

He lived for Us



He lives in Us

Adoretur et Ametur Jesus.

“Adored and Loved be Jesus.”

January 2008

Dear Confreres and Associates,

As we enter into this Holy Season of Lent, I am pleased to present this companion booklet to assist you in your personal and communal journey over these forty days. This booklet is designed to present the daily readings with a short reflection written by a fellow Viatorian of the Chicago Province. As each day unfolds, it is our hope that you find these reflections helpful in your daily prayer and meditation.

Lent is indeed a journey, a journey that should not be hurried. It is a time for us to walk with the Lord into the desert, examining our lives, and recommitting ourselves to the person of Jesus Christ. The holy season of Lent offers us the opportunity to look deeper into our souls and hearts, ridding ourselves of those things that get in the way of living the gospel. Let us embrace these forty days with commitment, hope, and a renewed dedication to the spiritual exercises. This is the time to prepare ourselves to embrace the Lord's victory over death. For we believe the journey ends not at the cross, but rather in the glory of the resurrection.

I would like to extend my appreciation and gratitude to those who took the time to meditate upon these readings and offer their reflections and prayer. I believe that we, as a community, are enriched when we share our spirituality with one another, and I am happy to offer my support of this publication. A special note of gratitude is extended to Associate Patty Wischnowski for organizing and publishing this booklet. It was a labor of love, and her efforts are greatly appreciated.

Finally, please know that I will hold each of you in my Lenten prayer and I ask the Lord to bless us as a community during this holy season. May the Lord help us enter into the spirit of conversion and may the peace of Christ be with you always.

In St. Viator and Fr. Querbes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rev. Thomas R. von Behren, C.S.V." The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'T'.

Rev. Thomas R. von Behren, C.S.V.
Provincial

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As we enter this great season of Lent, we recognize that it has many purposes and holds different meanings for each of us. One of these purposes is to know Jesus better; to understand his suffering. We can then approach Good Friday not as bystanders watching a crucifixion, but participating more fully in the crucifixion of our friend, Jesus, and understanding more fully His death for us.

Knowing Jesus comes from reading the Scripture, listening to His teachings and talking with Him in prayer. The Clerics of Saint Viator offer this collection of daily Scripture readings to you.

Loving Jesus brings recognition of our deep need for His friendship, a deep need to talk with Him. Loving Jesus deeply makes His suffering more real, His death a greater loss and yet a loss full of hope.

Adoretur et Ametur Jesus.

Wednesday, February 6, 2008

First Reading: Joel 2:12-18

Yet even now, says the LORD, return to me with your whole heart, with fasting, and weeping, and mourning; Rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to the LORD, your God. For gracious and merciful is he, slow to anger, rich in kindness, and relenting in punishment. Perhaps he will again relent and leave behind him a blessing, Offerings and libations for the LORD, your God. Blow the trumpet in Zion! proclaim a fast, call an assembly; Gather the people, notify the congregation; Assemble the elders, gather the children and the infants at the breast; Let the bridegroom quit his room, and the bride her chamber.

Between the porch and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep, And say, "Spare, O LORD, your people, and make not your heritage a reproach, with the nations ruling over them! Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'"

Then the LORD was stirred to concern for his land and took pity on his people.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 6:1-6,16-18

Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father.

When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win the praise of others. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

"When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward.

But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

"When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you.

Sacramentals

Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican Christians use them. Signs of the sacred. Blessings – to remind us that all of creation is sacred. A treasure trove of prayers and popular devotions. Medals, laying on of hands, anointings, holy water, incense, the sign of the cross. Ashes. Actions and objects that connect us to the sacred, that by touching us enable us to touch the divine around us and within us. Ashes. Joel warns: “Rend your hearts, not your garments.” Ashes. Paul urges: “Be reconciled.” Ashes. Jesus reminds us that righteous deeds are for service, not for reward, and are best done when not seen, when praise is not sought. After the unsightly ashes are washed off my forehead, will they still irritate my spirit and remind me of the unsightly things within that need my attention? After the unsightly ashes are washed off my forehead, will they still irritate my spirit and remind me of the unsightly things in the world out there that need my attention?

Lent is a liturgical season, so it is not just a “me and Jesus” time. Today Joel, Paul and Matthew call us, as they once called their communities of faith, both to individual and corporate repentance and renewal. Where will the sacramental trail of ashes lead each of us and our Viatorian Community this year?

Reverend John W. Milton

Thursday, February 7, 2008

First Reading: Dt 30:15-20

"Here, then, I have today set before you life and prosperity, death and doom. If you obey the commandments of the LORD, your God, which I enjoin on you today, loving him, and walking in his ways, and keeping his commandments, statutes and decrees, you will live and grow numerous, and the LORD, your God, will bless you in the land you are entering to occupy.

If, however, you turn away your hearts and will not listen, but are led astray and adore and serve other gods, I tell you now that you will certainly perish; you will not have a long life on the land which you are crossing the Jordan to enter and occupy. I call heaven and earth today to witness against you: I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse.

Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live, by loving the LORD, your God, heeding his voice, and holding fast to him. For that will mean life for you, a long life for you to live on the land which the LORD swore he would give to your fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

Gospel : Luke 9:22-25

"The Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised."

Then he said to all, "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.

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

Life or death? A stark choice.

But that really does sum up the challenge of Lent. I make choices each day, and they either give life or take life. Although they are little choices mostly, each changes the world for better or worse.

Will I take that extra moment to slow down and listen, and, thus, give someone a little life? Or will I rush through the day, missing those who need my compassion and, thus, deny someone a little life?

Will I look honestly at and try to break those habits that keep me away from God or others, thus giving myself life? Or will I turn away from those habits, promising to "deal with them" later, thus denying myself that opportunity for life?

Will I take a stand against those in my nation who promote war and torture as the way to keep us safe, and, thus, stand for life? Or will I stay quiet, and, thus, turn away from life?

Lent does challenge us to face the starkness of our daily decisions, to own up to their significance. And though they seem to be small in comparison to the decisions that Moses presented to the Israelites, our decisions add up over time. And the more we face the real impact our decisions have on others around us, as well as others that live thousands of miles away, the more we'll see how critical it is for the life and death of our world that we turn once again toward Christ this season.

That turn can cost us. Jesus is right. It can be painful to choose life. It hurts to let selfless decisions burn away our natural selfishness. And our ego wants to protect us from the disapproval of others that comes when we dare go against the grain.

But that's why we don't go through Lent alone. Thanks be to God, we go through under the protection of the God of love, the God of life who forgives our weaknesses and tendencies to sin, the God of strength who offers strength to those ordinary folks like us who want to bring a little bit more life each day to our families, workplaces, schools and nation.

Reverend Corey D. Brost

Friday, February 8, 2008

First Reading: Isaiah 58:1-9

Cry out full-throated and unsparingly, lift up your voice like a trumpet blast; Tell my people their wickedness, and the house of Jacob their sins. They seek me day after day, and desire to know my ways, Like a nation that has done what is just and not abandoned the law of their God; They ask me to declare what is due them, pleased to gain access to God. "Why do we fast, and you do not see it? afflict ourselves, and you take no note of it?" Lo, on your fast day you carry out your own pursuits, and drive all your laborers. Yes, your fast ends in quarreling and fighting, striking with wicked claw. Would that today you might fast so as to make your voice heard on high! Is this the manner of fasting I wish, of keeping a day of penance: That a man bow his head like a reed, and lie in sackcloth and ashes? Do you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?

This, rather, is the fasting that I wish: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; Setting free the oppressed, breaking every yoke; Sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless; Clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own. Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your wound shall quickly be healed; Your vindication shall go before you, and the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer you.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 9:14-15

The disciples of John approached him and said, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast much, but your disciples do not fast?"

Jesus answered them, "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.

“What did you give up for Lent? Chocolate? Eating between meals?”

These are probable questions in the air during the season of Lent, especially when surrounded by the young, and sometimes the not-so-young. The underlying motivation behind this question suggests that a deep expectation of abstaining from something enjoyable helps us remember this season of starkness exists. The people in Isaiah’s time fasted and hoped their sacrifices would bring them access to God. Why fast? This is the question asked in today’s scripture and it is relevant today. Should one fast because the voice of one’s parents is remembered? Should one fast to remind and be reminded of strong religious practices? Should one fast to allow the pangs of what was given up to serve as a reminder of those in the world who are not as fortunate?

Isaiah appears to answer these questions. There is nothing wrong with fasting. In fact, this practice has an appropriate time and place. Hopefully this is a starting place for all. If the pangs of what was given up help the image of those who are not as fortunate come to mind, then what are we to do with that image? The passage from Isaiah suggests we act on it by releasing those who are imprisoned and oppressed, feeding and sheltering the hungry and homeless, and clothing those who are naked. The suggestion is action. Simply remembering these people without an action to mend the division keeps the division alive and well. Jesus takes us one step further in today’s Gospel. We are challenged to look at fasting in a completely different way. As others observe the rules of fasting, Jesus is not concerned about the social protocols. Jesus is fasting with his actions. What he chooses to do is fast from actions that separate him from the ones who suffer and are not as fortunate. What actions pull our attention away from those accounted of little importance in our lives? How can we fast with our actions?

Brother John R. Eustice

Saturday, February 9, 2008

First Reading: Isaiah 58: 9-14

If you remove from your midst oppression, false accusation and malicious speech; If you bestow your bread on the hungry and satisfy the afflicted; Then light shall rise for you in the darkness, and the gloom shall become for you like midday; Then the LORD will guide you always and give you plenty even on the parched land. He will renew your strength, and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring whose water never fails. The ancient ruins shall be rebuilt for your sake, and the foundations from ages past you shall raise up; "Repairer of the breach," they shall call you, "Restorer of ruined homesteads." If you hold back your foot on the Sabbath from following your own pursuits on my holy day; If you call the Sabbath a delight, and the LORD'S holy day honorable; If you honor it by not following your ways, seeking your own interests, or speaking with malice. Then you shall delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; I will nourish you with the heritage of Jacob, your father, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Gospel Reading: Luke 5:27-32

After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at the customs post. He said to him, "Follow me." And leaving everything behind, he got up and followed him. Then Levi gave a great banquet for him in his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were at table with them. The Pharisees and their scribes complained to his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" Jesus said to them in reply, "Those who are healthy do not need a physician, but the sick do. I have not come to call the righteous to repentance but sinners."

The 16th Century Italian Renaissance painter Caravaggio in his "The Calling of St. Matthew" daringly set his characters in a contemporary scene which shows Matthew just as Jesus appears at the customhouse and, pointing his finger, says, "Follow me!" and changes Matthew's life forever. The light falls directly on Matthew who sits wide-eyed with his finger pointing at his own breast and seems to be saying, "Who me? Are you talking to me? Surely you don't mean me! Why on earth would you want someone like me?"

This magnificent painting solidifies in a never-ending moment the eternal relationship between the human and the divine. All of life is a continuous pattern of God's call and man's/woman's response, from the first moment of the call to life in the Spirit through the waters of Baptism to the final call to eternal life.

God calls us to a life of prayer, of study, of work. God calls us to service to others, to unconditional love, to self-sacrifice, to compassion, to forgiveness, to repentance. God calls us to holiness. However, God also gives us freedom to choose our own response to God's call. You and I are free to choose our own response today. What will it be?

John Ohlendorf, Associate

Sunday, February 10, 2008

First Reading: Genesis 2:7-9. 3:1-7

The LORD God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being.
Then the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and he placed there the man whom he had formed.
Out of the ground the LORD God made various trees grow that were delightful to look at and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and bad.
Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the animals that the LORD God had made. The serpent asked the woman, "Did God really tell you not to eat from any of the trees in the garden?"
The woman answered the serpent: "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; it is only about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said, 'You shall not eat it or even touch it, lest you die.'"
But the serpent said to the woman: "You certainly will not die! No, God knows well that the moment you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods who know what is good and what is bad."
The woman saw that the tree was good for food, pleasing to the eyes, and desirable for gaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.
Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves

Gospel Reading: Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.
He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was hungry.
The tempter approached and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become loaves of bread."
He said in reply, "It is written: 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.'"
Then the devil took him to the holy city, and made him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you and 'with their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone.'"
Jesus answered him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.'"
Then the devil took him up to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in their magnificence, and he said to him, "All these I shall give to you, if you will prostrate yourself and worship me."
At this, Jesus said to him, "Get away, Satan! It is written: 'The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve.'"
Then the devil left him and, behold, angels came and ministered to him.

Lent is a time for reflection, a time to strengthen our relationship with God, a time to face our own temptations. The Scriptures for today recall for us how Adam and Eve, and Jesus Christ, resolved their temptations. Adam and Eve succumbed to the allure to "know what is good and what is bad." Jesus, on the other hand, rejected what might bring Him comfort, what would test God, what would supposedly bring Him earthly power. And, how do we deal with temptation? We have the same choice as Adam and Eve, as Jesus Christ. We can seek what is pleasing to us, or seek to do what is pleasing to God. And God has provided us with the sources of grace that enable us to please Him: His Word in Scripture and the grace of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Reconciliation. But, we must also admit that to resist temptation is a struggle, one that will probably continue for our entire lives. At the same time, we have the assurance that God will be with us to strengthen us in our resolve to serve Him.

Although we lament the dramatic consequences of Adam and Eve's disobedience to God and its effect on us, we need also to reflect on the fact that God's creation is a great gift and a great calling. St. Paul in his Letter to the Romans, which is the Second Reading today, points out: "For if by that one person's transgression the many died, how much more did the grace of God and the gracious gift of the one person Jesus Christ overflow for the many." Paul is convinced that sin is neither the first nor the last word of human history. On the contrary, human history is blessed with God's overabundant and infinite grace that was gained through the obedience of Christ, as Paul says in the same Letter: "The law entered in so that transgression might increase, but, where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through justification for eternal life through Jesus Christ." Through Christ, we have been blessed with overabundant life, and creation, as well as human experience, are to be enjoyed as God's original and everlasting blessings. Temptation and sin are overcome in our lives by the grace of God through Jesus Christ.

Reverend James F. Crilly

Monday, February 11, 2008

First Reading: Leviticus 19:1-2,11-18

The LORD said to Moses, "Speak to the whole Israelite community and tell them: Be holy, for I, the LORD your God, am holy.

You shall not steal. You shall not lie or speak falsely to one another. You shall not swear falsely by my name, thus profaning the name of your God. I am the LORD.

"You shall not defraud or rob your neighbor. You shall not withhold overnight the wages of your day laborer.

You shall not curse the deaf, or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but you shall fear your God. I am the LORD.

"You shall not act dishonestly in rendering judgment. Show neither partiality to the weak nor deference to the mighty, but judge your fellow men justly. You shall not go about spreading slander among your kinsmen; nor shall you stand by idly when your neighbor's life is at stake. I am the LORD.

"You shall not bear hatred for your brother in your heart. Though you may have to reprove your fellow man, do not incur sin because of him.

Take no revenge and cherish no grudge against your fellow countrymen. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 25:31-46

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him. And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.'

Then the righteous¹ will answer him and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?'

And the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.'

Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.'

Then they will answer and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and not minister to your needs?'

He will answer them, 'Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.'

And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

Birth and death – the bookends that mark the entrance and the exits of our existence. For many the only goal of life is the inexorable march to death or annihilation. However, a message, (perhaps *the* message) of the Gospel is that death is not the final statement. We are involved in something far more mysterious and awesome than what we see on the surface. Jesus kept pushing his disciples to look deeper – to peel away the layers in order to find the core of existence. He taught that what is seen on the surface is only that – the surface. However when we begin to be able to admit our blindness, we then begin to peel away the scales of darkness, understanding that each layer is indeed real but only hides the deeper realities that lie just below. As we begin to encounter these deeper layers of reality, we are changed – we begin to experience a death and resurrection to new life – a metanoia or transformation.

Jesus taught his disciples (then and now) that as insight leads to a transformation of the person, so too does this experience lead to a change of behavior. Love always seems to lead to responding to the beloved – to become life giving – even if it meant giving up what we perceive to be our most precious possession – our own life for the sake of the beloved.

The message for today does not seem to me to be a call to action for its own sake, but rather as a response that is life giving because it is a response that emanates from the depths of our humanity – our compassion and empathy for the other. We are therefore, all of us, called to mission. We are called to look around carefully – to see beyond the surface and to find the presence of the divine in all of creation. We are called to look beyond the end of our own noses and our own wants – to see the world as it is in the face of each person and of all of humanity and then to respond, understanding that what we see in the faces of others is our own face and in all of this we find the face of the Christ.

The old argument of which comes first – faith or action (the chicken or the egg) therefore becomes moot. They are two sides of the same coin and each deepens the other. Faith (insight) leads to action which leads to further insight. It is in this process that we become fully alive and therefore life giving. We become active participants in the birth death and resurrection of Jesus. We are all, men and women individually and collectively, pregnant with life. We see ourselves as individuals, but as Church, we are one body and one blood, pregnant and struggling to both receive life and to be life givers.

In this way, we are able to see the face of God in the great diversity of humanity – in the oppressed, the poor, those who live and exist on the margins of social acceptance. It is easy to look down on those in prisons and mental hospitals; prostitutes and drug dealers; all who live on the margins of society and to see and judge them from our own position of self righteousness and fail to see the depths of our own reality and therefore unable to see others beyond the superficial appearance. In all of this the “law” becomes supreme and the subject of our idolatry. We begin to participate in death and become death givers.

These readings, as the Gospel itself, are filled with layers of meaning and pull us into reflection and action. Life constantly invites us to actively join in our common journey, not as judges, but as brothers and sisters.

Reverend Charles G. Bolser

Tuesday, February 12, 2008

First Reading: Isaiah 55:10-11

For just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down And do not return there till they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful, giving seed to him who sows and bread to him who eats, So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; It shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 6:7-15

In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

"This is how you are to pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and do not subject us to the final test, but deliver us from the evil one.

If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions.

What can we say to a God who is deserving of the kind of praise beyond what we are able to give, whose works are greater than what are able to imagine? During his ministry, the actions and teachings of Jesus centered on Love of God and Love of Neighbor. He was constantly grounded in prayer, often seeking to take time alone with God.

The disciples asked Jesus "Teach us to Pray". Jesus responded that, even before we utter our first words to God, we are to approach God with a humble heart, and we are to shed our external factors and present our 'true selves' before God. Jesus teaches us to establish an authentic relationship with God by not exalting ourselves and praying just to be noticed.

The Lord's Prayer is a prayer of relationship; we are children praying to an all powerful God. Whether we see God as 'our Father', 'our Mother', 'our Creator', or any other image, we indeed are the ones who are dependent on God's grace and mercy. Through God's providence, we are given the opportunity of a new day and daily bread to sustain us, through God's grace; we are forgiven of our sins, and through God's mercy, deliverance from evil.

If we really look at the words of the Lord's Prayer, it is the prayer of one who depends on God, and seeks to do God's will. Not only are we to pray those words, but we are called to live out the message by forgiving others.

The Lord's Prayer is a prayer we recite so often that sometimes it becomes a habit as the words roll from our tongues. This Lent, as we seek to do the things that bring us closer to God, and to do away with that which leads us from God, we remember that we are dependent on God, for even the smallest thing as the bread on our table, and for more important things such as forgiveness of sins and deliverance from evil, things that would not be possible without God's love for us.

Brother Jason P. Nesbit

Wednesday, February 13, 2008

First Reading: Jonah 3:1-10

The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: "Set out for the great city of Nineveh, and announce to it the message that I will tell you."

So Jonah made ready and went to Nineveh, according to the LORD'S bidding. Now Nineveh was an enormously large city; it took three days to go through it.

Jonah began his journey through the city, and had gone but a single day's walk announcing, "Forty days more and Nineveh shall be destroyed," when the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast and all of them, great and small, put on sackcloth.

When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in the ashes.

Then he had this proclaimed throughout Nineveh, by decree of the king and his nobles: "Neither man nor beast, neither cattle nor sheep, shall taste anything; they shall not eat, nor shall they drink water. Man and beast shall be covered with sackcloth and call loudly to God; every man shall turn from his evil way and from the violence he has in hand.

Who knows, God may relent and forgive, and withhold his blazing wrath, so that we shall not perish."

When God saw by their actions how they turned from their evil way, he repented of the evil that he had threatened to do to them; he did not carry it out.

Gospel Reading: Luke 11:29-32

While still more people gathered in the crowd, he said to them,

"This generation is an evil generation; it seeks a sign, but no sign will be given it, except the sign of Jonah. Just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation. At the judgment the queen of the south will rise with the men of this generation and she will condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and there is something greater than Solomon here. At the judgment the men of Nineveh will arise with this generation and condemn it, because at the preaching of Jonah they repented, and there is something greater than Jonah here.

Jonah in Nineveh! Can you imagine?

After a month in the belly of the big fish Jonah must have been a sight! And, most probably you would smell him before you saw him! He was a scary man with a scary message. "Forty days more and Nineveh shall be destroyed."

Was it any wonder that the people of Nineveh took his words to heart? Startled, shaken and perhaps scared by what they saw and heard, the people repent. With penitential sorrow they fast. Even their king dons sackcloth and sits in ashes.

Sometimes it seems as though I live in my own private Nineveh. Much like the folks of Nineveh I'm happily independent living in my sin. Plodding along in my own way, seeking my own comfort over that of others. excusing my own sinful behavior.

Everything seems just fine, until a Jonah steps into my life. Startling me. Shaking me. Scaring me. Like the people of Nineveh, between a rock and a hard place, I repent.

The people of Nineveh, because of their repentance were spared. Yet it seems that repentance is only the beginning of what it takes to move from sin and self-will.

Unless there is more, the comfortable old selfish attitudes and behaviors return. Lent calls us to more. Lent is for changing hearts. Only with a new heart can I live the graced life of a new person in Christ Jesus.

Reverend Gregory C. Jones

Thursday, February 14, 2008

First Reading: Esther C: 12, 14-16,23-25

Queen Esther, seized with mortal anguish, likewise had recourse to the Lord. Then she prayed to the Lord, the God of Israel, saying: "My Lord, our King, you alone are God. Help me, who am alone and have no help but you, for I am taking my life in my hand.

As a child I was wont to hear from the people of the land of my forefathers that you, O Lord, chose Israel from among all peoples, and our fathers from among all their ancestors, as a lasting heritage, and that you fulfilled all your promises to them.

Be mindful of us, O Lord. Manifest yourself in the time of our distress and give me courage, King of gods and Ruler of every power.

Put in my mouth persuasive words in the presence of the lion, and turn his heart to hatred for our enemy, so that he and those who are in league with him may perish. Save us by your power, and help me, who am alone and have no one but you, O Lord. You know all things."

Gospel Reading: Matthew 7:7-12

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

Which one of you would hand his son a stone when he asks for a loaf of bread, or a snake when he asks for a fish?

If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask him?

Do to others whatever you would have them do to you. This is the law and the prophets.

THE POWER OF PRAYER

Today's readings are two great examples of the power of prayer. We are told of the plan to destroy all of the Jews because Mordecai invoked the wrath of Haman, the King's top servant, for not bowing to him. Queen Esther (the adopted daughter of Mordecai and Jewish herself) pleaded with the King to reverse the order and have Haman killed instead.

In our first reading we hear Esther's prayer to God to "be mindful of us" and "give me courage." Esther turns to God for help in sparing her life and the life of all Jews. She acknowledges the power that God possesses when she asks him to "Save us by your power, and help me, who am alone and have no one but you." The prayer is answered and Esther and the Jews are spared.

In our Gospel reading Jesus instructs us on the power of prayer and the importance of prayer. In the previous chapter we learn about the proper way to pray and in today's reading we see the promise of our Lord to "ask and you shall receive." In our first reading we are given *proof* of answered prayer. In the Gospel we are given the *promise* of answered prayer.

It is my experience that the Lord answers my prayers. Not always on my time line and not always the answer I expect. To quote from the book *Purpose Driven Life* by Rick Warren, "It's not about us..." it is God's plan and we must allow God to carry out that plan.

Our prayer is one of the key ways we can develop a personal relationship with our Lord. Esther certainly knew who her God was and Jesus reminds us that we too are invited to seek him through prayer. What better way is there to connect with our Lord directly?

Randy Baker, Associate

Friday, February 15, 2008

First Reading: Ezekiel 18:21-28

But if the wicked man turns away from all the sins he committed, if he keeps all my statutes and does what is right and just, he shall surely live, he shall not die.

None of the crimes he committed shall be remembered against him; he shall live because of the virtue he has practiced.

Do I indeed derive any pleasure from the death of the wicked? says the Lord GOD.

Do I not rather rejoice when he turns from his evil way that he may live?

And if the virtuous man turns from the path of virtue to do evil, the same kind of abominable things that the wicked man does, can he do this and still live? None of his virtuous deeds shall be remembered, because he has broken faith and committed sin; because of this, he shall die.

You say, "The LORD'S way is not fair!" Hear now, house of Israel: Is it my way that is unfair, or rather, are not your ways unfair?

When a virtuous man turns away from virtue to commit iniquity, and dies, it is because of the iniquity he committed that he must die.

But if a wicked man, turning from the wickedness he has committed, does what is right and just, he shall preserve his life; since he has turned away from all the sins which he committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 5:20-26

I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

"You have heard that it was said to your ancestors, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills will be liable to judgment.'

But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment, and whoever says to his brother, 'Raqa,' will be answerable to the Sanhedrin, and whoever says, 'You fool,' will be liable to fiery Gehenna.

Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Settle with your opponent quickly while on the way to court with him. Otherwise your opponent will hand you over to the judge, and the judge will hand you over to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison.

Amen, I say to you, you will not be released until you have paid the last penny.

The readings of the first weeks of Lent present Christians a challenge and a call to live an evangelical life more fervently. We are called to conversion and to examine how we are living as disciples of Jesus.

Today's Word reminds us of what kind of God we are dealing with here – a God of compassion, justice and kindness. "For with the Lord is kindness, and with him is full redemption" (Ps. 130). Our God is a God who desires our turning from sin, our constant conversion and who desires that we experience life to the full. The prophet Ezekiel challenges us to "Return and live!" (Ez. 18:32).

We find life as we journey with Jesus, as his sisters and brothers. In today's gospel we hear Jesus challenging us to go beyond the superficial following of the law. Disciples of Jesus are called to be people with heart. We will experience the fullness of life –shalom—only if we love of our neighbor and are willing to be people of reconciliation and forgiveness. As we "wait with longing for the Lord," let us be ever ready to go beyond what appears as the "rational" thing to do, let us go deep into our hearts and reach out with compassion to those in need.

God truly rejoices when we live lives of radical discipleship, lives of service, lives motivated by love rather than following the law.

Daniel Lydon, Associate

Saturday, February 16, 2008

First Reading: Deuteronomy 26:6-19

This day the LORD, your God, commands you to observe these statutes and decrees. Be careful, then, to observe them with all your heart and with all your soul. Today you are making this agreement with the LORD: he is to be your God and you are to walk in his ways and observe his statutes, commandments and decrees, and to hearken to his voice.

And today the LORD is making this agreement with you: you are to be a people peculiarly his own, as he promised you; and provided you keep all his commandments, he will then raise you high in praise and renown and glory above all other nations he has made, and you will be a people sacred to the LORD, your God, as he promised."

Gospel Reading: Matthew 5:43-48

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same?"

So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.

"So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect."

"This, then, is what I pray kneeling before the Father, from whom every family, whether spiritual or natural takes its name:

Out of his infinite glory, may he give **me** the power through his Spirit for **my hidden self** to grow strong, so that Christ may live in **my heart** through faith, and then, rooted in love and built on love, **I will** with all the saints have strength to grasp the breadth and length, the height and depth; until, knowing the love of Christ, which is beyond all knowledge, **I am filled** with the utter fullness of God.

Glory be to him whose power, working in **me**, can do infinitely more than **I can ask** or imagine; glory be to him from generation to generation in the Church and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen."

Ep 3:14-21, Adapted from the JB,

Reverend George J. Auger

Sunday February 17, 2008

First Reading: Genesis 12:1- 4

The LORD said to Abram: "Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk and from your father's house to a land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. All the communities of the earth shall find blessing in you."
Abram went as the LORD directed him, and Lot went with him.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 17:1-9

After six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, conversing with him. Then Peter said to Jesus in reply, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."
While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud cast a shadow over them, then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."
When the disciples heard this, they fell prostrate and were very much afraid. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and do not be afraid."
And when the disciples raised their eyes, they saw no one else but Jesus alone. As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, "Do not tell the vision to anyone until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

My experiences in ministering to Belizeans have made me a better sacramental minister. It is the constant journeys up the mountain and returning to the valleys that continue to mold my relationship with Christ. Recently, I was reading an article that put the reason for working in Belize back into focus. It states;

Here is the human condition: the endurance of temptation contrasts with the fleetingness of glory. Here is the divine temptation: listen to Jesus and our fears are dispelled so we too can share in Jesus glory. Temptation and Christ's glory are both enduring; they parallel the pervasive dying and rising of the paschal mystery. The issue with living the paschal mystery is always the "theory" and put it into practice. Peter responded "practically" to Jesus transfiguration by wanting to "make three tents," make the experience of glory permanent. Christian living is about being "touched" by Jesus so that the fleeting moments of glory are made permanent in bettering the lives of others. We don't build tents; we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, touch the downhearted, visit the lonely, encourage the discouraged, etc. In this way Christ touches others through us. This kind of living is eminently practical and requires a real and constant dying to self.

Before, I based prior experiences by responding to the "practically," that is to make my moments always glorious. However, by living in Belize I am experiencing the "Touched." (No pun intended) The Belizeans have shown me the meaning of why we must not look for temporary moments of glory, but permanent ways to bring the Kingdom of God among us.

Reverend Daniel R. Belanger

Monday, February 18, 2008

First Reading: Daniel 9:4-10

"Ah, Lord, great and awesome God, you who keep your merciful covenant toward those who love you and observe your commandments!
We have sinned, been wicked and done evil; we have rebelled and departed from your commandments and your laws. We have not obeyed your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, our fathers, and all the people of the land. Justice, O Lord, is on your side; we are shamefaced even to this day: the men of Judah, the residents of Jerusalem, and all Israel, near and far, in all the countries to which you have scattered them because of their treachery toward you. O LORD, we are shamefaced, like our kings, our princes, and our fathers, for having sinned against you. But yours, O Lord, our God, are compassion and forgiveness! Yet we rebelled against you

Gospel Reading: Luke 6:36-38

Be merciful, just as also your Father is merciful. "Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you."

Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies. —
Being unwanted, unloved, uncared for, forgotten by everybody, I think that is
a much greater hunger, a much greater poverty than the person who has
nothing to eat. — Do not wait for leaders; do it alone, person to person. —
Each one of them is Jesus in disguise. — Everybody today seems to be in
such a terrible rush, anxious for greater developments and greater riches and
so on, so that children have very little time for their parents. Parents have very
little time for each other, and in the home begins the disruption of peace of
the world. — Every time you smile at someone, it is an action of love, a gift to
that person, a beautiful thing. — I do not pray for success, I ask for
faithfulness. — I know God will not give me anything I can't handle. I just wish
that He didn't trust me so much. — I have found the paradox, that if you love
until it hurts, there can be no more hurt, only more love. — I want you to be
concerned about your next door neighbor. Do you know your next door
neighbor? — If you can't feed a hundred people, then feed just one. — If you
judge people, you have no time to love them. — If you want a love message
to be heard, it has got to be sent out. To keep a lamp burning, we have to
keep putting oil in it. — In this life we cannot do great things. We can only do
small things with great love. — Intense love does not measure, it just gives.
— It is easy to love the people far away. It is not always easy to love those
close to us. It is easier to give a cup of rice to relieve hunger than to relieve
the loneliness and pain of someone unloved in our own home. Bring love into
your home for this is where our love for each other must start. — It is
impossible to walk rapidly and be unhappy — Jesus said love one another.
He didn't say love the whole world. — Joy is a net of love by which you can
catch souls. — Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes
are truly endless. — Let us always meet each other with smile, for the smile
is the beginning of love. — Let us not be satisfied with just giving money.
Money is not enough, money can be got, but they need your hearts to love
them. So, spread your love everywhere you go. — Let us touch the dying, the
poor, the lonely and the unwanted according to the graces we have received
and let us not be ashamed or slow to do the humble work. — Loneliness and
the feeling of being unwanted is the most terrible poverty. — Love begins at
home, and it is not how much we do... but how much love we put in that
action. — Many people mistake our work for our vocation. Our vocation is the
love of Jesus. — One of the greatest diseases is to be nobody to anybody. —
Peace begins with a smile. — Spread love everywhere you go. Let no one
ever come to you without leaving happier. — Sweetest Lord, make me
appreciative of the dignity of my high vocation, and its many responsibilities.
Never permit me to disgrace it by giving way to coldness, unkindness, or
impatience. — The miracle is not that we do this work, but that we are happy
to do it. — There is always the danger that we may just do the work for the
sake of the work. This is where the respect and the love and the devotion
come in - that we do it to God, to Christ, and that's why we try to do it as
beautifully as possible. — There is more hunger in the world for love and
appreciation in this world than for bread — Words which do not give the light
of Christ increase the darkness.

Quotes from Mother Teresa

Tuesday, February 19, 2008

First Reading: Isaiah 1:10, 16-20

Fear of the LORD warms the heart, giving gladness and joy and length of days. Wisdom's garland is fear of the LORD, with blossoms of peace and perfect health. Knowledge and full understanding she showers down; she heightens the glory of those who possess her. The root of wisdom is fear of the LORD; her branches are length of days. One cannot justify unjust anger; anger plunges a man to his downfall. A patient man need stand firm but for a time, and then contentment comes back to him.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 23: 1-12

Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to his disciples, saying, "The scribes and the Pharisees have taken their seat on the chair of Moses. Therefore, do and observe all things whatsoever they tell you, but do not follow their example. For they preach, but they do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on people's shoulders, but they will not lift a finger to move them. All their works are performed to be seen. They widen their phylacteries and lengthen their tassels. They love places of honor at banquets, seats of honor in synagogues, greetings in marketplaces, and the salutation 'Rabbi.' As for you, do not be called 'Rabbi.' You have but one teacher, and you are all brothers. Call no one on earth your father; you have but one Father in heaven. Do not be called 'Master'; you have but one master, the Messiah. The greatest among you must be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

Like most of you, I was brought up believing in a kind, compassionate, loving God. It always seemed like such a contradiction with these admonitions to fear the Lord. I lived with that incongruity for quite a while, more or less glossing over the word choice every time it came up in readings. Later, I learned that the word for fear and revere in Hebrew is the same word. Each time I read today's passage from Isaiah and similar passages, I substitute the word revere for the word fear. It fits with my image of the God I have come to know.

Matthew's gospel challenges our ideas about humility. As a society we generally agree that humility is a good thing, but we tend to think of it as a kind of decorative virtue. A certain amount of it can make people nicer and more pleasant to be around, but we hardly think of it as a quality that marks the difference between success and failure. How do we explain the difference between Jesus' conviction and ours? Why was humility more important to Jesus than it is to us? I think that the answer lies in the different ways of viewing life. Jesus was convinced that no one could ever truly succeed without it.

Throughout the New Testament, Jesus seems to have little tolerance for hypocrisy. As He encounters a person's sins, He forgives and encourages the repentant sinner to sin no more. With hypocrisy, however, he takes a totally different attitude. That was the crux of his conflict with some of the Scribes and Pharisees. They were the official teachers of Israel. Jesus apparently had little problem with their doctrine. He told his disciples to accept their teaching, but he also warned them not to follow their example. The basis of that warning was not left in doubt. They were not genuine. The sin of pride had robbed them of their humility. Their human weakness and fear of loss of status then led them to the hypocrisy that Jesus hated. Even their religion was mostly a performance intended to gain public approval. Jesus could not accept that kind of pretense. Jesus had more patience with a genuine sinner than with a phony saint.

Given that commitment to reality, it is not surprising that he placed such a high premium on humility. For him, it is the only honest approach to life. Jesus thought that humility was an indispensable quality of character.

Understanding the significance of the words "fear" and "humility", as used in today's readings, is important to understanding our faith.

Reverend Daniel R. Hall

Wednesday, February 20, 2008

First Reading: Jeremiah 18: 18-20

"Come," they said, "let us contrive a plot against Jeremiah. It will not mean the loss of instruction from the priests, nor of counsel from the wise, nor of messages from the prophets. And so, let us destroy him by his own tongue; let us carefully note his every word."

Heed me, O LORD, and listen to what my adversaries say.

Must good be repaid with evil that they should dig a pit to take my life?

Remember that I stood before you to speak in their behalf, to turn away your wrath from them.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 20: 17-28

As Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve aside by themselves, and said to them on the way,

"Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and scourged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day."

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee approached him with her sons and did him homage, wishing to ask him for something.

He said to her, "What do you wish?" She answered him, "Command that these two sons of mine sit, one at your right and the other at your left, in your kingdom."

Jesus said in reply, "You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?" They said to him, "We can."

He replied, "My cup you will indeed drink, but to sit at my right and at my left is not mine to give but is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father."

When the ten heard this, they became indignant at the two brothers.

But Jesus summoned them and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."

As he had already done on two previous and similar occasions, Jesus foretells his upcoming Passion in today's Gospel reading. This third prediction is one that is filled with hope – "he will be raised on the third day." The final outcome of Jesus' mission will not be death, but life; the final result of his efforts will not be failure, but victory.

In imitation of our master, we, as Jesus' disciples, should not have success as our goal, contending among ourselves as to who will be *Número Uno*. Rather, we should be searching, purely and simply, to discover God's will for us by humbling ourselves and being willing to serve others, even to the point of giving up our lives for their benefit. Such attitudes and actions, of course, will oftentimes bring us nothing but humiliation and failure in the eyes of others.

Just as we have difficulty doing so in the world of today, it is not surprising that the Apostles were unable to fully understand Jesus' words. The simple way of service that Jesus was pointing out to his followers is in utter contradiction to basic "natural" human priorities.

But, with his very life, the Lord showed us that such a goal is indeed attainable. Jesus came, as we know, not to be served, but to serve. And his service extended to the ultimate point of his death, which he lovingly accepted. Every authentic disciple of Jesus, beginning with ourselves, must accept – and imitate – Jesus' example.

Reverend John N. Peeters

Thursday, February 21, 2008

First Reading: Jeremiah 17: 5-10

Thus says the LORD: Cursed is the man who trusts in human beings, who seeks his strength in flesh, whose heart turns away from the LORD.

He is like a barren bush in the desert that enjoys no change of season, But stands in a lava waste, a salt and empty earth.

Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose hope is the LORD.

He is like a tree planted beside the waters that stretches out its roots to the stream: It fears not the heat when it comes, its leaves stay green; In the year of drought it shows no distress, but still bears fruit.

More tortuous than all else is the human heart, beyond remedy; who can understand it?

I, the LORD, alone probe the mind and test the heart, To reward everyone according to his ways, according to the merit of his deeds.

Gospel Reading: Luke 16:19-31

"There was a rich man who dressed in purple garments and fine linen and dined sumptuously each day. And lying at his door was a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who would gladly have eaten his fill of the scraps that fell from the rich man's table. Dogs even used to come and lick his sores.

When the poor man died, he was carried away by angels to the bosom of Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried, and from the netherworld, where he was in torment, he raised his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side.

And he cried out, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am suffering torment in these flames.'

Abraham replied, 'My child, remember that you received what was good during your lifetime while Lazarus likewise received what was bad; but now he is comforted here, whereas you are tormented.

Moreover, between us and you a great chasm is established to prevent anyone from crossing who might wish to go from our side to yours or from your side to ours.'

He said, 'Then I beg you, father, send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they too come to this place of torment.'

But Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them.'

He said, 'Oh no, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'

Then Abraham said, 'If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead.'"

It is not uncommon to hear individuals question (or complain) because God rewarded those who turn from evil in their final days the same as those who followed God's commands their whole lives. It is much like Jesus' parable of the workers in the vineyard or when someone can turn to God on his/her deathbed and receive the same reward as one whose entire life was spent in God's good graces.

Today's reading from Jeremiah offers us another picture. If we are concerned only with our "final reward" with life after death, then we are missing something very important. If being rich and powerful and wearing purple garments is our focus, then we miss our call to full humanity: a life lived in harmony and union with God in and through our brothers and sisters in Christ.

What is the best way to serve God now with the assurance of being with Him for all eternity? The best way is not necessarily to give up everything or turn our back on the world and go off to some monastery or spend hours each day in prayer. The best way to serve God is to extend ourselves in service to those less fortunate than ourselves and whose lives we may touch.

Today's Gospel uses Lazarus as a medium to translate this teaching of Jesus into lived action in our lives. The story of Lazarus contains both an invitation and a challenge. The action/inaction of the rich man invites us to take inventory of our lives and ask: what is my spirit of service in the work I am engaged in right now? Today's Gospel challenges each of us to ask ourselves: how can I bring a greater spirit of service to my work than I presently demonstrate? What can I do in my Lenten journey that will lead me to the Cross and resurrect me from the Tomb? Who is the Lazarus in my life? What is...could be...my response?

Reverend Lawrence D. Lentz

Friday, February 22, 2008

First Reading: 1Peter 5:1-4

So I exhort the presbyters among you, as a fellow presbyter and witness to the sufferings of Christ and one who has a share in the glory to be revealed. Tend the flock of God in your midst, (overseeing) not by constraint but willingly, as God would have it, not for shameful profit but eagerly. Do not lord it over those assigned to you, but be examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd is revealed, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 16:13 - 19

When Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter said in reply, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus said to him in reply, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

In today's gospel reading, we once again hear those very familiar questions: "Who do people say that I am?" and "Who do you say that I am?"

I suspect that several apostles spoke up at the same time to answer the first question. It's easy to put ourselves in their midst, feel their enthusiasm, and listen to their answers. But when Jesus asked that second question, the group's silence must have worn heavy and seemed interminable; each searched for something to say and how to say it. Peter finally answered for the rest. "You are the Christ, the son of the living God."

Perhaps when we are put in a position where we are expected to articulate how we think and feel about Jesus we respond like the apostles. We find it easier to express what others say about Jesus. And so we construct an easy answer based on what someone else said or what we read in a book or saw on Public Television.

However, to voice our own personal thoughts and feelings about Jesus while speaking from the center of our being with the same directness as Peter did is challenging.

Through the words and actions of Peter, Matthew teaches us about the integrity of discipleship. Through Peter we learn that integrity means to know what I believe, live it, and "say" that I live what I believe.

On our faith journey, we like Peter can expect disappointments mixed with joy, grace, and forgiveness. We remember Peter's unsettling remark to the servant girl in the courtyard after Jesus' arrest: "I don't even know the man!" From that scene we understand that our beliefs will inevitably be tested by our experiences.

So then we are left with this question: "Who do you say that I am?"

Reverend Arnold E. Perham

Saturday, February 23, 2008

First Reading: Micah 7:14-15, 18-20

Shepherd your people with your staff, the flock of your inheritance, that dwells apart in a woodland, in the midst of Carmel. Let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old; As in the days when you came from the land of Egypt, show us wonderful signs. Who is there like you, the God who removes guilt and pardons sin for the remnant of his inheritance; Who does not persist in anger forever, but delights rather in clemency, And will again have compassion on us, treading underfoot our guilt? You will cast into the depths of the sea all our sins; You will show faithfulness to Jacob, and grace to Abraham, As you have sworn to our fathers from days of old.

Gospel Reading: Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

The tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to him, but the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, saying, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." So to them he addressed this parable.

Then he said, "A man had two sons, and the younger son said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of your estate that should come to me.' So the father divided the property between them. After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation.

When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need. So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to his farm to tend the swine. And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any. Coming to his senses he thought, 'How many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger. I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers."' So he got up and went back to his father.

While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him. His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.' But his father ordered his servants, 'Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.' Then the celebration began.

Now the older son had been out in the field and, on his way back, as he neared the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what this might mean. The servant said to him, 'Your brother has returned and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' He became angry, and when he refused to enter the house, his father came out and pleaded with him. He said to his father in reply, 'Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends. But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf.' He said to him, 'My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours. But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.'"

*Love the Lord with your whole heart and He will fill your
heart
beyond anything you can imagine.
Love the Lord with your whole soul and He will fill your
soul
with joy, bliss, and a radiance that you cannot imagine.
Love the Lord with your whole mind and He will transform
it
so the renewed mind in you
will be the same as in Jesus Christ.*

From "Your Move God" by Sr. Francis Clare S.S.N.D.

Sunday, February 24, 2008

First Reading: Exodus 17:3-7

When Abram prostrated himself, God continued to speak to him:

"My covenant with you is this: you are to become the father of a host of nations. No longer shall you be called Abram; your name shall be Abraham, for I am making you the father of a host of nations. I will render you exceedingly fertile; I will make nations of you; kings shall stem from you. I will maintain my covenant with you and your descendants after you throughout the ages as an everlasting pact, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.

Gospel Reading: John 4:5-15

So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of land that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there. Jesus, tired from his journey, sat down there at the well. It was about noon.

A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.

The Samaritan woman said to him, "How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?"

Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

The woman said to him, "Sir, you do not even have a bucket and the cistern is deep; where then can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us this cistern and drank from it himself with his children and his flocks?"

Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again; but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may not be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

The message of Lent is that although life is dull and wintry and drab, although sin is as real as any reality we know, there is hope.

The biblical figure for that hope is water. St. Paul says it is still possible to realize our hope, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. His love is like a river, a cooling stream amidst a desert of selfishness.

During the Exodus, deep down on the Sinai Peninsula, there was no water. The people grumble – the place names “Massah” and “Meribah” mean “the testing” and “the quarreling” respectively. “What shall I do with these people?” says the despairing Moses. “A little more and they will stone me”. This is where John’s gospel gets its threat by the Jerusalem crowds to stone Jesus. He is portrayed as a prophet-Moses figure throughout that gospel. No hardship that Moses endured can Jesus escape.

He is that very same Moses-figure at Jacob’s well in the hostile territory of Samaria. “Sir”, said the woman, “I can see you are a prophet”. He is at least that for us Christians. We might even say, he is above all that. He is a teacher or spokesman for God, someone we can trust completely – about sin, about death, about the conduct of our life next week.

Today’s readings have a long history as the Scriptures proclaimed on the mid-Lenten Sunday. They hold out a promise, the promise of water and new life for the adults craving baptism who have only four weeks to go.

They hold out the promise to us, the long-baptized, of finally living the life we were committed to in infancy. I mean living it now, which is what Jesus meant. “Eternal life” in John’s gospel is a present reality. It is the life of the baptized, a fountain, a torrent within: their parched lives are slaked by the cooling waters of grace, a God who loves.

Faith in Christ has always meant new life for the Christian. Faith, a personal relation with God, made manifest by the symbol of a bath in water is new life, it is being born again, or it is nothing.

The water-baptized Catholic or Orthodox or Protestant of infancy may have an adult or an adolescent conversion. Many do. During courtship, when a first child comes, in war, at the time of religious profession, at any crisis time in conscious life. Most Christians ratify the sacrament of infancy by conscious choice at some time although, tragically, perhaps some never do. Hence, to know that you are reborn, to will it, choose it, embrace it, is a possibility for the Christian at any time. It could happen this Lent for the first time to you.

May we all cry out as a born-again believer in mid-Lent, dry, parched, calling out for the relief that Easter affords.

Reverend Robert E. Erickson

Monday, February 25, 2008

First Reading: 2 Kings 5:1-15

Naaman, the army commander of the king of Aram, was highly esteemed and respected by his master, for through him the LORD had brought victory to Aram. But valiant as he was, the man was a leper. Now the Arameans had captured from the land of Israel in a raid a little girl, who became the servant of Naaman's wife. "If only my master would present himself to the prophet in Samaria," she said to her mistress, "he would cure him of his leprosy." Naaman went and told his lord just what the slave girl from the land of Israel had said.

"Go," said the king of Aram. "I will send along a letter to the king of Israel." So Naaman set out, taking along ten silver talents, six thousand gold pieces, and ten festal garments.

To the king of Israel he brought the letter, which read: "With this letter I am sending my servant Naaman to you, that you may cure him of his leprosy." When he read the letter, the king of Israel tore his garments and exclaimed: "Am I a god with power over life and death, that this man should send someone to me to be cured of leprosy? Take note! You can see he is only looking for a quarrel with me!"

When Elisha, the man of God, heard that the king of Israel had torn his garments, he sent word to the king: "Why have you torn your garments? Let him come to me and find out that there is a prophet in Israel."

Naaman came with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha's house. The prophet sent him the message: "Go and wash seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will heal, and you will be clean." But Naaman went away angry, saying, "I thought that he would surely come out and stand there to invoke the LORD his God, and would move his hand over the spot, and thus cure the leprosy. Are not the rivers of Damascus, the Abana and the Pharpar, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be cleansed?" With this, he turned about in anger and left. But his servants came up and reasoned with him. "My father," they said, "if the prophet had told you to do something extraordinary, would you not have done it? All the more now, since he said to you, 'Wash and be clean,' should you do as he said." So Naaman went down and plunged into the Jordan seven times at the word of the man of God. His flesh became again like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean. He returned with his whole retinue to the man of God. On his arrival he stood before him and said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel. Please accept a gift from your servant."

Gospel Reading: Luke 4:24-30

He said, "Amen, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own native place. Indeed, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah when the sky was closed for three and a half years and a severe famine spread over the entire land. It was to none of these that Elijah was sent, but only to a widow in Zarephath in the land of Sidon. Again, there were many lepers in Israel during the time of Elisha the prophet; yet not one of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian."

When the people in the synagogue heard this, they were all filled with fury. They rose up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town had been built, to hurl him down headlong. But he passed through the midst of them and went away.

We fear it. We're crushed by it. Too, often we're guilty of it. But, we need to have faith to combat it.

In the first reading, Naaman the leper is sent to the king of Israel to be cured because of the faith of a small Jewish girl. When he arrives at the court of Israel, the King shows no faith in God or his prophet Elisha and rends his garments. Even the king of the chosen people reject's God's message!

Elisha the prophet tells Naaman to go and wash in the Jordan River and be clean. But, Naaman has no faith and refuses. He, too, rejects God's message. Finally the faith of his servants in the God of Israel convinces him to do as Elisha says and he is cured. Faith saves him.

Jesus himself warns us that "No prophet is accepted in his own native place." Not even Jesus, the people in his hometown ran him out and planned to throw him off a cliff. Judas betrayed him, Peter denied him. He was tortured, and killed, the ultimate rejection. This Lent we need to remember to keep our faith. God is with us even when we feel alone and forgotten. Even when our own family, our friends, or community rejects us, we need to remember to keep our faith and to keep on trying to follow our Lord all the way to Calvary this Lent. We need to remember always, that He is with us and after the Lord's great rejection came resurrection.

Susan Surprenant, Associate

Tuesday, February 26, 2008

First Reading: Daniel 3:25m 34-43

In the fire Azariah stood up and prayed aloud: For your name's sake, do not deliver us up forever, or make void your covenant. Do not take away your mercy from us, for the sake of Abraham, your beloved, Isaac your servant, and Israel your holy one, to whom you promised to multiply their offspring like the stars of heaven, or the sand on the shore of the sea. For we are reduced, O Lord, beyond any other nation, brought low everywhere in the world this day because of our sins. We have in our day no prince, prophet, or leader, no holocaust, sacrifice, oblation, or incense, no place to offer first fruits, to find favor with you. But with contrite heart and humble spirit let us be received; as though it were holocausts of rams and bullocks, or thousands of fat lambs, So let our sacrifice be in your presence today as we follow you unreservedly; for those who trust in you cannot be put to shame. And now we follow you with our whole heart, we fear you and we pray to you. Do not let us be put to shame, but deal with us in your kindness and great mercy. Deliver us by your wonders, and bring glory to your name, O Lord.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 18:21-35

Then Peter approaching asked him, "Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him? As many as seven times?"

Jesus answered, "I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times. That is why the kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king who decided to settle accounts with his servants. When he began the accounting, a debtor was brought before him who owed him a huge amount. Since he had no way of paying it back, his master ordered him to be sold, along with his wife, his children, and all his property, in payment of the debt.

At that, the servant fell down, did him homage, and said, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back in full.'

Moved with compassion the master of that servant let him go and forgave him the loan. When that servant had left, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a much smaller amount. He seized him and started to choke him, demanding, 'Pay back what you owe.'

Falling to his knees, his fellow servant begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' But he refused. Instead, he had him put in prison until he paid back the debt.

Now when his fellow servants saw what had happened, they were deeply disturbed, and went to their master and reported the whole affair.

His master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you your entire debt because you begged me to. Should you not have had pity on your fellow servant, as I had pity on you?'

Then in anger his master handed him over to the torturers until he should pay back the whole debt. So will my heavenly Father do to you, unless each of you forgives his brother from his heart."

It must have been hard to be a faithful follower of God during the time of Daniel. Whatever the king decreed had to be followed or a person could be put to death. Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, companions of Daniel (*also known as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego - names given by their Babylonian captors*), were thrown into the fire for not worshipping a statue. The above passage is a portion of the beautiful Prayer of Azariah. It is a remarkable testament to the faith and fortitude that Daniel and his companions had in the one true God. It is also a wonderful reminder of the faithfulness of God and His deliverance of those who love Him and strive to follow Him.

Today I find that I am often the one who places my own self into the proverbial fire. It seems that life is constantly rushed and busy. There are so many things to do. Oftentimes I feel like I fail at being a good wife, mom, worker, friend, and especially Christian. I find myself crying out to the Lord for help. It never ceases to amaze me of how God sustains and delivers me by sending me assistance. He constantly reminds me of how much He loves me. God is able to take my feeble attempts at trying to serve Him and molds them into something good for His kingdom.

In Biblical times, rabbis taught the people that they should forgive those who offended them three times. So when Peter asked Jesus how many times we must forgive someone, he thought he was being generous in offering seven times. Jesus answers Peter with seventy times seven. He follows up with a parable to show we should always forgive others because God, through Jesus, has forgiven us. Personally, I am glad that Jesus teaches us that there is no limit to forgiveness.

Last year during Lent, 7-year old Emma, stated that her Lenten promise was to “be nicer to her brother, Eric.” I tried to encourage her to choose a promise that is more concrete and one that she might have more success with. She was steadfast in her desire to fulfill her original promise to Jesus. When we woke up Ash Wednesday morning, Emma started fighting with her brother. Her Lenten promise did not even last for one hour. When reminded of her promise, she lowered her head in shame, asked for forgiveness and vowed once again to be nicer and more loving to her brother. She really wanted to please Jesus and be a better child of God. As you can imagine, her Lenten promise was broken many more times during Lent. Each time she was sorry and she promised to try again.

The last time I received the Sacrament of Reconciliation, I was reminded of Emma’s dilemma and realized that this is my own story as well. Each time I confess my sins they seem to be the same. I keep trying to be better, yet I struggle with the same sins. I think that many of us struggle in the same way as Emma. We vow to be better, we try very hard, we change a bit, but many times we fail. But we never stop trying to please the Lord. I am glad that Jesus always forgives us and reminds us that we must forgive others.

“Lord, you have been kind and forgiving towards me. May I be merciful as you are merciful. Free me from all bitterness and resentment that I may truly forgive from the heart those who have caused me injury or grief.”

Cathy Abrahamian, Associate

Wednesday, February 27, 2008

First Reading: Deuteronomy 4:1,5-9

"Now, Israel, hear the statutes and decrees which I am teaching you to observe, that you may live, and may enter in and take possession of the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you. Therefore, I teach you the statutes and decrees as the LORD, my God, has commanded me, that you may observe them in the land you are entering to occupy. Observe them carefully, for thus will you give evidence of your wisdom and intelligence to the nations, who will hear of all these statutes and say, 'This great nation is truly a wise and intelligent people.' For what great nation is there that has gods so close to it as the LORD, our God, is to us whenever we call upon him? Or what great nation has statutes and decrees that are as just as this whole law which I am setting before you today?

"However, take care and be earnestly on your guard not to forget the things which your own eyes have seen, nor let them slip from your memory as long as you live, but teach them to your children and to your children's children.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 5:17-19

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.

Ancient synagogue services began by taking the scroll of the laws from the ark and marching them around the congregation.today these laws that are in the first reading and the gospel are the same that are processed in the Mass, read from and left open during Mass. This link connects us to Moses' people listening in the desert. In our readings today, Moses calls on Israel to heed and obey not laws that he lays down but those laws that come from God. In the same way, Jesus says that he has, as the fulfillment, not new laws of his own making but the law whose author is God. Moses is making the distinction here between those laws which have been laid down and those which are God given. Why was he so definite about stressing that God's laws were to be obeyed and carefully handed on to our children and our children's children? Could it be Moses recognized that laws created by humans for themselves could, and would be altered or dismissed at will, and what do we have today? We have thousands of manmade laws just to interpret these 10 commandments. Moses was a wise man indeed! Knowing that God's laws would be like stone holding up the very foundation of the church as we know it...Jesus declares his mission is to fulfill, not destroy the law and prophets. He says this near the beginning of his Sermon on the Mount. He has declared the blessedness of the meek, the merciful, the mourners, the pure in heart, the peacemakers and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Some of those declarations are astonishing and sound like new teachings. He takes ancient teaching about murder and anger, about adultery and about revenge and gives the new meanings, some things well needed in our world today as we read about and hear on TV of all the wrong doings being done. Jesus must be disappointed seeing all this happening in his world especially in his hometown or Jerusalem and the sounds of war in the Mideast. But will the world leaders listen up rather than thinking of these laws as chains holding us to the dark ages? We would think of them as the links holding us together as the people of God, links connecting us to those men and women who stood in the desert so very long ago and listened to Moses.

Francis Chamness, Associate

Thursday, February 28, 2008

First Reading: Jeremiah 7:23-28

This rather is what I commanded them: Listen to my voice; then I will be your God and you shall be my people. Walk in all the ways that I command you, so that you may prosper. But they obeyed not, nor did they pay heed. They walked in the hardness of their evil hearts and turned their backs, not their faces, to me. From the day that your fathers left the land of Egypt even to this day, I have sent you untiringly all my servants the prophets. Yet they have not obeyed me nor paid heed; they have stiffened their necks and done worse than their fathers. When you speak all these words to them, they will not listen to you either; when you call to them, they will not answer you. Say to them: This is the nation which does not listen to the voice of the LORD, its God, or take correction. Faithfulness has disappeared; the word itself is banished from their speech.

Gospel Reading: Luke 11:14-23

He was driving out a demon that was mute, and when the demon had gone out, the mute person spoke and the crowds were amazed. Some of them said, "By the power of Beelzebul, the prince of demons, he drives out demons." Others, to test him, asked him for a sign from heaven. But he knew their thoughts and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be laid waste and house will fall against house. And if Satan is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that it is by Beelzebul that I drive out demons. If I, then, drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your own people drive them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if it is by the finger of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. When a strong man fully armed guards his palace, his possessions are safe. But when one stronger ^z than he attacks and overcomes him, he takes away the armor on which he relied and distributes the spoils. Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

As I sit with this reading and go over it I recall a homily that Father Tom von Behren ended with W.W.J.D. WHAT WOULD JESUS DO? Would He listen to his Father's voice? Would we listen to God's voice? Would we turn our backs on God's voice? In this reading of the Prophet Jeremiah it is obvious that the people did not listen to God's voice. I would think that God's heart was saddened by this. We should reflect on W.W.J.D. WHAT WOULD JESUS DO? After reflecting on this I would think that this reading would have a different theme.

With the gospel reading "Whoever is not with me is against me" people often like to hang quotable quotes on their wall to remind themselves of some important lesson. Every once in a while we read one that really makes us think, such as this quote "If you are not a part of the solution, you are part of the problem." Do we let someone else worry about the homeless or the hungry? Do we pass the homeless shelter and not go in to see if we can do anything to help? It may not be much maybe doing some laundry, some housekeeping. It need not be financial. In fact it is much better if you give of your time. Sometimes it is too easy to give of your treasures and forget all about the homeless, feeling you have done your part. It is much better to work among them and then you truly get a feeling of these people who have no home. Again I say to you.....W.W.J.D.? Would he pass by or would he stop and give of his time? In my everyday living when I come across a situation that I am not sure which way I should go, I think, W.W.J.D.? and believe me, it is not always what I would have done had I not said W.W.J.D.?

Henrietta Chamness, Associate

Friday, February 29, 2008

First Reading: Hosea 14:2-10

Return, O Israel, to the LORD, your God; you have collapsed through your guilt. Take with you words, and return to the LORD; Say to him, "Forgive all iniquity, and receive what is good, that we may render as offerings the bullocks from our stalls. Assyria will not save us, nor shall we have horses to mount; We shall say no more, 'Our god,' to the work of our hands; for in you the orphan finds compassion." I will heal their defection, I will love them freely; for my wrath is turned away from them. I will be like the dew for Israel: he shall blossom like the lily; He shall strike root like the Lebanon cedar, and put forth his shoots. His splendor shall be like the olive tree and his fragrance like the Lebanon cedar. Again they shall dwell in his shade and raise grain; They shall blossom like the vine, and his fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon. Ephraim! What more has he to do with idols? I have humbled him, but I will prosper him. "I am like a verdant cypress tree"-- Because of me you bear fruit! Let him who is wise understand these things; let him who is prudent know them. Straight are the paths of the LORD, in them the just walk, but sinners stumble in them.

Gospel Reading: Mark 12:28-34

One of the scribes, when he came forward and heard them disputing and saw how well he had answered them, asked him, "Which is the first of all the commandments?"

Jesus replied, "The first is this: 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

The scribe said to him, "Well said, teacher. You are right in saying, 'He is One and there is no other than he.' And 'to love him with all your heart, with all your understanding, with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself' is worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

And when Jesus saw that he answered with understanding, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And no one dared to ask him any more questions.

“And Jesus saw that he answered with understanding.” This phrase caught my attention. What is it to “understand” the One God Who is Love, to love that One God with every fiber of one’s existence, and to love another as one loves self.

Who can possibly “understand” such a wonderful and loving God Who can give so much. The prophet Amos talks of God as the “lover of souls”. In Hosea God finds compassion in the orphan and oppressed and says that God will “love them freely.”

And can I “understand” what it is to love that “Lover of souls”? I can hear the word but can I fully understand the depth of a Love offered to me and asking for total love back from me?

What is it to love another as myself? Is it a love that demands a respect for myself and others as the freely given gift back to the “Lover of souls”? Or is it in reality an accepting of a gift of love from One Who is Love? How I am to treat that homeless person as I see him on the same route that I walk my dog? How am I to respond to that cyclist who is walking because of a flat tire? Can I take upon myself a cause of justice out of love for those who have been unjustly treated? Can I just leave myself in the background and respond to others as I would love to have another respond to me?

Is the Lover of souls simply saying love the One God with your whole self in loving others? Lord, help me to be wise and understand these things; help me to be prudent know them. Lord, Lover of souls, help me to understand.

Reverend Alan M. Syslo

Saturday, March 1, 2008

First Reading: Hosea 6:1-6

In their affliction, they shall look for me: "Come, let us return to the LORD, For it is he who has rent, but he will heal us; he has struck us, but he will bind our wounds. He will revive us after two days; on the third day he will raise us up, to live in his presence. Let us know, let us strive to know the LORD; as certain as the dawn is his coming, and his judgment shines forth like the light of day! He will come to us like the rain, like spring rain that waters the earth."

What can I do with you, Ephraim? What can I do with you, Judah? Your piety is like a morning cloud, like the dew that early passes away. For this reason I smote them through the prophets, I slew them by the words of my mouth; For it is love that I desire, not sacrifice, and knowledge of God rather than holocausts.

Gospel Reading: Luke 18:9-14

He then addressed this parable to those who were convinced of their own righteousness and despised everyone else. "Two people went up to the temple area to pray; one was a Pharisee and the other was a tax collector. The Pharisee took up his position and spoke this prayer to himself, 'O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity--greedy, dishonest, adulterous--or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes on my whole income.' But the tax collector stood off at a distance and would not even raise his eyes to heaven but beat his breast and prayed, 'O God, be merciful to me a sinner.' I tell you, the latter went home justified, not the former; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

God has x-ray vision. God can see beyond words and deeds, even the most fervent of them. God can see into the heart. God can see intent, motive, sincerity and even more. God can also see into the unconscious - and can recognize impulses, affects, desires, passions, fears, and doubts, hopes that may lurk behind much of what we feel, think, say and do. Sometimes that can be a blessing; sometimes it can be risky.

Hosea gives us access to the mind of God. We are privileged to listen to God's stream of consciousness as God anticipates the empty prayer of the civil and religious leaders. Instead of trusting in the covenanted promises God had made with them, they have entered into desperate alliances with powerful Assyrian kings. Disaster follows. God foresees that they will voice repentant prayers of confidence in God's mercy, but God also knows the shallow level of their contrition. "What shall I do with you" God laments, "Your piety is like the early morning dew that quickly passes away".

We all know about crocodile tears. We also know about formulaic prayer. "Lord have mercy" we chant over and over again, "O my God I am heartily sorry", "Be merciful O God in your goodness; in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense". What was it that made the tax collector's prayer different? Jesus says that it was his humility. But is that all? In Hosea's words God insists that it is love that counts, not sacrifice. Love and humility. Perhaps genuine humility emerges from love, the awareness of **being** loved freely and without merit. The gift of being loved is transformational; it can also be humbling. Maybe God can look beyond the words of contrition to see if they come from an unconscious place within each of us which treasures the deep-down knowledge of being loved.

Reverend Patrick W. Render

Sunday, March 2, 2008

First Reading: 1 Samuel 16:1,6-7,10-13

The LORD said to Samuel: "How long will you grieve for Saul, whom I have rejected as king of Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and be on your way." As they came, he looked at Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD'S anointed is here before him."

In the same way Jesse presented seven sons before Samuel, but Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen any one of these."

Then Samuel asked Jesse, "Are these all the sons you have?" Jesse replied, "There is still the youngest, who is tending the sheep." Samuel said to Jesse, "Send for him; we will not begin the sacrificial banquet until he arrives here."

Jesse sent and had the young man brought to them. He was ruddy, a youth handsome to behold and making a splendid appearance. The LORD said, "There-anoint him, for this is he!"

Then Samuel, with the horn of oil in hand, anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and from that day on, the spirit of the LORD rushed upon David.

Gospel Reading: John: 9: 1, 6-9, 13-17, 34-38

As he passed by he saw a man blind from birth. He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva, and smeared the clay on his eyes, and said to him, "Go wash in the Pool of Siloam". So he went and washed, and came back able to see. His neighbors and those who had seen him earlier as a beggar said, "Isn't this the one who used to sit and beg?" They brought the one who was once blind to the Pharisees.

Now Jesus had made clay and opened his eyes on a sabbath. So then the Pharisees also asked him how he was able to see. He said to them, "He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and now I can see."

So some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, because he does not keep the sabbath." others said, "How can a sinful man do such signs?" And there was a division among them. So they said to the blind man again, "What do you have to say about him, since he opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet."

They answered and said to him, "You were born totally in sin, and are you trying to teach us?" Then they threw him out. When Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, he found him and said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

He answered and said, "Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?"

Jesus said to him, "You have seen him and the one speaking with you is he." He said, "I do believe, Lord," and he worshiped him.

In the reading from Samuel we learn that God chose David as the next ruler of the Israelites. If we study further it is found that the choice of David is unexpected in the eyes of Saul (the previous king) and others around him. We can entertain the thought that God could never choose "me" as anything of importance to the world, but nothing could be further from the truth...we are all chosen to be leaders. To spread God's word to all around us and represent God's Kingdom in our world.

In the miracle at "Siloam" a very interesting event happens. First of all, a blind man who is improperly accused of sin is given his sight at a pool of water named Siloam a name that means "to send". Secondly, blindness is given to the religious righteous (Pharisees) by disregarding Jesus as a Man from God. Jesus was sent to the world to give sight to the blind in spirit and in this case the physical body. He also was "sent" to take away the sight of the unbelievers who became blind to his teachings. We must not become like the righteous and feel secure in our religious laws if we forsake the truth that Jesus spoke. That truth is... we are called to believe in Him and bring comfort and aid to those who are thought to be of less worth in this world.

Michael Bourgeois, Associate

Monday, March 3, 2008

First Reading: Isaiah 65:17-21

Lo, I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; The things of the past shall not be remembered or come to mind. Instead, there shall always be rejoicing and happiness in what I create; For I create Jerusalem to be a joy and its people to be a delight;

I will rejoice in Jerusalem and exult in my people. No longer shall the sound of weeping be heard there, or the sound of crying; No longer shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not round out his full lifetime; He dies a mere youth who reaches but a hundred years, and he who fails of a hundred shall be thought accursed.

They shall live in the houses they build, and eat the fruit of the vineyards they plant.

Gospel Reading: John 4:43-54

After the two days, he left there for Galilee. For Jesus himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his native place.

When he came into Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, since they had seen all he had done in Jerusalem at the feast; for they themselves had gone to the feast.

Then he returned to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine. Now there was a royal official whose son was ill in Capernaum.

When he heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, who was near death.

Jesus said to him, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will not believe."

The royal official said to him, "Sir, come down before my child dies."

Jesus said to him, "You may go; your son will live." The man believed what Jesus said to him and left.

While he was on his way back, his slaves met him and told him that his boy would live. He asked them when he began to recover. They told him, "The fever left him yesterday, about one in the afternoon." The father realized that just at that time Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live," and he and his whole household came to believe.

Now this was the second sign Jesus did when he came to Galilee from Judea.

Some people want to believe in God but have lost the know-how. Our Gospel today tells of the second sign that Jesus gave to the Galileans and how this whole household then believed in him.

Jesus tells us in relaxed-let-go images of the wind throughout the Gospels. We cannot control the wind's direction. It blows where it will. Like a person in the sailboat, we do not master the wind, but try to catch it, ride with it and let it carry us forward into new waters...so also with our lives. We are unable to be the master of the Holy Spirit-----The Holy wind-breath of God. It is our task to sense the coming of God: to let go of our own controls and ride with the love and fulfillment the Spirit of God will bring us.

We should allow Christ to hear the cry of our heart and permit him to send the Spirit of Love to us that we may be born again. Lent is our born again time. As we move from Self-Denial –Self-Satisfaction to Self-Commitment, we need to be born again.

Come Lord Jesus, Save us from ourselves. Come Lord Jesus, Complete the good work you have begun in us.

Eucharist J. Marcotte, Associate

Tuesday, March 4, 2008

First Reading: Ezekiel 47:1-9,12

Then he brought me back to the entrance of the temple, and I saw water flowing out from beneath the threshold of the temple toward the east, for the facade of the temple was toward the east; the water flowed down from the southern side of the temple, south of the altar. He led me outside by the north gate, and around to the outer gate facing the east, where I saw water trickling from the southern side.

Then when he had walked off to the east with a measuring cord in his hand, he measured off a thousand cubits and had me wade through the water, which was ankle-deep.

He measured off another thousand and once more had me wade through the water, which was now knee-deep. Again he measured off a thousand and had me wade; the water was up to my waist.

Once more he measured off a thousand, but there was now a river through which I could not wade; for the water had risen so high it had become a river that could not be crossed except by swimming.

He asked me, "Have you seen this, son of man?" Then he brought me to the bank of the river, where he had me sit. Along the bank of the river I saw very many trees on both sides.

He said to me, "This water flows into the eastern district down upon the Arabah, and empties into the sea, the salt waters, which it makes fresh. Wherever the river flows, every sort of living creature that can multiply shall live, and there shall be abundant fish, for wherever this water comes the sea shall be made fresh. Along both banks of the river, fruit trees of every kind shall grow; their leaves shall not fade, nor their fruit fail. Every month they shall bear fresh fruit, for they shall be watered by the flow from the sanctuary. Their fruit shall serve for food, and their leaves for medicine."

Gospel Reading: John 5:1-16

There was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem at the Sheep Gate a pool called in Hebrew Bethesda, with five porticoes. In these lay a large number of ill, blind, lame, and crippled. One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been ill for a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be well?"

The sick man answered him, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; while I am on my way, someone else gets down there before me." Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your mat, and walk." Immediately the man became well, took up his mat, and walked. Now that day was a sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who was cured, "It is the sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to carry your mat." He answered them, "The man who made me well told me, 'Take up your mat and walk.'" They asked him, "Who is the man who told you, 'Take it up and walk?'" The man who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had slipped away, since there was a crowd there.

After this Jesus found him in the temple area and said to him, "Look, you are well; do not sin any more, so that nothing worse may happen to you." The man went and told the Jews that Jesus was the one who had made him well. Therefore, the Jews began to persecute Jesus because he did this on a sabbath.

Each of the prophets of the Exile uses his own distinctive imagery to describe God's restoration of the people of Israel to their own land. In our first reading, Ezekiel's vision of his peoples' return from Babylonian captivity centers in a river flowing from under the rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem. For Ezekiel, this River of Life nourishes the thick forests on its banks and sustains life wherever it flows; however, its true power becomes most apparent when it reaches the sea. It is here that the river transforms the salt sea water into fresh water. This River of Life transforms both the land and the sea—the leaves it nourishes bestow healing and the fruit it nourishes provides food for all Israel. Ezekiel's imagery truly describes a God who transforms, who heals, who sustains, who provides life in abundance.

The second reading from John's Gospel provides a graphic account of everyone's need, from time to time for healing, for life nourishment, for the transformative power of a helping hand extended in true friendship. How many people do we know who lie day after day, year after year, beside some pool of Bethesda, just waiting for someone to come along to lift them out of crippling despair, estrangement, marginalization, physical or emotional anguish? These are the people, sometimes others and sometimes our very selves, who are unable to help themselves just like the crippled beggar by the pool of Bethesda. He needed someone to hear him, to listen to his pain, to care about him. Trusted friendship is always a vital factor in the positive transformation of anyone's life. This man, who had lived with his malady for 38 years, found his help in the same place we must find it—in the person of Jesus the Christ—through experiencing the power of a life-changing relationship with the One who gave each of us life in the first place. We pray today for an increased awareness of His presence in our very beings and for the courage to extend our hands in transformative friendship so that we might help, heal, affirm, and offer life in His name.

Reverend Thomas G. Kass

Wednesday, March 5, 2008

First Reading: Isaiah 49:8-15

Thus says the LORD: In a time of favor I answer you, on the day of salvation I help you, To restore the land and allot the desolate heritages, Saying to the prisoners: Come out! To those in darkness: Show yourselves! Along the ways they shall find pasture, on every bare height shall their pastures be. They shall not hunger or thirst, nor shall the scorching wind or the sun strike them; For he who pities them leads them and guides them beside springs of water. I will cut a road through all my mountains, and make my highways level. See, some shall come from afar, others from the north and the west, and some from the land of Syene. Sing out, O heavens, and rejoice, O earth, break forth into song, you mountains. For the LORD comforts his people and shows mercy to his afflicted. But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me." Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you.

Gospel Reading: John 5: 17-30

But Jesus answered them, "My Father is at work until now, so I am at work." For this reason the Jews tried all the more to kill him, because he not only broke the sabbath but he also called God his own father, making himself equal to God. Jesus answered and said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, a son cannot do anything on his own, but only what he sees his father doing; for what he does, his son will do also. For the Father loves his Son and shows him everything that he himself does, and he will show him greater works than these, so that you may be amazed.

For just as the Father raises the dead and gives life, so also does the Son give life to whomever he wishes. Nor does the Father judge anyone, but he has given all judgment to his Son, so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.

Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes in the one who sent me has eternal life and will not come to condemnation, but has passed from death to life. Amen, amen, I say to you, the hour is coming and is now here when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in himself, so also he gave to his Son the possession of life in himself. And he gave him power to exercise judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not be amazed at this, because the hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and will come out, those who have done good deeds to the resurrection of life, but those who have done wicked deeds to the resurrection of condemnation.

"I cannot do anything on my own; I judge as I hear, and my judgment is just, because I do not seek my own will but the will of the one who sent me."

"It helps, now and then, to step back and take the long view. The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is beyond even our vision. We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying the Kingdom always lies beyond us."

The Long View, Oscar Romero.

Oscar Romero was the Bishop of San Salvador during a particularly trying and dangerous time in the Story of El Salvador. He was shot to death while celebrating Mass for his support of the poor, and his condemnation of the powerful oligarchy during a bloody civil war. He had been with his people and experienced their pain and deep suffering. He had seen many of his countrymen and women die, and or watch their children die. In this atmosphere he preached a Gospel of hope and justice.

Some might say that he was wasting his time, and that the unleashed forces of evil had the upper hand. And I am sure that at times he had similar thoughts.

At the same time he was a prophet of peace. I suspect that his prophecy was rooted deeply on his love for the poor and of God. In today's Gospel Jesus tells us, "My Father is at work until now, so I am at work." The kingdom of God is not a "Rose Garden." It calls those who are excited about being part of it to hard sweaty work, and at times even at great sacrifice.

It is good for us to reflect on the "work" of founding the kingdom and our role in that great enterprise. Truth be told, our part in the founding is really a small one, though an eminently necessary and urgent one. In our lifetime we may never witness the fulfillment of God's divine plan.

But the mere fact that God includes in the evolution of His divine kingdom gives us greater hope. During these forty days God calls us to deepen our efforts to create a world where justice and dignity are the hallmarks of human relations, where we make war against hunger, sickness, and poverty and oppression, and not against one another. This great work begins where we live, work, and play, in our homes, schools, and work places. It is born in the very womb of our hearts and souls the places of our prayer.

We are, at best, a work in progress. But our mission is one of deep hope.

Reverend Robert T. Bolser

Thursday, March 6, 2008

First Reading: Exodus 32: 7-14

With that, 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. They have soon turned aside from the way I pointed out to them, making for themselves a molten calf and worshiping it, sacrificing to it and crying out, 'This is your God, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt!' I see how stiff-necked this people is," continued the LORD to Moses. "Let me alone, then, that my wrath may blaze up against them to consume them. Then I will make of you a great nation."

But Moses implored the LORD, his God, saying, "Why, O LORD, should your wrath blaze up against your own people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with such great power and with so strong a hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'With evil intent he brought them out, that he might kill them in the mountains and exterminate them from the face of the earth'? Let your blazing wrath die down; relent in punishing your people. Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, and how you swore to them by your own self, saying, 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky; and all this land that I promised, I will give your descendants as their perpetual heritage.'"

So the LORD relented in the punishment he had threatened to inflict on his people.

Gospel Reading: John 5: 31-47

"If I testify on my own behalf, my testimony cannot be verified. But there is another who testifies on my behalf, and I know that the testimony he gives on my behalf is true. You sent emissaries to John, and he testified to the truth. I do not accept testimony from a human being, but I say this so that you may be saved. He was a burning and shining lamp, and for a while you were content to rejoice in his light. But I have testimony greater than John's. The works that the Father gave me to accomplish, these works that I perform testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me. Moreover, the Father who sent me has testified on my behalf. But you have never heard his voice nor seen his form, and you do not have his word remaining in you, because you do not believe in the one whom he has sent. You search the scriptures, because you think you have eternal life through them; even they testify on my behalf. But you do not want to come to me to have life.

"I do not accept human praise; moreover, I know that you do not have the love of God in you. I came in the name of my Father, but you do not accept me; yet if another comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe, when you accept praise from one another and do not seek the praise that comes from the only God? Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father: the one who will accuse you is Moses, in whom you have placed your hope. For if you had believed Moses, you would have believed me, because he wrote about me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?"

*Christ has many tasks for us, some are easy, others are difficult.
Some bring honour, others bring reproach.
Some are to our liking, and coincide with our own inclinations,
and are in our immediate best interest;
Some are just the opposite.
In some we may please Christ and please ourselves;
in others we cannot please Christ except by denying ourselves.
Yet the power to take on all of these is most definitely given in Jesus;
for it is He who strengthens us,
and comes to help us when we are weak.*

Let us say Yes to the covenant that He makes with us.

From Celtic Night Prayer of the Northumbrian Community

Friday, March 7, 2008

First Reading: Wisdom 2: 1, 12-22

They who said among themselves, thinking not aright, let us beset the just one, because he is obnoxious to us; he sets himself against our doings, Reproaches us for transgressions of the law and charges us with violations of our training. He professes to have knowledge of God and styles himself a child of the LORD. To us he is the censure of our thoughts; merely to see him is a hardship for us, because his life is not like other men's, and different are his ways. He judges us debased; he holds aloof from our paths as from things impure. He calls blest the destiny of the just and boasts that God is his Father. Let us see whether his words be true; let us find out what will happen to him. For if the just one be the son of God, he will defend him and deliver him from the hand of his foes. With revilement and torture let us put him to the test that we may have proof of his gentleness and try his patience. Let us condemn him to a shameful death; for according to his own words, God will take care of him." These were their thoughts, but they erred; for their wickedness blinded them, and they knew not the hidden counsels of God; neither did they count on a recompense of holiness nor discern the innocent souls' reward.

Gospel Reading: John 7: 1-2, 10, 25-30

After this, Jesus moved about within Galilee; but he did not wish to travel in Judea, because the Jews were trying to kill him. But the Jewish feast of Tabernacles was near. But when his brothers had gone up to the feast, he himself also went up, not openly but as it were in secret.

So some of the inhabitants of Jerusalem said, "Is he not the one they are trying to kill? And look, he is speaking openly and they say nothing to him. Could the authorities have realized that he is the Messiah? But we know where he is from. When the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from."

So Jesus cried out in the temple area as he was teaching and said, "You know me and also know where I am from. Yet I did not come on my own, but the one who sent me, whom you do not know, is true. I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me."

So they tried to arrest him, but no one laid a hand upon him, because his hour had not yet come.

Today's scripture from the fourth Gospel reminds us of the importance of a sense of timing in life. Jesus' controversial message about the Kingdom of God had stirred up trouble wherever he went. He knew that sooner or later this opposition would escalate to violence and that he would suffer at the hands of the very people he came to save.

Yet we are told that he purposely decided not to travel to Judea because some of the religious leaders of that territory were looking for a chance to kill him. This cautiousness seems strange, given the fact that Jesus had already realized that he was destined to save the world through his own sacrificial death. Why would he take such pains to avoid the risk of falling into the hands of these violent men when only weeks later he would walk into the very jaws of death without flinching?

The only answer that makes sense is that Jesus knew his time had not yet come. There were still things he needed to accomplish that made the threat of death too great a risk to run.

There is an important principle here that can be applied to all of life. Living wisely and virtuously is largely a matter of timing. There is a time to dedicate ourselves to learning and a time to apply ourselves to living. There is a time to keep our options open and a time to make long term commitments. There is a time to stick to a job no matter how difficult the demands and a time to move on no matter how comfortable the situation. There is a time to retreat from the conflicts of life and a time to press recklessly into the fray. Prudence and bravery are not opposite traits of character. They are timely virtues born of wisdom.

Reverend Michael P. Keliher

Saturday, March 8, 2008

First Reading: Jeremiah 11: 18-20

I knew it because the LORD informed me; at that time you, O LORD, showed me their doings. Yet I, like a trusting lamb led to slaughter, had not realized that they were hatching plots against me: "Let us destroy the tree in its vigor; let us cut him off from the land of the living, so that his name will be spoken no more."

But, you, O LORD of hosts, O just Judge, searcher of mind and heart, Let me witness the vengeance you take on them, for to you I have entrusted my cause!

Gospel Reading: John 7: 40-53

Some in the crowd who heard these words said, "This is truly the Prophet."

Others said, "This is the Messiah." But others said, "The Messiah will not come from Galilee, will he? Does not scripture say that the Messiah will be of David's family and come from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?"

So a division occurred in the crowd because of him. Some of them even wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him. So the guards went to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, "Why did you not bring him?"

The guards answered, "Never before has anyone spoken like this one."

So the Pharisees answered them, "Have you also been deceived? Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd, which does not know the law, is accursed."

Nicodemus, one of their members who had come to him earlier, said to them,

"Does our law condemn a person before it first hears him and finds out what he is doing?" They answered and said to him, "You are not from Galilee also, are you?"

Look and see that no prophet arises from Galilee."

Then each went to his own house.

A Lenten prayer by Walter Brueggemann

Loss is indeed our gain
The pushing and the shoving of the world is endless
We are pushed and shoved.
And we do our fair of pushing and shoving
in our great anxiety.
And in the middle of that
you have set down your beloved suffering son
who was like a sheep led to slaughter
who opened not his mouth.
We seem not able,
so we ask you to create spaces in our life
where we may ponder his suffering
and your summons for us to suffer with him,
suspecting that suffering is the only way to come to newness
So we pray for your church in these Lenten days,
when we are driven to denial-not
to notice the suffering,
not to engage it,
not to acknowledge it.
So be that way of truth among us
that we should not deceive ourselves.
That we shall see that loss is indeed our gain.
We give you thanks for that mystery from which we live. Amen.

Sunday, March 9, 2008

First Reading: Ezekiel 37; 12-14

Therefore, prophesy and say to them: Thus says the Lord GOD: O my people, I will open your graves and have you rise from them, and bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and have you rise from them, O my people! I will put my spirit in you that you may live, and I will settle you upon your land; thus you shall know that I am the LORD. I have promised, and I will do it, says the LORD.

Gospel Reading: John 11: 3-7, 17, 20-27, 33b-45

Mary and her sister Martha sent word to him, saying, "Master, the one you love is ill." When Jesus heard this he said, "This illness is not to end in death, but is for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that he was ill, he remained for two days in the place where he was. Then after this he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him; but Mary sat at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you."

Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise."

Martha said to him, "I know he will rise, in the resurrection on the last day."

Jesus told her, "I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

She said to him, "Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world."

He became perturbed and deeply troubled, and said, "Where have you laid him?"

They said to him, "Sir, come and see."

And Jesus wept. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him." But some of them said, "Could not the one who opened the eyes of the blind man have done something so that this man would not have died?"

So Jesus, perturbed again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay across it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the dead man's sister, said to him, "Lord, by now there will be a stench; he has been dead for four days."

Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?"

So they took away the stone. And Jesus raised his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you for hearing me. I know that you always hear me; but because of the crowd here I have said this, that they may believe that you sent me."

And when he had said this, he cried out in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"

The dead man came out, tied hand and foot with burial bands, and his face was wrapped in a cloth. So Jesus said to them, "Untie him and let him go."

Now many of the Jews who had come to Mary and seen what he had done began to believe in him.

First Reading: Ezekiel 37: 12-14

I was brought up to believe that Jesus will one day return to earth to welcome into heaven all the Christians who are still living and will also raise up from the grave those who have died. I have lived my life believing that and trying to be the best Christian I can be so that I might be one of the "chosen" ones. Because I am human I have often failed, but I know that our God is a forgiving God and that gives me the strength to keep trying.

I feel today's reading reveals not only God's promise to raise us from the dead to eternal life, but also suggests that we look to Him to help raise us up from the stress and pressures of daily life here on earth. He asks that we look to him for guidance when we are in despair. He asks that we look to him for hope and support in the good times, as well as in the bad times. If we do as He asks we cannot help but be better Christians.

Gospel Reading: John 11: 3-7, 17, 20-27, 33b-45

To me, this gospel reading emphasizes the importance of believing and having faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and his Word. Mary and Martha and even Lazarus thought Jesus had abandoned them in their time of need. As it turns out, Jesus was testing their faith and trying to make a point. *"The illness is not to end in death, but is for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it."* Jesus proved his Word to be true by raising Lazarus from the dead and promising eternal life to all who believe in Him.

How many times have we doubted our faith in God's Word? If we are honest, most of us would have to say many times. The loss of a loved one, the loss of a job, sudden illness, divorce, loneliness; the list is endless. During these times of darkness and despair in our lives, God is there for us because He loves us. All we need to do is reach out to Him, love Him and believe in Him. He will give us strength to endure life's disappointments if we give Him the opportunity.

Donna Schwarz, Associate

Monday, March 10, 2008

First Reading: Daniel 13: 41c - 62

They were elders and judges of the people, and they condemned her to death. But Susanna cried aloud: "O eternal God, you know what is hidden and are aware of all things before they come to be: you know that they have testified falsely against me. Here I am about to die, though I have done none of the things with which these wicked men have charged me." The Lord heard her prayer.

As she was being led to execution, God stirred up the holy spirit of a young boy named Daniel, and he cried aloud: "I will have no part in the death of this woman." All the people turned and asked him, "What is this you are saying?" He stood in their midst and continued, "Are you such fools, O Israelites! To condemn a woman of Israel without examination and without clear evidence? Return to court, for they have testified falsely against her."

Then all the people returned in haste. To Daniel the elders said, "Come, sit with us and inform us, since God has given you the prestige of old age." But he replied, "Separate these two far from one another that I may examine them." After they were separated one from the other, he called one of them and said: "How you have grown evil with age! Now have your past sins come to term: passing unjust sentences, condemning the innocent, and freeing the guilty, although the Lord says, 'The innocent and the just you shall not put to death.' Now, then, if you were a witness, tell me under what tree you saw them together." "Under a mastic tree," he answered. "Your fine lie has cost you your head," said Daniel; "for the angel of God shall receive the sentence from him and split you in two."

Putting him to one side, he ordered the other one to be brought. "Offspring of Canaan, not of Judah," Daniel said to him, "beauty has seduced you, lust has subverted your conscience. This is how you acted with the daughters of Israel, and in their fear they yielded to you; but a daughter of Judah did not tolerate your wickedness.

Now, then, tell me under what tree you surprised them together." "Under an oak," he said. "Your fine lie has cost you also your head," said Daniel; "for the angel of God waits with a sword to cut you in two so as to make an end of you both." The whole assembly cried aloud, blessing God who saves those that hope in him. They rose up against the two elders, for by their own words Daniel had convicted them of perjury. According to the law of Moses, they inflicted on them the penalty they had plotted to impose on their neighbor: they put them to death. Thus was innocent blood spared that day.

Gospel Reading: John 8: 1-11

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. But early in the morning he arrived again in the temple area, and all the people started coming to him, and he sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and made her stand in the middle. They said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" They said this to test him, so that they could have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger. But when they continued asking him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Again he bent down and wrote on the ground. And in response, they went away one by one, beginning with the elders. So he was left alone with the woman before him.

Then Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She replied, "No one, sir." Then Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go, from now on do not sin any more."

In these final days of our Lenten journey, the Scriptures of today present us with the well known story of Susanna in the Book of Daniel. And while this ancient story may look and sound like a modern day CSI episode with witnesses separated and stories compared, it is, in truth, about a much deeper and profound truth---the wisdom and the mercy of God. Daniel serves as the purveyor of God's truth and mercy, assuring that justice is served and truth revealed. Even in the face of untruth, imperfect judgments and wrongful condemnations, God's mercy prevails.

This same theme appears in the story of the adulterous woman in John's Gospel. While guilty of sin, and condemned by the self-righteous, it is Jesus who conveys God's forgiveness and challenges the woman to move on and live a life free of sin. It is Jesus who invites her to repentance and conversion and a newness of life that only he can offer. Even the Scribes and Pharisees who so publicly accused and condemned the woman recognized that they too were people of sin, they too were in need of forgiveness and conversion.

It strikes me that this is the same invitation that the Lord offers to each of us in these days of Lent---to turn away from judgment, self-righteousness and the darkness in our lives and to embrace his invitation to conversion and newness of life. It is in that conscious, personal decision by each of us that we discover the depth of God's forgiveness and mercy for us.

Reverend Robert M. Egan

Tuesday, March 11, 2008

First Reading: Numbers 21: 4-9

From Mount Hor they set out on the Red Sea road, to by-pass the land of Edom. But with their patience worn out by the journey, the people complained against God and Moses, "Why have you brought us up from Egypt to die in this desert, where there is no food or water? We are disgusted with this wretched food!"

In punishment the LORD sent among the people saraph serpents, which bit the people so that many of them died. Then the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned in complaining against the LORD and you. Pray the LORD to take the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people, and the LORD said to Moses, "Make a saraph and mount it on a pole, and if anyone who has been bitten looks at it, he will recover."

Moses accordingly made a bronze serpent and mounted it on a pole, and whenever anyone who had been bitten by a serpent looked at the bronze serpent, he recovered.

Gospel Reading: John 8: 31-42

He said to them again, "I am going away and you will look for me, but you will die in your sin. Where I am going you cannot come."

So the Jews said, "He is not going to kill himself, is he, because he said, 'Where I am going you cannot come?'"

He said to them, "You belong to what is below, I belong to what is above. You belong to this world, but I do not belong to this world. That is why I told you that you will die in your sins. For if you do not believe that I AM, you will die in your sins."

So they said to him, "Who are you?" Jesus said to them, "What I told you from the beginning. I have much to say about you in condemnation. But the one who sent me is true, and what I heard from him I tell the world." They did not realize that he was speaking to them of the Father.

So Jesus said, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I AM, and that I do nothing on my own, but I say only what the Father taught me. The one who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, because I always do what is pleasing to him."

Because he spoke this way, many came to believe in him.

. A Prayer for Lent

by Henri Nouwen

How often have I lived through these weeks without paying much attention to penance, fasting, and prayer? How often have I missed the spiritual fruits of the season without even being aware of it? But how can I ever really celebrate Easter without observing Lent? How can I rejoice fully in your Resurrection when I have avoided participating in your death?

Yes, Lord, I have to die—with you, through you, and in you—and thus become ready to recognize you when you appear to me in your Resurrection. There is so much in me that needs to die: false attachments, greed and anger, impatience and stinginess.... I see clearly now how little I have died with you, really gone your way and been faithful to it. O Lord, make this Lenten season different from the other ones. Let me find you again. Amen. (*A Cry for Mercy: Prayers from the Genesee*; Image Books, 2002)

Wednesday, March 12, 2008

First Reading: Daniel 3: 14-20, 91-92, 95

King Nebuchadnezzar questioned them: "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you will not serve my god, or worship the golden statue that I set up? Be ready now to fall down and worship the statue I had made, whenever you hear the sound of the trumpet, flute, lyre, harp, psaltery, bagpipe, and all the other musical instruments; otherwise, you shall be instantly cast into the white-hot furnace; and who is the God that can deliver you out of my hands?"

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered King Nebuchadnezzar, "There is no need for us to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If our God, whom we serve, can save us from the white-hot furnace and from your hands, O king, may he save us! But even if he will not, know, O king, that we will not serve your god or worship the golden statue which you set up."

Nebuchadnezzar's face became livid with utter rage against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He ordered the furnace to be heated seven times more than usual and had some of the strongest men in his army bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and cast them into the white-hot furnace. King Nebuchadnezzar rose in haste and asked his nobles, "Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?"

"Assuredly, O king," they answered. "But," he replied, "I see four men unfettered and unhurt, walking in the fire, and the fourth looks like a son of God."

Nebuchadnezzar exclaimed, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who sent his angel to deliver the servants that trusted in him; they disobeyed the royal command and yielded their bodies rather than serve or worship any god except their own God."

Gospel Reading: John 8: 31-42

Jesus then said to those Jews who believed in him, "If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." They answered him, "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How can you say, 'You will become free'?"

Jesus answered them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin. A slave does not remain in a household forever, but a son always remains. So if a son frees you, then you will truly be free. I know that you are descendants of Abraham. But you are trying to kill me, because my word has no room among you. I tell you what I have seen in the Father's presence; then do what you have heard from the Father." They answered and said to him, "Our father is Abraham."

Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works of Abraham. But now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God; Abraham did not do this. You are doing the works of your father!" They said to him, "We are not illegitimate. We have one Father, God."

Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and am here; I did not come on my own, but he sent me."

Reading Daniel's narrative of the fiery furnace reminds me of my youth. Sr. Pius spoke about such characters as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, as well as several early martyrs who died for their faith. She would ask us, her 4th grade class, "Do you think you would die for your faith?" As obedient students, enamored with the heroic acts of the characters in the embellished stories of Sr. Pius, my classmates and I would nod our heads and in unison say "Yes!" She would nod back, approvingly. What little Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego wannabes we were back then. That was 1965.

I imagine we have met King Nebuchnezzars and have been tempted by golden statues, but how many Shadrachs, Meshachs, and Abednegos have we met? While I still marvel at their faith and the faith of the early church martyrs, I am mindful that God still provides us with great people of faith who continue to risk their life. I am reminded of Bishop Oscar Romero, Maryknoll Srs. Maura Clark and Ita Ford, Ursuline Sr. Dorothy Kazel, laywoman Jean Donovan, Fr. Stanley Francis Rother of the 1980's and Sr. Dorothy Stang, SND who was murdered in 2005. Though I have not personally met them, their stories are more real to me. They did not live centuries ago. Rather, they were "contemporaries" who made a radical choice to live their faith in the face of death.

In John's gospel, Jesus says, "If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." Biblical commentary teaches us that Jesus was telling his disciples that if they remain in his teachings, then they will be free from sin. While this may be true, I tend to think that if we are true followers of the message of Jesus, then we are freed from the excuses that block us from doing the right thing. I would like to believe that our latter day martyrs were set free from excuses. This freedom is what compelled them to truly live their faith.

I am grateful to Sr. Pius for instilling in me a desire to embrace my faith. I am grateful to the martyrs of centuries ago whose faith made me, as a young person, proud to be a Catholic. I am grateful to the martyrs of today who inspire me to work at overcoming the excuses to live what I profess.

The question I ask myself today is not, "Am I willing to die for my faith?" Rather, it is "Am I willing to live my faith?"

Brother Michael T. Gosch

Thursday, March 13, 2008

First Reading: Genesis 17: 3-9

When Abram prostrated himself, God continued to speak to him: "My covenant with you is this: you are to become the father of a host of nations. No longer shall you be called Abram; your name shall be Abraham, for I am making you the father of a host of nations. I will render you exceedingly fertile; I will make nations of you; kings shall stem from you. I will maintain my covenant with you and your descendants after you throughout the ages as an everlasting pact, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. I will give to you and to your descendants after you the land in which you are now staying, the whole land of Canaan, as a permanent possession; and I will be their God." God also said to Abraham: "On your part, you and your descendants after you must keep my covenant throughout the ages.

Gospel Reading: John 8: 51-59

Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever keeps my word will never see death."

The Jews said to him, "Now we are sure that you are possessed. Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, 'Whoever keeps my word will never taste death.' Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? Or the prophets, who died? Who do you make yourself out to be?"

Jesus answered, "If I glorify myself, my glory is worth nothing; but it is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, 'He is our God.' You do not know him, but I know him. And if I should say that I do not know him, I would be like you a liar. But I do know him and I keep his word. Abraham your father rejoiced to see my day; he saw it and was glad.

So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old and you have seen Abraham?"

Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, before Abraham came to be, I AM."

So they picked up stones to throw at him; but Jesus hid and went out of the temple area.

A Covenant....A Promise....The Fulfillment

“Caution” “Danger” “Enter at your Own Risk”. We encounter these signposts often as we walk through life. Most of the time, we take note...adjust our pathway, avoid the potential hazard, and move on. No big deal! However, ‘not to notice’, or worse, ‘to ignore’ such warnings can lead to disastrous results.....even death.

What does this have to do with the readings of today? Let’s look at the first reading from the Book of Genesis. There we find that God extends an offer to Abram – an offer to enter into ‘covenant’...to enter into a personal relationship...a permanent relationship.

“You will be my people...and I will be your God”

“Caution...Danger....Enter at your Own Risk”.....for to enter into a covenant with God one must know that “you will never be the same again”. Abram becomes Abraham, Saul becomes Paul, Peter becomes “The Rock”. One does not enter into a relationship with God in a casual way. It is either all or nothing.

His promises are great “I will make nations of you”.....and His demands are real.... “you must keep my covenant throughout the ages”.

“Caution...Danger....Enter at your Own Risk”.....to be a true disciple of the God of Abraham....the God of Jesus Christ....one must commit wholeheartedly – and unreservedly – willing to be changed.

Lent is a time for change...a time to shed our old selves and become a new creation in Christ. Discipleship will cost us.....will demand great things of us...we will look and act differently, if we truly covenant ourselves in Christ.

The Jews in today’s gospel were not able to make such commitment to Jesus. They were not able to change...nor able to enter into conversion. Rather, they looked only to the past and not to the promise found in the words of the Messiah. It was too dangerous for them, too dangerous to give up their own safe way of thinking and living. “Caution...Danger....Enter at your Own Risk” – they turned and “picked up stones to throw at him”.

Are you ready? Are you ready to commit? Are you ready to covenant yourself to Christ? It is all or nothingand the reward/the promise? It is found in the first line of today’s gospel... “Amen, Amen, I say to you, whoever keeps my word will never see death.” This is the new covenant promised and fulfilled in Christ Jesus, Our Lord.

Reverend Thomas R. von Behren

Friday, March 14, 2008

First Reading: Jeremiah 20: 10-13

Yes, I hear the whisperings of many: "Terror on every side! Denounce! Let us denounce him!" All those who were my friends are on the watch for any misstep of mine. "Perhaps he will be trapped; then we can prevail, and take our vengeance on him." But the LORD is with me, like a mighty champion: my persecutors will stumble, they will not triumph. In their failure they will be put to utter shame, to lasting, unforgettable confusion. O LORD of hosts, you who test the just, who probe mind and heart, let me witness the vengeance you take on them, for to you I have entrusted my cause. Sing to the LORD, praise the LORD, for he has rescued the life of the poor from the power of the wicked!

Gospel Reading: John 10: 31-42

The Jews again picked up rocks to stone him. Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good works from my Father. For which of these are you trying to stone me?"

The Jews answered him, "We are not stoning you for a good work but for blasphemy. You, a man, are making yourself God."

Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, "You are gods"?' If it calls them gods to whom the word of God came, and scripture cannot be set aside, can you say that the one whom the Father has consecrated and sent into the world blasphemes because I said, 'I am the Son of God'? If I do not perform my Father's works, do not believe me; but if I perform them, even if you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may realize and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father."

They tried again to arrest him; but he escaped from their power.

He went back across the Jordan to the place where John first baptized, and there he remained. Many came to him and said, "John performed no sign, but everything John said about this man was true." And many there began to believe in him.

Here then Christ find us, weary of that world in which we are obliged to live and act, whether as willing or unwilling slaves to it. He finds us needing and seeking a home, and making one, as we best may, by means of the creature, since it is all we can do. The world, in which our duties lie, is as waste as the wilderness, as restless and turbulent as the ocean, as inconstant as the wind and weather. It has no substance in it, but is like a shade or phantom: when you pursue it, when you try to grasp it, it escapes from you, or it is malicious and does you a mischief. We need something which the world cannot give: this is what we need, and this is what the Gospel has supplied.

I say, that our Lord Jesus Christ, after dying for our sins on the Cross, and ascending on high, left not the world as He found it, but left a blessing behind Him. He left in the world what before was not in it—a secret home for faith and love to enjoy wherever they are found, in spite of the world around us.....This is the Church of God, which is our true Home of God's providing. His own heavenly court, where He dwells with Saints and Angels, into which He introduces us by a new birth, and in which we forget the outward and its many troubles.

The Heart of Newman, a Synthesis Arranged by Erich Przywara, S.J.
PS., *iv*, 198-90

Saturday, March 15, 2008

First Reading: 2 Samuel 7: 4-5a, 16

But that night the LORD spoke to Nathan and said: "Go, tell my servant David, 'when your time comes and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your heir after you, sprung from your loins, and I will make his kingdom firm. It is he who shall build a house for my name. And I will make his royal throne firm forever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me; your throne shall stand firm forever.'"

Gospel Reading: Matthew 1: 16, 18-21. 24a

Jacob, the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of her was born Jesus who is called the Messiah. Now this is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly. Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him.

Unquestioning faith - that defines Joseph. That defines Joseph as a man, a husband, a father, a son of David and a child of God. The Lord spoke to Joseph through His angel in a dream. Joseph heard the Lord's will and did as he was commanded. He abandoned his own plan for the Lord's plan. In doing so, unbeknownst to Joseph, the promise the Lord made to David was fulfilled. God kept His Word.

Unquestioning is defined in *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* as *accepting without examination or hesitation*. That was Joseph – he accepted and acted without hesitation. *Faith* is defined as the *act or state of wholeheartedly and steadfastly believing in the existence, power, and benevolence of a supreme being, of having confidence in his providential care, and of being loyal to his will as revealed or believed in: belief and trust in and loyalty to God*. That was Joseph - he believed with his whole heart and was steadfast, confident and loyal in his actions. He trusted in God's care. He was courageous to follow God's lead.

Unquestioning faith - that defines Joseph. Does it define us?

Do we listen to the Lord when He speaks to us? Our inner and outer lives are busy with thoughts and activities, filled with noise and distractions. Do we stop to listen, really listen? Do we quiet our minds and bodies long enough to hear our heart? The Lord has a plan for each of us. Do we believe? Do we abandon our plan? Do we surrender to His plan for us? Do we have the courage to act on it? Do we trust wholeheartedly and steadfastly?

God promises us the kingdom. He will lead the way. God will keep His Word. Be still and listen.

Prayer:

Lord, quiet my mind, so I hear your plan for me. Give me courage, so that I put your plan into action. Let me follow your lead with the unquestioning faith of Joseph. Let it define me here on earth and bring me to your everlasting kingdom. Amen.

Joan Sweeny, Archivist

Sunday, March 16, 2008

First Reading: Matthew 21: 1-11

When they drew near Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find an ass tethered, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them here to me. And if anyone should say anything to you, reply, 'The master has need of them.' Then he will send them at once."

This happened so that what had been spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled: "Say to daughter Zion, 'Behold, your king comes to you, meek and riding on an ass, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'" The disciples went and did as Jesus had ordered them. They brought the ass and the colt and laid their cloaks over them, and he sat upon them. The very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and strewed them on the road. The crowds preceding him and those following kept crying out and saying: "Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; hosanna in the highest." And when he entered Jerusalem the whole city was shaken and asked, "Who is this?" And the crowds replied, "This is Jesus the prophet, from Nazareth in Galilee."

Gospel Reading: Matthew 26:14 - 27:66

Then one of the Twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, "What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?" They paid him thirty pieces of silver, and from that time on he looked for an opportunity to hand him over.

On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the disciples approached Jesus and said, "Where do you want us to prepare for you to eat the Passover?"

He said, "Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, 'The teacher says, "My appointed time draws near; in your house I shall celebrate the Passover with my disciples.'""

The disciples then did as Jesus had ordered, and prepared the Passover.

When it was evening, he reclined at table with the Twelve. And while they were eating, he said, "Amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me." Deeply distressed at this, they began to say to him one after another, "Surely it is not I, Lord?"

He said in reply, "He who has dipped his hand into the dish with me is the one who will betray me. The Son of Man indeed goes, as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It would be better for that man if he had never been born."

Then Judas, his betrayer, said in reply, "Surely it is not I, Rabbi?" He answered, "You have said so."

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins.

I tell you; from now on I shall not drink this fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it with you new in the kingdom of my Father."

Then, after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Then Jesus said to them, "This night all of you will have your faith in me shaken, for it is written: 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be dispersed'; but after I have been raised up, I shall go before you to Galilee."

Peter said to him in reply, "Though all may have their faith in you shaken, mine will never be."

Jesus said to him, "Amen, I say to you, this very night before the cock crows, you will deny me three times."

Peter said to him, "Even though I should have to die with you, I will not deny you." And all the disciples spoke likewise.

Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took along Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to feel sorrow and distress. Then he said to them, "My soul is sorrowful even to death. Remain here and keep watch with me." He advanced a little and fell prostrate in prayer, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will."

When he returned to his disciples he found them asleep. He said to Peter, "So you could not keep watch with me for one hour? Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Withdrawing a second time, he prayed again, "My Father, if it is not possible that this cup pass without my drinking it, your will be done!" Then he returned once more and found them asleep, for they could not keep their eyes open.

He left them and withdrew again and prayed a third time, saying the same thing again. Then he returned to his disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Behold, the hour is at hand when the Son of Man is to be handed over to sinners. Get up, let us go. Look, my betrayer is at hand."

While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived, accompanied by a large crowd, with swords and clubs, who had come from the chief priests and the elders of the people. His betrayer had arranged a sign with them, saying, "The man I shall kiss is the one; arrest him." Immediately he went over to Jesus and said, "Hail, Rabbi!" and he kissed him.

Jesus answered him, "Friend, do what you have come for." Then stepping forward they laid hands on Jesus and arrested him. And behold, one of those who accompanied Jesus put his hand to his sword, drew it, and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his ear.

Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its sheath, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot call upon my Father and he will not provide me at this moment with more than twelve legions of angels? But then how would the scriptures be fulfilled which say that it must come to pass in this way?"

At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to seize me? Day after day I sat teaching in the temple area, yet you did not arrest me. But all this has come to pass that the writings of the prophets may be fulfilled." Then all the disciples left him and fled.

Those who had arrested Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled. Peter was following him at a distance as far as the high priest's courtyard, and going inside he sat down with the servants to see the outcome. The chief priests and the entire Sanhedrin kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus in order to put him to death, but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. Finally two came forward who stated, "This man said, 'I can destroy the temple of God and within three days rebuild it.'" The high priest rose and addressed him, "Have you no answer? What are these men testifying against you?"

But Jesus was silent. Then the high priest said to him, "I order you to tell us under oath before the living God whether you are the Messiah, the Son of God."

Jesus said to him in reply, "You have said so. But I tell you: From now on you will see 'the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power' and 'coming on the clouds of heaven.'"

Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has blasphemed! What further need have we of witnesses? You have now heard the blasphemy; what is your opinion?" They said in reply, "He deserves to die!"

Then they spat in his face and struck him, while some slapped him, saying, "Prophecy for us, Messiah: who is it that struck you?"

Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. One of the maids came over to him and said, "You too were with Jesus the Galilean." But he denied it in front of everyone, saying, "I do not know what you are talking about!" As he went out to the gate, another girl saw him and said to those who were there, "This man was with Jesus the Nazorean." Again he denied it with an oath, "I do not know the man!"

A little later the bystanders came over and said to Peter, "Surely you too are one of them; even your speech gives you away." At that he began to curse and to swear, "I do not know the man." And immediately a cock crowed.

Then Peter remembered the word that Jesus had spoken: "Before the cock crows you will deny me three times." He went out and began to weep bitterly.

When it was morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death. They bound him, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate, the governor.

Then Judas, his betrayer, seeing that Jesus had been condemned, deeply regretted what he had done. He returned the thirty pieces of silver ³ to the chief priests and elders, saying, "I have sinned in betraying innocent blood." They said, "What is that to us? Look to it yourself." Flinging the money into the temple, he departed and went off and hanged himself.

The chief priests gathered up the money, but said, "It is not lawful to deposit this in the temple treasury, for it is the price of blood." After consultation, they used it to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners. That is why that field even today is called the Field of Blood. Then was fulfilled what had been said through Jeremiah the prophet, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the value of a man with a price on his head, a price set by some of the Israelites, and they paid it out for the potter's field just as the Lord had commanded me."

Now Jesus stood before the governor, and he questioned him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You say so." And when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he made no answer.

Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many things they are testifying against you?" But he did not answer him one word, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

Now on the occasion of the feast the governor was accustomed to release to the crowd one prisoner whom they wished. And at that time they had a notorious prisoner called (Jesus) Barabbas.

So when they had assembled, Pilate said to them, "Which one do you want me to release to you, Barabbas, or Jesus called Messiah?" For he knew that it was out of envy that they had handed him over.

While he was still seated on the bench, his wife sent him a message, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man. I suffered much in a dream today because of him."

The chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas but to destroy Jesus. The governor said to them in reply, "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" They answered, "Barabbas!"

Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus called Messiah?" They all said, "Let him be crucified!"

But he said, "Why? What evil has he done?" They only shouted the louder, "Let him be crucified!"

When Pilate saw that he was not succeeding at all, but that a riot was breaking out instead, he took water and washed his hands in the sight of the crowd, saying, "I

am innocent of this man's blood. Look to it yourselves." And the whole people said in reply, "His blood be upon us and upon our children."

Then he released Barabbas to them, but after he had Jesus scourged, he handed him over to be crucified. Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus inside the praetorium and gathered the whole cohort around him.

They stripped off his clothes and threw a scarlet military cloak about him.

Weaving a crown out of thorns, they placed it on his head, and a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!"

They spat upon him and took the reed and kept striking him on the head.

And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the cloak, dressed him in his own clothes, and led him off to crucify him.

As they were going out, they met a Cyrenian named Simon; this man they pressed into service to carry his cross.

And when they came to a place called Golgotha which means Place of the Skull, they gave Jesus wine to drink mixed with gall. But when he had tasted it, he refused to drink.

After they had crucified him, they divided his garments by casting lots; then they sat down and kept watch over him there. And they placed over his head the written charge against him: This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.

Two revolutionaries were crucified with him, one on his right and the other on his left. Those passing by reviled him, shaking their heads and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, if you are the Son of God, come down from the cross!"

Likewise the chief priests with the scribes and elders mocked him and said, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. So he is the king of Israel! Let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now if he wants him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" The revolutionaries who were crucified with him also kept abusing him in the same way. From noon onward, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon.

And about three o'clock Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Some of the bystanders who heard it said, "This one is calling for Elijah."

Immediately one of them ran to get a sponge; he soaked it in wine, and putting it on a reed, gave it to him to drink.

But the rest said, "Wait, let us see if Elijah comes to save him."

But Jesus cried out again in a loud voice, and gave up his spirit.

And behold, the veil of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth quaked, rocks were split, tombs were opened, and the bodies of many saints who had fallen asleep were raised. And coming forth from their tombs after his resurrection, they entered the holy city and appeared to many.

The centurion and the men with him who were keeping watch over Jesus feared greatly when they saw the earthquake and all that was happening, and they said, "Truly, this was the Son of God!"

There were many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him. Among them were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee. When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph, who was himself a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be handed over. Taking the body, Joseph wrapped it in clean linen and laid it in his new tomb that he had hewn in the rock. Then he rolled a huge stone across the entrance to the tomb and departed. But Mary Magdalene and the other Mary remained sitting there, facing the tomb.

The next day, the one following the day of preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, "Sir, we remember that this impostor while still alive said, 'After three days I will be raised up.'
Give orders, then, that the grave be secured until the third day, lest his disciples come and steal him and say to the people, 'He has been raised from the dead.' This last imposture would be worse than the first."
Pilate said to them, "The guard is yours; go secure it as best you can."
So they went and secured the tomb by fixing a seal to the stone and setting the guard.

Today we begin our ceremonies with the blessing of the palm branches. We are reminded of the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. Then we heard the further story of how some of those who hailed Him as King later shouted for His crucifixion and death. Yet, through it all, Jesus never condemned them. He never resisted their attacks. He offered Himself up on the Cross and prayed for their forgiveness. To one extent or another, we are all somewhat like that crowd. God has blessed us with life and everything we have. He has promised us eternal salvation. We rejoice in the good news but every so often, we turn away from Him by turning to false gods. Whether it be drugs or alcohol; whether it is greed or envy; perhaps it's money or power or prestige; whatever sin we commit is contrary to God's plan and injurious to ourselves. Yet God does not abandon us.

And if we are honest with ourselves, we know that we were there too. Every attitude present on that hill is present here. And every emotion that tugged at human hearts then, tugs at human hearts now. Every face that is here, was there. Every human sin and failure came to Calvary. And there was pardon for them all in the prayer that He prayed and the death that He died.

Brother Dale A. Barth

Monday, March 17, 2008

First Reading: Isaiah: 42: 1-7

Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased, Upon whom I have put my spirit; he shall bring forth justice to the nations, Not crying out, not shouting, not making his voice heard in the street. A bruised reed he shall not break, and a smoldering wick he shall not quench, until he establishes justice on the earth; the coastlands will wait for his teaching.

Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spreads out the earth with its crops, Who gives breath to its people and spirit to those who walk on it: I, the LORD, have called you for the victory of justice, I have grasped you by the hand; I formed you, and set you as a covenant of the people, a light for the nations, To open the eyes of the blind, to bring out prisoners from confinement, and from the dungeon, those who live in darkness.

Gospel Reading: John 12; 1-11

Six days before Passover Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. They gave a dinner for him there, and Martha served, while Lazarus was one of those reclining at table with him.

Mary took a liter of costly perfumed oil made from genuine aromatic nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and dried them with her hair; the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil.

Then Judas the Iscariot, one of his disciples, and the one who would betray him, said, "Why was this oil not sold for three hundred days' wages and given to the poor?"

He said this not because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief and held the money bag and used to steal the contributions.

So Jesus said, "Leave her alone. Let her keep this for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

The large crowd of the Jews found out that he was there and came, not only because of Jesus, but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. And the chief priests plotted to kill Lazarus too, because many of the Jews were turning away and believing in Jesus because of him.

Today we begin Holy Week. I like to think of this last week of Lent as a kind of special retreat or long meditation on our redemption and the meaning of Christ's death on the cross. Today's reading taken from the collection of poems of Isaiah and his disciples can be the topic for my meditation. There are several readings from Isaiah for Holy Week liturgies culminating with the Easter Vigil's fifth reading from the prophet: ". . . my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. . ." Today's lines are a fitting prelude to the beautiful Vigil poem, Chapter 55.

This is a short reading, and so it is hard to avoid the importance of JUSTICE in my meditation. "He shall bring forth justice to the nations." ". . .until he establishes justice on earth. . ." "I the Lord have called you for the victory of justice." My meditation must deal with the injustices that are all around me today. I have to ask myself if my thoughts and ways are in harmony with those of the Lord. What do I do about the injustices I see every day? How do I **do** justice? The concept of justice is so predominant in the poems of Isaiah. How is it that the prophets of ages and ages past be on point today? Will we ever know justice and peace on this earth?

Brother Donald P. Houde

Tuesday, March 18, 2008

First Reading: Isaiah 49:1-6

Hear me, O coastlands, listen, O distant peoples. The LORD called me from birth, from my mother's womb he gave me my name. He made of me a sharp-edged sword and concealed me in the shadow of his arm. He made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me.

You are my servant, he said to me, Israel, through whom I show my glory. Though I thought I had toiled in vain, and for nothing, uselessly, spent my strength, Yet my reward is with the LORD, my recompense is with my God. For now the LORD has spoken who formed me as his servant from the womb, That Jacob may be brought back to him and Israel gathered to him; And I am made glorious in the sight of the LORD, and my God is now my strength!

It is too little, he says, for you to be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and restore the survivors of Israel; I will make you a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.

Gospel Reading: John 13: 21-33, 36-38

When he had said this, Jesus was deeply troubled and testified, "Amen, amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me."

The disciples looked at one another, at a loss as to whom he meant.

One of his disciples, the one whom Jesus loved, was reclining at Jesus' side.

So Simon Peter nodded to him to find out whom he meant. He leaned back against Jesus' chest and said to him, "Master, who is it?"

Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I hand the morsel after I have dipped it." So he dipped the morsel and handed it to Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot.

After he took the morsel, Satan entered him. So Jesus said to him, "What you are going to do, do quickly."

None of those reclining at table realized why he said this to him.

Some thought that since Judas kept the money bag, Jesus had told him, "Buy what we need for the feast," or to give something to the poor. So he took the morsel and left at once. And it was night.

When he had left, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. God will also glorify him in himself, and he will glorify him at once. My children, I will be with you only a little while longer. You will look for me, and as I told the Jews, 'Where I go you cannot come,' so now I say it to you.

Simon Peter said to him, "Master, where are you going?" Jesus answered, "Where I am going, you cannot follow me now, though you will follow later."

Peter said to him, "Master, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me? Amen, amen, I say to you, the cock will not crow before you deny me three times."

FIRST READING

We are born of Jesus from the very instant of conception. We know He will use us as an instrument to carry out His name and His teachings as promised. He will offer protection, but we must remember why we were given life... to glorify Him! Our lives can produce far-reaching results because of our example. We may not be aware but people are watching us very closely because we have committed to and professed our love of Jesus. They wish to see how someone who professes this truly lives out His Word in our daily life. They may be observing while we are in line at a grocery and department store, while waiting in heavy traffic or during a period of mental or physical stress.

SECOND READING

When I first viewed Leonardo Da Vinci's "Last Supper" in the refectory of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan, the family atmosphere struck me. The guests were seated around the table visiting socially in small groups as one might observe at any dinner.

We have all experienced a gathering of friends or relatives where we anticipated the event with enthusiasm but found that as the event played out, there began to emerge an uneasiness in the atmosphere. Someone is dissembling and one wonders if others have noticed. We begin to feel shock, disappointment, anger – what is really taking place? We begin to examine our own purpose for accepting the invitation.

In the case of the Last Supper, Jesus is aware that both Judas and Peter are not what they appear to be – each is about to bring great disappointment to the rest of the assembled disciples.

Jesus has asked us to trust and have faith in him to lead us to salvation, but along the way there may be more betrayals. Have I made a promise to myself or others that I could or would perform some task – only to disappoint at least one of us? Did I make a promise begrudgingly and then harbor resentment against the person I'd offered to help? Did I disguise this feeling from the intended victim? Did I promise to begin an exercise or diet only to fail myself?

We all seem to deny the opportunity to do good in one's life at one time or another.

Lynda Connor, Associate

Wednesday, March 19, 2008

First Reading Isaiah 50:4-9

The Lord GOD has given me a well-trained tongue, that I might know how to speak to the weary a word that will rouse them. Morning after morning he opens my ear that I may hear;

And I have not rebelled, have not turned back. I gave my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who plucked my beard; my face I did not shield from buffets and spitting.

The Lord GOD is my help, therefore I am not disgraced; I have set my face like flint, knowing that I shall not be put to shame. He is near who upholds my right; if anyone wishes to oppose me, let us appear together. Who disputes my right? Let him confront me.

See, the Lord GOD is my help; who will prove me wrong? Lo, they will all wear out like cloth, the moth will eat them up.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 26:14-25

Then one of the Twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, "What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?" They paid him thirty pieces of silver, and from that time on he looked for an opportunity to hand him over.

On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the disciples approached Jesus and said, "Where do you want us to prepare for you to eat the Passover?"

He said, "Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, 'The teacher says, "My appointed time draws near; in your house I shall celebrate the Passover with my disciples.'" The disciples then did as Jesus had ordered, and prepared the Passover.

When it was evening, he reclined at table with the Twelve. And while they were eating, he said, "Amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me." Deeply distressed at this, they began to say to him one after another, "Surely it is not I, Lord?" He said in reply, "He who has dipped his hand into the dish with me is the one who will betray me. The Son of Man indeed goes, as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It would be better for that man if he had never been born."

Then Judas, his betrayer, said in reply, "Surely it is not I, Rabbi?" He answered, "You have said so."

Isaiah speaks to us of the gifts that God gives us. Each morning God opens our ears that we may hear His word. God is our help; He is our strength to face those who attempt to weaken us.

The words of the Gospel of Matthew tell how Judas lost that strength. He betrayed his dear friend. Judas held a place of honor as he sat next to Jesus and shared a bowl with him. Judas was the treasurer, surely a sign that Jesus and all the disciples trusted him. Why did Judas betray Jesus? Matthew tells us that when Jesus said, "Amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me" all the disciples answered with "Is it I, Lord?" except Judas who replied, "Is it I, Rabbi?"

Did he not see him to be the Son of God: did he betray him for 30 pieces of silver? Did he betray him thinking that this would be an opportunity to force Jesus to show his power and prove that he was the Messiah?

Was he jealous of the attention that came to Jesus?

Was he disappointed in him?

What took over his mind?

When we read this Gospel of Matthew are we more aware of the fear of our own betrayal of Jesus?

Is Judas a symbol of the evil within us unlike the cross, which is a symbol of heroic self-sacrifice.

Perhaps we live in fear that we will betray Him? In our workplace when it will cost too much to think like a Christian, when anger is so great that we hurt those who trust us, in the sacred commitments we make but cannot keep. We will betray Jesus when we show our indifference to the poor, the unclean or those cast aside by our society.

The gospels tell us that Judas repented. He took the silver pieces to the chief priests but they would not take the blood money back.

Yes, Judas repented but he turned to the wrong person for forgiveness and finding none he made a futile attempt to make things right on his own.

God opens his arms to us, calling us to him..

"See, the Lord GOD is my help, who will prove me wrong.....(IS 50:9)

Patty Wischnowski, Associate

Thursday, March 20, 2008

First Reading: Exodus 12: 1-8, 11-14

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, "This month shall stand at the head of your calendar; you shall reckon it the first month of the year. Tell the whole community of Israel: On the tenth of this month every one of your families must procure for itself a lamb, one apiece for each household. If a family is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join the nearest household in procuring one and shall share in the lamb in proportion to the number of persons who partake of it. The lamb must be a year-old male and without blemish. You may take it from either the sheep or the goats. You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, and then, with the whole assembly of Israel present, it shall be slaughtered during the evening twilight. They shall take some of its blood and apply it to the two doorposts and the lintel of every house in which they partake of the lamb. That same night they shall eat its roasted flesh with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. This is how you are to eat it: with your loins girt, sandals on your feet and your staff in hand, you shall eat like those who are in flight. It is the Passover of the LORD. For on this same night I will go through Egypt, striking down every first-born of the land, both man and beast, and executing judgment on all the gods of Egypt-I, the LORD! But the blood will mark the houses where you are. Seeing the blood, I will pass over you; thus, when I strike the land of Egypt, no destructive blow will come upon you. This day shall be a memorial feast for you, which all your generations shall celebrate with pilgrimage to the LORD, as a perpetual institution."

Gospel Reading: John 13: 1-15

Before the feast of Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father. He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end. The devil had already induced Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot, to hand him over. So, during supper, fully aware that the Father had put everything into his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God, he rose from supper and took off his outer garments. He took a towel and tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and dry them with the towel around his waist. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Master, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing, you do not understand now, but you will understand later." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Master, then not only my feet, but my hands and head as well." Jesus said to him, "Whoever has bathed has no need except to have his feet washed, for he is clean all over; so you are clean, but not all." For he knew who would betray him; for this reason, he said, "Not all of you are clean." So when he had washed their feet and put his garments back on and reclined at table again, he said to them, "Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me 'teacher' and 'master,' and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do."

The Last Supper

A meditation by Victor Hoagland, C.P.

When Jesus Christ entered the supper room to eat the Passover meal that last Thursday night, he was aware a dark fate awaited him. Powerful forces were drawn their place at table, they gave him little support. Not only did Jesus face their pettiness, he also sensed their impending betrayal of him.

What would he do? Understandably he might respond with caution and draw back. Like the servant, whom Isaiah described, he might well say, "I toiled in vain; and for nothing, uselessly, spent my strength..." (Is. 49).

Jesus, however, took bread and gave it to his disciples. "Take this," he said, "this is my body." He took the cup and gave it to them. "This is my blood, the blood of the new covenant, to be poured out in behalf of many."

That night, without wariness or regret, he gave himself in love to his Father and his disciples. As Savior and Redeemer he gave himself unhesitatingly for the life of the world.

We remember that love each time we celebrate the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, the sacrament which makes a supper room of every time and place. Until the end of time, the sacrament says, Jesus Christ will offer his body and blood for all.

Friday, March 21, 2008

First Reading: Isaiah 52:13- 53:12

See, my servant shall prosper, he shall be raised high and greatly exalted. Even as many were amazed at him-- so marred was his look beyond that of man, and his appearance beyond that of mortals-- So shall he startle many nations, because of him kings shall stand speechless; For those who have not been told shall see, those who have not heard shall ponder it. Who would believe what we have heard? To whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

He grew up like a sapling before him, like a shoot from the parched earth; There was in him no stately bearing to make us look at him, nor appearance that would attract us to him. He was spurned and avoided by men, a man of suffering, accustomed to infirmity, One of those from whom men hide their faces, spurned, and we held him in no esteem. Yet it was our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings that he endured, while we thought of him as stricken, as one smitten by God and afflicted. But he was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins, upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole, by his stripes we were healed. We had all gone astray like sheep, each following his own way; But the LORD laid upon him the guilt of us all. Though he was harshly treated, he submitted and opened not his mouth; like a lamb led to the slaughter or a sheep before the shearers, he was silent and opened not his mouth. Oppressed and condemned, he was taken away, and who would have thought any more of his destiny? When he was cut off from the land of the living, and smitten for the sin of his people, a grave was assigned him among the wicked and a burial place with evildoers, Though he had done no wrong nor spoken any falsehood. If he gives his life as an offering for sin, he shall see his descendants in a long life, and the will of the LORD shall be accomplished through him. Because of his affliction he shall see the light in fullness of days; through his suffering, my servant shall justify many, and their guilt he shall bear. Therefore I will give him his portion among the great, and he shall divide the spoils with the mighty, because he surrendered himself to death and was counted among the wicked; And he shall take away the sins of many, and win pardon for their offenses.

Gospel Reading : John 18:1-19:42

When he had said this, Jesus went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to where there was a garden, into which he and his disciples entered. Judas his betrayer also knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples.

So Judas got a band of soldiers and guards from the chief priests and the Pharisees and went there with lanterns, torches, and weapons. Jesus, knowing everything that was going to happen to him, went out and said to them, "Whom are you looking for?"

They answered him, "Jesus the Nazorean." He said to them, "I AM." Judas his betrayer was also with them.

When he said to them, "I AM," they turned away and fell to the ground. So he again asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" They said, "Jesus the Nazorean."

Jesus answered, "I told you that I AM. So if you are looking for me, let these men go." This was to fulfill what he had said, "I have not lost any of those you gave me."

Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into its scabbard. Shall I not drink the cup that the Father gave me?"

So the band of soldiers, the tribune, and the Jewish guards seized Jesus, bound him, and brought him to Annas first. He was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. It was Caiaphas who had counseled the Jews that it was better that one man should die rather than the people.

Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Now the other disciple was known to the high priest, and he entered the courtyard of the high priest with Jesus. But Peter stood at the gate outside. So the other disciple, the acquaintance of the high priest, went out and spoke to the gatekeeper and brought Peter in. Then the maid who was the gatekeeper said to Peter, "You are not one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not."

Now the slaves and the guards were standing around a charcoal fire that they had made, because it was cold, and were warming themselves. Peter was also standing there keeping warm. The high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his doctrine. Jesus answered him, "I have spoken publicly to the world. I have always taught in a synagogue or in the temple area where all the Jews gather, and in secret I have said nothing. Why ask me? Ask those who heard me what I said to them. They know what I said."

When he had said this, one of the temple guards standing there struck Jesus and said, "Is this the way you answer the high priest?"

Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong; but if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?"

Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

Now Simon Peter was standing there keeping warm. And they said to him, "You are not one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not."

One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the one whose ear Peter had cut off, said, "Didn't I see you in the garden with him?" Again Peter denied it. And immediately the cock crowed.

Then they brought Jesus from Caiaphas to the praetorium. It was morning. And they themselves did not enter the praetorium, in order not to be defiled so that they could eat the Passover.

So Pilate came out to them and said, "What charge do you bring against this man?" They answered and said to him, "If he were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you."

At this, Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves, and judge him according to your law." The Jews answered him, "We do not have the right to execute anyone," in order that the word of Jesus might be fulfilled that he said indicating the kind of death he would die.

So Pilate went back into the praetorium and summoned Jesus and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?"

Jesus answered, "Do you say this on your own or have others told you about me?"

Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests handed you over to me. What have you done?"

Jesus answered, "My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom did belong to this world, my attendants would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not here."

So Pilate said to him, "Then you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say I am a king. For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.

Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."

Pilate said to him, "What is truth?" When he had said this, he again went out to the Jews and said to them, "I find no guilt in him. But you have a custom that I release one prisoner to you at Passover. Do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?"

They cried out again, "Not this one but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a revolutionary.

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him scourged.
And the soldiers wove a crown out of thorns and placed it on his head, and clothed him in a purple cloak, and they came to him and said, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they struck him repeatedly.
Once more Pilate went out and said to them, "Look, I am bringing him out to you, so that you may know that I find no guilt in him."
So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple cloak. And he said to them, "Behold, the man!"
When the chief priests and the guards saw him they cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him. I find no guilt in him."
The Jews answered, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God." Now when Pilate heard this statement, he became even more afraid, and went back into the praetorium and said to Jesus, "Where are you from?" Jesus did not answer him.
So Pilate said to him, "Do you not speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you and I have power to crucify you?"
Jesus answered him, "You would have no power over me if it had not been given to you from above. For this reason the one who handed me over to you has the greater sin."
Consequently, Pilate tried to release him; but the Jews cried out, "If you release him, you are not a Friend of Caesar. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar."
When Pilate heard these words he brought Jesus out and seated him on the judge's bench in the place called Stone Pavement, in Hebrew, Gabbatha. It was preparation day for Passover, and it was about noon. ⁵ And he said to the Jews, "Behold, your king!"
They cried out, "Take him away, take him away! Crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your king?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar."
Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus, and carrying the cross himself, he went out to what is called the Place of the Skull, in Hebrew, Golgotha.
There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus in the middle.
Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, "Jesus the Nazorean, the King of the Jews." Now many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write 'The King of the Jews,' but that he said, 'I am the King of the Jews.'" Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written."
When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four shares, a share for each soldier. They also took his tunic, but the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top down. So they said to one another, "Let's not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it will be," in order that the passage of scripture might be fulfilled that says: "They divided my garments among them, and for my vesture they cast lots." This is what the soldiers did.
Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.
After this, aware that everything was now finished, in order that the scripture might be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I thirst." There was a vessel filled with common wine. So

they put a sponge soaked in wine on a sprig of hyssop and put it up to his mouth. When Jesus had taken the wine, he said, "It is finished." And bowing his head, he handed over the spirit.

Now since it was preparation day, in order that the bodies might not remain on the cross on the Sabbath, for the Sabbath day of that week was a solemn one, the Jews asked Pilate that their legs be broken and they be taken down.

So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and then of the other one who was crucified with Jesus. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs, but one soldier thrust his lance into his side, and immediately blood and water flowed out.

An eyewitness has testified, and his testimony is true; he knows that he is speaking the truth, so that you also may come to believe. For this happened so that the scripture passage might be fulfilled: "Not a bone of it will be broken."

And again another passage says: "They will look upon him whom they have pierced."

After this, Joseph of Arimathea, secretly a disciple of Jesus for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate if he could remove the body of Jesus. And Pilate permitted it. So he came and took his body. Nicodemus, the one who had first come to him at night, also came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes weighing about one hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and bound it with burial cloths along with the spices, according to the Jewish burial custom.

Now in the place where he had been crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had yet been buried. So they laid Jesus there because of the Jewish preparation day; for the tomb was close by.

Pietà: A Meditation with Mary of Nazareth

I am surprised that he is not heavier. Strong, but slight of build, he was not at all like me. I'm a big woman, heavy in bone and flesh, toughened by years of hard work in house and field. I'm fifty now, but still strong enough to carry him. How many years has it been since his body lay in my lap? How long since I cradled his head in my arms? I think the last time was when he had that fever that almost took him. He was sixteen. Or was he seventeen by then? But look at him now! He is a body. I should know as well as my own. Perhaps better: it's flesh of my flesh. But all I see is lifeless, bruised, and battered flesh, sprawled across my knees. This is not my son! It can't be! This ugly twisted face is not his! This body is stretched, bloated and contorted, sculpted by violence and pain. Twisted and tortured legs and arms describe the instrument of its dying. And God! His wrists, and feet and side! Vicious with the fatal rust of dried blood and the deathly white of violated bone. This body reeks of death; death's sweat, death's blood, death's waste. O God! Can this be your child? Can this be my son?

But it's his hair that brings tears to my eyes. Silly, isn't it? To hold the lifeless body of your son, and weep because his hair is filthy. See how it's matted with sweat, blood, and yes, spittle. Can anyone count the times a mother washes the hair of her child, combs it, brushes it, smooths it away from the face, caresses it to comfort some passing hurt? His was so beautiful. Black and straight, thick and lustrous with reflected lights like those in hard coal newly prised from the mountain side. Soft as silk, sweet as the smell of morning after rain. I must strangle the urge to cry out: "This is not my son!" Yet it is! It is him! My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

They come to take him from me now. Should I try to remember what I see: Eyes without light, laughter, surprise, compassion, love. A mouth so bruised that it tells nothing of the strength and grace of his voice of the gentle understanding in his smile. I used to love to watch him run as a child and see how his every step mimicked the purposeful tread of his father. These legs are a cruel travesty of his. And I refuse to look at the hands. His were strong, beautiful, skilled, and his touch was tender.

What is real? What I remember or what I see? The boy and man I knew? Or this defiled remnant of a man? Maybe I never really knew him. Maybe memory and love betray the reality of the present.

I begged Joseph to believe that I had not sinned, that somehow God had given me this child. I don't know that he ever really believed me. But God, how he loved us! Me and his son. Conceived in distrust, born amid the confusion of omens pointing to both grief and glory, what a son he was! Yes, he was into all the innocent mischief that a village provides a lively boy. But how loving, sweet, and filled with life and joy he was for me and his father. With each passing day he grew in grace, and strength and wisdom before God and us all.

The day I most feared finally arrived. He must leave, he said. "God has called me and given me a work to do. I must be about it." Terror, like a sword, pierced me. I knew the end was beginning. We in this land do not welcome bearers of God's word. Our rulers are even more hostile. I pleaded with my son. I cried out to God. My son left as God said he must. I tried again and again to bring him home. Neither he nor God heard me.

Now I suppose I have him back; God's answer to my prayer. Shall I curse the God who gave him to me then gives him to me now? I want to. Perhaps, I should. But it's too late. I received God's first gift filled with joy. I cannot now refuse God's second gift, no matter how filled with suffering. I have trusted in God since childhood. I cannot do otherwise now. God is the bedrock of who I am and my last link to the son I loved.

Now strangers lift this burden from my lap. I stand and watch as they carry it away. Who will lift the heavier burden of memory's grief that bows my body and soul? I can but pray. Oh God, you shape the whole of who I am. Have mercy on me. Help me to find blessing in being the woman who mothered him. I am brought down to the depths; raise me up with your mighty arm. I am totally empty, fill me with your presence. Make me strong in my trust in you. Above all, God, my God, know that I am your servant to do with as you will.

Reverend John E. Linnan

Saturday, March 22, 2008

First Reading: Romans 6:3-11

Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life. For if we have grown into union with him through a death like his, we shall also be united with him in the resurrection. We know that our old self was crucified with him, so that our sinful body might be done away with, that we might no longer be in slavery to sin. For a dead person has been absolved from sin. If, then, we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. We know that Christ, raised from the dead, dies no more; death no longer has power over him. As to his death, he died to sin once and for all; as to his life, he lives for God. Consequently, you too must think of yourselves as being dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 28: 1-10

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb.

And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, approached, rolled back the stone, and sat upon it. His appearance was like lightning and his clothing was white as snow. The guards were shaken with fear of him and became like dead men.

Then the angel said to the women in reply, "Do not be afraid! I know that you are seeking Jesus the crucified. He is not here, for he has been raised just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him.' Behold, I have told you."

Then they went away quickly from the tomb, fearful yet overjoyed, and ran to announce this to his disciples.

And behold, Jesus met them on their way and greeted them. They approached, embraced his feet, and did him homage.

Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me"

The opening theme for the Easter Vigil is light. We light the "new fire" and it is from the new fire that paschal candle is lit and is carried down the main aisle of the Church with three intonations of "Christ, the light". It is from the light of Christ that all other candles in the Church are lit so that the light of Christ fills the Church, the "People of God."

We have come from the darkened tomb of Good Friday where Jesus laid amid the sorrows and tears and perhaps the hopes and fears of his followers. They only saw the empty cross and I suspect many of them echoed the words of the disciples on the way to Emmaus, "But we were hoping he would be the one to redeem Israel."

How can we go from the darkened tomb of Good Friday to the proclamation of "Christ, the light" and the Church filled with glorious light? Matthew tells us the story as he reminds us of Mary Magdalene's and the other women's journey to the tomb and their encountering the angel who told them: "Do not be frightened. I know you are looking for Jesus of the crucified, but he is not here. He has been raised exactly as he promised." He has been raised exactly as he promised!!

Finally, another very important theme that is very important part of the Easter Vigil is Baptism. And we listen to the words of Paul to the Romans to remind us of that. Paul says "Are you not aware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Through baptism into his death we were buried with him so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the God we too might live a new life. If we have been united with him through likeness to his death, so shall we be through a like resurrection." If we are fortunate enough, we might be able to witness an individual or two being baptized at the Easter Vigil and it allows us to recall our own baptism and it will allow us to recall the significance of this sacrament of dying with Christ in baptism to rise with him. Not only to rise with him after death but to rise with him in a new life in this life.

Perhaps the hopes of many of the followers of Christ suffered a tremendous setback as he was nailed to the cross and was buried in the tomb. Those same hopes were revitalized on that morning Mary and her sisters went to the tomb and found it empty. "He has been raised as he promised." The Easter Vigil with its reflection on light, baptism and resurrection can be the same source of revitalized hopes for us.

Reverend James E. Michaletz

Sunday, March 23, 2008

First Reading: Acts 10: 34a,37-43

Then Peter proceeded to speak " What has happened all over Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached, how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the holy Spirit and power. He went about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree. This man God raised on the third day and granted that he be visible, not to all the people, but to us, the witnesses chosen by God in advance, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commissioned us to preach to the people and testify that he is the one appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness, that everyone who believes in him will receive forgiveness of sins through his name."

Gospel: John 20:1-9

On the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark, and saw the stone removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they put him."

So Peter and the other disciple went out and came to the tomb. They both ran, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and arrived at the tomb first; he bent down and saw the burial cloths there, but did not go in.

When Simon Peter arrived after him, he went into the tomb and saw the burial cloths there, and the cloth that had covered his head, not with the burial cloths but rolled up in a separate place.

Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the tomb first, and he saw and believed.

For they did not yet understand the scripture that he had to rise from the dead.

“They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don’t know where they have laid him.” This anguished cry of Mary Magdalene is not just a prelude to the joyful announcement of the resurrection that will happen later in the narrative. It is the perennial cry of both believers and non-believers as we struggle to make sense of our lives in the light of the Gospel. Like the disciples who ran to the tomb, “we do not yet understand the scripture that Christ had to rise from the dead.”

For some Christ’s resurrection from the dead is pure fantasy—an invention of overly imaginative Jewish fishermen who couldn’t cope with the death of their leader. For others—even those who call themselves Christian—the resurrection is an event that took place two thousand years ago, but which has little relevance for our lives today. Even many who consider themselves fervent Christians and who adamantly profess belief in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead as well as their ultimate resurrection at the end of time are unable to explain the impact of the resurrection of Jesus in the here and now.

To paraphrase T.S. Eliot many have “had the experience but missed the meaning.” We miss the meaning when we fail to see Christ’s suffering, death and resurrection as the pattern for our own lives and the lives of others. We miss the meaning when we stop our ears to those who point to the presence of Jesus today in the poor, the sick, the excluded, those suffering from war and psychological violence. We miss the meaning every time we receive communion, saying “Amen” to the communion minister’s monition, “the Body of Christ,” and then return to our daily lives as if the Eucharist was not given to us to transform us into the very Body we affirm by saying “Amen.”

Very Reverend Mark R. Francis

Thank you to all participants:

**For opening your hearts, sharing your talents and the light of
your faith!**

Patty Wischnowski