

OUR LADY OF FATIMA PARISH

DURBAN NORTH

LENTEN REFLECTIONS 2021

THY WILL BE DONE



WEEK TWO

SUNDAY 28 FEBRUARY

Scripture: *Mark 9: 2 - 10*

Reflection

The transfiguration of Jesus marked a significant point in the ministry of Jesus. In chapter 10 of Mark's Gospel Jesus went to the district of Judaea and chapter 11 begins his Jerusalem ministry. Jesus knew that to do the will of the Father he had to go to Jerusalem where the religious leaders were, the heart of the Jewish faith.

He was under no illusion about the opposition he would encounter there from those who had grown accustomed to power and control over the lives of the people upon whom they imposed a multiplicity of laws, customs, rituals, and observances. They had no real love for God in their hearts. Jesus came to change hearts and to reveal a God of love, mercy, and compassion.

Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John he went up the mountain to pray and draw strength from God in order to face the hardships and challenges ahead. Here he was able to get some perspective, both physically and spiritually, about where he was coming from and where he was going to: physically from the relative quiet of the Galilee region to the turmoil of Jerusalem, and spiritually from being the fulfilment of the Law (Moses) and the Prophets (Elijah). The Father affirmed his Son through the appearance of Moses and Elijah and offered him a foretaste and vision of the glory that awaited him after the hardship, rejection, pain, suffering and death that lay ahead in Jerusalem.

Affirmed by the Father Jesus was able to come down from the mountain and set his face to Jerusalem. He was strengthened to endure and overcome whatever lay ahead.

This is precisely where we need to find ourselves at the beginning of this second week of Lent. We look back to where we have come from; more immediately from Ash Wednesday when we entered into this time of repentance with the words 'Repent and believe in the Gospel,' and where we are going to; the renewal of our faith and our lives at Easter! We also look back to the beginning of our journey of faith from our Baptism until now, and we look forward to what the lived reality of Baptism will lead us to, Eternal Life!

At Easter we will join the Catechumens dressed in white with our Baptism Candles in our hands and we will renew our faith. Like Jesus whose 'clothes became dazingly white, whiter than any earthly bleacher could make them' and whose 'face shone like the sun,' we will have a foretaste of the glory that awaits us!

Practical Suggestion:

Look ahead to Holy Week and Easter and prepare now to walk with Jesus through his passion, suffering and death to the glory of his resurrection. In his resurrection is our hope of Eternal Life!

Prayer

Father, strengthen me in my Lenten journey as you strengthened your Son Jesus. May I be faithful to my Lenten commitment so that I can become a better person and be born again at Easter. Amen.

MONDAY 1 MARCH

Scripture:

Luke 6: 36 – 38

“Be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate”

Reflection:

A Sister of the Servite community described compassion as ‘your pain in my heart.’ These words really get to the core of that emotion. When we are actually willing to carry someone else’s pain in our own hearts and minds, then we are truly on the way to discovering the real meaning of ‘unconditional love’!

We all like to think that we are compassionate people, but in reality, it is the thought that is more real than the actual feeling! The problem is that actually being compassionate people requires of us ACTION, not just words or platitudes.

For centuries people who believed in Jehovah, the one true God, did not see Him as compassionate and merciful. Therefore, if they were made in HIS image, there was no serious reason why they should be any different!

Jesus came to change all that! He came to show that God is indeed tender-hearted, loving, compassionate and merciful, and that we need to change the image of Him that we project in order that we may embrace his true nature and reflect all those qualities. That is what Jesus did throughout His interaction with people. He said that He was just doing ‘the Father’s will’.

Lent calls us to live compassion instead of just lauding the ‘nicety’ of it. It is an invitation to examine our hearts to see whose ‘pain’ we are carrying, and what we are doing about relieving it.

Practical Suggestion:

Is God calling you to perform some specific act of mercy? If so, answer His call. Spend some time reflecting on whether there is a difference between making a judgement and being judgmental.

Prayer

Lord, send Your Spirit into my heart to transform me and make me more like Your own. Help me extend mercy and compassion to all whom I meet. Amen.



TUESDAY 2 MARCH

Scripture: *Matthew 23: 1 - 12*

Reflection

Our focus this Lent is in DOING the will of God.
So easy to say – yet often so hard to actually do.

In today's Gospel Jesus chastises the Scribes and Pharisees for preaching *about* what should be done (and preaching correctly) but not actually *doing* what they are telling others to do. There are many examples of this type of 'talk the talk but not walk the walk' behaviour in our lives. My father was a heavy smoker yet told me not to smoke! Sometimes the 'doing what you say' is very hard. My dad struggled with his tobacco addiction for many years before finally giving it up at the age of 50. More troubling are the people in positions of authority; in government and even in the Church, who are caught doing immoral or criminal things. These transgressions often hit the news and form the subject of conversation around the braai or other social circles. We assume a position of moral uprightness for ourselves and become critical and judgemental of others.

Lent is a time for introspection, a time to reflect on our own lives. Instead of thinking critically of the 'Scribes and Pharisees' in our world, reflect on your own life. Do you put your faith first?

Are you contributing time and talents to the work and ministry of the church?

If you are involved, are you doing it for the status and recognition you gain in the community, or for the benefit of others and of service to God?

Are you creating burdens for other people without helping them to carry their burden?

Are you more concerned with your reputation and standing in the community than about the plight of others?

Are you guilty of not living out what you tell others to do?

Our focus through Lent and going forward should be to ACTIVELY WORK at doing the Will of God, bringing Glory to God and not to ourselves, and to be humble enough to repent and ask forgiveness each time we fail.

Practical Suggestion:

Consciously catch yourself being critical of the failings of others and stop. Identify one or two activities you can get involved in that will lift the burden others are bearing and undertake these activities quietly, effectively and for the benefit of others. Every evening reflect on what you should have done – but didn't do. Repent and ask God for His Forgiveness.

Prayer

Father I thank you for reminding me that I am also guilty of not walking the walk for which I ask forgiveness. Please give me the will, the courage, and the humility I need to do Your Will. Amen.

WEDNESDAY 3 MARCH

Scripture

Matthew 20: 17 - 28

Reflection

Jesus came to serve. He is our example in everything we do and, following his example we are called to serve one another. We have to abandon the attitude of 'everyone for himself/herself and God for us all.' We have to reset our deep internal motivation from its default mode of 'me, myself and I.' Why?

Our Lord, in the fullness of His humanity, loved His life right to His last breath and He knows that we will love our lives to the fullest extent possible when we help others. This help is the pinnacle of love as it is a love that demands all from us: our time, treasures, talents. This is *agape* – a love that calls for sacrifices and a love that truly manifests God-is-with-us.

Serving others imitates the life-giving intimacy that the love between God the Father and God the Son produces. So powerful is this love that it results in the person of the Holy Spirit. Jesus wants us to partake of this and become real children of God and enter into heaven after our life of earthly service.

The Creator has given to each of us some or all of the following: talents, resources, power, authority and a capacity to love; not just for our own self-advancement, but for the furthering of His kingdom on earth through reaching out to others and allowing others to reach out to us.

Many, many people feel confined within their hearts. They feel restricted, cornered and under the whip from deep within. Their lives feel limited.

Serving others gives our lives an infinite dimension of freedom because that is what love does to a person; it frees them and puts them directly into the light of God which removes the darkness, the fear, the anxiety which has become a pandemic worse than the Coronavirus.

Practical Suggestion:

During Lent especially, we are asked to pray and fast so that we empower ourselves to commit to a loving service of others.

Identify one area where you can serve others and try out the formula!!

Prayer

Holy Spirit of God, you renew the face of the earth when we all commit to serving one another. Fill my heart with a desire to do just this. Amen



THURSDAY 4 MARCH

Scripture: *Luke 16: 19 - 31*

Reflection

“The hunger for love is much more difficult to remove than the hunger for bread”
– Mother Teresa.

Catholics across the world are familiar with the three pillars of Lent: Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving. During Lent we are fundamentally called to repentance and conversion. Many of us, however, focus more on what we can give up as sacrifice to God. People draw up lists of things they would like to give up, usually material things.

Lent is not about giving up something for God or what we can sacrifice. All three pillars of Lent should derive from faith and love.

Without faith and love, prayer, fasting and almsgiving are easily turned into meaningless, religious rituals. Prayer, fasting and almsgiving are our expressions of our love of God and love of our neighbour, done in the spirit of conversion and repentance.

Mother Teresa who worked every day with the poor and marginalized people, suggests that people should hunger more for love than for bread. Lazarus was a beggar who was desperate to be fed with the scraps that fell from the rich man’s table. His immediate hunger, however, was for acknowledgement, love and acceptance; more than for the rich man’s bread Lazarus desired to be recognized and loved before he could be fed with food.

The rich man, on the other hand, was preoccupied with himself, more indulgent in his purple linen clothing and sumptuous feasts. He failed to even notice Lazarus at his gate. Like Lazarus, many people today are hungry for love, recognition and acknowledgement. This season of Lent calls us to open our eyes and see the many people around us who hunger, not just for food, but for recognition, love and acceptance - just like Lazarus.

Practical Suggestion:

Think about how you can reach out to those who are in need of love, and who hunger for recognition. Greet the person begging at the traffic light; acknowledge his or her presence. Just try it. It will make a difference to them – and to you!

Prayer:

Almighty God, thank you for the many gifts and good things you have blessed me with. Draw me into your divine life so that I can reach out to those who are in need. May everything that I do this Lent be inspired by love for you and my neighbour. Let your will be done in my life. Amen.



FRIDAY 5 MARCH

Scripture

Matthew 21: 33 - 46

Reflection

In today's parable, a landowner provides a vineyard and everything that would be required to produce an abundant harvest of grapes. He leases the vineyard to tenants who are overcome with greed, and at harvest time they refuse to give the landowner his rightful share of the produce.

They choose to keep the vineyard and all its yield for themselves.

While this parable was directed at the chief priests and scribes, we should also take His words to heart; *"The Kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit."*

At our Baptism we were given the gift of faith and became heirs of the Kingdom of God. The consequence of this is that we are expected to produce an abundance of the fruit of our faith. Faith calls us to bear good fruit. *"Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."* (James 2:17) James writes in verse 18: *"You have faith, and I have works. Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works."*

We all know people who are kind and generous and who do amazing work in the world. Many of them don't belong to our faith or profess to have any particular allegiance to any faith but are nevertheless considered to be wonderful people.

You don't have to have faith to be a good person, but as a person of faith, you do need to demonstrate your faith by the good things you do.

It is these actions which allow the love of God to shine through you to others.

It's very easy for the flame of faith to become a weakened flicker and eventually to die out altogether. For this reason Lent plays such an important part in the lives of the faithful. During Lent we are reminded to spend more time in prayer. We are encouraged to give up some of our worldly comforts and also to fast.

We are asked to demonstrate our faith by our generosity to the poor and the needy, by almsgiving. These are three of the most important ways in which we keep our faith alive and effective in our world today.

Practical Suggestion:

How are your Lenten resolutions going?

Don't beat yourself up if you have slipped up or come crashing down since Ash Wednesday. Just pick yourself up and dust yourself off and start again today.

God doesn't judge you. He is all-loving and is ready to bless even our smallest efforts; so, don't become despondent.

Prayer

Father, help me to see the opportunities where I can touch the lives of others by my kindness and generosity this week. Amen.

SATURDAY 6 MARCH

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

Reflection:

In Luke 15, the Pharisees and scribes complain that Jesus welcomes sinners and eats with them. In response Jesus tells them the 'prodigal son' parable.

A father (signifying God the Father) has two sons. The younger son asks for his inheritance and leaves his father's house for self-indulgence in a distant country. He does not value his father's love, but rather riches and pleasure. The father allows him to leave.

Pope Francis writes, God the Father works with us like this: He allows us to be free, even to making mistakes, because in creating us, He has given us the great gift of freedom, which we should put to good use. The father always carries his prodigal son in his heart; trustingly, he awaits his return; and watches the road in this hope. The son squanders his money in loose living, and ends up poor, sad, degraded, hungry, dirty and in rags, forced to work feeding pigs, mortifying for a Jew! The son examines his conscience, repents and decides to return to his father's house as a paid servant. The father sees the son returning and runs toward him, embraces him, kisses him, provides the finest robe, sandals, and ring. The fatted calf is killed, and a feast organised to celebrate the son's return. So much tenderness and welcome for a son who got into trouble!

The older son is indignant about the lavish treatment of his younger brother. He believes that he has been treated unfairly. He is envious, proud, self-sufficient and unforgiving. The father reminds him that they are always together, share everything, and he must welcome with joy his brother who has finally returned home.

The parable's father reveals the heart of God. He is the Merciful Father who, in Jesus, loves us beyond measure, always awaits our conversion every time we err; awaits our return when we turn away from Him; always ready to open His arms. "There is rejoicing among the angels of God over one repentant sinner." Lk 15:10.

Practical Suggestion:

Regularly examine your conscience and repent, preparatory to the Sacrament of Reconciliation this Lent.

Prayer:

But you Lord, God of tenderness and mercy, slow to anger, rich in faithful love and loyalty, turn to me and pity me. Give to your servant your strength, to the child of your servant your saving help. Amen. Psalm 86: 15-16

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.**