

First Sunday of Lent (3/1/09)

At the beginning of Lent we hear God making a new covenant with humanity. The message of the flood reminds us that God wants us to wash away our sins and turn back to God with our whole heart. When we have been washed clean through our humble and true repentance, God will restore us to His blessings.

The purpose of Lent is to help us draw closer to Jesus. In order to celebrate His resurrection at Easter we must first go through our own wilderness experience of temptation. Just as Jesus was tempted constantly in the desert for 40 days, so we will be tempted during our 40 days. Are we prepared for persevering through temptation? Temptation can actually make us stronger, if we use it to clearly see the choices we have. Of course, Satan never wants us to see things clearly. He always has a little spin on the truth to lead us astray. This is why it is so important to focus on Jesus and His life and His sacrifice for us during this season.

As we cooperate with God's grace to purify our hearts and remove irrelevant things to make room and time for Jesus, we will almost certainly encounter ups and downs. We must simply flow with God's grace through any obstacles, for it is God who will strengthen us. And God works His best at strengthening us when we are completely helpless and weak. We don't like being helpless. But it is only when we allow ourselves to recognize our spiritual weakness that we can then allow Jesus to fill us with His grace and strength.

My prayer this Lent is that we may all allow ourselves to be emptied of all distractions and allow the grace of the cross to lead us through Lent to the glory of the Resurrection. Amen!

Second Sunday of Lent (3/8/09)

As our first reading reminds us today, God sometimes puts His faithful people to the test. God's testing is for our benefit not His, since God already knows how we will respond. God wants us to struggle with the questions of life, especially "What does God want of me?" In the struggle we define ourselves in relationship to God. Do we insist, as some halfhearted disciples do, on understanding God's complete plan before we say yes? Or can we simply obey, while at the same time struggling to understand? That was St. Anselm's credo in the 12th century, "Faith seeking understanding." Too many so-called believers in God won't obey unless and until they understand and agree with God's will.

God has certainly demonstrated for us the depth of His love for us through the Paschal Mystery. Why do we still hesitate to trust His will? Abraham was unswerving in his obedience even when it seemed outrageous. Why do we struggle so much even after God showed us His love in the obedience of His Son Jesus? Let me give one example. God has called us to respect all human life, made in God's own image. Yet our generation has supported, legalized, and made ACCEPTABLE the killing of human life through abortion in this country. We have for some 40 years consistently gone along with politicians who favor this killing of God's life. Did the last election show that some so-called Catholics and Christians chose to be obedient to a particular political party rather than to God? Do we try to justify abortion by confusing the right to life with other issues that are important but lesser goods, e.g. caring for the poor? Do we listen to Jesus, as the gospel tells us, or do we listen to Satan's deceptions?

Satan's greatest triumph is to get us to support abortion and not see it as something bad. Each abortion kills at least three lives. It kills the child in the womb, it kills the mother, and it kills the abortionist. In addition, it may also kill the father, those who assist in the abortion, and those who support abortion. Abortion kills the child physically, but kills the others spiritually. Those who support the right to abortion are dead to God unless they repent and work for the protection of God's human life.

I hope you better understand how grave the issue of abortion is and why I am compelled, for the spiritual welfare of God's people in His Church, to speak out. May this Lent be a time of true repentance and obedience to God. Amen!

Third Sunday of Lent (3/15/09)

We are using Cycle A readings for the 3rd, 4th, and 5th Sundays of Lent because of the discipleship journey of those preparing to enter the Church at Easter. This weekend, the readings remind all of us on our journey of faith that Jesus is the source of “living” water. This water cleanses us from sin in Baptism, and refreshes and strengthens us for our journey. Just as water is a source of life in the desert, the living water (grace) from Jesus is the source of eternal life. With this grace we flourish and grow and become beautiful and fruitful for others on our journey.

In the physical world, we know when we are thirsty. Our body tells us. In the Spiritual world, however, we often do not recognize when we are thirsty for life-giving grace. We can fill our spiritual well with non-life-giving thoughts and activities that actually lead us away from an understanding of our spiritual thirst. The only way to recognize this thirst is to empty our hearts and minds of extraneous thoughts and actions. Only then can we sense our emptiness. Having emptied ourselves, we are ready to fill our minds and hearts with life-giving grace from our God. This process of emptying and refilling is essential for our spiritual growth.

Lent is a perfect opportunity for us to focus on this process. Prayer, fasting and almsgiving, all three, help us empty ourselves and recognize our need for God’s grace. And since God never forces His grace upon us, it is only when we make room for God in our lives that we can actually receive His life. May God bless us on our continuing Lenten journey. Amen!

Fourth Sunday of Lent (3/22/09)

The gift of sight is amazing. There are so many beautiful things to see in this world that really move our hearts to wonder and awe. Colors! How amazing they are in all their color and texture and hues. Each day is an incredible opportunity to witness beauty in all its many appearances. The seasons of the year cycle us through an amazing adventure of color and sight. We appreciate color all the more through its muting during winter, and then are ready to sing with the birds in spring.

Amazing as it is, sight can often lead to blindness. Sometimes we can look at something and not see the fullness of reality. Sometimes people see what they want to see and not what is actually there. And that's just with normal sight! When it comes to spiritual sight, it is much harder to distinguish reality from perception. As an example, all of the sacraments, but especially the Eucharist, have an appearance that can deceive. Someone without faith sees bread and wine, someone with faith sees the Body and Blood of our Lord and Savior. Deeper faith sees also the depth of God's Love for us in the humility of the Incarnation and Redemption. An all-knowing and all-powerful God offers Himself as a sacrifice to become the source of reconciling Grace for all who wish to receive it. How beautiful is that!

All of our sins, imperfections, fears, prejudices, etc. can blind us to the ever-present gift of God's Love in the ordinary things of everyday life. If we use the grace of this season of Lent, we will be able to see deeper beauty in God's Love for each of us and for all of us. Starting with those closest to us, may we work on cooperating with God's grace to reduce and remove our blindness. Then we will see more beauty and become ever more beautiful ourselves as a reflection of God's Love for all to see. Amen!

Fifth Sunday of Lent (3/29/09)

The Paschal Mystery is often shortened to the concise saying, "Dying and Rising." But perhaps it is too short to do justice to the most important theological principle in the entire Scriptures. Jesus, fully God and fully Human, gave himself up on the cross in obedience to the Father's will of Love, in order that we might be saved from the effects of sin. Jesus is the source of salvation and grace for all who acknowledge their sins and ask forgiveness. Like the grain of wheat, He died to His own wishes (to live and avoid pain and suffering) and therefore produced the grace of life for all.

Although pain and suffering were not God's original will for humanity, they are nonetheless real in the world as a result of sin. Every disciple of Christ has the choice of accepting suffering in the same way as Jesus, in obedience to the Love of God. Out of Love we can offer our suffering to be joined with the suffering of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins of our brothers and sisters. In that way we die to self and allow grace to flow from our choice to suffer in love. Our lives become an imitation of Jesus when we offer all for the glory of God.

May God bless our selfless sacrifices for others, and may we grow closer to Jesus through our love in action. Amen!