

LENTEN REFLECTIONS

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and
a friar on the journey . . .

From the Office of:
Justice, Peace
and
the Integrity of Creation

Province of St Barbara,

LENT

Reflections of Loren Kerkof, OFM

This humble effort at making some suggestions to open some doors for your imagination and creativity. It is an attempt to show some links between Catholic social teaching and the themes of Lent. It is based on the 1971 Synod of Bishop's insight that we should be encouraging the laity to take action on behalf of justice and to participate in the transformation of the world because this is a constitutive dimension of preaching the Gospel.

Do we realize how much Lent has changed? Lent is not about giving up candy or cigarettes, making the stations or garbing statues in purple. The Church is trying to restore Lent to its beginnings. As the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of Vat. II says: "Lent is marked by two themes, the baptismal and the penitential..." and "During Lent, penance should be not only inward and individual, but also outward and social."#109-110"

Lent is a 40-day retreat to prepare new Christians for baptism and to summon us as baptized Christians to welcome them into the community and to renew our own baptismal commitment. It is a time to remember *what and who we are as Church*. It is a time to "prepare joyfully for the mystery of Easter with minds and hearts renewed." And it is a time "to rejoice in the forgiveness of sins".

When we encourage the traditional practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving, we need to balance suggestions of *personal action with suggestions of social and communal action.*

Almsgiving should not be limited to charity to the poor but could also include other good works that promote justice for the poor and oppressed. Penance for sin should include both *personal* sin and also *social or structural* sin.

Opening Prayer

Loving and Merciful God, may these reflections help us to hear your Word of love anew and share it with those around us. May we prepare joyfully for the mystery of Easter when you began to fulfill your promise of a world renewed. Renew our baptismal commitment to live a life of love and to proclaim God's Kingdom of love, peace, justice, and freedom.

Amen



ASH Wednesday

Tom Messner, OFM

Return to me with your whole heart —.

Not just a partial return, but completely turning ourselves over to the Lord. Now is the very acceptable time to do this.

Lent is an opportunity to put first things first, giving the Lord his rightful place in our lives. Centering our desires and actions on the Lord brings us home again.

From a friar on the journey :

Haci como la creación aparentemente se destruye con el invierno, la primavera es para reparar y llenar la tierra de flores. Y la Cuaresma es la primavera para los cristianos. Durante el año nos hemos enfriado, nos hemos alejado de Dios. La Cuaresma es nuestra preparación. Entonces es para podernos acercar y llenarnos con el amor de Dios.

El Siglo VI esta definida a este aspecto y la Cuaresma empieza con el Miércoles de Ceniza y termina el Jueves Santo. La manera que nosotros podemos ocupar este tiempo de Cuaresma es con la oración, el ayuno, y con obras de caridad.

Jesús dice que nosotros demos limosna, pero no en la manera de los hipócritas, que lo hacían para que la gente los viera, pero para que solamente sepa el Padre Celestial. Por justicia hay que entender que la limosna se da como Jesús dice, “que no se entere tu mano izquierda de lo que hace la derecha.”

También habla de la oración. Dice que debemos hacer lo en nuestro hogar, con que nadie nos vea, no en las calles o plazas como lo hacían los hipócritas. Orar según Santa Teresa es hablar con Dios.

Pero de que hablaremos? Hablemos de lo que este lleno en nuestros corazones. Hablemos de nuestros sentimientos. Hablemos con Dios de tristeza, de alegrías, de fracaso, de problemas que estamos enfrentando, de problemas de la familia, del trabajo, de amigos, hablemos de nuestros éxitos. Necesitamos abrirle nuestro corazón a Dios. Dios no tiene teléfono, computadora, ni correo. El no tiene ninguna de estas cosas modernas, y es por eso que necesitamos hablar con el.

La escritura nos habla también del ayuno. Mortificamos nuestro cuerpo para que este listo para la oración. No tenemos que ayunar como los Fariseos, que lo hacían para que todos supieran. Lo hacían con caras tristes en las calles, olían mal con el cabello despeinado. Lo tenemos que hacer en nuestras casas, donde nadie nos vea, peinados, y perfumados.

El Ayuno que le gusta a Dios es como lo describe Izáis 18: 6, “Es compartir pan con los que no tienen.” También es lo que dice San Mateo 25: 31- 46 “Porque tuve hambre, y ustedes me dieron de comer; tuve sed, y me dieron de beber; fui forastero, y me dieron alojamiento; necesité ropa, y me vistieron; estuve enfermo, y me atendieron; estuve en la cárcel, y me visitaron.” Igualmente Jesús quiere que hagamos esto. Para poder vivir como dice Pedro, “Busquemos hacer el bien, no busquemos el mal, odiamos el mal, amemos el bien.”

La Cuaresma en un tiempo de preparación y renovación. No es para tomar las palabras de Dios y guardarlas en un saco roto, sino para que hagamos caso para poder decir como dijo San Pablo, ya no soy yo, sino es Cristo el que vive en mí.

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

Mark Schroeder, OFM

Way back when, I learned that “evil” spelled backwards is “live.” My theme for Lent this year is: to live! This Sunday’s familiar reading talks about the devil. I always wonder who first personified the concept of devil—made this so called “evil” as person-initiated....Nevertheless, I recognize that the teachings of Jesus are all about living. Living on the Word. Living uprightly. Living in full confidence of God’s Power.

Look what it leads to—service. Matthew ends this reading with a reminder that Lent is about service. I read nothing here about giving-up candy nor cigarettes nor other things that are unhealthy anyway. What are you gonna do this Lent—to live!

Tom Messner, OFM

For forty days and forty nights we can review our lives and fix what we see needs repairing. We can fast as the Lord did or give up what we know is harmful for us. Adam sinned by dis-obeying God and we can make up for our sins by changing our lives to be more in conformity with the Lord’s life.

Patricia Proctor, OSC

In our community we once knew of a man who had severe mental problems. His sister was helping him to cope and he seemed to be doing very well. Then one day he went to a place for help and there were a bunch of young people who started making fun of him. He was so angry and upset that when he went home he would not talk or see anyone. When his sister went to see him and help him, he lashed out at her and killed her. He then of course was up for murder. But one wonders... who was really responsible?

Our actions no matter how seemingly small may play a larger role than we know. It is the same way with our actions for good. Who knows what even a smile might do for someone who is dire need?

Norberta Villaseñor, OSF

In the First Reading, Adam and Eve did not listen to God and this brought about death. In the Responsorial Psalm, we recognize God's mercy. In the Second Reading, Paul writes that Jesus' obedience brought life. To conclude, the Gospel recounts the temptations of Jesus and how he listened to God.

Jesus responded with passages from the Hebrew Scriptures, which makes me think that Jesus also knew the passage from Micah where it says, "This is what the Lord asks of you: only this, to act justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly with your God." (6:8)

Jesus was in the desert and fasted for forty days. Out of this experience Jesus could later in his ministry identify with all the people that he encountered; Jesus fed the hungry, healed the sick, freed the slaves, talked to women and walked his talk. As a result of his going through this experience in the desert, Jesus grew in wisdom and understanding.

We have people who have paved the road for us, such as Jesus, Martin Luther King Jr., Cesar Chavez, Dorothy Day and many more who listened to God. In our time we are experiencing a culture of fear, violence and death. What am I doing to bring hope, peace and love to our world? How do I respond to desert experiences? Do I encounter the temptations of life as opportunities to grow and gain insight like Jesus, or do I act like Adam and Eve?

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

Mark Schroeder, OFM

Do not be afraid—to live! To live life abundantly, selflessly, courageously. When we are surrounded by politicians vying for prestige, don't you wonder who is speaking the truth?

I mean, really. Rhetoric is a learned skill, and it seems that each politician says they are able to build a bigger and fancier tent than his (or her, finally) predecessor. Yet like Jesus to Peter, the response is nothing about promises, campaign spending, nor platforms. It's about living. Living as a beloved child of God.

So, your homework—when alone, peer into a mirror, and say three times aloud, “You, _____ [insert your first name] are my beloved child; I am well pleased with you.”

After doing that, come down off that mountain and go for a walk. Literally, go outside and walk for 30 minutes. Take along a piece of paper if you need, and write down anything new or unusual that you spot as you walk along. Here is a little secret: all of Creation is beloved.

Tom Messner, OFM

God showers upon us many blessings and graces as He did for Abram, Peter, James, and John. We need to take time to thank God for so much that he has given us. And, in turn, let us be a blessing for those who people our world. What we have received freely, we should give freely too.

Colleen Byrne, OSC

St. Matthew's Transfiguration account touches me in a profound way because ordinary men were given an extraordinary experience of the Lord. I have found that the Lord uses a variety of ordinary people and events to give me "small mountaintop experiences" of Himself. When I go with Sr. Patricia to see her mom at an assisted-living facility, there are many folks living there that are quite frail. Some are mentally failing and others are physically weakening. Most of them will give me a smile or wave anyway, in spite of their infirmities.

What strikes me about these people is the innocence of their lives at this stage. I get a real sense of the presence of the Lord, especially if they're developmentally disabled. As our former chaplain, Fr. Sebastian Drake, would say, "The kingdom of God is breaking through." It seems that as they're approaching eternity, Eternity is coming from within them. When Paul told Timothy in the second reading, that God has called us to a holy life, according to his own design, I can see it in these folks. God's design is being worked out in them – they can't see it, but it is there.

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

Mark Schroeder, OFM

During Lent, I have been focusing on the theme—to live! In today’s Gospel from John, our friend Jesus says that he is the “living water.” I easily see this living water idea come alive every Sunday afternoon. There are a group of farm-workers who camp out in Carlsbad (California), six miles from my home. For the last seven years, a mother and father and their two sons unload those large 2 ½ gallon plastic jugs of water—one for each worker. With smiles on their faces, they freely give away this vital necessity. Have you ever camped out? Where did you get your drinking water? Do you realize that across this country of ours, thousands of farm-workers need drinking water. Living water. Daily.

You eat fruit and vegetables daily, right? Well, the people who plant them and harvest them are farm-workers. Are there farm-workers in your locale that need your assistance?

Tom Messner, OFM

We all thirst for the water that will not end from the well of Jesus Christ. It takes faith to believe that Jesus will satisfy our thirsts and hungers as well. The Samaritan woman gives us an example for she came to believe in Jesus and proclaimed her faith to all the other villagers. Let us proclaim to others all that the Lord has done for us.

Dorothy McCormack, OSF

In today's readings we are faced with the experience of THIRST. The people grumbled against Moses in their thirst for water. Jesus, tired from his journey, was thirsty and asked the Samaritan woman for a drink. She, too, was thirsty but not for well water. She had suffered thirst most of her life, having sought in vain for that which would quench her thirsting spirit. Where do I look for "living water?" in power, wealth, status, sex, independence, or relationship, communion, solidarity?

Jesus enters into dialogue with her, gently inviting her to look within to discover the Spirit – living water that will quench her thirst – eternal life. She accepts Jesus invitation and, in the process, is satiated and then becomes a bearer of the Word. As the Samaritan woman opened herself to receive this "living water," am I open to drink of this "living water" and then share it with others who thirst, as did she, for justice, peace, and love?

"If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts."

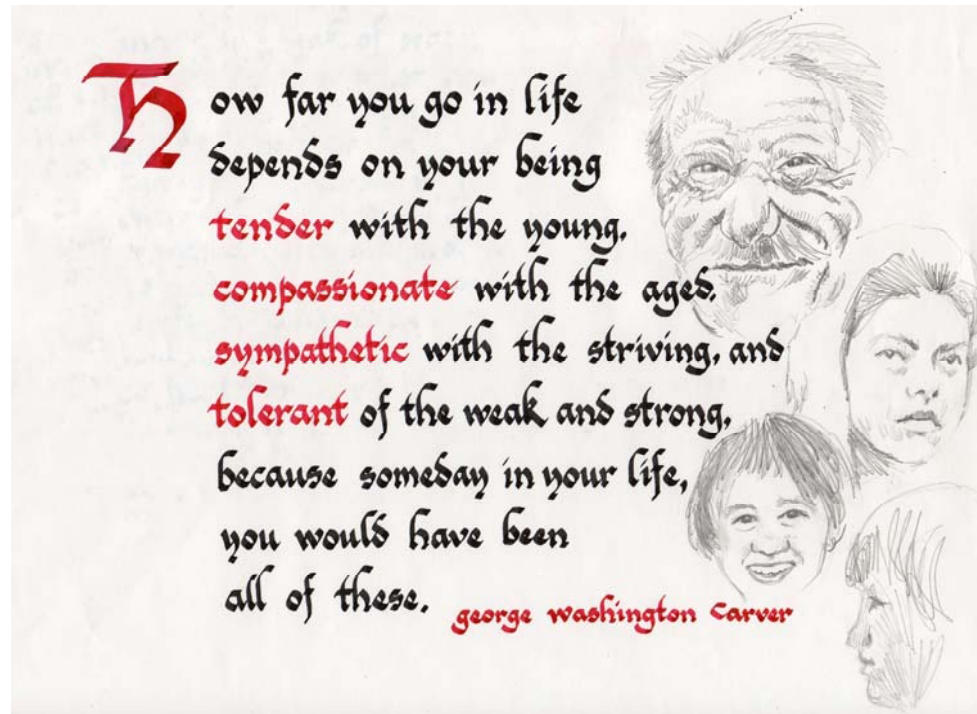
THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

Sheral Marshall, OSF

As I reflected recently on the story of the Samaritan woman, I asked myself more deeply than usually: Who **was** this woman? She was, of course, a second class believer in the eyes of observant Jews. She was a second class human being as a woman in a totally patriarchal society. And she must have been considered the lowest of the low by the other women, since she preferred the heat of the day to interacting with them as they drew water in the coolness of early morning. Many of us in a similar life situation would have an abysmal sense of ourselves, but not this woman. She breaks the taboo of speaking with a man with whom she is not related, and a Jew at that! She communicates with him as an equal, responding to his statements and engaging him in a theological discussion. She holds her own and is not even distracted by his comment about her husbands. She is a believer and a thoughtful one at that. She is so excited about what he tells her that she forgets her supposedly inferior status and goes off to spread the news. She wants to tell those who don't accept her of the marvelous encounter she has had. Could he be the Christ?

Isn't she an unlikely proclaimer of the Word? Isn't it amazing that Jesus chose her as the one to whom he reveals his identity? And isn't it fascinating that the people who seemingly shunned her are open enough to her message that they drop what they are doing, in the heat of the day, and come out to see for themselves?

How about us? Are we open to hearing the Word from people we least expect? The Turkish Muslim women whom I am getting to know have are the very incarnation of Jesus' gospel of peace, through their praying five times a day and honestly trying to live an honorable life. How ironic that the Qur'an states that it would be unfitting for Allah to have a son, yet Allah is so very present in these daughters!



Calligraphy by F. Fong, OFM, Drawings by Joseph Abando

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

Mark Schroeder, OFM

This Gospel story is about sight. That's so easy to see!!! You've made it half-way through Lent. Time now to look around your house. Look at all the gadgets and appliances. Isn't Lent about simplifying? About really living without trappings; therefore, to live centered in Christ....Here is an idea I stole, coming from a book titled "Sabbath," by Wayne Miller. See if you can do this for one week. Starting today.

Pick an Appliance, Any Appliance

Sabbath can only begin if we close the factory, turn out the lights, turn off the computer, and withdraw from the concerns of the marketplace. Choose at least one heavily used appliance or device — the telephone, television, computer, washer/dryer — and don't use it for a Sabbath period. Whether it is a morning, afternoon, or entire day, surrender to a quality of time when you will not be disturbed, seduced, or responsive to what our technologies have to offer. Notice how you respond to its absence.

Tom Messner, OFM

We do not see as God sees. We see externals and God sees the heart. He sees through the darkness. In the gospel, he gives sight to a man born blind. He gives the gift of sight which he has given us also. Oh, that we may see all the injustice in our world strive to rectify it. That we may see the needs of the poor and seek to meet them.

Robert Rodrigues, OFM

Jesus answered, “Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him. We have to do the works of the one who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” When he had said this, (he spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva, and smeared clay on his eyes, and said to him, “Go wash in the Pool of Siloam”—which means *Sent*. So he went and washed, and came back able to see.

We have in this gospel reading images of light, darkness, blindness, sight, healing, cleansing and being sent. We read about a blind man who in his encounter with Jesus can see again, he is no longer in the dark but in the light and in this light he recognizes who Jesus is, the Son of God.

But soon after this he is brought (sent) to the Pharisees who want to keep this man in darkness, they cannot believe in his healing, mostly because they are stuck in their tradition (worried about healings on the Sabbath, and everyone’s sinfulness) and so they cannot see that a new way is bursting forth, they cannot see the kingdom of God that Jesus preaches which is not about power and control and darkness but it is about justice, peace, and empowerment of moving people from the darkness of that which may oppress them to the light of God’s love and freedom. This scares the Pharisees who spend much of their energy trying to push him back into the dark where they can label him, and control him. (continued on next page. . .)

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

Robert Rodrigues, OFM (continued)

They even go so far as to drag in his parents to prove their point. They wisely toss it back to their son, who now being in the light stands firm in it and refuses to go back into the darkness. For in the darkness he experienced oppression, fear, ridicule, helplessness, dependency and most likely an inner death. And now in the light he has life and he acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God by simply saying, *I do believe, Lord.*

Sadly, and even with some arrogance the Pharisees standing firm say to Jesus, *Surely we are not also blind, are we?* They chose not to get it, too much is at stake for them, so they remain in the darkness.

As we continue our Lenten journey let us look for ways that we can bring God's people and our brothers into the light of God's kingdom, a kingdom where love, mercy, compassion, justice and empowerment, are freely given as gift. Let us work for ways to help those in darkness to see and let those who are in the Light be sent to stand before those places of darkness where God's light needs to shine.



Consult not
your fears,
but your hopes
and dreams.

Pope John XXIII

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

Mark Schroeder, OFM

My theme this Lent remains focused on—to live! Ah, now the familiar story about Lazarus. First he is ill; then he dies. Jesus responds to a distraught Martha with a simple, “I am the resurrection and the life.” The Christ is the Life...Jesus proceeds to the village, deeply troubled. “And Jesus wept.” And pay attention to what the Jews saw in those tears, “See how he loved him.” To live—Life—is to love—Love.

There is a friar who will read these reflections this Lent from a jail cell, having finished five months of his six-month sentence. His name is Louie Vitale. And he knows about Life, and literally placing his body-and-soul on the front line of standing tall for human rights. It's easy for me to label that “Love.”.... Louie knows that our U.S. Army has a school at Fort Hauchuca, Arizona, that teaches interrogation tactics; he attempted to deliver a letter to the commander of the base, asking for a radical end to this school of violence. He along with another priest was arrested....If you asked him why he'd risk arrest, Louie would talk about resurrection. Like the story of how Jesus responds to Martha and Mary, Louie sees Life as stronger than death, Love as stronger than violence.

Tom Messner, OFM

In the gospel today, Jesus gives new life to Lazarus. He will do the same for us now and in eternity. Thus he fulfills our hopes

What are our hopes this Lent?
What kind of new life do we seek?

It is our opportunity to live a life more dedicated to God. Turning aside the temptations that surround us. It is also our chance to give new life to others by giving them another chance with us.

FAITH

I believe in the SUN even when
the SUN isn't shining.
I believe in LOVE even when
I don't feel it.
I believe in GOD even when
GOD is silent.

ASH WEDNESDAY

Jl 2:12-18

Psalm 51:3-4, 5-6ab, 12-13, 14 and 17

2 Corinthians 5:20—6:2

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

First Sunday of Lent

Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7

Psalms 51:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 17

Romans 5:12-19 or 5:12, 17-19

Matthew 4:1-11

Second Sunday of Lent

Genesis 12:1-4a

Psalm 33:4-5, 18-19, 20, 22

2 Timothy 1:8b-10

Matthew 17:1-9

Third Sunday of Lent

Exodus 17:3-7

Psalm 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9

Romans 5:1-2, 5-8

John 4:5-42

Fourth Sunday of Lent

1 Samuel 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a

Ephesians 5:8-14

John 9:1-41

Fifth Sunday of Lent

Ezekial 37:12-14

Romans 8: 8-11

John 11: 1-45