

## **2015 Daily Reflections for Lent—The First Week**

### **February 23—Monday of the First Week**

Scripture Passage Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

Scripture Verse: Beware of practising your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Matthew 6: 1  
Millions of Christians went to church last Wednesday. Why? As always the simplest answer is the best answer. We went to church last Wednesday because, in our baptism, we were given the gift of faith. This gift of the Holy Spirit has the ability to affect our lives profoundly.

On Ash Wednesday and throughout Lent, we are guided by the wisdom captured in an old rhyme. “There is a little good in the worst of us and a little bad in the best of us. So it ill behooves any of us to talk about the rest of us.”

During Lent we are invited to cast our critical gaze upon ourselves rather than others. The ashes of Ash Wednesday are a sign that we know we live one life and within that life we have the potential to change. They are a sign that we are people who want to live faithful lives as baptised followers of Jesus. They are a sign that we want to be better stewards of the gifts God has given us.

Prayer: Loving God, of all the gifts you have given us, we focus today on the gift of faith. Help us, most generous God, to be filled with gratitude for this wonderful gift. Amen

### **February 24—Tuesday of the First Week**

Scripture Passage: Luke 9: 22-25

Scripture Verse: Then Jesus said to them all, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.”

Taking up crosses, denying ourselves, are not popular slogans or material for bumper stickers in our culture. When people are used to a comfortable life, people seek even more comfort. Newer, easier and faster are the battle cries of our culture. And into our culture comes Jesus with the message that being one of his followers requires courage and discipline. Jesus did not just talk about high standards for his followers, he lived those standards.

When Jesus prayed in the garden before being arrested, he prayed that his cross might be lifted but he dedicated himself to the will of the God he called Father. When the crowds were hungry and there were only a few loaves and fish, Jesus did not sneak off and feed himself and his friends. Instead he prayed and shared the little that he had and there was enough for everyone.

There is not one example in the gospels where Jesus took the easy way out. At the end of his life, when he needed to accept the cross and lose his life; he accepted the cross and gained life as the Risen Lord.

We do not have to look long and hard for crosses in our lives. We will have all the crosses we need if we respond to the challenges to be faithful that are presented to us each day.

Prayer: Loving God, your Son Jesus took up his cross over and over again. Through him you reach out to those on the fringes of life and welcome them into your Kingdom. Help us to do the same. Amen

### **February 25—Wednesday of the First Week**

Scripture Passage: Matthew 9: 14-15

Scripture Verse: Then the disciples of John came to Jesus saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?”

In Lent we fast so that we will hunger. When hunger, either spiritual or physical, sets in, our senses become more acute. We are more attuned to what will feed us.

Rare indeed is the individual who does not overindulge in some aspect of life. Lent is a time to face any overindulgent behaviour we might have and fast to cure it.

Workaholics need to fast from work so they can discover the joy of leisure time.

Couch potatoes need to get up and get moving so they can experience the happiness of activity.

It is all about balance. That is part of what Jesus was getting at when he said the humble need to be exalted and the exalted need to be more humble. The proper use of the gifts and talents God has given us requires balance.

In Lent we can learn about living more balanced lives. There is an old prayer known as the “Seventeenth Century Nun's Prayer.” Its unknown author was a true seeker of a balanced life. The prayer ends with this “Keep me reasonably sweet; I do not want to be a saint—some of them are so hard to live with—but a sour old person is one of the crowning works of the devil. Give me the ability to see good things in unexpected places, and talents in unexpected people. And give me the grace O Lord, the grace to tell them so.

Prayer: Loving God, help us to achieve balance in our lives. Allow us to see goodness and talents in unexpected places and people.

### **February 26—Thursday of the First Week**

Scripture Passage: Isaiah 58: 9(b)-14 Luke 5:27-32

Scripture Verse: He will renew your strength and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring whose water never fails. Isaiah 58:11

Isaiah tells us that if we do our best to live and act with a spirit of generosity and stand up against injustice and feed the hungry...we will find ourselves richly blessed. The passage for today contains a wonderful message of hope.

Sometimes we may feel that our response is inadequate in the face of the oppression and poverty that is endured by millions of people. But as long as we go on caring and

trying to do what we can, God promises to refresh and strengthen us. What God asks of us, in response to all that God has given us, is a generous heart.

Like Levi the tax collector, when we accept Jesus' call to follow him, we experience being loved by God and we can respond as generously as we can. In that response, we find blessing and joy.

Prayer: Loving God help us to express some of your love and compassion in our attitudes, words and actions.

### **February 27—Friday of the First Week**

Scripture Passage: Luke 4: 1-13

Scripture Verse: Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for 40 days he was tempted by the devil.

There is a story about a woman who was fond of saying, "I have no problem with will-power. It's "won't-power" that causes me problems." By this the woman was expressing one of life's enduring frustrations—"giving in to temptations" Resisting temptation involves us in saying "No" to some things that are incompatible with following Jesus and that try to claim our allegiance in everyday life.

Successfully resisting temptation involves us in saying "I won't give in and take the easy way out." We need God's help as we try to resist temptation. Thankfully God is happy to help us if we are open to receiving God's help.

Prayer: Loving God, in the wilderness your Son Jesus depended upon your Word in Scripture and your Holy Spirit to resist the devil. Help us to remember that we do not have to fight temptation alone—help us to use this Lent to increase our "reading and meditating on the word of God" (Ash Wednesday service—page 282 Green Service Book) and our spending time in prayer.