in some way? Have I been guilty of ‘exalting’ myself above others?” If so, pray for the grace to make change where it is needed.

Prayer

Lord, I pray for the grace to be humble – also for the grace to be able to distinguish between the ‘messenger’ and the ‘message’, and so to follow the truth at all times. Amen.

WEDNESDAY 16 MARCH

Scripture

Matthew 20: 17 - 28

Reflection

This is the third time Jesus tells His Apostles that He is going to suffer grievously and that He will rise again. Despite Peter having professed his faith (Matthew 16:16), in the presence of these same Apostles, that Jesus is the Christ, it goes way over their heads. They are too focused on themselves. Me, myself and I.

The mother of Zebedee's sons joins their misunderstanding: they were looking for Our Lord's crown and not His cross; they were looking toward to His coronation and not His crucifixion. The cup that the Saviour will drink is the cup of giving His life for the life of others. There is no greater love than to lay down your life for others. (John 15:3) This is the ultimate honour in servant leadership. For us, "laying down your life," means sacrificing time, talents and treasure for the sake of others. Jesus and the martyrs of the Church took this to the extreme.

Our Saviour does not give us a choice of what type of Christianity we would like. His Christianity has nothing to do with warm fuzzy feelings, nothing to do with what appeals naturally to human wants and desires, nothing to do with health and wealth. He did not die to make us happy (satisfying all our appetites and making us rich). In this Gospel extract, Jesus puts paid to any notion of prosperity as a reward for being Christian. His cross must be at the centre of our life of service.

In serving others in moments of sharing, tender care, helping with chores, conversations, meals, listening, encouraging and empathising, we will find our true humanity. We will also find the deep meaning of our lives and will attain true happiness and joy. We also need to be open to receiving from what others have to offer us.

Practical Suggestion

Lent is a time when we look into ourselves to determine the extent to which we are living out Christ's call to serve others. We enrich this introspection with prayer, fasting and almsgiving. This brings us back to the essence of being Christian.

Prayer

Holy Spirit, without your help, we cannot truly look into the mirror of our relationship with the Father and with others and find a true reflection. Kindle in us the fire of Your love so that we may be renewed during this precious Lenten season.

THURSDAY 17 MARCH

Scripture: *Luke 16 : 19 - 31*

Reflection

When we read this parable, our first impression may well be that if you're rich in this life, you will spend eternity in Hell in the next and if you're poor in this life, you are guaranteed to spend eternity in Heaven. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is so easy to overlook the real reason the rich man was punished and the poor beggar won God's approval.

If you read from the beginning of Chapter 16 you will notice that Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees who loved money (Vs. 14). Jesus was not condemning the rich man for having great wealth but He was drawing their attention to the fact that the rich man was self-indulgent and all-consumed by his lavish lifestyle, that he was completely oblivious of the plight of Lazarus who lay outside his gate.

We can tell that the rich man knew something about the Jewish faith because he calls out to father Abraham, but he was so totally obsessed with the amassing of material things that he had completely cut himself off from God. When our lives are filled with 'stuff' and every minute of our day is taken up attending to our material possessions, we run out of the time to spend growing our relationship with God and eventually God is squeezed completely out of our life.

The first commandment states "I am the Lord your God, you shall not have false gods before me." We think that this commandment forbids the fashioning of pagan idols. That may well have been true for the Israelites who didn't hesitate to make a golden calf during their sojourn in the desert. This commandment is even more relevant for us today.

We accumulate a wide variety of false gods, and while material possessions in themselves are not evil, anything that keeps us from spending time growing in faith can turn our hearts away from God and become a false god in our life. God knows that we are going to be attracted to material things and He doesn't forbid us from having them, providing that we keep His commandments and put faith first.

The rich man had hardened his heart and had chosen to separate himself from God in this life, and so he continued to live separated from God in the after life.

Practical Suggestion

Spend a while analysing where and what you spend your time on. See what activities you would be able to cut back on or give up each day to make time to spend reading God's Word and praying.

Prayer

Father, forgive me for the times when I've been too busy to make time for You. Never let me be separated from Your love. Amen.

FRIDAY 18 MARCH

Scripture: *Genesis 37: 3-4,12-13,17-28 Matthew 21:33-43,45-46*

Reflection

"It was the stone rejected by the builders that became the keystone." Today we see a correlation between the first reading and the gospel. In the first reading, Joseph was rejected by his brothers and sold into slavery in Egypt because of jealousy and envy. Likewise, in the gospel, Jesus tells a parable about the vineyard. The tenants of the vineyard killed the landowner's son. This parable is about God's own Son, Jesus Christ. The rejection of Joseph prefigures the rejection and death of Jesus. The tenants who were left in charge of the vineyard are God's own people. The servants sent to collect the harvest are the prophets (God's spokesmen) who were beaten, stoned and killed. God's own people killed his prophets and ultimately killed his Son. John's words are fulfilled: *"He came to what was his own but his own people did not accept him"* (John 1:11). The scripture that Jesus quoted is about himself, *"The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone."*

The rejected One becomes the Saviour: Joseph saved his family from famine and Jesus saved us from our sins. During this second week of Lent there is something we can learn from our readings. God has been generous and entrusted us with many gifts and in return he wants us to produce fruit, the fruit of God's Kingdom. God wants us to spread the Kingdom to others. Like the tenants we become selfish and think of ourselves first, using God's gifts to our own satisfaction. During Lent we are called to share God's love with others through almsgiving. We must avoid the temptation to be self-indulgent.

When we choose self-indulgent and selfish desires we reject God's message of love, and ultimately reject Jesus who came to share God's love with us. Genuine love for God and for one another will help us produce the fruit of the vineyard which is what God wants. Finally, in today's parable, the patience of vineyard owner (God) was absolutely staggering. He gave the tenants many opportunities to produce the fruit of the vineyard. Likewise, God is always visiting us looking for fruit. Lent affords us the opportunity to produce the fruit of conversion and repentance, the fruit of holiness and faith so that we can spread the Good News.

Practical Suggestion

God has blessed us with various gifts. Freely he has given to us these gifts. How does he want you to use those gifts for his people during Lent? Find a form of almsgiving that can benefit the less fortunate.

Prayer

Thank you, Lord Jesus Christ, for all the benefits which you have given us - for all the pains and insults which you have borne for us. O most merciful redeemer, friend, and brother, may we know you more clearly, love you more dearly, and follow you more nearly, for your own sake. Amen. (prayer of St. Richard of Chichester).

SATURDAY 19 MARCH

Solemnity of St Joseph – Earthly father of Jesus

Scripture: *2 Sam 7:4-5a, Rom 4:13, 16-18, 22, Mt 1:16, 18-21, 24a*

Reflection:

We are now two and a half weeks into Lent. How is your faith holding up? Remember our theme this Lent is “Come back to me with all your heart.” This call to us requires that we have an uncompromising faith.

All three readings on this Solemnity of St Joseph are calls to remain steadfast in faith. In the Old Testament reading, God makes a promise to David through the prophet Nathan, that God himself would preserve the House of David, leading in time to Joseph, Mary and Jesus.

In St Paul’s letter to the Romans, Paul reminds us of Abraham’s faith and of how God’s promises are fulfilled, not by observing laws and rituals, but rather through an uncompromising faith.

In Matthew’s Gospel we see how, through his amazing faith, Joseph has absolute trust in the Lord and in Mary, and readily accepts her as his wife, even though she is pregnant. He also accepts Jesus as his son. What an extraordinary example of faith!

Matthew portrays Joseph as an ordinary, good, observant and obedient Jew. Through the intervention of the Holy Spirit, Joseph’s plans for his future are shattered and he is called to a new level of obedience through faith. God called Joseph to let go of his own plans and to put himself at the service of Jesus and Mary. Joseph obeyed without hesitation!

Joseph was open to hearing God. How open are we to hearing God’s call in our own lives? Only through prayer are we able to strengthen our faith and develop a deepening trust in the Lord.

Practical Suggestion

At the end of your morning prayers spend 10 minutes being still and quiet. Allow yourself to rest in the Lord’s company. He understands your daily tasks. Let him look lovingly at you and all you have to do today. Be at ease in the presence of the One who calls you to “Come back to me with all your heart.”

Prayer

Lord, when my problems seem heavy and impenetrable, may I remember that you are watching over me and are ever-present to help me, even in the most unexpected circumstances. Help me to be still enough to hear your voice and courageous enough to act on it.

Father, you give your help and guidance to those who trust in you. Strengthen my faith that I may willingly receive your help and guidance today. Amen.

These Daily Reflections for Lent 2022 are written by Fr. Desmond Nair, Irene Helsdon, George Cominos, Veronica Donnelly Fr. Wandile Cagwe, and Mike Montocchio. Please acknowledge the authors when copying and distributing. We wish you a fruitful and blessed Lenten Season as you respond to God's call to come back to him with all your heart.

Archdiocese of Durban



Lenten Reflections 2022

**Come back to me
with all your heart**



WEEK THREE

SUNDAY 20 MARCH

Scripture: *Luke 13: 6 - 9*

Reflection

What good is a fruit tree that doesn't produce any fruit? It serves no useful function and should be chopped down.

In this parable of the barren fig tree, Jesus questions the usefulness of a disciple who fails to produce the fruit of faith. The owner of the vineyard (God) tells the gardener (Jesus) to chop it down. The gardener implores the owner to give him time to dig around it and manure it in the hope that it will produce fruit next year. If it doesn't then it will be chopped down.

What sort of 'fig tree' (disciple) are you? Do you produce the fruit of faith in abundance, in half-measure, scarcely, or none at all? Just the fact that you are reading this reflection is an indication that you are living the faith as a disciple.

Each of us has the capacity and potential to produce fruit in abundance but we are often focused on so many other things that our measure is greatly reduced. This sacred season is an opportunity to allow the Lord to care for us and give us all the help we need to produce fruit in abundance.

Lent is a time of spiritual fervour, a time to do more, and to experience the abundance of God's grace to strengthen us in our faith, to live as faithful followers, and to produce the fruit of compassion, care, kindness, love, charity, patience, tolerance and active participation in the life of the Church through Christian Stewardship.

There is a general consensus that after two years of Covid there appears to be less enthusiasm in regard to matters of faith. Few volunteer to do anything in the parish, and to do anything more than attend Mass once during the week. Getting parishioners to volunteer for ministries that are restarting appears to be a real challenge in many parishes. Have we become reluctant and minimalistic followers of Jesus?

This time of renewal should find us joyful and enthusiastic about contribution towards and actively participating in the life, work, mission, ministry and worship of the Church. Jesus gives us everything we need to do this. He gave everything, he gave his life!

Practical Suggestion

How much of yourself are you willing to give in the service of others? What ministry or area in the life of your parish are you involved with or participating in?

Prayer:

Thank you Lord Jesus for this time you give to me to grow my faith and to produce fruit in abundance by serving others. Amen.

MONDAY 21 MARCH

Scripture: *Luke 4: 24 - 30*

Reflection

It is easy to fall into the trap of believing that Christians have an exclusive claim to God and his love. It was this arrogant attitude that led to Israel's downfall and their rejection of Jesus.

Religious intolerance has been the cause of many wars, acts of terrorism, division in families and hatred among people.

Just the mention by Jesus of Elijah who was sent to a widow in a Sidonian town, and the healing of the Syrian commander Naaman by the prophet Elisha, enrages the people gathered in the synagogue in Nazareth. Widows were outcasts in society and often reduced to begging to eake out a living. Sidon was not in Israel but in Lebanon. Naaman was a foreigner who came from Syria. Yet both these children of God encountered him through his prophets. God reaches out in love to all his children!

Jesus was rejected in his own town, by his own people. Yet when the disciples set out to preach and teach after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, it was many outside Israel who welcomed his message and embraced the Gospel.

God sent his Son to his people and they rejected him and crucified him. God sends his priests to us in our parishes today. How do we welcome them and embrace their message? Or should that be; Do we welcome them and embrace their message?

Besides being intolerant of those who don't share in our Catholic faith, we can also be intolerant towards those whom God sends to us. Lent is a call to us to open our eyes, our minds and our hearts; to see that we are all God's children, that he works in the lives of all whom he created, regardless of race, gender, nationality, ethnicity, religious beliefs, or all our many other differences. Pope Francis wrote his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* which means "all brothers and sisters," and taken from the Admonitions of Saint Francis of Assisi, to remind us that we are all God's children, brothers, and sisters in the great family of God. In our parish communities we call our priests 'Father' because they lead our family of faith. Let us not reject those whom God sends to us as did the people of Nazareth.

Practical Suggestion

Pray for your priest today, thanking God for his ministry, dedication and service.

Prayer:

Father, help me to see your presence in everybody and to embrace the family of mankind, even those who are different and especially those who are regected by society. Amen.

TUESDAY 22 MARCH

Scripture:

Matthew 18: 21 – 35

"Lord, how often must I forgive my brother if he wrongs me?"

Reflection:

Peter had been brought up with a law that said 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' – which was a progressive step from what used to take place between the people of the tribes of Israel! So, in suggesting to Jesus that 'seven times' should be more than sufficient, he probably expected to get a 'gold star'!

Instead Jesus says, "Don't even count!" and then tells the story of the king and the servant with the 'huge debt', that he was never going to be able to repay. The king, 'moved with pity' cancels the entire debt! Does Jesus mean that if we beg hard enough that God will forgive, no matter what sin, and with no strings attached? No! He says that there is a limit to God's mercy – mercy received must equal mercy given! When we experience the incredibly generous forgiveness of God – as we do, over and over again, there is only one return we must make – go and do the same!

Practical suggestion:

Reflect on the number of times you have asked for 'forgiveness' in the words of the 'Our Father': 'Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us'. We are asking God to forgive us in the same way that we forgive. Do you forgive from the heart – over and over?

Prayer:

Father God, we count on Your willingness to forgive our sins no matter how many times we ask. Fill our hearts with Your love and compassion so that we may truly forgive those who have wronged us. Amen.

WEDNESDAY 23 MARCH

Scripture

Matthew 5: 17-19

Reflection

The coming of Jesus was certainly not to get rid of what God had said through His prophets and through the Law of Moses. Jesus came to give a better understanding of what is contained in the five books of the Old Testament: the Jewish Pentateuch.

Over a period of one thousand three hundred years and through man's self-interest, the religious leaders of the people had added many by-laws and many of their own interpretations - to the extent that it had actually taken people away from serving God. They had been brought up to observe rules and in the hope

that this would please God. Their actions and thoughts were not driven by love, just adherence to laws and the performance of many rituals. They were overburdened. They needed to be freed.

Jesus came to give a first-hand perspective of what it means to love God through obeying His law. He now includes the love of neighbour.

Adultery is no longer confined to its narrow definition where the adulteress is stoned to death. In the teaching of Jesus a man offends God when he looks lustfully at a woman. It is no longer acceptable not only to covet your neighbour, but one now has to go out of one's way to help that neighbour. No longer is that neighbour a friend or acquaintance or someone from your own culture; he or she is now everyone whom you encounter. Your enemy is not to be hated and plotted against, even more, according to Jesus, he or she must benefit from your time, talents, treasure and love.

The Jewish Elders were most unhappy about the Saviour's far-reaching teaching because it showed that they were not as holy as they made themselves out to be, and this behaviour, according to Jesus, did not find favour with God. Their interpretation was narrow and self-serving: it was actually too easy because it missed the point. Indeed our Lord, in fulfilling the law, has cast its scope very widely, and makes us more acutely aware of how much we sin.

Practical Suggestion

The "new" version of the law is summed up in love of God and neighbour. How much of your time, talents and treasure do you devote to both?

Prayer

Holy Spirit, search me and help me to identify those areas where I am not obeying God's laws as defined by Jesus. Help me to ask for forgiveness. Our sinfulness is now much greater than we thought. That is why He died for us. Amen

THURSDAY 24 MARCH

Scripture: *Luke 11 : 14 - 23*

Reflection

Jesus knew what the people who witnessed the healing of the mute were thinking. We often use the phrase "I know exactly what you're thinking," usually after we are aware of a change in a person's facial expression in response to something we've just said or done. In reality it is very difficult to know what someone is thinking, but God knows our every thought.

Most thoughts pass through our mind without us paying much attention to them, while others take root. It is from those thoughts that our behaviour stems. We pray at Mass "I confess to Almighty God and to you my brothers and sisters, that I have greatly sinned, in my thoughts and in my words ..."

It's hard enough to control what we say and what we do, but knowing that God is aware of our every thought means we should make the effort to be more mindful of what we are thinking. Positive thoughts will often lead to noble activities, while evil thoughts can result in sinful actions.

In 2 Corinthians 10:5 we are told to take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. That's a tall order when science speculates that we have a new thought every 2 seconds which equates to 30 thoughts every minute! But God doesn't expect us to do the impossible. He has sent us the Holy Spirit who will guide so that we keep our *thoughts* continually fixed on all that is authentic and real, honourable and admirable, beautiful and respectful, pure and holy, merciful and kind. (Philippians 4:8)

While so much that we focus on during Lent is action-driven, it would be a good opportunity to be more aware of the thoughts which are going through our mind. It's so easy to get caught up thinking about negative situations and everything that could go wrong. God gave us the ability and capacity to think so we could be inspired by wonderful, exciting, magnificent thoughts!

Practical Suggestion

Try to be more aware of the thoughts you are focusing on during the day. Slip an elastic band onto your wrist and whenever you catch yourself thinking about something negative give yourself a ping with the elastic band. Then immediately turn that thought around into something positive.

Sometimes it's quite a challenge, but we can always ask the Holy Spirit to help us to change that thought into something beautiful for God.

Prayer

Father, thank you for giving me the ability to think and reason. Thank you for my imagination and my creativity which stem from my thoughts. Help me to keep by thoughts pure and positive. Amen.

FRIDAY 25 MARCH

Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord

Scripture: *Psalm 39 (40):7 - 11 & Luke 1:26 - 38*

Reflection

"Here I am, Lord! I come to do your will. You do not ask for sacrifice and offerings, but an open ear." Today we recall with great joy that most extraordinary moment in the dramatic history of our salvation! The Annunciation of the Lord falls exactly nine months before Christmas Day, the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. These words of the psalm are so appropriate to the Annunciation of the Lord. The Psalmist embraced the will of God just as Mary did. She said, *"I am the handmaid of the Lord...let what you have said be done to me."* God took the

initiative and reached out to fallen human nature through a young Hebrew girl and she said “Yes” to the will for God.

The ‘Yes’ of Mary changed the world! There is something truly great that preceded Mary’s fiat. Mary listened to God’s messenger the angel Gabriel. In the same breath, the Psalmist says, *“You do not ask for sacrifice and offerings, but an open ear.”* God wants us to listen to him even before we offer sacrifices and gifts. Even before we choose to abstain and fast during Lent, God wants an open ear from us in the imitation of Mary. We must first listen to what God has to say to us. We are to cultivate a listening ear so that we can say yes to his will. Sometimes we suffer from selective hearing, we only listen to what we like and ignore what seems to be difficult. Luke (2:19) also tells us that Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart. After listening to God, we are called to a deep reflection on his words.

Mary gave herself totally to God and without reservation. She accepted the will of God even though she didn’t fully know what was in store for her. All she knew was that God would always be by her side. Mary’s faith and trust made a huge difference. She becomes a model of total trust and faith in God. God asked a lot from her; he asked for her life, reputation and herself. She didn’t hold anything back. In turn, God gave her every grace and blessing. Dear beloved, the source of our real joy comes from listening to God and doing his will. The demand may be enormous but we trust in the Holy Spirit to give us the grace to give way to the will of God - just as Mary did.

Practical Suggestion

Do you ever give yourself time to listen to God? Sometimes we think that prayer only consists of us enumerating our needs to God. Today’s Gospel reminds us that we should always listen to the things that God tells us, even though they may be difficult. The more we pray, the greater is our capacity to listen to God.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, you offer us abundant grace, mercy, and forgiveness through your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Help me to live a grace-filled life as Mary did, by believing in your promises and by giving you my unqualified ‘yes’ to your will and plan for my life. Amen.

SATURDAY 26 MARCH

Scripture: *Hosea 5: 15 – 6: 6*

Reflection

Today’s readings play down the value of outward actions and emphasise the importance of love and a sincere change of heart. These demand so much more of us than mere actions. Whilst we may not be feeling it mid-way into Lent, the

sacrifices of Lent are the easy part. We should look inwardly and ask, “do our sacrifices flow from a sincere change of heart?” (*metanoia*) Are we sincere, committed and consistent in our response to God’s call through the prophet Joel to “Come back to me with all your heart”?

The first line of today’s reading (Hos 6:1) “*Come let us return to Yahweh*” seems, on the face of the reading, to be a positive response to God’s call. However, in this instance, Hosea is putting insincere words of repentance into the mouths of the people of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. These people, after being warned by God of dire punishment in chapter 5, decide to make a confession of repentance hoping to satisfy God and guarantee His Blessing in the future. BUT – they have no love or loyalty to God and no desire to know Him. These people of the Northern Kingdom professed to follow the faith in Yahweh of their ancestors but allowed the pagan worship and rituals of their neighbouring states to assimilate into their religion. Hosea describes the insincerity of his people in 6:4b, “*For your love is like the morning mist, like the dew that quickly disappears.*”

Are we also guilty of proclaiming our Faith in God on Ash Wednesday only for it to falter and fail as a result of the “more important” things we have to do? Many of us profess to be Catholic Christians but lead a divided life of Church on Sunday and work during the week. Our faith is left at the Church door!

God is a loving, forgiving God who looks to us for “Faithful Love... not sacrifice.” Let us repent and go to God with ALL OUR HEART.

Practical Suggestion

Reflect on how your faith may take a back-seat at times, replaced by your life activities. Resolve in your heart to be more sincere, committed, and consistent in demonstrating your faithful love to God, our Father.

Prayer

Father, forgive me for my insincerity, lack of commitment and inconsistency in showing my love for you. Send your Holy Spirit to guide me to be prudent in what I think, say, decide and do, and provide me with the self-control I need to remain consistent in my love for you, and the courage to do what I know is right even in the face of pressure from this secular world. Amen.



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Lenten Reflections 2022

**Come back to me
with all your heart.**



WEEK FOUR

SUNDAY 27 MARCH

Scripture: ***Luke 15: 1 – 3, 11 - 32***

Reflection: The parable of the prodigal son is so familiar to us that we may be tempted to skip over this passage and not read it. If this is the case, I encourage you to stop and read the passage, slowly.

Verses 1 – 3 provide the reason for the telling of this parable, in addition to the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin in chapter 15. When the Saviour came among us, it was people like the tax collectors, who were despised in Jewish society for their collaboration with the Romans, and sinners who sought his company. Jesus readily welcomed them and ate with them – much to the horror of the scribes and Pharisees. It wasn't the first time they had been disgusted by his choice to dine with sinners. The same happened when he was in the home of Matthew, the tax collector. There Jesus responded to them "It is not the healthy who need the doctor but the sick. Go and learn the meaning of the words: *what I want is mercy, not sacrifice*. And indeed I did not come to call the virtuous, but sinners." (Matthew 9: 12 – 13). This must surely be Good News for all who are conscious of and aware of our sins and failings. We are the reason Jesus came, and why he chooses to associate with us!

If this is not Good News enough, the parable of the prodigal son goes even further! The father in Jesus' story, whom we identify as God the Father, was filled with pity. He ran to meet his son, "clasped him in his arms and kissed him tenderly." What a beautiful description! The dirty, stinky and bedraggled state of his son did not matter in this moment of exuberant and abundant joy! Nothing but the fattened calf, the best robe, a ring on his finger and sandals on his bruised and dirty feet, would do. This is the welcome we receive when we come back with all our heart! WOW!

Just in case we don't consider ourselves to be in the dirty state of sinners, the final part of Jesus story is for us: "My son, you are with me always, and all I have is yours. But it was only right that we should celebrate and rejoice" at the return of his lost son.

I always love the atmosphere in church and outside the church at the end of a Penitential Service. There is such great rejoicing and much celebrating at having been forgiven! This Lent don't hesitate. Come back with all your heart!

Practical Suggestion: Plan and prepare now to go to confession at the Penitential Service and receive God's forgiveness. Then experience the joy at having been forgiven and made ready to renew your faith at Easter. Listen to this song – and sing along if you want to:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SFV00VeKdlw>

Prayer: Father, forgive me for I have sinned. Amen.

MONDAY 28 MARCH

Scripture: *John 4: 43 - 54*

Reflection: This was not the first time that a father had approached Jesus, imploring him to heal his child. You may recall Jairus in the synoptic Gospels (Mark 5:21–43, Matthew 9:18–26 and Luke 8:40–56) who made the same request of Jesus as did the court official at Cana. On that occasion Jesus went to the house of Jairus to heal his daughter. This time, Jesus instructs the court official to “go home, your son will live.” He put his faith and trust in Jesus and began his journey back to Capernaum, and while on his way his servants came to meet him to tell him that his son had recovered – at exactly the time Jesus had assured him that his son would live!

Lent is the season for the healing of our mind, heart, body and spirit; in other words, our whole being. Who among us can say that we have no need for healing?

It is not without significance that Cana, the place of Jesus’ first miracle, is where Jesus was when the court official approached him. On the occasion of his miracle of changing water into wine at the wedding feast, Mary told the servants to “Do whatever he tells you.” When they did, they were able to serve the best wine. Likewise, the court official does what Jesus tells him to do, “go home, your son will live.”

On the Second Sunday of Lent we heard the voice of the Father during the transfiguration of Jesus “This is my son, the Chosen One. Listen to him.” During Lent we listen with an attentive mind and an open heart. With the faith of the servants and the court official, we listen to Jesus and we do what he tells us. When we do this, and place our faith and trust in him, we experience his healing power and presence in our lives. Do you believe this?

Practical Suggestion: Make a list of what you need for the healing of your heart, mind, body and spirit. Light a candle and sit quietly for a few minutes. Place a cross or crucifix over you list and listen to Jesus. Then do whatever he tells you.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I place my complete faith, hope and trust in you as I bring you my need for healing and wholeness. Amen

Listen to this song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AyDr9-Mpc s>

TUESDAY 29 MARCH

Scripture: *John 5: 1 – 16 “Do you want to be well?”*

Reflection: Jesus goes to the Pool of Bethesda and there he comes across a man who, for 38 years, has been paralysed, and had been trying to avail himself of the ‘healing waters’ of the Pool.

There was an underground stream which fed the pool, and every now and then some movement caused the water in the pool to bubble up. The people had come to believe that this disturbance was caused by an angel, and that the first person to get into the water after it was disturbed would be healed of any illness from which he was suffering. But people could not accomplish this unaided, and this man had ‘no-one to help him in’!

Jesus asks a question which seems entirely superfluous: “Do you want to be well?” Surely that was why the man was there? However, Jesus wants him to make the decision, because it may well have been the case that the man wanted to remain a ‘victim.’ Healed, he would have had to shoulder the burden of making a living – fending for himself; he could no longer depend on the charity of others. Sometimes it is easier to be dependent, and leave the work and the worrying to someone else.

We too can get ‘stuck’ or ‘paralysed’ in life – it may be a physical ailment, or an addiction of some kind, or fear, or pride, or vanity. And we too have to make a conscious decision to ‘pick up our mat’, throw it away and walk forward in trust, with Jesus!

Practical suggestion

Reflect on the things in your life that need to change in order for you to ‘be well’. Also, reflect on the people in your life who allow you never to say that you have ‘no-one to help’, and give thanks for them.

Prayer

Jesus our healer, help us to see the infirm and paralysed in our midst, and give us the grace to bend down and help them experience the healing waters of Your love and reconciliation. Amen.

WEDNESDAY 30 MARCH

Scripture

John 5: 17 - 30

Reflection

At every Sunday Mass, celebrated in over two hundred and fifty thousand Catholic Parishes world-wide, hundreds of millions of the faithful recite the words “God from God, light from light, true God from true God “(Nicene Creed)

In today’s Gospel, Our Lord goes to great lengths to explain, as best He can, the reasoning behind these words: the most incredible intimacy between two persons we can ever imagine. The Father is the air that Jesus breathes. Jesus’s heart is in perfect union with the heart of His Father. Together with the Holy Spirit, who is born of this intense intimacy, they are utterly united.

Of course, our limited rational capacity, our inability fully to understand the enormous humanity of Jesus, and the fullness of His divinity, makes us leap into faith. In this faith we rest in the knowledge that the Father is in Jesus and Jesus is in the Father. They are fully and perfectly informed about each other.

So the words of Jesus to us, carry the authority and authenticity of the will of the Father. We can measure our sensitivity or insensitivity to His message and easily determine if we are living well or not, in our spiritual relationship with God.

Through His discourse we also learn how God works. Running the world is a big and complicated task where nothing is left to chance. Father, Son and Spirit are deeply involved in the drama of our lives whether we perceive this or not. God does not rest, even on the Sabbath: we are supposed to rest in honour of Him.

Whatever we do to the Son, affects His Father and thus the Father has given to His Son the role of coming to “ judge the living and the dead” (Nicene Creed)

Practical Suggestion

This passage must be read quietly and slowly as a prayer that truly allows us to pay attention to what Jesus is saying. It is fundamental in understanding why Jesus came down from heaven to earth to reveal so great a mystery. Read it again, quietly and slowly.

Prayer

Father, in the great prayer of the Nicene Creed we acknowledge the intimacy you have with your Son in the unity of the Holy Spirit, and we come to appreciate our only realistic response to you is:” Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end.” In coming back to Jesus with all our heart, we come back to you, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

THURSDAY 31 MARCH

Scripture: *John 5: 18, 31-47*

Reflection

The Jewish leaders were out to find fault with Jesus at any cost. They would have had a very good knowledge of their scriptures but they were unable to recognise that He was the promised saviour even though the writings of the prophets showed that to be true.

They had the testimony of John the Baptist that Jesus was the long awaited messiah and Jesus' preaching, teaching and miracles all bore testimony to the fact that He was the chosen one of God, but they just couldn't see it Or perhaps they just wouldn't see it.

Jesus chastised them because, although they were well versed in the Law and the Prophets, the Word of God was not a lived reality for them. Reading God's Word alone will never guarantee eternal life to the reader. The words of scripture have to be internalised and become an integral part of our life. Once that happens it is impossible not to testify that Jesus is the Son of God, because all scripture points to that fact.

Their religious rules and traditions would not allow them to accept a messiah who said He had come to fulfil the law and then broke those lawful requirements under the pretext of love. Instead of accepting God's divine grace, they preferred the approvals of others. They sought after self-love rather than God's divine love.

It was clear to Jesus that they did not have the love of God within them. That was quite evident by the way they treated Jesus and His followers. It would seem that Jesus' words were falling on deaf ears as they continued to plot his demise.

The love of God is made real in us through our thoughts and actions. It grows and is strengthened by our regular participation in the sacrament of reconciliation and our reception of the Eucharist. In 1 John 4:12 we are told that if we love one another, God abides in us and His love is perfected in us and in 2 John 6 we read "To love is to live according to His commandments To live a life of love."

As we continue of our Lenten journey, we seek to grow and be strengthened by the power of the love of God poured so generously into our lives.

Practical Suggestion: Set aside some time to read the First Letter of John. There are many concepts in today's reading which are explained in more detail in this beautiful Epistle.

Prayer: God my Father, thank you for revealing Jesus to me as my Lord and Saviour. Fill me with Your divine love and strengthen my faith so that I may be a beacon of Your love to others. Amen

FRIDAY 1 APRIL

Scripture: *Wisdom 2: 1, 12 - 22 & John 7: 1 - 2, 10, 25 - 30*

Reflection

"Let us lie in wait for the virtuous man, since he annoys us and opposes our way of life." As we approach Holy Week, the battle lines are drawn in both readings today. In the reading from the Book of Wisdom we witness the wicked plotting against a Just One. They said, *"The very sight of him weighs our spirits down; his way of life is not like other men's, the paths he treads are unfamiliar."* On this fourth Friday of Lent, it becomes apparent that the reading from Wisdom points us to Jesus, the Just One. The wicked find those who are holy, like Jesus, an obstacle and should therefore be removed.

In the Gospel, John tells us bluntly that *"the Jews were out to kill him"* (Jesus). Such a plot to kill Jesus was public knowledge. Some of the people in Jerusalem were saying, *"isn't this the man they want to kill? And here he is, speaking freely, and they have nothing to say to him!"* Like Wisdom, the Jewish authorities tried to eliminate Jesus because he opposed their interpretation of the law, showed compassion to sinners and the marginalized, healed the sick and called himself the 'Son of God'. All these accusations had no basis. The plot was concocted because the authorities had met their match in Jesus. They were hostile towards him and all he stood for.

"Let us condemn him to a shameful death since he will be looked after – we have his word for it." This prophecy pointed to the shameful death Jesus was going to suffer in the hands of religious authorities. Jesus knew very well what was in store for him, but it never deterred him from his mission.

Today we cannot afford to be indifferent towards Jesus and his mission. As disciples, we need to stand up for the Gospel. We can start by becoming witnesses by our lives. The Christian life is the way of the cross which takes us through Calvary to Eternal Life. Among the many things lacking in our world today, is true commitment. We only experience this when we commit ourselves, without reservation, to our Christian faith. Ask God to give us the grace to hold firm to the teachings of Jesus.

Practical Suggestion

Do you accept all that Jesus taught and did for you, with faith and reverence or with disbelief and contempt? Many men and women laid down their lives for their Christian faith. Likewise we are told not to be indifferent or lukewarm, but to commit ourselves to our faith. What are the ways you can commit yourself to your faith?

Prayer

Eternal Father, who are the light of the minds that know you, the joy of the hearts that love you, and the strength of the wills that serve you; grant us so to know you, that we may truly love you, and so to love you that we may fully serve you, whom to serve is perfect freedom, in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SATURDAY 2 APRIL

Scripture: *John 7: 40 - 53*

Reflection

Earlier in Chapter 7 of John's Gospel we hear that Jesus knew that going to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles would be dangerous for him. "*He would not go about in Judea because the Jews sought to kill him.*" (Jn 7:1) Jesus did go though, because he wanted to teach the people. Whilst he taught "*the Jews marvelled at him.*" (Jn 7:15) However, instead of taking in what they heard, they started arguing amongst themselves about His credentials. Do we open up our hearts and minds to Jesus' teaching or do we try to question and discredit his Word and the Scriptures?

The Temple officers or police had been given instructions to arrest Jesus, but on hearing Him teach, they were amazed and could not bring themselves to arrest Him. Many of us enter into situations and conversations with preconceived views. Are we open to hearing the truth, even if it is uncomfortable and contrary to our preconceived ideas? Are we open to hearing the Word of God and going back to Him with all our Hearts?

Jesus was certainly making an impression on those who heard Him. No one could be indifferent when confronted with His teaching. He was believed by some to be the prophet, by others to be the Messiah, and by others to be a phony. How do we react to his teaching? With amazement like the Temple officers? With contempt like the Pharisees or with timidity like Nicodemus? Nicodemus didn't have the courage to openly defend Jesus to his fellow Pharisees, but he did find enough courage to challenge the Pharisees not to judge Him before he had been heard. Do we have the courage to speak the Truth in the face of many who oppose it? Are we able to speak up in defence of Jesus and our faith, accepting the consequences of doing so? Have we ever considered the consequences of not speaking up?

Today's Gospel ends with each person huffing off to their own separate homes. How much better it would have been if they had gathered to talk to God and to one another to resolve their confusion through prayer and mutual understanding. Isn't this what our small group faith sharing during Lent and Advent gives us the opportunity to do: to listen to the Word of God (from the Holy Scriptures), to pray for guidance and understanding, to ask and answer

questions of each other and discuss areas of confusion? Then, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to reach a mutual understanding and resolution.

Practical Suggestion

Next time you are in the company of people, and you hear criticism of your faith, have the courage to say something to defend your Catholic Christian faith.

Prayer

My Lord and my God. Forgive me for my lack of amazement at hearing your Word and my lack of Courage to defend you in the face of criticism, when your name is used in vain and in mockery. Let me hear your teaching with an open heart and give me the courage to speak up and speak the truth in the face of dissent. Amen.

These Daily Reflections for Lent 2022 are written by Fr. Desmond Nair, Irene Helsdon, George Cominos, Veronica Donnelly Fr. Wandile Cagwe, and Mike Montocchio. Please acknowledge the authors when copying and distributing. We wish you a fruitful and blessed Lenten Season as you respond to God's call to come back to him with all your heart.

Archdiocese of Durban



Lenten Reflections 2022

**Come back to me
with all your heart.**

Create in me
a pure heart, O God,
 and renew a
steadfast
spirit within me.

- Psalm 51:10

WEEK FIVE - PASSIONTIDE

SUNDAY 3 APRIL

Scripture: *John 8: 1 - 11*

Reflection:

How easy it is to judge and condemn others! Who among us is perfect? Who among us is without sin? As long as we have the honesty and humility to acknowledge that we are not perfect and neither are we sinless, then we must accept that it is not our place to judge or condemn others.

The scribes and Pharisees regarded themselves as virtuous and upright and, in their minds, they were following the law by stoning the adulterous woman to death. In the same way, they felt justified in what would have been a murderous act, after which they would probably have washed their hands and gone off to supper with their wives and children.

How awful is a religion without any heart – or soul! But they weren't or aren't alone. Even in our own time there are Christians who call for the execution of murderers and rapists. Have we learnt nothing from Jesus? Has his example and teaching made any impact on our lives? Do we allow our faith to guide and direct our lives? Or are we filled with what we perceive to be 'righteous and religious indignation?

Jesus' action – or inaction – with the woman caught in adultery must surely be a lesson to us all and evoke within us a spirit of love, mercy and compassion, demonstrated in the attitude of the father in the parable of the prodigal son last week.

When Jesus invited them "If there is one of you who has not sinned, let him be the first to throw a stone at her" he knew that they had no leg to stand on. The truth is that there was one person present who had not sinned – Jesus himself! And he chose neither to stone her nor to condemn her. With words of love and compassion he said to her "Neither do I condemn you."

It is this same Jesus whom we encounter when we go to confession. There is no condemnation, no judgement and no punishment. There is forgiveness, healing, reconciliation and peace.

Practical Suggestion

Have you been to Confession this Lent? Don't allow this sacred season to pass by without a good Confession. And when you do, you will hear Jesus say to you through his priest: "Your sins are forgiven, go in peace."

Prayer:

Father, grant me the gifts of humility and sincerity. Help me to see my own sins and failings. May I never pass judgement on or condemn others. Amen.

MONDAY 4 APRIL

Scripture: *John 8: 12 - 20*

Reflection:

Today's Gospel continues from yesterday's. Jesus had put the scribes and Pharisees in their place but they continued to goad him. He had known that this would happen in Jerusalem, that he had to assert himself and proclaim what the Father had sent him to reveal. Their hearts had been hardened by the attitude of arrogance and their minds were closed because of their unwillingness to listen and to learn. They prided themselves on their superior knowledge.

Are we not sometimes hard of heart as well? Are our minds always open to learn and to grow in wisdom and knowledge?

Lent is a time for us to experience true repentance and heart-felt renewal. To do this we must be willing to undergo a change of heart (*metanoia*), and be open to grow, so that we may do good and become better. We should not be satisfied with just the outward observances, customs, traditions and rituals of Lent. The end of this sacred season must find us changed, renewed and transformed.

It is easy to fall into the trap of religious customs and rituals as did the scribes and Pharisees. Churches are crowded on Ash Wednesday but the crowds are seldom seen again during Lent. The ritual was done, and some will do it again on Good Friday and perhaps Easter Sunday. But the dawn of the new light of the Risen Christ at Easter must find us truly renewed with hearts that have been changed, truly born-again because of our spiritual experiences during Lent, having listened to Jesus with open hearts and minds.

When we listen to Jesus, we come to know the Father, and experience the Father's love for us. "You do not know me, nor do you know my Father" Jesus said to them. That was the sad reality. If only they had been humble enough to listen, they would have welcomed the message Jesus came to proclaim, and come to know the Father whom he came to reveal.

Practical Suggestion:

Make a list of what you need change, renewal and transformation for or from in your life. Light a candle and sit quietly for a few minutes. Place a cross or crucifix over your list and listen to Jesus. Ask him to change your heart.

Prayer:

Change my Heart O God. Renew in me your divine presence that I may experience with newness of faith the joy of Easter and the promise of Eternal Life. Amen.

Listen to this song: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bc9md8B_N7s

TUESDAY 5 APRIL

Scripture: **Numbers 21: 4 – 9**

"With their patience worn out, the people complained against God and against Moses"

Reflection

The Israelites spent 400+ years complaining about being slaves in Egypt. Finally they are set free through the efforts of Moses and Aaron, led by God, and they begin the journey through the desert back to the land promised by God to Abraham and his descendants forever.

However, they are not satisfied with anything! On this occasion they engage in one of their endless gripes about the 'wretched food' God has provided for them – which in fact has kept them alive!

This time God responds by sending 'poisonous serpents' among them, and many who are bitten, die. That brings about a 'change of heart,' and the people repent of their behaviour and beg to have the serpents removed.

Moses, at God's command, makes a bronze image of the serpent and fixes it to a pole – which is raised up – whoever sees it is healed and does not die. So the 'image of death becomes the image of salvation'!

The Cross that Jesus is nailed to on Good Friday does the same for us – He takes our 'sinful humanity' which caused our death, and transforms it, through love, into the cause of our salvation!

We need to continue to 'lift Him up' for all to see – and acknowledge the depth of the love of God made visible!

Practical suggestion

Reflect on your ability to approach even the difficult situations in your life with gratitude – or do you just rail against God and complain about what you don't have? Are you able to see the signs of God present in your life and rejoice in them?

Prayer

God our Father, give us the strength to embrace all the good things in our lives right now instead of complaining or hankering after the things that are wrong. Amen.

WEDNESDAY 6 APRIL

Scripture

John 8: 31 - 42

Reflection

Jesus is talking to a group of believers who have a long history of tradition and heritage going back to the time of Abraham, some two thousand years before. They are blind to change, blind to growing in gratitude and generosity. They are extremely defensive when challenged. The oyster shell around their hearts is tough and Jesus laments that His words cannot penetrate this stubbornness.

They are aghast when he tells them that the truth will set them free. They regard themselves as utterly free and miss the point about being slaves to sin. Slaves to an inner darkness, their ulterior motives, stress, anxiety, debt, lack of discipline, rituals, hate, inability to see everyone as a neighbour, and so much more.

At the Saviour's trial, He stated that He had come to bear witness to the truth and these disciples reacted just like Pilate did: "What is that" (John 19:38). Jesus came to reveal the truth about God, about His love, mercy, compassion and forgiveness, and His entire earthly stay was a witness to that truth. This truth about God as revealed by the Word of God made flesh, enables us to define who we are in Christ. It enables us to be free from the corruption of sin and death, free from feeling threatened all the time, free from fear.

This freedom that we pursue in faith, that draws its strength from "I am the way, the truth and the life" can give us a peace that the world cannot give.

The call of Pope St. John Paul II "Be not afraid" and repeated last Saturday by Joe Biden in Poland, is another way of saying that the truth about God will set one free. The war started because someone felt threatened and the truth evaded him.

Practical Suggestion

What are you scared of? What thoughts, events or daily routines make you a prisoner? Can you take one, and bring it into the presence of God, pray hard about it and witness for yourself the change bearing in mind the prayer below?

Prayer

Holy Spirit of God in my prayer to be relieved of something that makes me scared, help me to understand that God might not change the circumstances but rather change my response and attitude to those very same circumstances.

THURSDAY 7 APRIL

Scripture: *John 8: 51 - 59*

Reflection

If you watch documentaries on past civilisations and ancient tribes you notice that they all have one thing in common: they all acknowledged the existence of gods and worshipped them, offering sacrifices to atone for wrongdoing and to guarantee victory in battles. It is evident that mankind has always recognised a form of godly power which they believed controlled the world, and they felt compelled to honour and appease these gods. They treated their gods with reverence but lived in great fear of offending them.

Jesus' great mission was to reveal God as our Father. He came to teach us that God our Father is a God of mercy, love and compassion, as we heard in last Sunday's Gospel. He also revealed the relationship He has with God as His Father and made the claim that He existed before Abraham, which according to the Jews was blasphemous!

We read in John 1:1 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Jesus existed with God the Father and the Holy Spirit even before the very instant of the creation of the universe. In the creation account in Genesis 1:2 we are told that the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. So we see the Holy Trinity being revealed to us throughout the scriptures.

The Jews prided themselves as being the offspring of their father Abraham. How privileged we are because Jesus was sent into our world to reveal to us that God is our Father. Jesus preached about the Kingdom of God and went on to teach that through our Baptism we are God's children, and heirs to the Kingdom of Heaven according to Romans 8: 16-17; The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Our Lenten journey ends with the glorious resurrection of Jesus. This is a foretaste of Jesus' promise to us that at the end of our earthly life we will not see death but will live eternally with Him and the Father in the Kingdom prepared for those who love Him and keep His commandments.

Practical Suggestion

As a meditation sit quietly and listen to the words of the Beatitudes on this clip: <https://youtu.be/lGNtmlbp3ZE>

Prayer:

God my Father, thank you for giving me the gift of eternal life. Help me to live according to your commandments and to be merciful, kind, forgiving and compassionate no matter what circumstances I may find myself in. Amen

FRIDAY 8 APRIL

Scripture: *John 10: 31 - 42*

Reflection

Once again the opponents of Jesus want to stone him because they believed he has committed the sin of blasphemy, *"We are not stoning you for doing a good work but for blasphemy: you are only a man and you claim to be God."* When the religious authorities cornered Jesus, they completely forgot the good he had done for the people. When Jesus finally revealed his divinity, they took offense and sought to kill him. Both Jeremiah and Jesus were provoked, they saw terror from every side.

It is true when they say every dark cloud has a silver lining. *"Many people who came to him there said, 'John gave no signs, but all he said about this man was true,' and many of them believed in him."* These are the people who had listened carefully and observed John the Baptist. They remembered that John the Baptist performed no miracles, he was simply a voice crying in the wilderness, *"make straight the way of the Lord."* On the other hand, Jesus performed and worked many miracles. As a result, these "learned" (scribes and Pharisees) could not come to the same conclusion. Many people today reject Jesus and his message but let us not follow that same path. Our mission is to seek Jesus and believe in him. When we believe in him we also believe in the Father who sent him.

There are a few things we can learn from the ordinary people who believed in the divinity of Jesus, in today's Gospel. They made an effort to listen to Jesus' predecessor, John the Baptist, and observed the miracles performed by Jesus. The ordinary people saw what the Pharisees and scribes failed to see in Jesus. Not only did they believe in Jesus, but they also took a risk. Around this time (in Jesus' public ministry), it was no longer fashionable to associate with Jesus because a death warrant against him had already been issued. They could be judged by associating with Jesus (guilt by association). This, however, did not deter them. In this Fifth Week of Lent, let us carefully listen to the words of Jesus so that we can produce a living and courageous faith. When we do listen to Jesus, his words will show us the way back to the Father.

Practical Suggestion

The Apostle James (1:22) encourages us to be doers of the word, and not hearers, only deceiving ourselves. In addition, Jesus often impressed upon his followers the need to act upon his word because actions speak louder than words. Do you put your faith into action? If not, pray to God to give you a living and courageous faith.

Prayer

Father, write upon our hearts the lessons of your holy word, and grant that we may be doers of your word, and not forgetful hearers only. Amen

SATURDAY 9 APRIL

Scripture: *John 11: 45 - 56*

Reflection

We read today of how Jesus' gift of life to Lazarus led to his own death. The crowds gathered to see what Jesus had done, and in seeing it many believed in Him. The growing support for Jesus worried the religious leaders in Jerusalem who became concerned that their Roman rulers would see this growing support as a possible uprising and a threat to peaceful co-existence in Israel, resulting in a violent reaction causing destruction and domination.

Caiaphas said to the Chief Priests and Pharisees *"... it is better for one man to die for the people than for the whole nation to be destroyed."* This utterance by Caiaphas has two distinct meanings: it can be understood in the literal sense in which Caiaphas meant it – kill one person (Jesus) to prevent the Romans destroying the Jewish nation; or, as an unconscious prophecy where Caiaphas says more than he intended: "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many."

We can only imagine Jesus' thoughts and feelings at this time as the events leading to His suffering and death began to unfold – exactly as he knew they would. Jesus did not resist the Father's plan but approached it solemnly and calmly. In His commitment to do the Father's will he teaches us the wisdom of letting go of circumstances that are beyond of our control – but within the Father's control. He teaches us to embrace the Divine Will with total trust and solemnity.

As Good Friday approaches, our striving through Lent to "Come back to me with all your heart" should have bolstered our faith and realisation of what Jesus has done for us. We will soon be celebrating His Resurrection and need, in the time remaining, to continue to make a conscious and heartfelt return to faith, acknowledging how Jesus suffered for us, repenting for our sins, our regressions and our lapses which separate us from God. Commit to spend time in prayer and fasting and to be generous in your almsgiving.

Practical Suggestion

Instead of fretting and stressing over circumstances out of your control, embrace those circumstances with faith and confidence in the Lord. Make a commitment to repent for your sins at the Penitential Service in the confidence of God's unending Mercy and Compassion.

Prayer

Lord, you are life and truth and goodness. You are mercy and peace. Without you I can do no good. All the good I do is You working through me. Here I am Lord, ready to love you more. Amen



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