

Our Lady of Lourdes Parish

Westville

Lenten Programme 2019

**Come back to me
with all your heart**



WEEK ONE

SUNDAY 10 MARCH

Scripture: *Luke 4: 1 - 13*

Reflection

There is a very strong possibility that you have already experienced strong temptations to abandon the Lenten resolution you embraced on Ash Wednesday. Perhaps you have already given up!

Temptation strikes at the very heart of all our good intentions, resolutions, decisions and plans. After all, if Jesus was subject to serious temptation at a crucial time in his life what chance do we have?

How did he resist temptation? It was through the Holy Spirit, Prayer and Scripture – even when Scripture was used against him! Having been tempted in every way that we are, we must know that he is with us to strengthen us as we begin our Lenten Journey. Today we open ourselves to the presence, power, help and guidance of the Holy Spirit. We draw strength from Jesus through the Holy Eucharist, and we allow his Word to be a ‘lamp for our steps and a light for our path’.

It’s not going to be easy – we must know that! But we must also know that we have all the help we need. Today fix your eyes on the goal of Lent: the renewal of our faith (as well as our hearts, minds and our whole being) at Easter when we celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus and renew our Baptismal vows. We need to be determined to emerge at the end of this Lenten Journey with our hearts changed, a better person, renewed in faith and with an absolute resolve never to return to the sins, faults, failings and lifestyle of the past. Each Lent draws us to our ultimate goal and destination – Eternal Life. If we live with him, endure with him, suffer with him and die with him – we shall most certainly rise with him!

Practical suggestion

Look at the parish's weekday Mass schedule. Make an special effort to attend at least one weekday Mass as well as Stations of the Cross this week. Allow yourself to be strengthened by Jesus in the Holy Eucharist.

Prayer

Be with me Lord at the beginning of this Lenten Journey. Help me in my moments of weakness, strengthen me in those times of temptation and guide me through the presence and power of your Holy Spirit. Amen.



MONDAY 11 MARCH

Scripture: *Leviticus 19:1-2 11-18 Matt. 25: 31-46*

Reflection

Most of us go through life in pursuit of happiness. There is nothing wrong with this. Where we often go wrong, however, is how we go about trying to achieve it. To be really happy we first need to discover what true happiness is, after which we must establish the right way to acquire it. Regrettably in today's world, happiness and wealth seem to go hand in hand. Those who believe this will soon discover that it's not true.

Material wealth can bring instant satisfaction and gratification, but this is not happiness. Happiness is something much deeper. Happiness goes to the very core of our existence, which is eternal life in the presence of God. This is what we were created for and God, through Jesus, is the only one who can help us to accomplish this goal.

To be truly happy we need to know, love and serve God - and this includes our fellow man. Only if we do this, will we enjoy real happiness. The gospel tells us that on the last day, God will separate the sheep from the goats. Those who were searching for true happiness are the sheep, while those who were seeking only wealth and enjoyment, are the goats. What we need to remember is that only the

sheep will be accepted into the safety of God's house, while the goats will be left to do the best they can in the wilderness of a life, misguided by their false sense of happiness.

Today Jesus clarifies the way we need to live our lives if true happiness is our goal. He says, "When I was hungry you fed me, when I was thirsty you gave me drink, when I was a stranger you welcomed me, when I was naked you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison you came to see me. None of these actions gains for us material wealth, but in truth this is the means to true and genuine happiness.

Practical suggestion

Think about how you can feed the hungry, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, visit the sick. All these opportunities are available in the parish. Do you really want to experience real happiness?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, in love you gave yourself completely. Help me to imitate your self-sacrificing love. Amen



TUESDAY 12 MARCH

Scripture

Matthew: 6:7-15

Reflection

A military recruit was allocated to kitchen duty because he was physically weak. His counterparts would tease him but he never ever showed anger or revenge. When they nailed his boots to the floor, he removed the nails. When they balanced a bucket on his door, he would just dry himself after being wet, and much more. This carried on for months and eventually they called him and praised him for his inexhaustible supply of forgiveness. After a while, he responded "then I can stop spitting in your soup". He had never forgiven them!

Forgiveness is a sensitive topic for human beings and a very sensitive topic for Jesus. He suffered a brutal death after an apparently failed ministry so that we could be recipients of His Father's mercy, compassion and forgiveness through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In today's scripture, we are taught by the Lord to ask God to forgive us to the extent that we are willing to forgive others. This forgiveness must not only show itself externally but must reflect in our internal disposition. Members of families cannot forgive hurts and then never speak to each other again. Neighbours cannot be forgiven for transgressions whilst silent grudges are held. Friends cannot be forgiven and then gossip incessantly thereafter. The acid test is that of not being a hypocrite, not secretly withholding forgiveness whilst going through the external motions of doing so.

This is difficult and sometimes we need to draw strength from repeating over and over again: "Father forgive them for they know not what they do". Incomplete forgiveness leads to our own personal unhappiness and a restless heart. Jesus knows this and hence encourages us to come back to Him with a clean heart.

Practical Suggestion

Spend quality time searching for unforgiven hurts (some may date back decades) and then call on the Holy Spirit to renew efforts to forgive from within.

Prayer

Father forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Amen.



WEDNESDAY 13 MARCH

Scripture *Jonah 3:1-10* *Luke 11: 29 – 32*

Reflection

The readings during this time of Lent focus on the sinful ways of people: their disobedience, theft, lies, deceit (you can add more that you might think of) – all the actions that God tries to lead us away from as he guides us through the teachings of the Church - especially if we spend time reading the Gospels.

But, as in those early days of Christ's time on earth we read in Luke's Gospel: "People of the present time are troubled people. They ask for a sign." This has not changed over the years. We still demand and look for signs, ready to blame everybody else for our unhappiness and woeful situations. We even blame God!

Henri Nouwen writes about God's powerlessness: God made us in HIS image in the hope that we will follow His ways. He came to us in person - Jesus is God-with-us – Emmanuel! Do we really believe this essential truth of our faith that He is actually with us? His hope is that we will live our lives by imitating Him. This is where God's powerlessness is evident. We refuse to live the way Jesus calls us to. The truth is that He has given us the power to change things – even to change the world. All of creation's future is in our hands! This is the way God wants it to be. All we have to do is to live the way He calls us to live; the way of Jesus, which is so clearly evident in the Gospel. Lent provides a perfect opportunity. This is our time to show God that we are worthy of His LOVE, FAITH and TRUST. We can make a difference. Our lives can be different. Our world can be a different place. He who lives in us, who is ONE with us, gives us the power, capacity and ability to do this. Do we dare to do this?

Practical Suggestion

"A humbled, contrite heart, O God, you will not spurn." Use this sacred time to change your heart so that you can begin to experience a genuine change, transformation and renewal. Go to confession believing that the sins of the past can be forgiven and that you can make a new beginning

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you came to us to show how to live our lives in full communion with you. Please help me listen attentively to your words so that my actions and behaviour may bring me a genuine peace of heart, mind, body and spirit. Amen.



THURSDAY 14 MARCH

Scripture *Matthew 7: 7 - 12*

Reflection

Do you have a particular objective for Lent? When Jesus spent forty days in the desert He certainly had an objective in mind. He spent that period of preparation by fasting and by praying to gain absolute clarity about the mission he was soon to embark on. At the end of the forty days, no temptation could deter Him from the purpose He was now completely ready and determined to pursue.

In today's Gospel we are told to ask, to seek and to knock and we are guaranteed to receive, to find and to have the door opened for us. There is however, one vital criteria which is so often overlooked: we need to have absolute clarity as to what our objective is. In the example Jesus gives about the generosity of God, the child asks for a specific object; bread or a fish.

In Mark 10:51 Jesus says to the blind man "*What do you want me to do for you?*" Jesus could tell that he was blind so it really wasn't necessary for Him to ask that question, but He needed the man to verbalise his need. In the same way, it is necessary for us to be clear about what we are asking for. God knows what we need and what we want but He wants us to come to Him with our petitions, acknowledging His awesome generosity and constant love and care He gives to us. He wants us to be aware of those things which we desire to know and understand and so our seeking, as well as our prayers, must be with purpose.

So what do you want Jesus to do for you this Lent? During this period of renewal, what specifically do you need Jesus to cleanse and heal in your life so that you can turn back to Him with all your heart? Perhaps you are looking to deepen your prayer life or wanting to have a more meaningful experience during Mass. You may want to have a closer and more personal encounter with Jesus in the Sacraments or spend more time reading and reflecting on the Word of God and more specifically the Gospels. At the end of Lent, will you be more aware of your mission and purpose as a follower and a disciple of Jesus? What do you think that mission and purpose will be?

Practical Suggestions:

Spend a few minutes thinking about your objective for Lent. Write down the five questions in the reflection above and jot down your answers. During the course of the next six weeks, reflect on your answers and assess whether or not you are still on track to realise your objective.

Prayer: Father, help me to identify those areas in my life where I need to be healed and renewed. Give me the strength I need to do my best to achieve what I have resolved to do this Lent. Amen.

FRIDAY 15 MARCH

Scripture *Matthew 5: 20-26*

Reflection

Reconciliation... what does it really mean? Some dictionaries define it as “the restoring of a friendship between people after an estrangement or quarrel” or “to induce a person or ones self to accept an unwelcome fact or situation” or “to bring facts or statements into harmony or compatibility when they appear to conflict or “when former enemies agree to an amicable truce” or so on and so on. There are many so called “definitions’ of the word.

Today we are called to more than just “understanding” the meaning of the word. In the gospel Jesus calls upon our innate sense of right and wrong. Scholars have studied the old adage, “It is said that all men are created equal and without sin” and

draw the conclusion this is correct. The sinner therefore makes a conscious decision to deviate from God's given norm of righteousness. That same sinner, no matter how skilled he or she may be at masking the pain of sin, is well known to God the ever-loving Father.

Only the return to righteousness reserves the entry to the kingdom of heaven and the sinner always has the opportunity to repent and be reconciled. This change of heart and mind also takes a conscious decision, and may be taken at any time prior to the conclusion of this life. To pass from this life as an unrepentant sinner is an unnecessary burden upon one's soul.

Jesus states that if you have unresolved issues, it is important that you search your soul for a possible solution. Don't accept "we'll agree to disagree", and simply leave it at that. If you do nothing, nothing is resolved or reconciled. The process of reconciliation requires that we accept the truth, which is sometimes thought to be subjective. It is not. There is only one truth and that is the truth as the Master taught.

In an effort to be reconciled with the Father it is a requirement we adhere to the commandments "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart all your soul and all your mind" and "you shall love your brother as you love yourself", which encompasses all teachings. If we live our life in a Christ-like manner, acknowledge and confess our sins of commission and omission, then our reconciliation with God the loving, merciful, forgiving father is assured.

Practical Suggestion

Read the Gospels. Go to Confession and be reconciled. Receive Jesus in the Holy Eucharist as often as possible. This is a conscious choice and personal decision!

Prayer:

Father I want to come back to you with all my heart. Forgive my many sins and draw me into the intimacy of your love. Amen

SATURDAY 16 MARCH

Scripture

Deuteronomy 26: 16 – 19

Reflection

The Israelites had entered into a Sacred Covenant with God: They would worship Him only and obey His commandments. In return, He would provide for them, protect them, and lead them back to the land promised to Abraham and his descendants forever. First thing in the morning, at noon, and as the sun was about to set, they would remind themselves that there was only one God and that they owed Him their allegiance.

We are the people of the *new* covenant – described by Jesus as ‘the new and everlasting covenant’. Through baptism we have declared that there is only one God, and that we want to follow His WAY – the way shown by His only Son, Jesus. How faithful are we to that promise? Lest we forget, every Easter we are given the opportunity to renew this promise and to own it for ourselves. Can we call ourselves a ‘God-oriented people’?

The old saying, “The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak” applies here. So often we are filled with good intentions; we want to walk with God but the world offers what appears to be a more attractive option; we want to spend extra time in prayer and reading His Word, but we allow something else to detract from that time.

This Lenten season is a good time to take stock; to renew our ‘covenant’. God is always faithful. He never forgets or reneges on His promises to us – are we keeping our part of the agreement?

Practical suggestion:

Set aside a half-hour today, when you can be quiet and alone with the Lord. Reflect on your ‘agreement’ with Him – where you have been strong, where you have fallen short of the mark. Ask His help in staying faithful, and then try to live out your covenant.

Prayer

Lord, You are perfect and holy in all things, and You call me to be holy and perfect too. I cannot do this in my own, so I ask You to strengthen my resolve through Your

Holy Spirit. Keep me close to You at all times, and guide my thoughts, words and actions. Amen.

These Daily Reflections for Lent 2019 are written by Fr. Desmond Nair, Lawrence Surgeson, George Cominos, Deacon Mark Wardell, Veronica Donnelly, Tony Clewlow and Irene Helsdon. Please acknowledge the authors when copying and distributing. We wish you a fruitful and blessed Lenten Journey.