

Lent

1st Sunday in Lent

Background: To understand this Sunday's Gospel, we need to realize that we are jumping back over the unfolding of Jesus's ministry in Galilee that we have been reading in the early Sundays of Ordinary Time and returning to his baptism in the Jordan. Having received the overwhelming awareness that he was God's beloved Son/Servant, he needs to ponder the implications of that calling. And so, he heads out into the desert to pray and there is tested/tempted. What does this mission involve; and, perhaps more importantly, what does it not?

In Luke's version Jesus is repeating the Exodus journey of Israel from slavery to freedom, an event referred to in the reading from Deuteronomy; yet we are on the same journey. And so, this is the day when the catechumens publicly state their desire make the Promises of Baptism, to be reborn by water and the Spirit, and to share in the Eucharist. It is also the day when the candidates express their desire to be received by renewing their Baptismal Promises before being sealed with the Spirit and sharing the Eucharist. As we the faithful accompany them on their Lenten journey to initiation, we must join them in that renewal since on Easter we too will be asked to reaffirm our Baptism by renouncing sin and professing faith.

1. The first temptation/testing is about relying on material things rather than on spiritual. Which have priority in your life?
2. The second temptation is about relying on power to bring happiness. What do you need to give up to find simplicity and inner freedom in your life?
3. Faith is saying to God: "Thy will be done," not expecting God to work miracles just for you. When has humble trust in God already brought you through to the other side of a difficult time?
4. What temptation do you think our society or our church has fallen into? How might we return to faithful service of the Gospel?

Practice: This week pray St. Ignatius Loyola's prayer, "Take, Lord, Receive." Each day before saying it ponder what grace you might need right now.

2nd Sunday in Lent

Background: We read this week the last of three interconnected episodes in the Gospel: the Jesus's Baptism, Temptation, and now Transfiguration. What links them is that they deal with the meaning of his being the beloved Son/Servant. We have seen how he has struggled to understand the meaning of his Sonship; now for his disciples the meaning is confirmed as the voice tell them to "listen to him." If, like Abram, we put our deepest trust in God, we shall see God's promise fulfilled in glory.

1. When have you experienced the glory of Jesus? When did he become for you not just your Teacher but your Savior and Lord?
2. Are you so focused on your own sins and unworthiness that you cannot believe that God's is guiding you to glory through this Lenten journey?
3. Have you kept silent like the disciples, or have you told others of how God's grace is at work within you?
4. Which person's goodness have you been most blind to?

Practice: This day's responsorial psalm is Ps. 27, a prayer of trust in God in the midst of difficulties. Pray it each day this week. Before you pray it, each day ponder from what difficulty you might need, if not deliverance, then new strength.

Introduction to the 3d to 5th Sundays in Lent: Unlike Cycles A and B in which the Gospels are taken from John, this year they are taken from Luke and his parables of mercy. As we draw closer and closer to Easter, we keep hearing the call to repentance, the sole condition for receiving God's mercy and reconciliation.

Introduction for the 3d to 5th Sundays in Lent: For three Sundays the Gospel selections from John are part of the final, intense preparation of those called to the Easter sacraments of initiation. The scrutiny celebrated each Sunday is meant to help them "achiev(e) an intimate knowledge of Christ" by "progress(ing) in genuine self-knowledge through serious examination of their lives and true repentance." (RCIA 142) They will come to trust the transforming power of Christ at work within them as they encounter him as the living water (3d Sunday), the light of the world (4th), and the resurrection and the life (5th).

We who accompany them on their journey of faith are also invited to strengthen our relationship with Christ by turning away once again from whatever keeps us from holding fast to him in love.

3d Sunday – Scrutiny

Background: Jesus will step over boundaries in order to bring the Good News to everyone. Although the Samaritans claimed to be authentic inheritors of God's covenant, the Jews regarded them as apostates and refused to allow them to worship at the Temple in Jerusalem. And so, the Samaritans had built their own Temple on Mt. Gerizim. Yet in this passage Jesus not only asks a Samaritan but a woman to give him a drink of water. An important detail: she is coming to the village well alone and in the heat of the day probably because the other women won't have anything to do with her because her checkered marital history.

1. In what ways have you found yourself alone, thirsty, dried out, and hopeless?
2. What are you afraid to tell Jesus about yourself even though you want to?

3. What do you want to tell him that you are really thirsty for?
4. How has he already given you living water? How have you shared it with others?

Practice: Blessing ourselves with holy water as we enter church is an ancient custom. Rather than being a bit of Catholic magic, it is meant to remind us of our Baptism, of the cleansing that God continually gives us and of God's invitation to be part of his covenant people. The gesture proclaims our belief in Christ as Redeemer and the words our faith in the Trinity. How can you make this gesture more intentional for yourself?

4th Sunday – Scrutiny

The Pharisees think that they know The Truth about God and about life. To them suffering is a punishment for sin, and God doesn't listen to the prayers of sinners. Yet in Jesus we come to know a God who step-by-step leads people to know God's power and compassion and to a clearer vision of the meaning of life.

1. How have you been blind to a crucial truth about yourself?
2. How has Christ's life already scattered some shadows in your life?
3. What are the shadows in society or in the Church that obscure for you the light of Christ?
4. How can your love bring light and healing to others?

Practice: Light a candle, and stare into its flame as you meditate on your blindness this week. What have you been blinded by? What have you been blind to? Each day list your types of blindness, and write down next to them what you need to say or do to bring light into your darkness.

5th Sunday – Scrutiny

Background: Like those preparing for the Easter sacraments, Mary and Martha already have faith in Jesus. Their challenge is to grow in that belief. Can he really do the impossible right here and now—for me? Can he really bring the dead to life—even me? Have we asked him?

1. What part of your life makes you feel as if you were living in a tomb? What old habits or perspectives make you feel trapped and lifeless?
2. What part of society or the Church makes you feel the same way?
3. What do you experience a call to come forth from your tomb? To liberation?
4. How has Jesus been restoring you to life? When do you feel his new life in you?

Practice: Some people live in tombs—through chronic illness, disability, mental or emotional challenge, age, etc. Look around at your own life, and discover whom you can bring to life simply by reaching out to them. Then do so.

Palm Sunday -- Luke

Background: Christian liturgy is not a play reenacting past events but a living celebration of the inner meaning of those events so that it comes alive in us today. As the oldest Palm Sunday hymn says: “To you before your passion, they sang their hymns of praise. To you, now high exalted, our melody we raise.” Luke’s account of the triumphal entry has two episodes. First, we see that willingness of the owners of the donkey to give it up if the Master needs it. Second, the point about the donkey is that a victor entered mounted on a warhorse, but Jesus it rides a humble beast of burden. The crowd’s chant about the “king” who brings heavenly peace and glory proclaims that Jesus is bringing with him an idyllic reign of justice, harmony, and prosperity

1. Why are you happy to join in welcoming Christ today?
2. What is Christ asking you to let him make use of as he proclaims today the coming of God’s kingdom/reign?
3. What can you do to help others experience the coming of Christ with joy? How will you share the message of Jesus not as judgement but as Good News?
4. Jesus is “King of Israel and David’s royal Son.” But anti-Semitism is a persistent Christian sin. Where have you encountered it? What will you resolve to do next time?

Practice: Placing the palms with the cross or crucifix at home is an old custom—as is weaving them into crosses. Allow this custom to help you keep in mind during prayer this week that both dying and rising are part of the paschal mystery.