

OUR LADY OF FATIMA PARISH

DURBAN NORTH

LENTEN REFLECTIONS 2021

THY WILL BE DONE



PRAY



FAST



GIVE

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WEEK ONE

SUNDAY 21 FEBRUARY

Scripture: *Mark1: 12 - 15*

Reflection

Are you open to the work, power, help and guidance of the Holy Spirit?

The same Holy Spirit who led Jesus into the wilderness, who inspired and guided him throughout his ministry, this same Spirit has been given to us, in no lesser or greater measure. But are we really open to be led by the Spirit or is everything we do done by our own effort and self-reliance?

Lent provides an opportunity for us to be guided by the Holy Spirit, just as Jesus was. If he, the Son of God, relied on the Holy Spirit, how much more so should we!

As with Jesus, the Spirit leads us into this sacred time, to unite ourselves with the Catechumens (*Elect*) and Candidates in the RCIA programme through this Period of Purification. Like them, we purify our minds, hearts, and lives so that we can allow God's will to be done and be born-again at Easter.

Jesus knew that if his ministry was to bear fruit he had to 'take the road less travelled.' The journey ahead marked by preaching, teaching, and proclaiming the kingdom of God, was going to be difficult and challenging. He allowed himself to be led by the Spirit into the wilderness for a time (*40 days*) of prayer and fasting.

If Lent is to bear fruit in our spiritual lives, if we want to be renewed in faith, experience genuine metanoia, and become better people, then we need to purify ourselves through prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

It is important to know what our goal and destiny is as we begin this Lenten Journey. We are journeying to Easter, via the cross of Calvary, so that we can be born-again into a renewed life in Christ, to rid ourselves of the sins, faults and failings of the past and to make a fresh start.

Practical suggestion

Like Jesus, we will be tempted to abandon our Lenten resolutions. He resisted temptation by focusing on the word of God and prayer. In this way he was able to do the will of the Father. Commit to reading Scripture every day during Lent (*provided in these reflections*), receive the Holy Eucharist as often as possible and spend time in personal prayer.

Prayer

Holy Spirit be my helper and guide during this Lenten journey. Strengthen me in moments of weakness that I may follow Jesus with a lively faith and come to the joy of Easter. Amen.

MONDAY 22 FEBRUARY

Scripture: *Matthew 25: 31-46*

Reflection:

We have no excuse! If the cries and calls for help of our brothers and sisters are not enough to wake us up, then the words "*in so far as you neglected to do this to one of the least of these, you neglected to do it to me*" should!

Faith is not just a matter of maintaining one's own spiritual life. Our Christian faith calls us to reach out to one another. During Lent we make an extra special effort to do this. It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking about ourselves and our own needs. The Lord wants to draw us out of this pre-occupation with self.

We often turn away from the poor and needy and we write them off as being lazy or just plain unfortunate. 'There but for the grace of God go I.' That down-and-out person could be me! Our circumstances in life have brought us to where we are today, and we need to know that not everybody has been as fortunate as we are. Many of those whom we try to ignore have never had the chances that we have had. Who knows where they would be today if they did?

This is why the Lord calls us to reach out to the hungry, the naked, the sick, the imprisoned, the homeless. We might not be able to resolve the world-wide problem of homelessness or hunger, but we might be able to help one person. Remember the words of St. Mother Theresa: "We can do no great things, but only little things with great love. You can do what I cannot do. I can do what you can't do, but together we can do something beautiful for God."

Practical suggestion:

Do something beautiful for God today. Be a little more tolerant and generous to someone in need, especially someone down-and-out or begging at the street corner or at your gate. Try to be compassionate and non-judgmental; just generous in heart and spirit and experience the beauty of God shining through you. Check through your cupboards and gather your unused clothing for the St. Vincent de Paul Society. Don't leave it too tomorrow. The need is great today.

Prayer

Lord, help me to be generous with all that I have. Give me the grace and the strength to reach out to those in need. Help me not to be filled with prejudice and rejection. Rather let me be filled with love, compassion and kindness.

Thank you for all that I have and for the many graces and benefits which I have received. Help me to use these for the good of others that I may be deserving of the words of Jesus "In so much as you have done this to one of these least of mine, you have done it to me." Amen.

TUESDAY 23 FEBRUARY

Scripture: *Matthew 6:7-15* *How to Pray*

Reflection

“You should pray like this.” In today’s gospel Jesus teaches His disciples and us, how to pray. For many of us, prayers are either a long rambling session of pleas and requests, or a mindless recitation of formal, scripted prayer, or embarrassed utterances of what we hope others want us to pray for. Jesus tells us that prayer should be simple: “Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

The ‘Our Father’ or ‘Lord’s Prayer’ is one prayer that unites Christians of all denominations. It mentions no doctrines or intermediaries. Many Christians emphasise things that this prayer never mentions, but, and probably more importantly, many of us Christians ignore what it does say. In his book titled “The Greatest Prayer,” John Dominic Crossan describes this prayer as “... *a prayer from the heart of Judaism, on the lips of Christianity, for the conscience of the world.*”

It is a prayer about justice and hope; both of which are much needed in these turbulent times we are living in. Justice and hope also to come about when we take action in the way we promise when we pray the “Our Father.” We promise to hold God’s name holy by being holy ourselves. We promise to trust in the will of God; “Thy will be done.” We promise to accept and be grateful for receiving what we need “our daily bread” and not go in search for excess. We promise to forgive others for their sins against us and to be mindful of the sins we commit and are asking forgiveness for.

Through much of Jewish history the Prophets warned the people of God that prayer alone is not enough. Continuing to worship in the Temple without amending their ways would lead to their destruction. The Prophet Jeremiah sets it out for us: “*But if you really amend your behaviour and your actions, if you really treat one another fairly, if you do not exploit the stranger,... and if you do not follow other gods to your ruin, then I shall let you stay in this place...*” (7:5-7) The ‘Our Father’ is a simple prayer with large responsibilities attached to it. Pray it often but live it always!

Practical Suggestion

Think through each of the promises you make when you pray the ‘Our Father.’ Identify one in particular that is troublesome and requires you to change your behaviour and actions. Commit to making that change.

Prayer

Father, it is a joy for me to pray as Jesus taught: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us, this day, our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we

forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. Amen

WEDNESDAY 24 FEBRUARY

Scripture

Luke 11: 29 - 32

Reflection

Jesus is the Word of God and words form the basis of any message: He is the Message of Eternal life. Essential to this message is doing the will of God - something many find difficult to establish and difficult to do.

During this Lenten season, "Thy will be done" means we have to internalise the message. This message will speak to our hearts when we put in the effort to initiate or strengthen our relationship with the Lord. We are not to look for signs in the hope that Jesus will do something spectacular for us. We are to hear His Message in a manner that we will wish to do something humanly spectacular for Him: glorify Him, praise Him, love Him and as a result fully demonstrate his mercy and compassion to all. Love God, neighbour and self!

Jesus was at pains to prevent people from being mesmerised by His power drawn from His relationship with the Father. People would have listened to demons and would have been exposed to who He really was just because of the spectacular. He silenced the demons. He told the cleansed leper not to let everyone know about his healing. He wanted people to get the essential message of salvation into their hearts and not just process the signs in their minds.

We are startled today by being called a "wicked generation" for wanting signs such as the miraculous elimination of the Coronavirus. But the Lord knows that the fleeting feeling of awe when we revel in the spectacular does not usually lead to a permanent change in heart. It is like the rah-rah stadium experience, and when the stadium is exited, a long-lasting change seldom takes place.

Practical Suggestion

We are all battling with this once-in-a-century pandemic and during this Lenten season we would do well to reflect on and pray for what God's will is right now, and how to react in a manner that draws us closer to the Lord so that we can sincerely proclaim 'Thy will be done.'

Prayer

Holy Spirit of God, You who are mightier than any virus. Fill our minds and hearts with the wisdom so necessary during this most difficult time of human anxiety. Through this, allow the injunction "Thy will be done" to become a living reality in our lives. Amen

THURSDAY 25 FEBRUARY

Scripture *Esther 14: 1, 3 - 4, 13 - 14 & Matthew 7: 7 - 12*

Reflection

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” We are all well aware that there are many forms of prayer, but today’s readings deal with prayer of petition. The Old Testament reading presents Esther’s prayer of petition. Esther, a Jewish woman, and queen prays to God on behalf of her people. She was in desperate need of God’s intervention. She asked God to stretch his protecting hand over the people.

When we pray, do we believe that God hears our prayers every time we approach him? Do we totally surrender ourselves to the mercy and care of our loving God? Esther knew that God had been faithful to her ancestors and that he is a God who keeps his promises from one generation to the next. She also knew that God heard her prayers and that He would help her in her time of need. Esther’s confidence can be compared to the Psalmist “I lift up my eyes to the mountains where my help shall come from? My help comes from God who made heaven and earth.” (*Psalm 141: 1-2*)

In the same breath, Jesus in today’s gospel, assures us that our Father listens to our petitions and he answers our prayers. “If you, then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!” These words are an assurance that the heavenly Father will give ‘good things’ to those who ask. I must highlight that the heavenly Father will only give the ‘good gifts.’ A child might ask a parent for a dangerous object, like a knife, to play with, but a good parent knows that the object is dangerous, and the child might be injured. Likewise, with our Father, he knows what is good for us and what we need, as opposed to what we want. Whenever we pray, we should ask God to enlighten our hearts with his will.

Practical Suggestion

Reflect on God’s love for you, personally. It is through the very same love that we are assured that God knows us and our needs. So, strive to turn your fears into total trust in God.

Prayer

Almighty God, I pray this day that your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Help me to see things from your perspective and may I humbly seek your will in all things so that I may yield to you the appropriate fruits of Lent. Amen.

FRIDAY 26 FEBRUARY

Scripture

Matthew 5: 20 - 26

Reflection

Lent is a time for self-reflection. It calls for us to take a serious look at our attitude, behaviour and lifestyle and to be ready and willing to make any necessary changes according to God's Will for us.

Jesus condemns anger as a serious sin, no less serious than the sin of murder. Anger has often led to disastrous outcomes. Angry thoughts can lead to regrettable actions and behaviour. We say things when we are angry and later wish we could take back those words. Anger has resulted in people carrying out dreadful actions with dire consequences.

Jesus went on to explain that we cannot be reconciled to God until we have resolved any issues we have with others. This requires putting our pride aside and humbly asking for forgiveness from the other. It may mean making the first move and forgiving a person regardless of whether we think they deserve it or before they even ask for it.

In the Lord's Prayer we pray "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." We are asking God to forgive us only as much as we are willing to forgive others. This is quite a daunting realisation! As long as division exists between us and members of our family or the people in our community, how can we possibly ask God to forgive us and expect to be forgiven by Him?

It is God's will for our lives that we live in peace, harmony, and unity with Him and with one another. Jesus prayed "I pray that they may all be one. Father! May they be in us, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they be one, so that the world will believe that you sent me." (*John 17:21*)

God is always ready, willing and able to forgive us. The question is, are we prepared to forgive ourselves and others?

Practical Suggestion

If you battle with issues of anger management, now is the perfect time to make a concerted effort to control yourself, your slanderous thoughts, your hurtful words and your aggressive actions. Spend time thinking about the relationships which have broken down for whatever reason and make personal contact with those people. Try to resolve those issues and be reconciled with them.

Prayer

Father, help me to recognise those times when I allow my anger to get the better of me. Give me the gift of self-control. Assist me in my desire to be a more loving and forgiving person. Amen.

SATURDAY 27 FEBRUARY

Scripture

Matthew 5: 43 - 48

Reflection

Today Jesus describes the “Law” of the Gospel in His sermon on the mount, covering beatitudes such as “Happy the poor in spirit”; “Happy the gentle”; “Happy the merciful”, “Happy the pure in heart”.

Jesus said “Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets. I have not come to abolish but to fulfil them.” Jesus fulfilled the Law and the Prophets in many ways E.G: by His actions fulfilling many things prefigured in the Old Testament; by working through grace and the Holy Spirit to make us holy people; by sacrificing himself for the sins which made us transgressors of the Law; and by applying certain perfections to the Law for greater understanding of the Law or greater perfection of Justice.

In such perfections to the Law, Jesus did not add to the Law but explained the Law in greater detail E.G: you shall not murder, but you also should not get angry.

Jesus explained a variety of Laws in such a manner, covering murder, lust, divorce, oaths, and revenge.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus explained the inadequacy of loving our neighbour and hating our enemy. Instead love your neighbour AND your enemy. By praying for those who persecute us, we become more like children of our Father in heaven. Jesus Himself prayed for those who crucified him. When He was insulted, He did not retaliate with insults, and He made no threats even when being tortured.

By imitating Jesus, embracing His beatitudes, and having faith, we will certainly grow closer to Him and become purer in heart so that (one day) we shall see God.

Practical Suggestion

Come to know Jesus by reading the Gospels. Go to Mass as often as possible and experience the miracle of the Eucharist. Pray frequently.

Prayer

Father give us power through your Spirit for our hidden selves to grow strong, so that Christ may live in our hearts through faith, and with love we may know the love of Christ and be filled with the fullness of God. Amen.

These Daily Reflections for Lent 2021 are written by Fr. Desmond Nair, Irene Helsdon, Mike Montocchio, George Cominos, Fr. Wandile Cagwe, Veronica Donnelly and Andy McMichael.

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We wish you a fruitful and blessed Lenten Season.