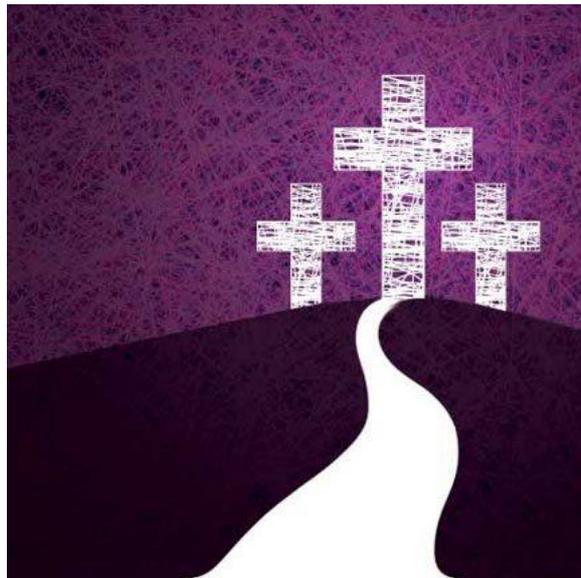


Church of the Resurrection

Bryanston

Lenten Programme 2020

From Repentance to Renewal



WEEK FIVE

From Death to Life

SUNDAY 29 MARCH

Its worth reading the full text of today's scripture.

Scripture: *John 11: 1 - 45*

Reflection

Death is an inevitable reality. We choose not to think about it too often because we need to get on with living life – and living it to the fullest. There are times, events, situations and occasions which remind us about this inevitable reality. Today's gospel is one such occasion. What do we really believe about death? What do I believe about my death?

At their Baptism at the Easter Vigil the Catechumens will be asked “What do you ask of God's Church?” they will answer “Faith.” Next they will be asked “What does faith offer you?” They will respond “Eternal Life!”

These are more than correct responses. This is the TRUTH of our faith! Faith offers us eternal life. When Jesus proclaims “I am the resurrection and the life. If anyone believes in me, even though he dies he will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die,” he asks Mary, “Do you believe this?” She responds “Yes Lord I believe.”

Today Jesus asks us the same “Do you believe this?”

Do we really? This entire Lenten Journey of renewal, change, transformation and metanoia – change of heart, prepares us for the renewal of our faith at Easter and for the final Easter of our lives – when Christ will come again – our own personal Easter! This is why its worth taking our faith seriously; it captures, in these short six weeks, our journey from life to death to eternal life!

Someday the body of our earthly dwelling will lie in death. We spend so much time, effort, energy and expense on these earthly bodies which eventually succumb to death – and rightly so – up to a point, because our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and we have been made holy and sanctified through Baptism and our regular reception of the Eucharist. But what happens when this body of our earthly dwelling lies in death? We will gain an everlasting dwelling place in heaven. WOW! This is the extraordinary truth of our faith. The daily lived reality of faith makes us immortal!

When Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead today he demonstrates that he is the Lord and master over the living and the dead – truly the Resurrection and the Life! Raising Lazarus from the dead prefigures Jesus' own resurrection – that death will have no power over him. We who share in his life through the gift and lived reality of faith, will also be able to triumph over death. The life and faith we have in Jesus is his resurrected and glorified life. “Do you believe this?”

Practical Suggestion

Personal sin stains the dignity of faith we were given at Baptism. None of us wants to die in the state of sin. The Sacrament of Reconciliation restores the dignity of our Baptism as our sins are forgiven. Although there will not be a Penitential Service due to the lockdown, do an Examination of Conscience and ask for God's forgiveness.

Prayer

Yes Lord I believe! Strengthen my little faith so that I may journey through life with courage and the certainty that through living with you and dying with you, I will rise with you. Amen. Change my Heart O God! Amen.

MONDAY 30 MARCH

Scripture: *Daniel 13:1-62 John 8: 1-11*

Reflection

The mind and body have a very powerful influence on the way we act and react, but in the background there always lurks the conscience, that something, which reminding us of the real truth, the truth as taught by Jesus. Because it's more comfortable to let the mind have its way, we often allow it to override our conscience and so we sin.

In today's Old Testament reading we hear how two senior members of the Jewish community, let their mind and physical desires, override their conscience and so they sinned - big time. This led them gradually, to more and more offences against God, because to cover up their sins, they came up with lies that covered their lustful faults, and this in turn, led to more and more lies.

This is why so-called venial sins are so insidious. On their own, they do not completely cut us off from God, but if we ignore these "minor issues" they pile up and sooner than later, we end up turning our back on God's teachings and this eventually places us firmly in a state of serious or mortal sin, cut off from God.

The good news for us is that all is not lost, because if we go to today's gospel, written by John, we see God's mercy and compassion coming to the fore.

God, through Jesus Christ, foils the deceit and duplicity of the scribes and Pharisees by playing them at their own game. When they present him with a woman, "caught in the very act of adultery", and ask him if the woman should be stoned to death, Jesus replies, "Let the one who has committed no sin, throw the first stone."

This puts the ball firmly in their court! Then bending down he writes in the dust, probably highlighting their most secret sins. These strict observers of the law are forced to back down, because their own (so-called) little venial sins having deadened their consciences over time, forced them into a state of mortal sin. This is now made very clear to them.

God has left them in no doubt about their own guilt, in all its gruesome detail. It makes them as guilty as those that they were accusing, and therefore as liable to be stoned to death as the woman they had accused.

This makes even the apostles sit up and take note, because we hear them ask, "If that is the case how can anyone be saved?" The response Jesus gives them, is also our saving grace, because it tells us, that on our own we cannot succeed in gaining eternal glory, but with Gods help it becomes possible.

There are, however, two things that we need to remember: we must make the first move and ask God for his help, then secondly we must try as hard as we can to avoid the occasions of sin. In other words we must also come to the party.

Practical Suggestion

Read the scriptures often, and in particular the Gospels, so that you are well informed about the teachings of Jesus and eager to follow them. This will help you to avoid all those so-called venial sins that can place you in a state of serious or mortal sin.

Then pray, that God will give you the courage, the strength and the wisdom to follow his teachings.

Prayer

Lord God, through the wisdom of the scriptures and with your help, point me to the way I should follow you in my quest for love of you and love of neighbour, knowing that if I follow in the footsteps of Jesus I will enjoy eternal life with you in heaven. Amen. Change my Heart O God!

TUESDAY 31 MARCH

Scripture

Psalm 101 John 8:21-30

"Let this be written for ages to come that a people yet unborn may praise the Lord;"

Reflection

Much of our life is spent focusing on the world around us with little thought of preparing for our own future (eternal life) and the future of those to come – our children; their life on earth and eventual immortality in the presence of God!

Yes, we know very well what house we want, schools and universities to choose, careers to follow but do we plan our days to co - exist with the ways of God's plan?

The Pharisees had, over time, let their guard down. Even when the Messiah was with them, they were blinded and became trapped in believing that the laws they (not God) made, regarding worldly values, which would endear them to God, not knowing of course, that they were alienating themselves from Him whilst He who stood - right before their eyes.

In their darkness they were led into sin. They were dead to Christ. All that was needed was to look beyond their material and legalistic way of life and to choose the Life that only Jesus could lead them to!

We are called every day to renew our choice to follow God; to leave sin, the darkness offered by the world that leads to DEATH and choose instead to live in the light of His way - the way to eternal LIFE.

As we draw nearer to Easter in our long term goal we should, in our thought and action, be making every effort to bring about our renewed commitment to leave the darkness that invades our physical, material world and live in the light dominated by our faith in Jesus.

Practical Suggestion

Relook at your priorities in life. What are your priorities this week: In this time of lockdown, strive to pray together as a family at home. Remember that Jesus died to so that you may have eternal life. Join Him!

Prayer

Almighty God I thank you for the sacrifice that you made for made for me. Help me to leave the darkness of the world below to live in your world of light. Amen. Change my Heart O God!

WEDNESDAY 01 APRIL

Scripture: *Daniel 3: 14 - 28*

Reflection

Today we read the account of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. These three young Israelites were among many who had been captured and taken to Babylon. Being of royal descent, they were chosen to be educated in the language and literature of the Babylonians but in all the time they spent in the King's courts, they did not relinquish their faith in God and would not serve the pagan gods of the Babylonians. They refused to bow down and worship the golden image which King Nebuchadnezzar had erected. As punishment for their disobedience to the King, these young men of faith were bound and hurled into a fiery furnace which was so hot that even those who prepared it were burnt to death.

We read that the King noticed the three young men walking about in the flames together with an angel. All were completely unharmed. He ordered them to come out of the burning furnace. The three young men who had been thrown into the fire which should have resulted in them being instantly burnt to death, came walking out of those flames very much alive and completely unscathed.

Then something more miraculous than that happened. This cruel king had a complete change of heart and issued a public decree that no one should say anything against the God whom these three men worshipped.

Here we see the results of a king meeting three men whose faith was on fire and it had a very profound effect on him which led to his incredible conversion experience.

God wants His people to be on fire for their faith. He wants our faith to be active and alive. We read in Revelations 3:15-16 that God has no time for lukewarm people. He gives a very strong warning to such people.

Lukewarm people are easy to spot by their attitude, behaviour and lifestyle. They go to Mass because they need to fulfill the Sunday observance but fail to enter fully into the celebration by praying the prayers and singing the hymns. They go through the motions to fulfill an obligation but their hearts are far from Jesus. The flame of faith has been reduced to a tiny flicker.

We need again to be fired up in our faith. Our flame of faith needs to be burning brightly so that others may see that we have something special in our life and this may well lead to them having their own change of heart.

Practical Suggestion

Videos of daily Mass from our parish are on YouTube. Search for 'Bryanston Catholic Church' on YouTube to find our channel, or look on www.bryanstoncatholic.co.za for the link. Experience Holy Mass and let your faith shine through.

Prayer

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of your love. Change my Heart O God! Amen

THURSDAY 02 APRIL

Scripture:

John 8: 51-59 Oh! Harden not your hearts as to who He is.

Reflection

Jesus continues to challenge the Jews about His real identity. They regarded his "I AM" as the worst form of blasphemy as He stated that He was one with the Eternal God. He sees that they are spiritually sick and the dialogue turns very ugly – they have no answer to His diagnosis and run out of intelligent comments accusing Him of being possessed.

It was them (and us) who were possessed by protecting their vested interests, keeping the peace and subduing all criticism so as to maintain the status quo. When He challenges us through His Church, its ministers and others, we invariably become hostile and defensive losing all prospects of seeing the light He is trying to bring to our darkness. We miss the point that He came to bring to an end the stranglehold that death held over mankind by removing the prospect of facing the absolute wrath of God and giving to us the gift of eternal life.

We are NEVER to challenge the Lord when He challenges us. Ask Him questions and understanding but do not argue with Him!! It is when we react negatively to constructive challenges by Him that we run the risk of Him just leaving us to die (spiritually) in our sins. Sometimes by the grace of God, we are forcibly brought to our senses like St Paul (when he was known as Saul) who was thrown off his horse by a bright light and temporarily blinded. He then had his sight restored and saw the light of Christ to our and many other's eternal benefit.

We often just ignore Our Lord's invitation and shrug Him off as though He never died for us. He was just a good Man favoured by God. This is the time when Jesus hides from us. This is when He does what He did in the scripture today – just disappears from the temple as they try to kill Him with stones (the punishment for blasphemy).

Jesus was eventually killed by them when the Father's timing permitted it. He knew the Father so intimately and all He came to do was to reveal to man, the true compassion and mercy of the Father and the way He wanted us to live. He came to reveal the path from a life leading to eternal death, to a life leading to eternal life.

Practical Suggestion

What stones do you hold ready to chase Jesus away when He is not falling in with your plans and your will? Ignoring Him, doubting Him, perhaps even accusing Him of not acting in your best interests? He acts to our eternal benefit.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, crucified by the hardened hearts of men who refuse to see the light, forcibly change my heart (like you did for Saul) to see your light, your eternal light. Change my Heart O God! Amen.

FRIDAY 03 APRIL

Scripture: *Jeremiah 20: 10 - 13; John 10: 31 - 42*

Reflection:

“High noon!” Both Jeremiah and Jesus are faced with great opposition, even from people who were supposedly ‘friends’! Both faced the threat of death. Jeremiah puts his trust in God, and says, ‘but Yahweh is at my side, a mighty hero’, and believes that God will overcome those seeking his downfall.

Jesus is calm in the midst of the storm surrounding him. He attempts to reason with those demanding answers from him, telling them that if they cannot and will not believe in what He says, then they should look at what He has done for proof that is He is of and from God.

Their minds are closed, and they only want to kill him! Undoubtedly there was confusion – some wanted to believe, others perhaps did believe, but the majority would not listen and had made up their minds that He was a blasphemer and needed to be got rid of.

As for us, where do we stand? Sometimes we find it easy to believe that **Jesus is** the Son of God, and capable of amazing things. At other times, when we are in the midst of a crisis, He seems to be quite unreal and very far away.

Hopefully our Lenten journey has brought us closer to Him, and has strengthened our belief in Him as friend, Lord and Saviour.

Let us pray, in these remaining days, for the courage to be His friend, loyal and faithful, no matter what it may cost us, because we **know, deep inside**, that He is always there for us, even when we cannot see or feel Him.

Practical Suggestion:

Spend some quality time reflecting on your relationship with Jesus. Has it changed over these weeks? Is it strong? Would you describe yourself as a loyal and faithful friend? What has this friendship cost you?

Prayer

Loving God, and mighty champion of Your people, help me to be always aware of Your presence in my life. May that knowledge help me to assist others in times of distress, so that they too come to recognise You as a God who cares. I ask this in the name of Jesus, Your Son, Amen. Change my Heart O God!

SATURDAY 04 APRIL

Scripture: *John 11: 45 - 56*

Reflection

Things are coming to a head – just as Jesus had feared and anticipated before he had travelled to Jerusalem. He had a powerful sense that his preaching and teaching would not be accepted by the religious leaders. They were too entrenched in the customs, traditions, laws, rules, rituals and ceremonies all of which had hardened their hearts

and prevented them from seeing and recognising love and goodness right there before them.

It is easy for us to judge and even condemn them. The horrible reality and truth is that, in so many ways (if we had to be truly honest with ourselves) we have become like them – and date I say, so has our Church. Jesus came to change hearts but the hardest hearts were those of the religious leaders. The speech of Caiaphas the high priest is quite a revelation! Selfish interests would come before the truth. “Everybody will believe in him” is his great fear, and then of course they will lose power and control. So he uses the threat of the Roman authority (whom he presumes will be displeased) to influence and convince the people.

Their determination to kill him is astounding! For what? Raising a man from the dead? Giving sight to a blind man? Curing a man unable to walk for 38 years? Preaching about love, mercy, compassion, forgiveness? Calling God Father? Restoring the sanctity and sacredness of the Temple?

This is what happens when we lose our focus on faith! That is why we need this time and this Lenten Season to help us to regain our focus or to refocus. If we don't or refuse to grasp this opportunity then our hearts will remain as stubborn, closed and as hard as the hearts of Caiaphas and the religious leaders. The events of Holy Week ahead will pass us by without any real meaningful change or impact.

Practical Suggestion

Tomorrow Passion/Palm Sunday begins the holiest week in the Christian calendar. It is our opportunity to focus on our faith and to enter as fully as possible into the Lord's passion, suffering, death and resurrection. Sadly we are unable to attend the Holy Week services due to the nationwide lockdown. To make this week a Holy Week, please download our parish app (instructions are on www.bryanstoncatholic.co.za) and for each service there will be a special prayer service to do at home with your family, and a video on our YouTube channel. This way, we can stay connected to our parish and experience Holy Week.

Prayer

Father, as the saving work of your Son Jesus intensifies, strengthen my faith and give me the courage to step aside from the routine of my life that I may enter as fully as possible into the events of this Holy Week and walk with Jesus my Lord and Saviour. Amen. Change my Heart O God!

These Daily Reflections for Lent are written by Fr. Desmond Nair, Lawrence Surgeson, Deacon Mark Wardell, Veronica Donnelly, George Cominos and Irene Helsdon. Please acknowledge the authors when copying and distributing. We wish you blessed and spirit-filled Holy Week. Adapted for Bryanston Catholic Church.

