

Church of the Resurrection

Bryanston

Lenten Reflections 2021

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Thy will be done

JESUS SAID,
YOU MUST LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD
WITH ALL YOUR
HEART,
ALL YOUR SOUL,
AND ALL YOUR MIND. MATTHEW 22:37

WEEK THREE

SUNDAY 7 MARCH

Scripture: *John 2: 13 - 25*

Reflection

Have you ever heard the term 'righteous anger'? A search through Google will reveal some interesting results. This is what we observe in today's Gospel; the righteous anger of Jesus as he drove the money-changers and pigeon-sellers out of the temple.

It was just before Passover when Jesus went up to the temple. People were busy preparing for this holy event and there was great activity all around. It was a perfect opportunity to profit from the Passover festival. There was money to be made.

It offended Jesus to see the sacredness of the temple desecrated by the market-like atmosphere. No doubt those who were responsible for the temple were getting a cut out of all the trade and business being conducted. *"Take all this out of here and stop turning my Father's house into a market"* Jesus exclaimed.

Is there any place or anything that is sacred today? Sadly we have lost our sense of the sacred and have become like tourists wandering through sacred places with no real sense of where we really are. Along with a sense of the sacred come the gifts of wonder and awe given by the Holy Spirit. A person with wonder and awe knows that God is the perfection of all we desire: perfect knowledge, perfect goodness, perfect power, and perfect love. This gift is described by Thomas Aquinas as a fear of separating oneself from God and knowing that God is all powerful.

Our churches are sacred places because of the presence of Jesus in and through the Blessed Sacrament. In truth we should actually go down on our knees and bow with reverence on coming into the presence of the Lord. In honesty, however, we seldom take notice or are aware. How much we need to restore our sense of the sacred and rediscover the gifts of wonder and awe.

Lent provides an opportunity to restore our sense of the sacred. We may not have to remove our shoes as Moslems and Hindus do when entering their sacred places, or cover our heads as the Jews do, but both outwardly and inwardly we can develop a deep sense of reverence when entering into the sacred presence of the Lord.

Practical suggestion

Visit the church to spend a few minutes of quiet prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. Go to Mass earlier than usual and bring yourself into the awesome presence of God. If you are a parent, guide your children to an acceptance and understanding of what is sacred: the church, a rosary, the Bible, a crucifix etc. Let them see from your example that going into the church is very special and holy. For this reason we dress properly, check our behaviour and express reverence in the way we make the sign of the cross, genuflect and kneel in prayer – amongst other things.

Prayer

Lord, fill me with the spirit of wonder and awe. May I be always mindful of that which is sacred in my life and be an example to others. Amen.

MONDAY 8 MARCH

Scripture: *Luke 4: 24 – 30* *“No prophet is ever accepted in his own country”*

Reflection:

Jesus is experiencing rejection from the people of His hometown, Nazareth. They start out impressed by what He says, only to do a 180 degree turn and begin to criticize and spread doubt based on ‘who He is, who His family are, and their background!’

One of the flaws of humanity is our tendency to take the familiar for granted – be that a person, a place or a thing. We get all excited when someone famous comes to town to give a talk or conduct a seminar, and we enthuse to others about how great it all was, totally forgetting about all the more than competent speakers who live in our midst! We travel hundreds of miles to go and see the wonders of another country, while failing to notice or rave about the wonders of our own homeland!

And what about the people we take for granted; the faithful servant who works long hours day after day to ensure that we are comfortable and everything is shipshape, or the loving grandparent, still with us, who babysits, bakes, and welcomes us home with a smile after a hard day’s work?

Jesus was experiencing what most of the prophets endured; rejection of their message. Driven by the desire to do God’s will, they persevered in their mission to speak God’s truth. Jesus would do the same, right up to the moment of His death on the Cross!

Practical Suggestion

Consider whether there is a person close to you who is being 'taken for granted.' If so, find a practical way of showing appreciation to that person today.

Prayer

Jesus, You took nothing or nobody for granted. Help me to see with Your eyes, and to appreciate all and everyone around me. Amen.

TUESDAY 9 MARCH

Scripture: *Daniel 3: 25, 34 - 43*

Reflection

Former US president Harry S Truman is reputed to have worked his staff at a tremendous pace and put them under a lot of pressure to keep up with him and to deliver. When one of his staff complained he told them "If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen." When we are put to the test in our faith (when the heat is on us), do we have the courage and strength of faith to trust that God will be with us and will protect us or do we give up and "get out of the kitchen"?

The background to today's reading from the book of Daniel is a startling scene set in Babylon during the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar. The king built a golden statue and demanded that all people bow down and worship it or be burnt to death. What a test of faith! Three Hebrew officials in positions of authority refused to forsake their God and worship this statue. The king had them thrown into a burning furnace – "*and they walked into the heart of the flames praising God and blessing the Lord*" (Dan 3: 24) "*Azariah stood in the heart of the fire praying aloud thus:*" (Daniel 3:25) What follows in the reading is a beautiful prayer pleading with God that the faithful not be abandoned.

When we are put to the test, as we surely are every day, particularly during this time of Lent, do we give up and "get out of the kitchen" or do we stay in the fire and put our trust in God "that His will be done"? This prayer by Azariah is a prayer we could all read when in our times of pressure and when our faith is being tested. Then, through faithful prayer "*God will send the Angel of the Lord down into the furnace beside us to drive the flames of the fire outwards and allow to waft in a coolness of the breeze and dew so that the fire will not touch us.*" Daniel 3:49-50 – edited.

Practical Suggestion

Read chapter 3 of the Book of Daniel. Reflect on these four lessons we can learn and how they affect us: Lesson #1 – Azariah and his two colleagues were true

to God. Lesson #2 – They entrusted themselves into God’s hands. Lesson #3 – God was with them in their trials. Lesson #4 – God came through for them.

Prayer

Our Father in heaven, Your will be done. I place myself into your hands and trust that you will be with me when my faith in you and commitment to you are tested and when I lose my way. Thank you for the gift of your Holy Spirit who gives me courage to stay true and who guides me back to the right way. Amen

WEDNESDAY 10 MARCH

Scripture

Matthew 5: 17 - 19

Reflection

It is still early days in the public ministry of Jesus and He has just taught His followers the beatitudes. Prior to this magnificent exposition of how to be happy and blessed by God, He has healed a great number of people of their illnesses and a great multitude listened to His every Word.

Our Lord makes it clear that people are greatly mistaken if they think He has come to reveal a God totally different from the One revealed in the Old Testament. No, He has come to reveal that same God and the will of that same God and not His own will. He has come to perfect our understanding of God.

For centuries, the Jewish people have followed the Law of Moses drawn from the Ten Commandments some fifteen centuries before. That Law has been refined, developed and passed down through generations and it has become very cumbersome and people are burdened with adhering to the six hundred plus laws, bylaws and rituals. Jesus wants to perfect that Law so that it truly reflects the will of God and allows people to become genuinely holy.

This holiness has little to do with external perfection, extraordinary feats or a permanent inability to sin (an agenda pursued by the scribes and Pharisees). Rather it has to do with growing indefinitely in love for God and all our brothers and sisters. It is not a destination in itself, rather a life-long journey where God accompanies us for that entire journey. We must thus really appreciate that we have the stuff of saints, that we have a profound grace, through Baptism, to accomplish this.

In “fulfilling the Law for us”, the Saviour puts a real challenge in place that we use our free will to do God’s will! “Thy will be done” thus defines our lives.

Practical Suggestion

During this holy season of Lent, we must abide by the rules and traditions of the Church but at the same time internalise the reality that sticking to the rules and

traditions alone is pointless. Our efforts must move us forward in our love of God and neighbour – a love truly calling for sacrifices of time, resources and talents.

Prayer

Holy Spirit of God, we beg for the power of discernment in where we put our efforts during Lent 2021 and in spite of the lockdown. Amen.

THURSDAY 11 MARCH

Scripture

Jeremiah 7: 23 - 28

Reflection

Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and walk in all the way that I command you, that it maybe be well with you. Through the writings of the prophet Jeremiah, God calls us to listen to his voice and follow his commands. When Jeremiah proclaimed this message to the Israelites, these words would have triggered something in the people's hearts. A faithful Jew would have always mentioned Deuteronomy 6:4 in their daily prayers which says: *'Hear, O Israel.'* God always called them to keep faithful to their covenant by listening and honouring his voice.

Today, we still hear God inviting us to listen to his voice and follow his commands and not what our hearts desire. If we can look back at the first two Sundays of Lent, from the gospel of Mark, we reflected on Jesus' temptation in the desert and last Sunday we went up with Jesus to a mountain to behold his glory. Not only did we see the glory of Jesus but we also heard the Father's voice: *'Listen to him.'* Lent invites us to a deep active listening of God's voice.

Mountains and deserts were often a place where God encountered his people, where he changed their lives and send them back with an important message. This Lent we are called to move away from our noisy world, demanding schedules and other preoccupations. The Church has afforded us an opportunity to search for the voice of God inside our hearts. *"I am going to seduce her and lead her into the desert and speak to her heart"* Hosea 2:16. God always speaks to us tenderly, as a loving Father, but we are hard of hearing and we wander away from what he intends with our lives.

Practical Suggestion

Usually when we pray we like to speak to God and we hardly listen. It is very hard for us to listen. So, how can we listen to God? Read today's scripture from Jeremiah and choose a verse you would like to reflect on. Then spend 5 to 10

minutes rereading the verse and meditate on it. Think about how it applies to your life.

Prayer

Grant, almighty God, through the yearly observances of holy Lent, that I may grow to hear and understand your tender voice in my heart. Help me to follow your loving commandments that they may guide me on the right path. Amen

FRIDAY 12 MARCH

Scripture

Mark 12: 28 - 34

Reflection

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength and love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than this.”

In 1 John 4:8 we read “God is love” and so we were created by love in order to love. We are commanded to love God with every ounce of our being. With all our heart, the seat of our emotions; with all our soul, our spirituality; with all our mind, the seat of our intellect and all our strength which is a physical body. Jesus reiterates that we also have to love our neighbour as our self. In 1 John 4 :7 we read “Let us love one another, for love comes from God.” Therefore, love is our default setting.

If love truly is our default setting, why did God find it necessary to give us these commandments? Unfortunately, a virus entered our world in the form of sin. We sin when our thoughts and actions are devoid of love for God, for others or for ourselves.

The love which God is calling us to show, is not some wishy-washy, warm, fuzzy feeling. Of course there’s a time and a place for that. It is the love we have for God which stands strong in the face of hardships and adversity. It’s the love we have for others when we are able to share their joy and happiness when things are going well and to hold them up and support them when times are challenging. It is the love we have for the wonder of our entire being. The admiration we have for our amazing body and how it functions; our incredible, reasoning mind, our intuitive and compassionate heart and the precious gift of our faith.

Practical Suggestion

In your daily prayers, pray for any person who you feel may be persecuting you. (Matthew 5:44) and perform one act of kindness towards anyone you may consider to be your enemy (Luke 6:27).

Prayer

Father, you created me to love You and others, and to love myself. There are days when that feels like a tall order. Sometimes I wonder why You let bad things happen to me and those I care about, and then I really find it hard to love You. Sometimes it is unbelievably difficult to find anything to love about various people around me. It is at times like these that I ask you to pour out an extra portion of Your Holy Spirit and to change my hardness of heart to a heart of love. Amen.

SATURDAY 13 MARCH

Scripture

Luke 18: 9 - 14

Reflection: Jesus spoke a parable to some people who prided themselves on being virtuous and despised everyone else. The Pharisee prides himself on his virtuous acts, while the tax collector lowers himself and is humble in his prayer. Pope Francis writes: The Pharisee has an attitude which does not express thanksgiving to God for his blessings and his mercy, but rather self-satisfaction. The Pharisee feels himself justified, he feels his life is in order, he boasts of this, and he judges others from his pedestal. The tax collector, on the other hand, does not multiply words. His prayer is humble, sober, pervaded by a consciousness of his own unworthiness, of his own needs. Here is a man who truly realizes that he needs God's forgiveness and his mercy.

The sin of pride is an excessive preoccupation with self and one's importance, achievements, status, or possessions. Pride is rebellion against God because it attributes to one's self the honour and glory that belongs to God. St. Augustine writes that pride is to be feared in our very acts of virtue; otherwise, those praiseworthy acts will be lost through the desire of praise itself. Humility is the opposite of pride. St Theresa of Avila says that humility is truth. It is becoming aware of and accepting the truth of who we are. According to St Augustine, that humility is the foundation of all the other virtues, hence in the soul in which this virtue does not exist there cannot be any other virtue except in mere appearance. The first beatitude is "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven". A person who is humble is indeed "poor in spirit", unlike the proud.

Christ gives us a perfect example of humility: "His state was divine, yet He did not cling to His equality with God but emptied Himself to assume the condition

of a slave and became as men are; and being as all men are, He was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross." Philippians: 2: 6-8

Practical Suggestion: Always consider the other person to be better than yourself, so that nobody thinks of his/her own interests first but everybody thinks of other people's interests instead. Philippians: 2: 3-4

Prayer: My sacrifice, a contrite spirit. A humbled, contrite heart you will not spurn. (Psalm 51: 17)

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. Please acknowledge the authors when copying and distributing. We wish you a fruitful and blessed Lenten Season.