

2021 Redemptorist Reflections



Daily Lenten Devotions

Prayer
Fasting
Almsgiving

The Redemptorists

With Him is plentiful redemption. (Psalm 130:7)



Who are the Redemptorists?

St. Alphonsus Liguori was born in Naples, Italy, in 1696. He left a promising legal career against the wishes of his family and became a priest. Alphonsus dedicated himself completely to serving the poor and most abandoned, and in 1732 he founded the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer: The Redemptorists.

Alphonsus and his companions preached the word of God in rural and isolated communities around Naples. By the early 19th century Redemptorists were serving in central Italy, Poland, Germany, Belgium, and Holland.

In 1832 six Redemptorists traveled to the United States and for the first time began missionary work outside of Europe. They served initially among Native Americans and then with Irish, German, and Slavic immigrants. In 1850 the Redemptorists' American Province was established in Baltimore.

Today we Redemptorists continue our ministry to the poor and most abandoned, in inner cities, hospitals, and prisons. We preach parish missions, staff parishes, promote devotion to Our Mother of Perpetual Help, and participate in many evangelization activities through traditional and new media.

Following in the footsteps of St. Alphonsus Liguori and 18 other confreres who have been canonized or beatified, approximately 5,500 Redemptorists serve in 82 countries throughout the world.

As Redemptorists, we have a special devotion to the crib of Bethlehem, the cross of Calvary, the Eucharist, and Mary, the Mother of God.

Will you help us serve God's people with a gift today? Please visit redemptorists.net/giving/ to give via our secure online page or mail your gift to the following address:

Redemptorist Office of Mission Advancement
Holy Redeemer Provincial Residence
3112 Seventh St. NE
Washington, DC 20017-1411



May God bless you!

February 17

Ash Wednesday

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

Matthew T. Allman, C.Ss.R.

Aside from Christmas and Easter, few days in our religious calendar connect with the popular imagination the way that Ash Wednesday does. Outside of pandemics, Ash Wednesday sees full churches. People who haven't been to Mass for months and sometimes years go looking for services where they can line up to get their ashes. Why? Because this day makes sense.

So many of us know that we've messed up. We know we are sinners. We know we've missed the mark. We know we've damaged relationships. We know we haven't lived up to who we are meant to be. And we'd like to try again. This is the truth Ash Wednesday touches. It speaks to our desire for conversion.

We'd like to start over. We would like to do better. We would like to repent and to rend our hearts. We want to tear through the hard rind that has built up through our negligence, our personal sin, and our complicity in sinful structures. We want to be free, to have our hearts beating fresh and unencumbered. Perhaps not everyone uses the word, but we'd really like to be "holy." We'd like to be whole, complete, alive, and in love with what is truly Good.

Ash Wednesday gives us a chance to begin again with these good desires. May we take it, and may our prayer, fasting, and almsgiving this season bring us more firmly into union with Christ who is the Good we long for in the flesh.



February 18

Thursday after Ash Wednesday

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

Jim McCabe, C.Ss.R.

The first reading appears ominous and threatening. For most of Israel's history, the Jewish people have been occupied by foreign powers, their temple in Jerusalem is not rebuilt, and they suffered terrible persecutions by many peoples including Christians, and by what occurred in Germany during Adolph Hitler's reign – the “final solution.”

People taking the first reading at face value could argue the Jews are being punished for not obeying God. However, in the Gospel reading we have the Son of Man, Jesus the risen Christ. When the Father raised Jesus from the dead, Jesus did not punish anybody – not even St. Peter, our first Pope, who denied him three times.

Jesus didn't kill or destroy those who killed him – the Romans and Jewish leaders. We believe in a God who loves the human race and our planet. Can we love one another and our planet as much as the Son of Man? What a loving challenge.

February 19

Friday after Ash Wednesday

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

Dennis Billy, C.Ss.R.

Fasting is a nasty spiritual practice! Why would anyone want to do it? It hurts. It throws our daily schedule out of whack. It disturbs our ordinary way of doing things. It sends us off kilter.

Our readings today speak to us about fasting. There is a right way and a wrong way of going about it.

So, let us ask ourselves:

Are we fasting because we wish to be closer to God and united with his will?

Or do we have some other ulterior motive?

In today's Gospel, Jesus evokes the Wisdom tradition and reminds us that there is a time for everything under the sun: a time for fasting, but also a time for feasting.

With Jesus in their midst, there is no need for the disciples to fast. But the day would come, he tells them (and us) that he would not be with them, and then they would need to fast.

Our reading from Isaiah reminds us that fasting is not a mere matter of refraining from food and drink. It also means reaching out to those who are poor and marginalized, to those in need.

During this Lenten season, let us ask the Lord for the grace to fast in a way that builds up the kingdom. Let us glorify the Lord in our bodies and be transformed by the renewal of our minds.

February 20

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

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

Thomas Travers, C.Ss.R.

Today's Gospel is about the calling of Matthew, a hated tax-collector of Capernaum where the apostles Peter, Andrew, James, and John, worked their fishing industry. Matthew's job was to review the daily catch and calculate the taxes due to the Roman authorities to support their army occupying Israel.

And yet, Jesus, living in Capernaum at this time and knowing this situation, calls Matthew to join his community with the fishermen that Matthew aggravated so much. What a shock it must have been for them! A "public sinner" to be part of their life and mission!

Matthew's call was a call to conversion for both him and the apostles. It was a call *from* something and a call *to* something greater. Matthew was called from his presumed cheating and his employment by a foreign power to following Jesus. The apostles were called from their prejudice against "sinners" to reaching out to them, "to welcome sinners and eat with them" as Jesus did.

We are members of the "Community of Disciples," and we are called to the same conversion as Matthew and the apostles. We are called to leave our attachments and prejudices and to reach out to others whom we may consider "sinners" – the addicted, the street people, the immigrants, the poor and abandoned – and to welcome them into our community in order to share with them our life and mission.

Today's gospel ends with a symbolic meal that expresses everything that Jesus was teaching. The apostles and "sinners" sat at the same table, and ate a common meal, which signified a fellowship of acceptance and love. Today, when we celebrate the Eucharist, we are continuing this tradition which we inherit from Jesus who says: "*Do this in memory of me.*"

February 21

First Sunday of Lent

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

Mark Owen, C.Ss.R.

Covenant is the subject of our first reading today and will be the subject of the first reading every Sunday this Lent. Today we recall the covenant God made with Noah and with all of creation, as is repeated an impressive six times in the reading.

As with all covenants there is a promise from God and a sign. God promised Noah that he would preserve not only humankind but the whole of creation from destruction from floodwaters, a timely reminder of the most urgent pro-life issue of our day: the protection of our planet from human-caused global warming and its associated catastrophic effects, including of course unprecedented flooding not seen since the days of Noah!

We are also communally guilty of massive pollution and the elimination of species, plus horrendous cruelty to the animals which share our common home. The Gospel calls us to repent; unless we repent of our planet-abuse we shall indeed all perish!

The sign of Noah's covenant is the rainbow, a sign of God's promise never again to destroy the earth with water. The rainbow is a beautiful sign of hope on a dark, cloudy, and perhaps, stormy day; a touch of beauty among gray and forbidding clouds. God's love shines through our darkest moments. It is a sign of the day when God would wash away the sins of the world not with a flood but with the Blood of his Son and the waters of Baptism.

The forty days of Lent are a period of preparation for the renewal of our Baptismal promises, and it is to this that St. Peter turns in the second reading. As we begin our forty-day desert experience with Jesus, let us prepare ourselves to renew our promises of baptism, and pledge ourselves to work together with our Creator to keep the promise made to Noah so many centuries ago.

February 22

Feast of the Chair of St. Peter the Apostle

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

Gerard H. Chylko, C.Ss.R.

Today is the *Feast of the Chair of St. Peter*, which may sound odd at first. Are we celebrating a piece of furniture? Well, yes and no. It depends on what we mean. On the one hand, there is a physical object, an ancient chair, located in St. Peter's Basilica, which is revered as a relic. On the other hand, there is the spiritual authority that this chair represents. Today's Feast celebrates both.



If you have ever seen the installation of a Bishop, you would have noticed that part of the ceremony involved the Bishop being formally seated on an elaborate chair. In Latin, this is the *Cathedra*, from which we get the word, "*Cathedral*," which means the *Church of the Bishop's Chair*. It represents his authority as a Bishop, especially his teaching authority.

If ever you watch footage of Pope Francis giving a talk, you may notice that, sometimes, he speaks while sitting down. His being seated doesn't mean that the talk is informal. Just the opposite; he is teaching *ex cathedra*, "*from the chair*". And whenever a pope speaks with infallibility, it is also referred to as his speaking "*from the chair*," whether he is actually seated or not.

According to Pope Benedict, today's Feast goes back to an ancient tradition dating from, at least, the fourth century. After St. Peter's travels, Rome came to be recognized as the See of the Successor of Peter, and its "*Cathedra*" represented the mission entrusted to him by Christ: to safeguard and to transmit to the Christian Community the truth of the Faith. Today, we are asked to give thanks to God for the mission he entrusted to the Apostle Peter and his Successors.

Again, Pope Benedict writes: "*Celebrating the 'Chair' of Peter means attributing a strong spiritual significance to it and recognizing it as a privileged sign of the love of God, the eternal Good Shepherd, who wants to gather his whole Church and lead her on the path of salvation.*" [General Audience, Feb. 22, 2006]

So, the First Reading for today is addressed to the leaders of God's people as spiritual shepherds, focusing on Christ, the Chief Shepherd. St. Peter urges the leaders in his audience to serve the flock of Christ entrusted to their care, not by lording it over them, but by serving in a truly spiritual manner and *"being examples to the flock"*. This First Reading is an instruction, first of all, for those who are ordained ministers in the Church, but it also serves as an instruction for all of us, because we all influence others and should set an example.

The Gospel for today gives us the source of Peter's authority: it is directly from Jesus Himself, who declares Peter to be the Rock on which he will build his Church.

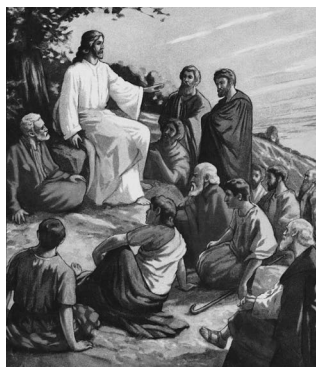
From the beginning, the distinctiveness, or primacy, of Peter has been recognized. So, on this Feast of the Chair of St. Peter, we celebrate the unity of the Church. We celebrate the love, presence, and protection of Christ for us, his Church. As I've said, the Cathedra refers to the chair from which a bishop presides, a symbol of his authority. When referring to St. Peter, it recalls the supreme teaching power of St. Peter and his successors. It is *"from the chair,"* from the pastoral power given him, that the pope shepherds Christ's flock.

February 23

Tuesday of the First Week of Lent

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

John Collins, C.Ss.R.



Today's gospel is Jesus' instruction on the how and what of prayer. Jesus instructs his disciples to pray simply and sincerely from within their whole being to God who already knows their needs and who will respond in love to their longing. At prayer I bring who I am and what I am before God - with humility and honesty - to draw closer to God, to all of God's people, and to my deepest self.

We pray the "Our Father" so frequently that we can easily lose touch with its power to shape our hearts, our lives, and our world. When Jesus instructs us how to pray in the "Our Father," He teaches us that Christian prayer begins in seeing God as Creator of all life and as the One in whose image every human being has been made. Jesus proclaims that God is 'our' Father, not only 'my' Father, and that every other person is therefore my sister or brother.

Jesus reminds us that prayer is all about doing God's will and not asking God to do mine or ours. Prayer makes us people of God's Kingdom when we ask for forgiveness, when we share and extend forgiveness, and when we become daily bread of hope and life for one another's lives.

May all of our praying this Lent lead us to a deeper experience of the Kingdom of God within and of our kinship with one another as the beloved of God!

February 24

Wednesday of the First Week of Lent

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

Raymond Collins, C.Ss.R.

Today we read from the prophet Jonah. Some refer to this 1300-word Book as the ‘comic strip of the bible.’ But this does not take away the fact that it has an important message for us as we are at the beginning of our Lenten journey.

Like other prophets, Jonah was first called by God. Some of God’s prophets have had their moments of reluctance in responding to the call, but Jonah wins the prize. Jonah simply could not believe that God loves both the Israelites and the Ninevites!

Preach penance to pagans? Announce the possibility of salvation to non-Jews? Jonah could not handle this and makes an effort to flee, as far as he is able, from the Lord who called him.

Jonah eventually preaches, the Ninevites are converted, and God spares the city.

The Book of Jonah tells us much more about God than it does about Jonah. The message is about how good God is, and how loving God is. All men and women can come within the embrace of our caring God!

People in many countries of our world, including our own, think about God in an extremely narrow way. And we live much of our lives creating God in our own image. Before it was the norm, Jonah was practicing ‘social distancing’...from God! Jonah really loses track of who God is.

The book of Jonah serves as a reminder that during the season of Lent 2021, we should not socially distance ourselves from God in these difficult times. We should not flee God.

We may even be more creative than Jonah in fleeing God. We may limit God to one hour a week; we may be upset if mass runs over by 10 minutes and intrudes on our plans; we may spend time convincing ourselves that God loves only the kind of people that I like; we may begin to believe that God cannot possibly forgive me for what I have done.

There are multiple ways of fleeing God, but if we find ourselves running this Lent, let us make certain that this merciful and loving God is running alongside us.

February 25

Thursday of the First Week of Lent

Esther C:12, 14-16, 23-25; Psalm 138; Matthew 7:7-12

Andy Costello, C.Ss.R.

KNOCK! KNOCK!

Knock! Knock!

“Who’s there?”

“Truth!”

“Go away! I don’t know you.”

Knock! Knock!

“Who’s there?”

“Anger Regret Spite Resentment”

“Come on in! I’m feeling that way right now.”

Knock! Knock!

“Who’s there?”

“Jesus!”

“Go away!”

“Wait! I’m not here to give you stones or poisonous snakes. I am here to ask, to seek, and to find you. I’m here to give you me in loaves of bread.”

February 26

Friday of the First Week of Lent

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

Blas Cáceres, C.Ss.R.

The word Conversion is one of the most heard words in Lenten time. This special time that has already started, expects us to start a conversion path. That if we have offended, we will be able to ask for forgiveness. And if we have been offended, that we know how to grant forgiveness.

There are two kinds of people: those who convert from evil to good, and those who turn away from good to evil. The former group have life and rejoice in God with His change. The latter die in their sin. God does not want the death of the sinner but rather for them to live!

Jesus reminds us today that “If they are no better than the scribes and Pharisees, they will not enter the kingdom of heaven.” The scribes and Pharisees had pompous ceremonies but, in their hearts, they bore a burden of contempt for their brothers and sisters.

Love, prayer, and service to our neighbor lead us to practice justice and to live God’s mercy more effectively.

Let our hearts never get out of the way of conversion. May this Lenten road make us more supportive and closer to our neighbors, especially those who suffer and are forgotten on the shores of the ways of life.

February 27

Saturday of the First Week of Lent

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

Phillip Dabney, C.Ss.R.

The story is told of a holy man meditating under a large tree on the banks of a river. Suddenly he noticed a large scorpion struggling to free itself from the tree's long roots that extended into the riverbed. As he reached out to free the scorpion, the scorpion lifted its tail and stung him wildly. A young man passing by saw what had happened. He shouted: "Old man, you must be mad! Why bother risking your life to save such a useless creature?" The old man turned to the onlooker and said: "My friend, because it is the nature of the scorpion to sting, why should I give up my own nature to save?"

This story raises a problem that we all face: do we take our cue for action from the treatment we receive from others, or do we continue in the way of graciousness even when we get stung ourselves?

In today's Gospel we hear Jesus address himself to the question of how his disciples should conduct themselves when they are faced with hurt and hatred. Jesus tells his disciples that retaliation for the wrong people will do to them is not in line with his law of love. In asking his disciples to love their enemies he is lifting all limitations to love. No one is excluded from Christian love, not even the one who persecutes the disciple. Love is the way of Christ and it stays His way no matter what appears on the agenda. Even the scorpions!

February 28

Second Sunday of Lent

Genesis 22:1-2; 9-18; Psalm 116; Romans 8:31b-34; Mark 9:2-10

Royce Thomas, C.Ss.R.

Peter, upon seeing Jesus radiating in this way, immediately felt that they should remain. One gets the sense that Peter felt that staying on the mountain with the transfigured Lord would solve all life's problems. Remaining means not returning to the life he had before but building a new life with the peace and joy he must have felt and seen displayed on Jesus. Unfortunately for Peter, this was not the end, nor was it permanent, but a glimpse of what was to come for him. The same may be for us at various junctions in our lives when we encounter the transfigured Lord. On receiving a glimpse of the tranquil state of being with the Lord, we desire to ditch the life we know and remain with Lord; however, we must continue the journey, which means trekking down the mountain to a somewhat chaotic world accompanied by the Lord.



It is precisely at this point we recall in the story of the Transfiguration, the words echoed, “This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.”

Interestingly here in this statement, we are provided with an affirmation of God's love for Jesus, and also, we are affirmed of God's love for us by sending His beloved Son. The statement also illuminates that once we remain with Jesus, on the mountain top and in the valleys below, we are secured and protected. If we take heed of the

words and listen to him, we will not have to erect tents to remain with the transfigured Lord on a mountaintop, but we will be permanently affixed to the company of the transfigured Lord in heaven.

March 1

Monday of the Second Week of Lent

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

J. Joseph Dionne, C.Ss.R.

The Lord, our God, is “compassionate and merciful” and has established a “merciful covenant” with those who belong to Him. Thus, we are to be merciful as He is always inclined to be.

I once heard a bishop preach something to this effect in a homily on this passage:

“There was a woman who was pious to the extreme, participating in every group and activity of her parish. If there were two Masses celebrated that day, she attended both of them. She was, of course, given to the study of the Bible and adept at applying Scripture passages to the many situations and persons she encountered in her devout life. She easily found fault with one and all by these means.

Her husband, an occasional Catholic, was quite the polar opposite in this respect to his wife. And he very often had to listen to her complaints about fellow parishioners and other acquaintances for their lack of moral righteousness and general laziness. The husband, for his part, was forever making excuses for those she condemned, forgiving them for their faults due to their youth or ignorance or some unfortunate events that influenced their actions. This irked her to no end, and she made her accusations even more forcibly.

When they were about to take leave of this world, they both imagined that their final destiny would be different than that which they encountered. The woman supposed she was going straight to heaven on the fast track, but she was halted at the pearly gates by Saint Peter, who informed her that since she so readily applied the Scripture passages she studied to one and all, the same standard had to be used for examining her life...

The husband, for his part, feared for his eternal destiny and was very apologetic for his lack of fidelity to divine and Church law. But Saint Peter was quick to excuse his presumed guilt: “That was because you were very busy indeed and could not be as faithful as you would have liked.”

The measure by which we measure will in turn be measured out to us.

March 2

Tuesday of the Second Week of Lent

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

Karl E. Esker, C.Ss.R.

Lent is a time to examine our hearts and our behaviors to bring them more in line with the mystery of Jesus' death and resurrection. In the gospel we hear Jesus denouncing the Pharisees' outward manifestations of religious piety. While we would probably never dress up as the Pharisees did, how often do we count our rosaries and our frequency at Mass and Communion as signs that we are fulfilling our commitment to Jesus, while pride, judgment and bitter words still dwell in our hearts? All too often it is our inner attitudes more than our external reactions that need to be challenged and modified.

We need to take seriously the prophet Isaiah's call to action: "Wash yourselves clean! Cease doing evil! Make justice your aim: redress the wronged, hear the orphan's plea, defend the widow." I may not know many widows and orphans that are suffering, but is there anyone in my house or my workplace that I have been ignoring or avoiding to better care for myself and my needs? These are attitudes that are so easy to justify. Isaiah cries: "Come now, let us set things right, says the LORD." And Jesus confirms: "The greatest among you must be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted."

Help me Jesus to truly recognize my need for your grace and the openness to accept your promptings for change.

March 3

Wednesday of the Second Week of Lent

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

Ed Faliskie, C.Ss.R.

This is the third time that Jesus warned his disciples that he was on his way to the cross. Jesus deliberately, and with eyes wide open, sets out for Jerusalem and knows his fate will lead to the cross. Jesus describes in great detail this upcoming suffering which will include injustice, disloyalty, mockery, insult, and humiliation, and ultimately end in his death. But even at such a time, he doesn't end the prediction with death. Rather, his prediction ends with an assertion of the Resurrection. Beyond his suffering will be glory. Beyond his death will be new life.

Then there is a dramatic shift in today's gospel, as the mother of James and John approaches Jesus to ask the favor of allowing her sons to sit on Jesus' right and left in his kingdom. Jesus goes on to explain that to be great, one must be willing to serve even to the point of death. He says, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

The disciples, who begin the passage as ambitious and jealous, eventually come to know and understand the truth of Jesus' message as they see his prediction fulfilled. They witnessed Jesus as the servant who gave his life as a ransom for us. They would eventually do the same. What about you?

March 4

Thursday of the Second Week of Lent

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

Thomas Siconolfi, C.Ss.R.

*"You are not a human being in search of a spiritual experience.
You are a spiritual being immersed in a human experience."*

Teilhard de Chardin

To be alive and vibrant like a mighty tree planted beside running waters, or exist like an insipid barren bush in the desert? Being Grace to those in your presence, or sapping the world like a sumptuously dined and fine robed rich man? These are the questions of Lent, a season of soul-searching, a time for reflection, as you seek to live more fully as a son/daughter of God, amidst soiled diapers, rows of pill bottles, and artificially intelligent machines.

Jeremiah expresses what you already experience. The human heart is torturous, full of deceit, pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, wrath, and sloth.

With Christ is plenteous redemption! By prayer and meditation with the Lord, you probe the mind and test the heart to know yourself and mature in wisdom, knowledge, love of God and neighbor, growing in counsel, fortitude, piety and fear of the Lord.

By the Eucharist His Word is forming you, He feeds you with His Body and Blood, thus being enabled to stretch out your roots to a world covered in sores. By dying to self, you rise to bear much fruit that lasts.

This day be aware of how you effect the people you meet, but more importantly, be conscious of the negative mass influences on your persona. Make an examination of conscience that leads to repentance and unflinching confession.

March 5

Friday of the Second Week of Lent

Genesis 37:3-4, 12-13a, 17b-28a; Psalm 105; Matthew 21:33-4

Francis Gargani, C.Ss.R.

We've made a mess of the vineyard of God's good creation -- failing marriages and families, failing schools, failing health care, failing affordable housing, failing to end homelessness, failing the end of stockpiling weapons of mass destruction, failing prison reform, failing the "war on drugs" and opioid addiction, failing political reform, failing to address our nation's original sin of racism, failing to bridge the breach between poor and rich, failing to heal the divide within Church and society, and failing the reversal of climate change and the healing of wounded mother earth, her creatures, and the cosmos.

And like in both today's First Reading from Genesis, narrating the abduction of Joseph sold into slavery by his own brothers, and in the chilling parable of slaying the vineyard owner's son in the Matthean Gospel, we have too often sold ourselves into the slavery of greed and consumption, slain those who prophetically challenge our failure to share the fruits of God's vineyard, to work faithfully for the common good.

We tell these stories this Season of reform and renewal not to drown in guilt and self-recrimination, but to unleash the power of Christ's death and resurrection. Lent is not only about our journey as a Community of Christ Disciples with our catechumens to become more clearly a Sign of God's "kingdom," but Lent is the season we renew our mission to co-redeem our wounded world, its peoples and creatures, and to yield a rich harvest of God's justice, compassion, love, and peace.

"Come Holy Spirit, convert our repentance into healing and liberation for all God's People and Creation."

March 6

Saturday of the Second Week of Lent

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

James Gilmour, C.Ss.R.

“We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace. Our salvation depends on it. Mercy: the word reveals the very mystery of the Most Holy Trinity. Mercy: the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us. Mercy: the bridge that connects God and humans, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness.” Pope Francis introduced the 2016 Jubilee Year of Mercy with these words.

Today’s Gospel, the parable of the prodigal son, gives us a picture of mercy in the flesh and blood of the merciful father and the son who returns to the father’s house. Reading the gospel is like watching a movie. Imagine yourself in the gospel scene. Who are you? What are you doing? What is going through your mind? What are your feelings?

Pope Francis writes: “...mercy is the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us.” When the father sees the son coming down the road, he runs to meet him – he has been looking for him every day since his departure. This Lent 2021 the Father comes to meet you and me. Imagine the Father coming to meet you and embrace you.

Again, Pope Francis writes: “...mercy is the bridge that connects God and each person and all humanity, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness.” I believe that each of us has that hope of being loved by God in spite of our sins. Sometimes we get the message or think that what we have done is so terrible that God really doesn’t love us and doesn’t really forgive. Or at least we don’t feel forgiven - perhaps we haven’t forgiven ourselves. Our image of God is, perhaps, a demanding, strict, judge. The Gospel invites us to know God in a different way. There’s a song with these words: “Loving and forgiving are You, O Lord; slow to anger, rich in kindness, loving and forgiving are You.” When we think of our sins and failings of the past, we tell God once again we are sorry and thank God for forgiving them – we do believe in God’s forgiveness through the sacrament of penance.

Today take a moment of silence to picture in your mind and heart the experience of the prodigal son, the prodigal daughter, embraced by the merciful Father.

How does that feel?

What do you want to say to the Father? ...to Jesus?



March 7

Third Sunday of Lent

Exodus 20:1-17; Psalm 19; 1 Corinthians 1:22-25; John 2:13-25 or John 4:5-42

John Harrison, C.Ss.R.

In today's Gospel passage, Jesus is intent upon "cleaning house." He banishes the moneychangers, not for dealing with money (they were actually performing a good deed, helping pilgrims have the correct currency for the worship in the Temple). Jesus is angry for another reason: the moneychangers are cheating the pilgrims—right in God's House! How could any God-fearing son of Abraham enter the Temple and offer sacrifice and praise to God when he had just been cheated. Jesus wasted no time, expelling the moneychangers from His Father's house. This rankled the authorities to no end, and probably for this reason they began to plot against Jesus.

Part of worship was the tithe. The God-fearing person was expected to give one-tenth of his weekly earning to the Temple so that the Temple could continue to give assistance to the widows and orphans—the truly needy. God gives His people some slack, but when it comes to injustice, cheating, and downright robbery, He loses patience. God wants everyone to be on the up-and-up, just toward everyone, and everyone just to everyone else.

March 8

Monday of the Third Week of Lent

2 Kings 5:1-15; Psalm 42, 43; Luke 4:24-30

Robert Harrison, C.Ss.R.

Just a simple washing in the river. This didn't seem like the way to be healed! Sometimes it seems that in order to be forgiven, something extraordinary must happen, or we must jump through hoops or even bribe the person for forgiveness. In order to receive forgiveness from someone doesn't it seem like we must work to earn their forgiveness? Yet this isn't how it is with God. He washes away our sins and our transgressions just as he washed away Naaman's leprosy. God loves us so much that his forgiveness is unconditional – we don't have to jump through hoops to obtain his mercy. We are continual sinners. We fall down over and over again, but God never stops letting us go to the river. If we bathe in his word and his love, we will all be made clean.

Today we are called to be washed clean of our sins. Lent is a time of preparation and forgiveness, so what a perfect time to be made clean. Wash in God's forgiveness, be grateful of his unconditional love and mercy, extend forgiveness to those who have hurt you, and try to emulate the type of faith that a child has.

March 9

Tuesday of the Third Week of Lent

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

Charles Hergenroeder, C.Ss.R.

How many times must I forgive another? Peter's question is one that we all ask at one time or another. Seven times? No—but seventy times seven, or as many times as GOD forgives us.

The readings today return us to the most basic theme of Jesus' teaching regarding our relationships: forgiveness. We are to forgive one another: "as God in Christ forgave you."

In the gospel today, Peter wants to know how many times he should forgive a brother who has sinned against him. He is willing to go as high as seven times. Jesus' answer basically tells Peter to stop counting. Then he tells this story, which, as is often the case with Jesus' parables, is marked by an exuberance of numbers and details. And the gospel concludes: Unless each of you forgives your brother and sister from your heart, the Father will not forgive you.

Only the saints know how great the debt against us is, which the Father cancelled because of the blood of his Son. Overwhelmed by feeling God's great mercy, only they know how to forgive "from the heart." We can learn both these aspects of forgiveness from the Holy Spirit, if we ask. And our prayer will be very optimistic, because it will know that no sin is unforgiveable. Even if there are some seemingly unjust sufferings which are beyond our capacity to understand and to pardon (The Holocaust, Hiroshima, "9/11"), still we know that by the grace of God the human spirit can be greater than any injustice and is able to forgive it. There are many examples around us of those who have forgiven; and they are proofs to us of how great the human spirit can be.

In our own lives, I am sure that there exist sufferings that have been imposed on us: childhood abuse, spousal abuse, deep rejection. When we bring these sufferings to Jesus, we must be honest; and first of all: acknowledge that we have been sinned against. Then, we must quietly tell the Lord: "I forgive the person who has committed this injury." We should not be afraid of our emotions. The important thing is to say these words, perhaps in prayer with another person. In this way the movement of our heart will share in the infinity of God's own mercy. And finally, we must repent of any anger that has been in our own heart. In this way we can come to experience the wonderful freedom of knowing how much we are forgiven; so that we can lift this burden also from another person.

March 10

Wednesday of the Third Week of Lent

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

Peter Hill, C.Ss.R.

Jesus said to his disciples: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. Amen, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter will pass from the law, until all things have taken place. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do so will be called least in the Kingdom of heaven. But whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called greatest in the Kingdom of heaven.”

Today’s Gospel is a reminder to us that following Jesus is difficult. What does it mean when Jesus says that he has come not to abolish but to fulfill the law? It means that we cannot adopt a legalistic way of living, a way by which we go through the motions of living our faith and checking out the boxes.

During this Lenten Season, many people will be giving up things that they like, which is undoubtedly a good practice. However, if we are not being converted and disciplined to be better Christians, we are missing the point. Jesus is challenging us to be men and women of love and to do everything from a perspective of love. This show of love is precisely what Jesus himself will do for us. He will go through great lengths, even death, to show us how much He loves us.

As we continue this journey of Lent, may we allow the love of God to shape and mold us, and in everything we do, may we obey and teach others to love God and neighbor so that we may be called the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven.

March 11

Thursday of the Third Week of Lent

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

Ako Walker, C.Ss.R.

The Responsorial Psalm today makes a correlation between listening and the heart: “If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.” When God speaks to us, we discern His voice not with our ears but within the depths of our hearts, that sacred place in which God chooses to communicate with us. The Prophet Jeremiah, oracle of the Lord, tells us that once we listen to God’s voice that He will be the God of our lives and that prosperity will come our way.

The truth is that it is not always easy to listen to God. There are so many competing interests, and sometimes it is difficult to discern God’s voice among the many voices seeking our attention in this world. We become frustrated and tired and find ourselves giving in easily to the wrong voices. These moments are extremely painful, especially if we have been struggling for a long time to overcome some sin.

The irony is though that we human beings who are made in God’s image and likeness find it hard to listen to God’s voice, yet demons cower whenever Jesus speaks. In today’s Gospel we see that they know His voice and understand its power. This is why they come at us almost with a double force when they realize that we have habitual sins against which we are struggling. They are fully aware that they are on a kamikaze mission when they seek to attack us, for they can be obliterated merely by the voice of the Lord.

During this Lenten Season and always, let us ask God for a clean and pure heart so that we can truly hear His voice. Let us ask God to massage our stiff necks with the gentleness of the Holy Spirit so that our lives will be lives of obedience. Let us continue to pray each day that our hearts will be softened so that God can use us to bring about His kingdom.

March 12

Friday of the Third Week of Lent

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

John Kingsbury, C.Ss.R.

When the scribe asks what the greatest commandment is, he is asking “What really matters?”

The answer that Jesus gives points to three vital relationships in our life “that really matter.” Our relationship with ourselves, our relationships with one another, and our relationship with God.

The relationship that we begin with, meaning the one that is most natural from our birth, is concern for oneself. As a baby we seek food, comfort, and security for ourselves.

As we grow, our concern moves out to others. I care for myself and I care for this loving person who is the source of the food, loves me, and protects me. This first of my “other” relationships will continue to expand as I meet more and more family members and friends.

Through my relationship with my family and friends, I will begin to discover another connection and that is a relationship with God who is the ultimate source of life, love, and security.

It is through my relationship with God that I begin to learn that my relationship with others must expand far beyond my concern for just my own family, friends, and neighbors. I am called to be concerned for the food, comfort, and safety of all people because we ultimately all belong to the one family of God.

During Lent we are invited to examine our various relationships and see how things are going because that is “What really Matters” in the eyes of God.

March 13

Saturday of the Third Week of Lent

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

Elton Letang, C.Ss.R.

I desire mercy, not sacrifice.

Why does God desire love and knowledge of Him instead of burnt offerings?

The meaning of mercy is to have compassion. The meaning of mercy is to have the ability to forgive. Hosea's message was a response to Israel's hypocrisy. God desires our love, first, over external practices of piety. He longed for us to have a desire for Him rather than simply continuing a religious tradition.

The Pharisees put a great emphasis on the Law. They acted as if it were these laws, traditions, and sacrifices that saved one's life.

Today, we have to be careful, because we can fall into the same situation as the Pharisees. If we do not love God and seek to know Him through others, our love and mercy or hearts will be hardened to others.

God cares more about our heart's content than laws and sacrifices; he wants to know how much we love Him rather than the things that we do in His name. We must not substitute religious traditions for a relationship with God. May we never be like those whom Jesus described: "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me" (Mark 7:6).

We can easily forget that we too are sinners, and if it was not for Christ's mercy, we would be lost. Thankfully, Jesus came for us. It is so easy for us (also) to want to make following God into a checklist; that we must follow these rules and laws and perform these sacrifices. Even though these have helped us with our spiritual development, sometimes we can find ourselves upholding religious traditions out of guilt. Even worse than that, sometimes we find ourselves holding other Christians to our standards! We want to shove it down their throats and call them names; and discriminate because they are not like us.

The Lord wants us to follow Him with all our heart and give Him everything. He desires us to act out in faith and open heart, like the many sick that came to Him for healing. Faith is the empty hands by which we receive His grace and mercy. That is what He will reward us for.

There is no guilt and condemnation in Jesus. That does not mean there is no pain and suffering, but we do not go through these alone. The Lord is right there with us. He is not far away. He just asks us to submit and be faithful. He will do all the hard work for us. The hardest thing we truly have to do is trust in the Lord. The reason why it is hard is because it is against our prideful nature. We want control and independence. That is often why we make checklists and rules. It is something we can follow and give ourselves credit for. The problem is, we often break our own rules and checklists and find ourselves frustrated, humiliated, and guilty.

Jesus is just there patiently waiting, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rests for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30).

March 14

Fourth Sunday of Lent

2 Chronicles 36:14-23; Psalm 137; Ephesians 2:4-10; John 3:14-21 or John 9:1-41

Kevin MacDonald, C.Ss.R.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.”

What makes John 3:16 so impactful in people’s lives? Because it informs us of three essential facts: 1. We are loved by God; 2. We express our love for God through faith; and 3. The reward of faith is eternal life.

Through Mary, a truly human life was given birth in Jesus, who is Lord as well as Son of King David. Christ is the union of humanity and divinity in one individual existence. It is called the hypostatic union. The Son of God has two natures: human and divine, united in one Person with neither confusion nor division. In knowing, loving, and serving God, we grow to our full human potential. Through the free and unmerited favor of God (grace), we are to live happily with God in the life to come.

March 15

Feast of St. Clement Mary Hofbauer, C.Ss.R.

1 Corinthians 3:6-11; Psalm 117; Luke 10:1-9

John McGowan, C.Ss.R.



Today is the feast of St. Clement Mary Hofbauer – known to all of us Redemptorists as our second founder. St. Clement was born in present-day Czech Republic and lived and ministered in the mid 1700s in Vienna, Austria and Warsaw, Poland.

We Redemptorists admire Clement for his creativity and energy as a zealous priest. He was a real “street priest” who worked tirelessly for the poor, for orphans and the common folk. People mattered to him. One of his churches – St. Benno’s – was popular for hosting “a perpetual mission” with Masses and confessions, novenas and devotions each day from 5 a.m. until nightfall.

St. Clement was the one most responsible for extending the young Redemptorist Congregation from Italy over the Alps and eventually into the New World. He was a spiritual and apostolic dynamo who endured persecution, anticlericalism; often being arrested and jailed for spreading the faith.

St. Clement is an appropriate role model during this Lenten season of prayer and penance. He once remarked that it was better to speak to God about the sinner than to the sinner about God. As a preacher and confessor, he said that preaching should shake the tree so that the fruit falls and then in the confessional priests should gently collect the fruit.

Today we pray to St. Clement to gift all of us with a spark of his zeal to preach and live the gospel anew.

March 16

Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Lent

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

John McKenna, C.Ss.R.

The most precious liquid in the Middle East is not oil; it is water. Water is the source of life. A common theme in both readings today is that water is life-giving. Both readings are pointing towards the Easter Vigil that we will celebrate a few weeks from now.

Galilee in the north is lush green. The snow runoff from the surprisingly tall mountains filled rivers. The rivers fed Lake Gennesaret sometimes called the Sea of Galilee. The lake then pours water into the Jordan River, a ribbon of life in an arid desert. John the Baptist called people to a change of heart in the cleansing waters of the Jordan.

Cisterns captured rainwater for storage. Deep subterranean rivers could be tapped by digging wells. King Hezekiah built a water tunnel that brought water from the Gihon Spring, in the Kedron Valley into Jerusalem. It fed the Pools of Siloam.

Today's Gospel takes place in another place of water, the Pools of Bethesda. The ruins of these pools are very close to the Western Wall of the Temple. People would bathe there to purify themselves before entering the Temple for prayer.

Jesus came upon a man who had been ill for 38 years lying on the ground near the pool. Some said the pool had healing waters. Jesus saw him among all the throng and moved with compassion and told him. "Take up your mat and walk." Then Jesus blended into the crowds.

People saw the man who had been a beggar, carrying his mat. They accused him of working on the sabbath. They nit-picked the law of rest and missed the great miracle of God's healing love for this poor man. This is sad. Jesus said in one part of the gospels, "They strain out the gnat and swallow the camel." They longed for the Messiah, but when the Messiah lived among them, they could not accept Him.

We are approaching Holy Week. In the great celebration of the Easter Vigil we have the Baptism of Catechumens. These men and women have been searching, longing for a long time. Jesus' amazing grace met them and changed them. They have been preparing for the life-giving waters of Baptism. They will become members of God's Holy People, the living Temple of God's presence in the World.

We will join with them as we renew the gift of our own Baptism. And then, like the life-giving waters that flowed from the Temple, we will, with God's help, be like those waters flowing, in all bringing life, to a world that so desperately needs the healing.

Sing 3x "Peace is flowing like a River, flowing out from you and me, flowing out into the desert, setting all the captives free."

March 17

Wednesday of the Fourth Week of Lent

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

Sean McGillicuddy, C.Ss.R.

In today's Gospel Jesus proclaims that he is doing the works of the Father. He, Emmanuel - God with us, was sent by the Father, and he is doing what the Father wants - his works. We know how wonderful these works are: the proclamation in word and action of the presence of the Kingdom of God among us; the gifts of forgiveness and eternal life through his cross, resurrection and ascension; and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

We, disciples of Jesus Christ, are also called to do the Father's works. We are called to proclaim in word and action the Good News of the Gospel.

Today we celebrate the feast of St. Patrick, the apostle to Ireland. When Patrick was a teenager, he was brought to Ireland as a slave and suffered the cruelty of slavery for six years. In his slavery he experienced a deep conversion. In his frequent moments of prayer and reflection, the Good News of Jesus took root in his heart. Finally, he escaped and returned to his homeland with the strong desire to do the works of God. He began his studies for the priesthood and was ordained. After a few years when he was ordained a bishop, he felt that God was calling him to return to Ireland as a missionary. With great love and commitment, he returned and had great success.

During this Lenten season we are called to deepen our commitment to doing the works of the Father. This is the whole purpose of all our Lenten practices - the moments of prayer and reflection, the penances, the sacrifices, and the acts of charity.

As we go through this day, we ask Jesus to help us to be apostles like St. Patrick - people with the Good News in our hearts and with love in our actions.



March 18

Thursday of the Fourth Week of Lent

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

John McLoughlin, C.Ss.R.

The Lord said to Moses, “Go down at once to your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt, for they have become depraved” (Exodus 32:7).

Throughout human history sin has caused individuals and communities to become depraved and evil. Greed, violence, corruption, hunger, racism, poverty and oppression exist because of humanity’s sin. We all know that sin is present within us, our families, communities, society and even in our Church causing chaos, moral decay, evil, pain and suffering. Sin has empowered the world to maintain a depraved indifference towards human life, stripping persons of their dignity.

Many people do not like to talk about sin because they consider the word and concept as being too judgmental or accusatory. Our word “sin” is translated from the Greek **hamartia** meaning “to miss the mark or to veer off course.” The word **hamartia** was used to describe an arrow missing the mark on a target. When we sin, we miss the mark of doing what is right, just, proper and morally decent. We veer off course and become disconnected in our loving relationship with God and others. We lose sight of our true selves as being God’s beloved children. Sin creates within us a depraved selfish heart which refuses to care for God and others.

These remaining days of Lent provide us with an opportunity to redirect our lives “aiming” to live wisely and rightly as God’s beloved sons and daughters. With God’s grace we can “turn” away from sin, freeing ourselves from the depravity and selfishness in which we are mired. In seeking forgiveness and reconciliation from God and with each other we can get back on course in reconnecting and healing our broken relationships. By addressing the sin that exists in our own lives and in our communities, we begin the process of removing the depravity and corruption that exists in our midst. In doing so, we will once again reclaim our divine dignity as God’s beloved children.

March 19

Solemnity of St. Joseph, Spouse of Blessed Virgin Mary

2 Samuel 7:4-5a, 12-14a, 16; Psalm 89; Romans 4:13, 16-18, 22; Matthew 1:16-24 or Luke 2:41-51

Kevin Moley, C.Ss.R.

St. Joseph was a special dad and husband. He was the father to Jesus and the husband to Mary, the Mother of God.

He was a man of complete **faith and trust in God**.

When Mary was told that she was pregnant with child by the Holy Spirit and would give birth to the Savior of the World, she had to tell Joseph. Joseph, a righteous and just man, did not understand and wanted to divorce his dearly betrothed privately because he loved her so much. Then an angel came to him in a dream and told him to take Mary as his wife because she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit, and that their son, named Jesus, would be the Savior of the World. **He believed and trusted in God.**



When Jesus, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, was born in a stable, **Joseph believed and trusted in God**. After Jesus was born, Joseph, Mary, and Jesus had to flee to Egypt because Herod, hearing about the birth of a King in Bethlehem, killed all the babies newly born in Bethlehem so that there would be no King except him. In that long journey to Egypt, **Joseph trusted and believed in God**.

When Jesus as a young boy was found after three days in the Temple by Mary and Joseph, the Word of God says: “Jesus returned home, was **obedient, and grew in wisdom and grace before God and man.**” Where did Jesus get all that wisdom and grace? He got it from his parents, Joseph and Mary. These two extraordinary parents instilled in Jesus obedience, wisdom and grace because they walked and lived “**with faith and trust in God**”.

No one of us knows what might happen in our lives. May St. Joseph teach us always to “**Walk in faith and trust in God**” in anything that has happened, is happening, and will happen in our lives!

God bless you.

March 20

Saturday of the Fourth Week of Lent

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

Francis Mulvaney, C.Ss.R.

Human judgment is notoriously inaccurate and flawed. Abraham Lincoln is considered one of the greatest, if not *the* greatest, president in America's history. Yet, his first fiancée rejected his marriage proposal, and he had a nervous breakdown. He started two businesses that went bankrupt. He lost eight elections before eventually becoming president of the United States. Lincoln's victory and vindication came not from confidence in himself or trust in human beings, but from his faith in God. "The will of God prevails," Lincoln said.

The will of God does prevail, against all human judgment and authority. The prophet Jeremiah, rejected and persecuted even by members of his own family, entrusted his cause to God, and he was vindicated. When guards tried to arrest Jesus, they came back empty handed; their testimony, "No one ever spoke like this man." His word was more powerful than their weapons, His authority more just than their corruption and injustice.

Lent is a time to humble our will, mortify the power of the senses, correct inaccurate perceptions, and trust in the will and word of God. As that great man of perseverance, a victim many times of flawed human judgement, said "the will of God prevails."

March 21

Fifth Sunday of Lent

Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 51; Hebrews 5:7-9; John 12:20-33 or John 11:1-45

Don Roth, C.Ss.R.

Jesus declares that the hour of his death is near. He is speaking within the context of religious sacrifice of the Old Testament. Today, sacrifice has come to mean pain. Then, sacrifice was the act of offering something precious to God to create union with Him, an act of love.

Jesus will be the grain of wheat that dies to bring forth life. Erich Fromm in his book “The Art of Loving” describes love as a decision that defines a way to live. The outstanding quality of true love is the ability to give, to think of others first.

For example, parents and children. Parents often do without something so that their children can have what they need. If this act is seen only as an economic necessity, it causes pain and resentment. But, if it is seen as an act of love that gives life to their children, the joy of seeing their children grow brings the joy of life to the parents.

Jesus said that the one who loves his life, or puts himself in first place, will lose it. The one who gives his life in love will find true life. To truly live is to choose to love. To give with love, brings forth life.

March 22

Monday of the Fifth Week of Lent

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

John Murray, C.Ss.R

The story of the woman caught in adultery is not about adultery, nor the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. It is about Jesus' teaching on forgiveness.

Out of love, Jesus forgives the woman, but he also says, "Don't be doing this anymore." Sadly, the Catholic mentality is that God does not love us when we sin.

Here we see Jesus' mercy at its fullness. Neither Jesus nor the woman question the fact of the sin. But Jesus came to save the sinner. He was not sent to cure the sick or to give nice talks or to incite a religious revolution. Jesus came to call sinners. They were the "apple of His eye." He took the first step with sinners.

A theme of every Lent is forgiveness. As Jesus forgave the woman, so too he opens His arms to forgive us. We are already forgiven if only we ask for it. All we need to do is let the forgiving Father touch us and we are reconciled. We do that in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, a tough experience for many. It is not easy to confess our dark side, but we all need confession.

The ability to forgive easily is a gift. Whether it is children or a spouse or parents or the BOSS, learn to forgive and forget. It takes humility to forgive as Jesus did.

When we find ourselves in sin, we often try to forget our sins instead of asking forgiveness. But forgetting is not enough. It won't work. We will always remember. Get to confession before Easter.

March 23

Tuesday of the Fifth Week of Lent

Numbers 21:4-9; Psalm 102; John 8:21-30

John Olenick, C.Ss.R.

I am the oldest child in my family. I have two younger sisters, who when they were young, often followed me around. It didn't matter what I was doing, they wanted to do the same thing. This upset me a lot! Because when I was playing with my friends, I didn't want those little girls around bothering me. I always told them, "You can't do everything that I do. Get out of here!" There were even times when I had to go to my mom and complain in order to receive some relief from their nagging presence.

In today's gospel from St. John, Jesus tells the Jews, "Where I am going, you cannot come." The Jews thought that perhaps Jesus was going to commit suicide but no. What the Lord was trying to explain was that He and they were not from the same place. He is from above while they are from below. In other words, Jesus was going back to his Heavenly Father. The Jews did not understand this reality, because they couldn't recognize the divinity of Christ.

During this season of Lent, all of us have the challenge to look for Jesus. By our penances, our fasting, and our works of charity we should draw closer to him. Lent is a wonderful opportunity to search for Jesus through our prayer, attending daily Mass, and reading God's Word. Unlike the Jews and me with my sisters, Jesus wants us to be close to him with every part of our being during this holy season.

March 24

Wednesday of the Fifth Week of Lent

Daniel 3:14-20, 91-95; Daniel 3:52-56; John 8:31-42

Kevin O'Neil, C.Ss.R.

If I were asked to take one line from Sacred Scripture that captures all that God has done and all that we are invited to do in response to God, it would be Jesus' words from St. John's Gospel: "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

In today's Gospel passage, Jesus speaks of the freedom that comes from being His disciple, from letting the word that He speaks dwell in our hearts. Then we will know the truth, He says, and we will be free. Free for what? Free to love as He loved. Any choice for anything but love is a choice for slavery. Am I really free when I choose to hurt someone? No, I'm a slave to selfishness and sin. Am I truly free when I act violently in thought, word, or deed? No, I'm a slave to vengeance and anger. Am I free when I help another? Yes, an act of love. Am I free when I speak out against injustice? Yes, I'm loving as Jesus loved.

There was a song from the musical "Goodbye Mr. Chips" that posed a question to be asked at the morning, noontime, and evening of our lives—perhaps every day. The question was simple and direct: "Did I fill the world with love?" Seven simple words to ask in response to Jesus' love and call to freedom: "Love one another." May our response to the question always be "Yes!"

March 25

Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord

Isaiah 7:10-14; 8:10; Psalm 40; Hebrews 10:4-10; Luke 1:26-38

Anthony E. Michalik, C.Ss.R.



Why was Mary chosen by God and hailed “full of grace” at the Annunciation? Why was Mary conceived free of original sin, and so, free from any stain of sin throughout her life? Why was Mary – above all others – chosen by God to be the mother of Christ? If we think that God simply created Mary perfect in holiness because God needed a mother to be without sin, we are missing something crucial with regard to Mary – the person – and that “something” has to do with the understanding of the gift of human freedom.

From the very beginning, God saw Mary and knew the humility, the beauty, and the love in her heart. And God said: “I choose her, because she, above all others, will choose fully and freely to cooperate with the ‘fullness of grace’ that I will give. I choose her because I see in her the greatest willingness and desire to love God above all others. I choose her because she – above and beyond all others – desires to know and to cooperate with my holy will.”

Are we cooperating with God’s holy will in our lives? Mary is helping us to do this because she wants her children – like her – to bear the light of Christ and – like her – to be filled with God’s grace.

March 26

Friday of the Fifth Week of Lent

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

Henry Sattler, C.Ss.R.

“‘Denounce! Let us denounce him.’ All those who were my friends are on the watch for any misstep of mine.” This comes from the first reading today from the prophet Jeremiah. Glad I don’t have friends like that! How hard and devastating when people we thought were our friends turn against us. Jeremiah is left on his own with only God to rely on and he trusts that his prayer will be heard.

The responsorial Psalm echoes this trust; the response is: “In my distress I called upon the Lord, and he heard my voice.”

The Gospel from John finds the crowd ready to stone Jesus. The very people he came to save. He says as much. John 10:32 “I have shown you many good works from my Father. For which of these are you trying to stone me?” They respond they are stoning him for making himself God. He tells them “The Father is in me and I am in the Father.” They are one God. Others who are witnessing and listening with their heart and minds are converted to his message and his life.

We who have been baptized have received the Trinity, Father, Son, Spirit into our lives and hearts. May we continue to be open to the promptings of the Spirit of God. May we also trust in the Lord that he hears our voice. May we also recognize that the answer we receive is not always our plan but the plan of God.

March 27

Saturday of the Fifth Week of Lent

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

Brian Vaccaro, C.Ss.R.

The liturgy's first reading and responsorial Psalm both emphasize that God will restore Israel. Having been conquered and exiled, God promises to restore the people to the nation they once were. The promise of restoration gives tremendous hope to the Jewish people.

God's message of restoration applies to us also. Even though our sinfulness and brokenness damage our relationship with God, God's love for us is unconditional. God always wants us to have a relationship with Him. But, as in any relationship, we have to do our part. What concrete steps can we take to facilitate the restoration and strengthening of our relationship with God? Several thoughts come to mind.

First, we should identify the areas of weakness and sinfulness in our lives and continuously strive to improve in these areas. Second, we should make frequent use of the sacraments of Eucharist and Reconciliation, where we receive forgiveness for our sins and can deepen our relationship with God. Third, we should strive to deepen our prayer life, particularly by setting aside time each day for quiet prayer where we can talk to God as a friend. Finally, we should be other-focused, continually looking for ways to help those around us who are in need.

While implementing these suggestions in our lives may be difficult, they can help us restore and strengthen our relationship with God and become the people that God has called us to be.

March 28

Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord

Mark 11:1-10; Isaiah 50:4-7; Psalm 22; Philippians 2:6-11; Mark 14:1-15:47

Francis Skelly, C.Ss.R.

God goes to hell to get us out.

God sees us at our worst and still loves us.

God dies for all of us—even the worst of us.

As human beings we look for our love to be returned;

God loves us even when we don't love Him.

The cross is a sign of God's love.

Greater love than this has no one, than to lay down one's life for one's friends;

it is an invitation to love; love one another as I have loved you;

it is a revelation that love involves suffering.

If you love me, take up your cross and follow me.

Take 15 minutes in front of the cross and ask our Lord to show you what you are afraid of in your life, where his call to follow is frightening you.

Someone once said that if you want to walk on the water, like Jesus, we have to get out of the boat.

Reflect on your own woundedness, where life has beaten us up.

The Passion story tells us of betrayal and abandonment.

When have these been part of my life?

God is closest to the spot where we hurt the most.

Relationships are painful at times, hurt by gossip, silences, lack of communication, abandonment, betrayal.



As we meditate on the cross, we will see two crosses: the first, the instrument of harm built by humans to hurt one another; the second, Jesus stretching out his arms to embrace our world.

Which will be the cross we make our own?

Take 15 minutes in front of the cross and reflect on accepting God's will in our lives.

If we pray to get God to give us what we want,
we will see not getting what we asked for as a punishment.
But if we pray to seek God's will,
to be totally open to God as we try to be in meditation,
we will find God's care and love even in the painful happenings of our lives.
Let this cup pass; but not my will, your will be done.
Then God's dream for us can come true.
Then we will be free.

March 29

Monday of Holy Week

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

Denis J. Sweeney, C.Ss.R.

“Love Changes Everything!”

Brothers and Sisters, we journey once again these most holy and sacred days, these high holy days revealing the immeasurable love God has for each one of us. The prophet Isaiah speaks today of the Suffering Servant. The Suffering Servant is one willing to risk all, even life itself, to manifest the power of love. For ourselves as Christians the Suffering Servant is Jesus Christ. Jesus is God’s love revealed! Through His passion, suffering and death we see that “Love Changes Everything.”

The Gospel of St. John brings us back to Bethany and the home of Martha and Mary and Lazarus. Jesus is among friends He loves. It was love that had restored Lazarus from death to life. It was love that had Mary instinctively reach for the perfumed oil, anoint the feet of Jesus with its lovely fragrance and dry them lovingly with her hair. Love was in the air that moment and “Love Changes Everything.”

But sad to say in that same moment love was departing from the heart of Judas. Darkness was now clouding his ability to accept and enjoy pure goodness and kindness and love. He was no longer accepting that “Love Changes Everything.”

And what about you and me?

Let us pray this Holy Week for the grace to see the good in others. The great temptation is to be suspicious, to be judgmental, to be envious and to question the motives of others. Let us pray rather to love and to learn from the example of Jesus. If we strive to live that kind of love day-by-day, then we will come to a greater belief as Jesus has taught us that “Love Changes Everything.”

May it be so!

March 30

Tuesday of Holy Week

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

Joseph Tizio, C.Ss.R.

The French philosopher/mystic Simone Weil once wrote “For Peter to say to Christ, ‘I will never deny thee’ was to deny him already, for it was supposing the source of faithfulness to be in himself and not in grace.”

In today’s gospel, John describes the Last Supper with intense drama and intimacy as Jesus reveals to the apostles that one of them is about to betray him. It is then that Peter confidently, without the slightest doubt, says to Jesus, “I will lay down my life for you.” Those words flowed from Peter’s deep love for Jesus and panic at the thought of his death; however, they also flowed from his pride and confidence in his own power. Peter will soon be humbled, having denied Christ three times, he will shed bitter tears, and he will learn not to trust in his own power but to trust in the power of God’s grace.

Pope Francis once said, “If you pray for humility, expect humiliation,” humility is always learned in the school of failure and sometimes tears, as Peter shows us. As we contemplate the Lord who humbled himself, trusted in the power of his heavenly Father, and accepted the cross; let us pray for trust, not in our own power, but in the power of God’s amazing grace.

March 31

Wednesday of Holy Week

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

Mark Wise, C.Ss.R.

He reclined at table with the twelve.

The Gospel presents us with that last supper that Jesus shared with those of his inner circle. They had heard him preach so powerfully, act so compassionately, and yet in a matter of hours they would all fail him in some way or another.

One might ask who would want to share a last supper with ones such as these? Such was his love for them, stronger and more enduring than their weakness. He probably saw beyond all that; saw something that was deep within them, something that could be saved, redeemed, raised up, given new life. In the end they all came back except Judas. Who knows if the love of Christ somehow won over even him in his last moments?

Jesus continues to recline at table with us at each and every Eucharist. He does so despite our weakness and our brokenness, our conflicted nature. Such is his love for us. Even though we give up on him, he does not give up on us. He sees something deep within as well to be saved, redeemed, raised, given new life. Yes, he doesn't give up on us. Hopefully we can finally see it, believe it and like Peter and the others, come back not just for now, but for always.

April 1

Holy Thursday of the Lord's Supper

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

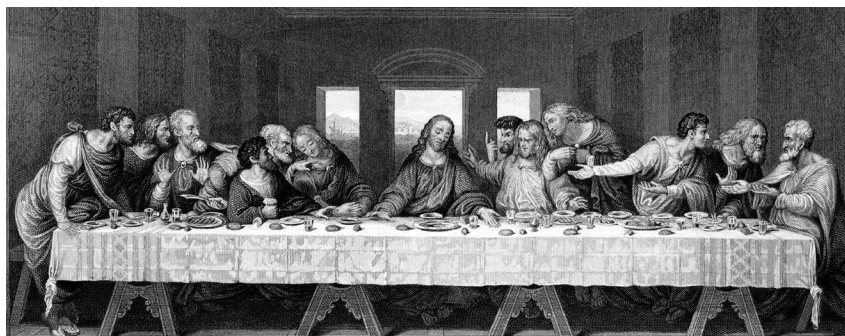
James A. Wallace, C.Ss.R.

Table and Towel – these are the great symbols of Holy Thursday. This evening's liturgy is the first movement of the Paschal Triduum ("The Three Days"), the most sacred time of the Church's liturgical year, beginning on Holy Thursday and ending on Easter Sunday. During these days throughout the world, Christians celebrate the central mystery of our faith, the Paschal Mystery of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Holy Thursday invites us to remember what happened the night before Jesus died, when he gathered in the upper room for a meal with his disciples. On this night Jesus gave us the great gift of his body and blood in the sacrament of the Eucharist. "This is my body, given for you...this is my blood...Do this in memory of me."

And so, we know ourselves as "People of the Table," as we continue to move from the Table of the Word of God to the Table of the Eucharist to the Table of the World, picking up the Towel of Service, in imitation of our Redeemer and Teacher: "As I have done for you, you should also do."

We don't have to do it on our own. Just as the Father raised Jesus in the Spirit, just as this same Spirit continues to transform bread and wine into Christ's body and blood, so this Spirit continues to work in us, transforming us into the Church, the Body of Christ in the world, serving others. People of the Table, People of the Towel – can we live more deeply into today's invitation?



April 2

Good Friday of the Passion of the Lord

Isaiah 52:12-53:12; Psalm 31; Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9; John 18:1-19:42

Patrick Woods, C.Ss.R.

Several years ago, I was taking a liturgy class at The Catholic University of America. Our professor was speaking about the Good Friday liturgy. During his lecture, he asked us the question: Should a cross or a crucifix be used in the solemn veneration of the cross on Good Friday?

Many Catholics find this ritual to be one of the most moving moments of the entire Church year. I raised my hand, to confidently speak in the tradition of St. Alphonsus Liguori who saw the crucifix as a most powerful image of the passionate love of Jesus Christ and said a crucifix should be revered rather than a plain cross.

The teachers said I disagree, Pat (there went my A). He went on to say a simple cross and not a crucifix should be at the core of the veneration rite. He went on to explain that Jesus is no longer on the cross; He is sitting at the right hand of the Father in glory. We, his sons and daughters, are now asked to kiss the cross because humanity itself and every human being at various times in his or her life are on the cross where Christ has gone before us.

Our simple act of reverencing the cross is a powerful statement that we believe that Our Lord Jesus Christ is with us in the dark moments of our lives and has not abandoned us in our physical, emotional, or spiritual pain. Rather he has gone before us in his own humanity. The words of the professor have stayed with me. We think of the word Emmanuel as a Christmas word meaning God with us. This Hebrew word speaks to us that God is always with us in all the joys and sorrows of life. The cross is the sign of the victory of God over sin and suffering. It is the door to eternal life.

April 3

Holy Saturday & the Easter Vigil in the Holy Night

Exodus 14:15-31; Romans 6:3-11; Psalm 118; Mark 16:1-7

Gerard J. Knapp, C.Ss.R.

Holy Saturday begins in great somberness, as we recall that the lifeless body of Jesus lay in the tomb. An anonymous writer of an ancient homily proclaims, “Something strange is happening – there is a great silence on earth today, a great silence and stillness. The whole earth keeps silence because the King is asleep.” No mourners were present at the tomb because Jesus’ mother and friends were observing the Sabbath rest. The only people there were the guards assigned by Pontius Pilate at the request of the chief priests and the Pharisees. Even our churches have a certain emptiness. There is no morning Mass, the altar is stripped bare, and the tabernacle is empty – all symbols of the dead Jesus.

Yet we know that this is not the end of the story. Jesus rose from the dead and is alive, which we solemnly celebrate tonight at the Easter Vigil in a four-part liturgy: 1. blessing the fire, lighting the Paschal candle, and singing the Easter proclamation; 2. recounting the history of salvation by reading various passages of the Word of God culminating with the Gospel in which the angel announces to Mary Magdalen at the empty tomb, “Do not be amazed! You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified. He has been raised; he is not here.”; 3. blessing the water and welcoming new members into the community through Baptism and Confirmation; and 4. celebrating the Eucharist during which we receive the very Body and Blood of the resurrected Lord.

Holy Saturday begins with somberness, silence, and emptiness, but ends at the Easter Vigil with a joyful, exultant, and life-filled chorus of “The Lord is risen! Alleluia!”

April 4

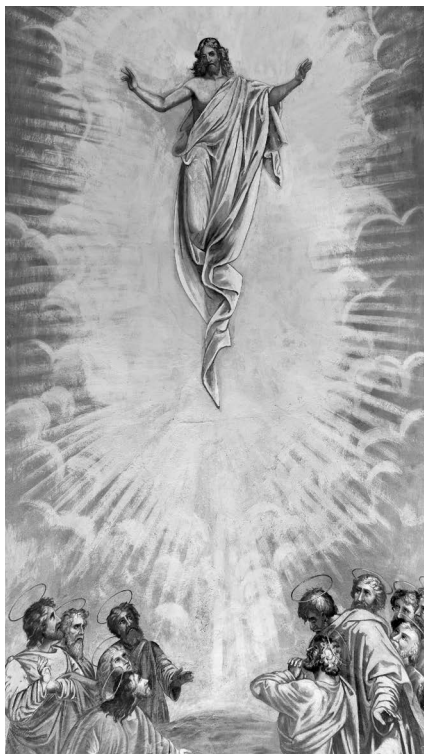
Easter Sunday of the Resurrection of the Lord

Acts 10:34a, 37-43; Psalm 118; Colossians 3:1-4; John 20:1-9

Paul Borowski, C.Ss.R.

Today we celebrate what is central to our faith: Christ is risen from the dead! He has conquered sin and death. He is Risen! Alleluia! Alleluia!

On that first Easter Sunday the disciples were not outside celebrating the resurrection of the Lord. They were gathered physically distant from others. Yet in their time of sadness and fear the Lord broke into their lives and gave them his peace. The message to all is quite simple: Jesus is in our midst. He is alive. He is risen. He speaks to us this day and his message is: Peace be with you! He is risen from the dead and yet we still struggle with the effects of evil in our world. This Easter morning, we pray for so many people that the peace of the Risen Christ be with them.



Amidst all the fears that attack us, the Easter message is repeated: “Peace be with you.” On the evening of that first Easter, the disciples were together behind locked doors full of fear. Hear again what St. John writes: Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’” The words of Jesus are a promise to the disciples then and to us today. These words, “Peace be with you!” are a great blessing that only Jesus can give; the real peace that drives out fear. He had said to His disciples already on Holy Thursday, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you. Not as the world gives, do I give unto you. Do not let your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”

Note that Jesus' gift of peace did not immediately change their circumstances. They were still behind locked doors. Their situation had not changed, but Jesus gave them peace and faith to overcome their fears. Yet as we face the problems of the world, we face it not alone but with the presence and peace of Christ. The true peace of the Christian life is not the absence of troubles. Jesus tells us, "These things I have spoken to you that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have troubles, but take heart, I have overcome the world!"

On that first Easter evening, the fearful disciples, having received from Jesus the blessing of peace, "were over-joyed when they saw the Lord." Because of Jesus' presence with them, they had moved from fear to peace and faith!

The message of Easter is that Jesus conquered sin and death (the causes of fear in our lives) and through His death and resurrection, we have his presence and his peace. The ongoing message of Easter is: "Do not be Afraid" – You are freed from fear.

May Mary, Our Mother of Perpetual Help ... who stood by the foot of the Cross and on that first Easter day celebrated the resurrection of Her Son ... continue to watch over us and protect us! May the Risen Christ be in your homes this day to protect you and your loved ones. And may the peace of the Lord, which drives out all fear, be with today and all the days of your lives.

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!