

Lent Take-Homes Week Two

Monday February 22

Readings: Esther 14: 1,3-5 (*found in Bibles which contain the Apocryphal books*) Matthew 7:7-12

Scripture Verse: Ask and you will receive. Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be opened to you" Matthew 7:7

Reflection: Today Jesus is describing the prayer style known as “petition”—that is asking the God he called Father to help us out with something. He gives us a insight into prayer with his insistence on persistence. Persistent petitioning is good and Lent invites us to be more attentive to our prayer life (among other activities)

More than that, however, our readings today remind us of the possibilities of God’s intervention in our lives. Each of us has access to God as we make persistent (i.e. daily-at-least) prayer part of our daily lives. Of course prayer can lead to, for us, surprising results because many times God answers us in a way that may be different from what we thought we wanted. God sees deeper and farther than do we. What we receive from God will be “good things” from the perspective of God’s abundant wisdom rather than our limited ideas.

We are reminded as well in this passage of the golden rule—to treat others as we would want to be treated. It is a good thing to check on how we are doing with that when we begin to pray.

In Lent we are invited to spend time each day in prayer before God, asking him to teach us something of Jesus' way and, through listening to and meditating on God’s Word, learning about Jesus' way. If we open our hearts and our minds and focus on God in prayer, the Lord will teach us—this is a very good thing.

Tuesday

Readings: Ezekiel 18:21-28; Matthew 5: 20-26

Scripture Verse: "But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgement..." (Matthew 5:22)

Reflection: In this passage Jesus is extending the traditional Law and reminding us that following Jesus involves something deeper than just obeying the commandments. In this case Jesus is elaborating on the commandment, "You shall not kill." Anger, if not curbed, can lead to us being judged.

As we know, anger can certainly cause us to say or do things that we later regret. It can lead to harsh words, hard feelings, desires for revenge and can ultimately lead to hostility and violence. We can become obsessed with it and anger can consume us and harm our relationships with others.

At times, of course, there are circumstances in which anger is justifiable. When we discover that someone has been mistreated we can feel righteous anger. When we become aware of people being treated unjustly in our community, we can feel moved to speak out. The key is to make sure that the anger we feel is just and to channel that “righteous” anger to seek both justice and reconciliation as its outcome.

Jesus tells us that we must be reconciled with one another before bringing our gifts to the altar. This is the reason that the exchange of “the peace of Christ” occurs after the confession and absolution and before the offertory hymn. We are called, as Christians, to work at being reconciled with one another.

In Lent we might reflect on who, if there are any, the people or situations are in my life toward whom I feel anger? Can the cause of the anger be resolved with justice? Can I bring myself to forgive that person? What might I do as a step toward reconciliation?

In Lent we are invited to pray for the person or situation and, if possible, to be led by God in the direction of justice, forgiveness, reconciliation and peace.

Wednesday

Readings: Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18 Luke 9: 28-36

Scripture Verse: “But since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory” Luke 9:32

Reflection: On the Sunday before Ash Wednesday we celebrated the Feast of the Transfiguration—a reminder that occurs between Jesus’ baptism and his death and resurrection of who it is in whose name and presence we gather each Sunday. The Transfiguration is a moment that expresses that while Jesus is fully human he is also fully divine. In the gospel it is not until his resurrection that Jesus’ divinity is as expressly revealed as it is at the Transfiguration.

The Transfiguration occurs immediately after Jesus predicts his suffering and death. It was the first time that the apostles had heard him speak in this manner. Undoubtedly, his prediction caused some grumbling, a little doubting and a hint of uncertainty and confusion among his followers. So God hands three of them a vision that could inspire courage.

The voice of God, coming from the clouds, is also an indication of the purpose of the Transfiguration. “This is my Son, my Chosen One. Listen to him.” This is a clear

exhortation to the apostles to listen to Jesus and not to the voices of the scribes and Pharisees and all the other voices in their culture that call out for attention.

The power of the witness of the Transfiguration is not limited to Jesus' first followers. It is also meant for us. If we might be inclined to dismiss the teaching of Jesus, or to listen to the "other voices" that call out to us for our attention, the Transfiguration is a clear remedy. "This is my Son, my Chosen One.", says God. "Listen to him"

Thursday

Readings: Daniel 9:4-10 Luke 6: 36-38

Scripture Verse: "Give and it shall be given to you. Good measure pressed down, shaken together, and running over." Luke 6:38

Reflection: It may feel like it is still quite some time away but when springtime comes, many of us will become gardeners. Many of us find something fulfilling as we dig in the earth, plant seeds and seedlings and nourish them with fertilizer and water for their growth. The plants rely on our care for their welfare. They can't plant themselves, trim themselves or fertilize themselves. Once we accept responsibility for them, they become connected to our caring.

Our readings for today present us with a God who is compassionately connected to our growth. In the first reading from Daniel, we sense that the repentant nation of Israel stands in need of knowing itself cared for and nourished by God. The people have turned away. They have not listened. They need the compassion of God to raise them up again. Jesus tells us that we, his followers, are to be a people overflowing with care and compassion. Each person we encounter in our daily lives is to be treated with compassion and we are to the best of our ability to accept responsibility for caring for their well-being. Lent is a season in which we are invited to check on our sense of compassion. If we find that our attitude towards others has become hardened, we are invited to ask Jesus to help us to have a compassion that overflows.

Friday

Readings: Isaiah 1:10, 16-20; Matthew 23:1-12

Scripture Verse: "Make justice your aim; redress the wronged, hear the orphan's plea, defend the widow." Isaiah 1:17

Reflection: Mother Teresa used to say that we should help those who suffer because it is Jesus who we discover in the midst of the suffering. Mother Teresa was a humble,

very determined, woman who did not place herself above the sick and dying but considered them her equals.

The first step in recognising the Christ in others (see baptismal covenant page 159 Book of Alternative Services) is to see ourselves as their peers. In the gospel Jesus says it this way: "Whoever humbles himself shall be exalted." (23:12). Jesus condemns the Pharisees because they are so puffed up with their own clothing, position and language that they cannot see beyond themselves. In the first reading, Isaiah denounces the towns of Sodom and Gomorrah because they have ceased to care for the wronged, the orphaned and the widowed.

Lent invites us to look beyond ourselves. Perhaps we might know of someone who has been wronged or is poor, orphaned or widowed, sick or lonely etc. We might keep them in our thoughts and prayers in this season of Lent and, if possible, reach out to them as our equals to offer them practical help. We might well discover Jesus is at the center of those actions.