

Lent Week Three Reflections

Monday March 9

Scripture Readings: Daniel 9: 4(b)-10; Luke 6:36-38

Scripture Verse: "To the Lord our God, belong mercy and forgiveness..." Daniel 9:9

In penitential prayer we reach out to God honestly expressing sorrow for our sins. In today's first reading Daniel acts on behalf of people of Israel as he opens his heart to the justice and mercy of God.

There is a sense of awe. God is not to be trifled with. God's mercy is not to be taken for granted. We confess our sins honestly and trust that God's merciful covenant with us will be kept. (Daniel 9:4)

Sometimes it seems that some people would almost prefer. Jesus repudiates the popular view of a punishing God and instructs us in today's Gospel to be generous and to "be merciful just as...your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36). This does not mean we can be casual about our sins or about the destructive power of evil. But mercy and compassion have the last word in God's dealings with us and should have the last word in our attitude to each other.

It is easy to be judgemental. But Jesus' words are clear: "Stop judging and you will not be judged" (Luke 6:37)

The forgiveness God offers us through Jesus is not something we have earned nor is it something we deserve.

All we can do is accept it and allow it to shape our lives and the way we treat other people.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we come to you with open hearts and ask that you forgive our sins and help us to accept your gift of forgiveness.

Tuesday March 10

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

Scripture Verse: "Put away your misdeeds from before my eyes; cease doing evil; learn to do good" Isaiah 1:16-17

True penitence is a positive affair. If we acknowledge our sinfulness honestly before God and accept God's forgiveness we can, by God's grace, become less negative and better care for others: "Learn to do good, make justice your aim, redress the wrong, hear the orphans plea, defend the widow" Isaiah 1:17

Some people seem to be unable to accept that their wrongdoing could be forgiven. Isaiah reminds us that even though our sinfulness feels like it is a "scarlet robe" enveloping our heart, God will make us "white as snow" No matter how bad we think we are, God's forgiving love will cleanse us. All we need to do is to turn to God and engage in a prayerful conversation with God. The New Jerusalem Bible translates God's invitation to us as "Come let us talk this over" (Isaiah 1:18)

God never forces us to respond and we are free to reject God's forgiveness if, for some reason, we so choose. God always offers us the opportunity to repent regardless of the number of times we have chosen not to do so. Lent is a good time to place our trust in God's forgiving, transforming love.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I bring my sins and weaknesses to you and ask that you forgive me and help me to learn to do your will by doing good and caring for others.

Wednesday March 11

Scripture Reading: Luke 16:19-31

Scripture Verse: He said to him, "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead." Luke 16:31

The rich man in the parable made two mistakes: first he was blind to the fact that he was so richly blessed, and second he failed to be generous to Lazarus.

Gratitude and generosity—Jesus challenges us about these things. We need to remember to be thankful for the goodness of God who gives us so much each day. When we are aware of how much God has given us, we are more likely to be generous ourselves.

It can be a helpful Lenten exercise to take note of the blessings that surround us: good and loving people, food, clothes, fresh air, music, books, shelter, the beauty of nature—and so much else. Then it is good to remind ourselves about the plight of so many people—both locally and around the world—people who have no decent housing, who struggle to feed their children, whose countries suffer from war, oppression, terror—and so much else. God trusts us who live relatively comfortable lives to responsibly care and share. In Lent we are invited to take actions on behalf of those who are less fortunate than us.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to be more thankful and generous followers of Jesus.

Thursday March 12

Scripture Reading: Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Scripture Verse: But when he came to himself he said, "I will get up and go to my father and say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." Luke 15:18

A key to the parable of the prodigal son are the words "when he came to himself" (that is came to his senses). Repentance involves us in coming to our senses and recognizing that we have botched up a few things in our lives. Some of the things we have botched up create bigger messes than others but botching things up is part of our lives.

Our biggest botch-up occurs when we try to push God to the fringes of our live, try to replace God with ourselves and think of ourselves as god(s) who can dictate the conditions of life.

Our lives are filled with gifts from God. When we fail to recognize God as the giver of these gifts and take the gifts for granted, we fail to develop the virtue of gratitude. Without gratitude we never see our lives as a living "thank you" to God. We become self-absorbed. We botch things up. We make a mess of our lives and the lives of others.

Several years ago there was an article in Newsweek magazine that made this startling observation: there is a "nagging sense that unlimited personal freedom and rampant materialism yield only greater hungers and lonelier nights". This quote certainly describes the condition of the younger son in the parable; it may describe many people in our culture as well. Freedom is a gift, but we think it is a right. The bounty of this world is a gift, but we treat it as our possession. God, the giver of all our gifts, is waiting for us to "come to our senses." When was the last time we said "Thank you" to God? How can we better practice the virtue of gratitude in our lives?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, your goodness to us knows no end. Help us to remember that you are the giver of all good gifts. Help us to remember to say "Thank you" every day.

Friday March 13

Scripture Readings: Luke 13:1-9

Scripture Verse: The gardener replied, "Sir, let the tree alone for one more year, until I did around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down." Luke 13:9

Today's gospel parable reminds us that the God revealed to us in Jesus is the God of second chances. No matter how often we fail, God always focuses on the good we could do if we just made better choices. Lent is a time when we are invited to reflect on second chances. It is a time for us to learn to trust in the potential for good that God sees in us.

Lent is also a time for us to acknowledge that without God we will lose our way on life's journey. If we demand the "right" to live in our own ways separate from God, we will never experience the purposeful life in God's service that God knows we can live.

If we turn back to God we will find God reaching out to us with the offer of another chance. All we have to do is be honest and admit we have made mistakes and have wandered from the path of Jesus—the path God wants us to walk.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, in Jesus you are revealed to be the God of forgiveness and new beginnings. Help us to believe that, despite our mistakes, with your help we can live the new life as followers of Jesus