

Palm Sunday (04/17/11)

Holy Week begins with the reading of the Passion at all masses on Palm Sunday. The reading sets the stage for the events of Holy Week; Holy Thursday commemorating the Institution of the Eucharist; Good Friday commemorating the suffering and death of Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins; Easter Vigil begins the celebration of Christ's triumph over sin and death through His resurrection. As a whole, Holy Week is meant to be a sobering reminder of the depth of Christ's suffering for us. That depth of suffering represents the infinite love of God for us. Jesus willingly gave up His power as God to live with us, to completely identify with our struggles against temptation and evil. Because of the fullness of His humanity, Jesus takes upon Himself all of the sins of our human condition. Because of the fullness of His divinity, Jesus becomes the eternal high priest offering Himself for our salvation.

This week is our final opportunity this Lenten season to reflect on our lives and our response to Jesus' offering for us. Do we really understand how much He suffered for us? Do we really understand how much He loves us? Jesus suffered and died so that each of us could be forgiven our sins and live in the Spirit as His witnesses in the world. Does our daily life reflect our picking up our cross and following Jesus? It is only through our participation in His cross that we can come to the power of the resurrection. May this Holy Week help us to appreciate Jesus' love for each of us, and may it truly be holy for us! Amen!

The Fifth Sunday of Lent (04/10/11)

The fifth Sunday of Lent moves to a universal concern, life and death. Jesus comes to Bethany after Lazarus has been dead for four days. He delays in coming so that his disciples will see His last great work before His passion. His disciples will need that strength before undergoing their own trials of doubt during the suffering and death of Jesus. They won't understand at the time, but after the resurrection they will remember and see the raising of Lazarus as a foreshadowing of Jesus' own rising. The major difference though is that Lazarus was resuscitated to the same human life he had before he died whereas Jesus is resurrected to a completely new level of life in the Spirit, a life not bound by space and time.

The resurrection means nothing to those who have no faith. But with faith comes a deepening awareness that the universe, and my own individual life, is changed forever. We still live in time but with a much greater awareness that what we do in time for the Lord with our lives is extremely important. We are not like livestock in a pen waiting to be slaughtered. Rather, we live in awareness that we are baptized into a life with Christ in the Spirit even as we continue to live our normal lives. Our lives become a sharing in the life of Christ who came that we might have life, and have it to the full. The fullness of our life in time comes from serving the Lord and one another with our lives, with the different gifts the Lord has given us. As long as we have faith in the resurrection of Jesus and our future resurrection, life takes on new and poignant meaning. We no longer have to fear death. May our faith free us from all the constraints and fears that keep us from being Christlike to others. May we find the fullness of Life Jesus wishes us to share, beginning here and now, in Longmont, Colorado! Amen

The Fourth Sunday of Lent (04/03/11)

Continuing from last week's reading on the personal encounter with Jesus (the woman at the well) and His desire to move into our personal lives to heal any brokenness, today's gospel of the healing of the man born blind reminds us that we must be careful how we interpret encounters with God and His church. The Pharisees did not like that Jesus healed on the Sabbath when no work was allowed. They judged that the healing was a disobedience to God's law. But they failed to distinguish between good and evil in the healing. Instead of rejoicing with the healed man, they questioned him to find some reason to attack Jesus. You may sometimes hear me speak about Protestantism in a critical way. I firmly believe that, although reform is always needed in the church and in each of us, the proper way Jesus would want us to work on reform is from within the church. Luther and other Protestant reformers were too impatient, too proud to allow time for the reforms to work from within. They failed to respect Jesus' prayer at the last supper: I pray, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you; John 17:21-22. But, that does not mean that Protestants, as well as people of other religions, do not love God and do good things in His name. They do, and we should honor the good that anyone does, while always praying that all Christians may one day be united. Unfortunately, as a world we are still going in the wrong direction, with more division in the Body of Christ each year.

Individually, we must be careful we do not judge others (although we always must judge behavior). We judge actions so that we can learn from them and teach others the good things of God's will for us. But only God can judge a person. Each of us is a pilgrim on the road of life, given instruction from God down through the ages through His prophets and Church. Each generation we must apply God's teachings to new circumstances in a way that honors God's will, always keeping our eyes and hearts open to hear God's will. If we do that, we will celebrate with the eyes of faith God's incredible love in our lives and in the world. Amen!

The Third Sunday of Lent (03/27/11)

Today's reading is the gospel of the woman at the well. It is the story of the early church's experience of the faith journey. The woman is the church, she is you and me. When we first come to an experience of Christ our eyes are not yet opened. But if we are open to the truth and continue the dialog of our life with Christ we will gradually begin to understand who we are in relation to Christ, who wants desperately to give us the water of life. Even when we do not completely understand our mission as disciples, Jesus entrusts us with the task of spreading the gospel message. The woman grows in her understanding with the titles she uses for Jesus: sir, prophet, Messiah. Believing that Jesus is the Messiah, she immediately goes and tells others, even those with whom she does not have good relations (she is an outcast because she comes to the well by herself, very uncommon, and she has had 5 husbands). Through her testimony many others come to believe in Jesus.

We too are called to be testifiers for Jesus, primarily by the way we live our lives. Do you think someone looking at our lives could tell we are disciples of Jesus? If we are strong in our faith we will attract others to Christ. If we are weak we will not. Let us choose through this Lenten season to grow stronger in our witness to Christ in the world, in our everyday life. We will face persecution for standing up for Jesus' teaching but we will have the living water and bread of life to help us!

The Second Sunday of Lent (03/20/11)

One of my favorite prayers is to ask God to handle my problems so that I don't have to! Wouldn't that be great? But the reality is that each of us must do the preparation work for our own growth. It is God, of course, who inspires us to want to change so that we grow more loving, and it is God who strengthens us for the work. But we must each do the work of transformation by facing our darkness and using the light of Christ to guide us. It would certainly be nice to stay up on the mountaintop of the Transfiguration with Peter, James and John. But we, like them, have to follow Jesus down the mountain to carry our cross, to face the troubles of life.

Jesus will often give us moments of enlightenment and joy to strengthen us for our faith journey. These can be like the disciples' joy on the mountaintop. But then the Lord wants us to come down off the mountain and work with His grace to change our hearts and to change the world. It is indeed refreshing to know that we don't have to face all our troubles by ourselves. God will always be with us. Having been blessed by the Lord, we are asked to be a blessing to others, just as God informed Abram. May this Lenten journey bring us closer to our Loving Master and help us to help others to see His light. Amen!

The First Sunday of Lent (03/13/11)

It is very fitting that at the beginning of Lent we hear the basic story of temptation, beginning at creation and up to the time of Jesus. Temptation is what draws us away from God. We live indeed to determine good from evil, and to do good and avoid evil. Satan of course doesn't want to make it easy for us. You notice how conniving he is with Adam and Eve, changes the truth subtly and lies very easily. But temptation isn't what leads to sin, it is our inability to recognize the truth of temptation. The woman saw that the tree was good for food, pleasing to the eye, and desirable for gaining wisdom; (Gen. 3:5). Because her desires dimmed her vision, Eve failed to see the truth that, although the fruit looked good, she would have to disobey God if she ate the fruit.

That really is the essence of sin for most people. It is our failure to recognize the truth of any temptation because of a greater desire for something else, whether it's a good thing that requires us doing something bad to get, or a failure to do something that is hard but good (accepting responsibility for our creative actions). For example, truth tells us that abortion is the killing of a human life, which starts at conception. But our desire to be freed from responsibility for our human sexuality leads us to accept the deadly sin of abortion. We choose to ignore the truth that engaging in the act of creation is designed by nature to result in the conception of a new human life, within the context of a married husband and wife committed to the protection and education of the child. When we clear away the smoke and mirrors Satan creates and look at the issue clearly, we see that as a society we value sexual irresponsibility over human life itself, since we do little to change that value through the political process.

Another lie, and this is Satan at his best, is that we have convinced ourselves that the sacrifice (killing) of the human life of the fetus through embryonic stem cell research is necessary in order to possibly cure many devastating diseases. We blind ourselves to the truth because we want the desired results and

because we don't have to personally destroy the embryo. Thus, we make ourselves gods with the power of life and death over others. We turn away from God. Let us use this Lent as an opportunity to rededicate ourselves to God and His teachings. Let us ask for the grace to recognize temptation, and the strength to overcome it to serve the Lord with our whole heart, mind and being. Jesus gives us the grace to overcome evil and temptation. Let us accept that grace and reflect Christ's light in our lives for all to see! Amen!