

Lent – Week 5 Readings

Monday March 23

Scripture Reading: John 4:43-54

Scripture Verse: Jesus said to him, “Go, your son will live.” The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way.” John 4:50

We want to have the faith of the royal official who believed before knowing that the cure had occurred. He went to Jesus, made his request, the cure was promised, and he went home. Only the next day did he find out that the cure had actually happened. The official believed without the benefit of a sign. The sign—in this case the cure—was the verification, not the cause, of his faith.

Many people are familiar with the popular “Footprints” prayer. The author of this prayer says that for most of his life, there are two sets of footprints. During difficult times one set of footprints disappears. The author wonders why God has abandoned the author during the difficult times. The prayer concludes with God telling the author that where there is only set of footprints, they are not the author's but God's who is carrying him through the tough times.

This prayer has much to teach us. When we think that God has abandoned us, we need to realize that is precisely when God is carrying us. When there are no “signs” of God being with us, God is supporting us and giving us the strength to persevere. When we think that we are doing all the work, we need to realize that it is God, not us, who is saving the day.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, you are the God who, in Jesus, promises to be with us. Help us believe more fully that you are our God and we are your people.

Tuesday March 24

Scripture Passage: John 8: 1-11

Scripture Verse: When they kept on questioning him, Jesus straightened up and said to them, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” John 8:7

What Jesus wanted was to turn sinners around, to get the sinner back on the right path.

Jesus re-directed the attention of the crowd. He points out that they are all sinners and, as a result, they deserve punishment. They were humiliating the woman and using her to serve their purpose of trying to trap Jesus. Jesus forgave her and sent her on her way with the admonition “Go and sin no more.”

We need to be more like Jesus and less like the accusers. We need to focus more on the goodness in people and less on their faults. There is a story of a student and a college professor who had acquired a grandfather clock with its hands permanently stuck at ten minutes past two. The student asked the professor why she did not have it fixed or get rid of it. The professor replied, “It is right twice a day. I just have to know when to look at it” The student learned that the way his professor looked at the clock was the way he should look at people. He should try to catch them doing right.

In Jesus God affirms our goodness and sees our potential to change and return to God when we head off on the wrong path. In Lent we are invited to challenge ourselves to treat people the same way.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, you are always ready to forgive our sins and send us on the way with the words, “Go and sin no more.”. Help us not abuse your forgiveness.

Wednesday March 25

Scripture Reading: John 8: 12-20

Scripture Verse: Again Jesus spoke to them saying "I am the light of the world. Whoever walks with me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." John 8: 12

The darkness seems to be growing stronger. Deeds of darkness dominate the media. Reading a newspaper or watching the TV newscasts can be depressing and discouraging.

We seem to be fascinated by light. As children we all played with light. We were thrilled to learn that a mirror allowed us to direct light and a magnifying glass helped us to concentrate it and create fire. As adults, fascination gives way to utilitarianism. We need brighter and better light to read. Sunny days are better than rainy days.

Light brings joy; darkness brings sadness.

Is it any wonder that Jesus calls himself the light of the world? Jesus came to cast out the darkness and trusts his followers to do the same. It can be quite simple. If we walk with our face to the sun... our shadow is always behind us. If we walk with our backs to the sun... our shadow always precedes us. If all our efforts are directed towards God then our deeds of darkness will be history. If we turn our backs on God, sin will dominate our future. When we sin we can turn our lives around (repent) and face the light of God's love. Plants turn toward the sun; Christians are to turn toward the Son.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, you are the God of goodness and joy. You brighten our days with the light of your love. Help us to walk in your light and grow in your love.

Thursday March 26

Scripture Passage: John 8: 51-59

Scripture Verse: Jesus said, "Very truly I tell you, before Abraham was, I am." So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple." John 8: 58

During his earthly ministry, Jesus' followers had difficulty accepting that Jesus was divine.

However once they embraced the resurrection and experienced the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, they began to believe in Jesus' divinity. With the passage of time, his divinity was fully embraced by the early church.

However as they began to have no problem believing that Jesus was the Son of God, they began to have problems believing that Jesus was also the son of Mary. They began to have problems believing that Jesus was both fully divine and fully human...as human as we are. When the idea began to be floated that Jesus was merely God playing at being human—that Jesus wasn't really tempted—that Jesus didn't really experience anguish in the garden—that he didn't really die on the cross, the church stepped in and insisted on both the full divinity and full humanity of Jesus. To think that Jesus was God pretending to be human is an insult to his life, death and resurrection and an insult to the mystery of the incarnation.

It will take us a lifetime and then some to fully experience the love offered to us by God in the fully human and fully divine Jesus. He is the gift of reconciliation between the Creator and creation.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, your Son Jesus became one of us and took on our human nature fully. He showed us how to live according to your will. Help us to follow his example more fully.

Friday March 27

Scripture Passage: John 11: 45-57

Scripture Verse: So from that day on they planned to kill him. So Jesus no longer walked about in public...but he left for a region near the desert..." John 11: 53-54

Jesus has already spoken of his death, describing himself as the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep. But the time is not yet right for him to die so he takes his disciples away from Jerusalem to a safer place just as he had once walked away from a murderous crowd in Nazareth.

People of faith sometimes realize that they have been protected by God in dangerous circumstances. Author Angela Ashwin writes of attending a lecture given by a Christian who ministers in a congregation in the Middle East. Many in his congregation have been threatened...some have been killed but they still worship and care for those in need. The speaker mentioned that he prays for protection every time he gets into his car. He knows that he may be killed at any time and he accepts this, remaining true to his conviction that he is to continue his ministry in the Middle East for the present time. At times, he says that he knows he has been protected from almost certain death.

In today's passage, Jesus too knows that he needs to be safe for the moment but the time is coming when he will "set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51) and the events of Holy Week. He will lay down his life for us.

Have you ever sensed that you have been protected from some sort of danger or trouble? Has this affected the way you live and respond to God?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, may you protect us and all those whom we love. Keep us close to you; keep us faithful, generous and unselfish—to the end.