

Sunday after Ash Wednesday

Genesis 2:7-9, 3:1-7; Matthew 4:1-9

When I was a young girl, I delivered eighty "Marquette Mining Journals" in my home town in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. During one Lent as a paper girl, I decided to pray my rosary as I walked to two homes on the outskirts of the town. That day as I walked back in an alley to the next home, I heard a call deep within me to be a Sister. I have never forgotten that moment.



In today's Scriptures, Jesus is called to be about his mission as a human person and to be faithful to God's plan for him. In the three temptations of Jesus, the spirit of evil is tempting Jesus to abandon who he is and what his mission is. It is his remembrance of the Scriptures that nourishes him in rebuking the devil. In the first temptation, he is able to withstand his hunger and be true to the Word of God. He is not about his own personal comfort. In the second temptation, Jesus is tempted to use his divine status as protection if he jumps off the temple pinnacle. And lastly, in the third temptation, the devil offers Jesus all the nations of the world, if Jesus will worship him. With authority, Jesus says: "Get away, Satan!"



We too are called to follow Jesus and to bring about God's reign. Our integrity is to be our true selves. Our mission is God's plan for us. As we journey in community, a conviction wells up within us that we are on the right path. The outcome is uncertain. We hear other voices that tempt us to abandon our call and our mission. And in the depths of our being we hear; "God alone shall you serve."

Clarice Sevegney, OP
Racine Dominicans

(My present mission is to walk with persons in the gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgender community. Their call to be persons of integrity and to be who they are has caused them much suffering.)

March 13

Monday, First Week of Lent

Leviticus 19: 1-2, 11-18; Matthew 25: 31-46



Recently I observed Damian, one of our 'guests' at our homeless drop-in Center, studying the individual pictures of our frequent visitors we display on our walls. After a few minutes he asked me:

"Sister, why is it that the people on the street who pass us by look at us with such distaste and disgust? When I look at us in these pictures here on our walls, I see compassion, suffering and struggling . . . beautiful faces! I wish we could invite them **to come and see us here.**"

As I relate this conversation to today's Gospel I hear the words "*when did you see me?*" . . . echoing through Damian . . . Am I able to truly 'see' what Damian sees . . . To rise above the exterior trappings, hurts and sufferings to greet 'the beautiful face', the real person, within each of our 'guests'?

I am invited to ask myself in turn: What do those who come here to the Center see in my responses to each of them . . . respect, non-judgment, love, compassion? Or do I act like the people on the street who look but do not see? Come, but do nothing and pass on by?

At times it is difficult to see the real person. I too hide behind my own feelings of mistrust, judgment and impatience. Today Damian reminds me of the essential: offer more than food, drink, and clothes . . . offer the 'real' you!

Damian grasped the true meaning of today's parable. When will I?

"Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to Me."
Matt 25:46 NRJ Version Bible c.1989

Lois Silva, OP
San Rafael Dominicans

March 14

Tuesday, First Week of Lent

Isaiah 55:10-11; Matthew 6:7-15

The Lord's Prayer

How do we normally say the prayer that Jesus taught his followers in today's reading? It is so familiar that it's easy just to rattle it off without realizing what we are doing. But there is an important point to remember here: In this prayer, Jesus wasn't just giving us words to use, but rather, telling us how to relate to God as a loving parent. As Jesus did, we can ask God directly for what we need, in simple terms and without fear. It's not that God doesn't know what we need, but rather, we need to remember that everything we need comes from God.

We begin the prayer with "Our Father." I am a child of God, and so, too, is every other person. We are all brothers and sisters of Jesus, which makes us brothers and sisters of each other. We are privileged to have the same intimate relationship with God and each other as Jesus has with his Father, his Abba. It's hard to imagine such a wondrous gift, but if we realize that this is what we are saying, we may feel amazed to be able to say it.

To pray for the coming of God's kingdom sounds simple, but since we don't really know what God's will is and what God's kingdom will be like, we don't really know exactly what we're praying for. When we listen to our hearts, we can imagine the world filled with peace and love, with no one suffering or sick without loving care. How different this would be from the real images we see on TV, images of malnourished and starving children, victims of natural disasters, those who have lost their jobs and often their hope, and those who are trying desperately to support their families, to provide them with food and shelter! We pray for our daily bread with them in our hearts.

Then we get to the part that brings us up short: "Forgive us as we forgive others." It is quite a challenge to forgive others (and ourselves), day in and day out, but that's what God asks us to do. Only with God's help can we even attempt it. Considering the consequences if we don't forgive, we need to ask for God's help every day. And because God is our Abba, too, we know we will be heard.

Mary Jo Knittel, OP
Dominican Sisters of Peace

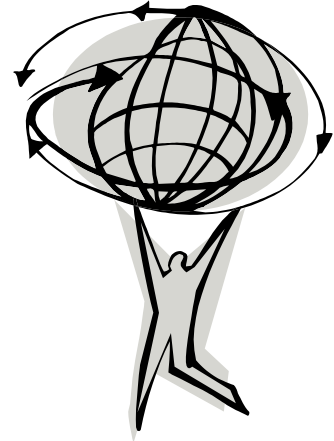


Wednesday, First Week of Lent

Jonah 3: 1-10; Luke 11: 29-32

My Lenten reflection in 2007 was on these same scriptures. Unfortunately, some of my concerns of three years ago are still present. In 2007 I wrote:

“Our gracious God continues to bestow blessings on a sinful people. We have the need to repent for the arrogance of our country’s national power. We need to turn away from a stance that dominates others, ignores human rights, supports the continual division of the “haves” from the “have-nots”, supports the concept of just war and supports an imperialistic society rather than a humanistic one.”



Looking back at that reflection, I know I cannot allow myself to become apathetic about these concerns simply because there seems to be little improvement in world affairs. This year my spiritual journey has led me to a transformation of thought that allows me to trust, more fully, in the initial sign of Jonah and truly accept the reality that my timetable is not God’s timetable.

I am writing this reflection on the Feast Day of Epiphany, a day celebrating the revealing of the light of Jesus Christ to the gentiles and the hope of reconciliation with our gracious God. What does it mean to repent? In the most simplistic version it means to acknowledge the sin and move away from it. We have no earthly kings to order us to wear sackcloth, fast and sit on the ash heap. What we **do have** is the still small voice arising in our soul and our relationship with the Divine Presence. Sister Jeremy Hall, OSB in her book Silence, Solitude, Simplicity: A Hermit’s Love Affair with a Noisy, Crowded and Complicated World tells us of the need to be open to God’s transforming love. This openness allows us to be receptive to God’s love with gratitude and look for and listen to the signs of change, first in ourselves and then in others.

To repent is not to feel bad, but to think differently. If we, as disciples of the historic Jesus also search for the Cosmic Christ, who is Holy Wisdom, maybe each of us can comprehend a modicum of that Wisdom. We can then be receptive to the signs around us which can be captured and utilized to move toward the blessings of life and away from arrogance, domination of others, the indifference to the poor and any kind of emotional or physical violence.

So, my brothers and sisters, we really do not need a sign other than the sign of Jonah, do we?

Joyce Hopson, OPA
Tacoma Dominicans

March 16

Thursday, First Week of Lent

Esther 12, 14-16, 23-25; Matthew 7: 7-12

On January 8, 2011, just one week into a new year, citizens of the quiet town of Tucson, Arizona were horrified by a violent shooting spree that took place on a Saturday morning in a grocery store parking lot. Eighteen local residents were shot, six of whom were killed. Many were traumatically affected by the event. Local and national news reporters worked to learn information from credible sources to report to the citizens of Tucson and to the nation. One source interviewed was the local county sheriff, a 50-year law enforcement veteran. Crime and murder are not new to southern Arizona, where illegal drug and arms trafficking and gang-related crimes are frequent occurrences. In a televised briefing after the shooting, the sheriff attributed the shooting, in part, to the vitriolic climate of political and public discourse present in our society. Many were outraged at his comments; however, the degree to which his allegation hit a national nerve should give us pause for further reflection.

It is one thing to blame our politicians for the tone that exists in our political arena with regard to health care, the economic crisis and bipartisanship; however, it is often easier to point one finger at another than to consider the fingers pointing to oneself. A peaceful, nonviolent society can only come from each person conducting themselves in a just and respectful manner. This means identifying the obstacles of prejudice and hatred, judgment and anger that lie within.

Discourse refers to our speech with another on a particular topic. Surely, that sounds simple enough. However, layers of truth may be uncovered if we pursue modes of discourse between ourselves and another. On the surface, tension and conflict may cloud the ability to communicate; anger and judgment towards another may create obstacles to successful exchange. How can we get to truth? How can we get beyond the obstacles to connect in mutual understanding? Today's gospel offers the answer to those who are seeking truth and who seek to be a source of peace in our world: "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." With God's help, one may come to recognize a 15-year-old prejudice lurking against a superior from a misunderstanding that took place in community, or the deep fear held inside toward another member in community who exhibits hostility and anger. Attitudes of disdain towards evangelical or traditional Catholics may seem justified, until a closer look. These are obstacles to peaceful discourse.

Jesus invites us to call to him for what we need. What if our need is to recognize and to be healed of an obstacle that keeps us from peaceful connection with another? He invites us to seek his help. And if that which is hidden is the root of our obstacle with another, Jesus promises to reveal to us what we are seeking. Above all, if there is a door, or even a wall separating us from another, Jesus promises that the door will be opened. Perhaps the obstacle may clear slowly, one slat of wood or one brick at a time, but this passage promises us conversion. We are called to trust in our God who has made a covenant to care for God's people. Overcoming fear and moving to compassion for the other, or naming a prejudice and realizing the humanness of the other brings us to conversion and to the possibility for peace-filled relationship. God's promise of care is sure, "This is the law and the prophets."



Elizabeth O'Donnell, O.P.
Mission San Jose Dominicans

March 17

Friday, First Week of Lent Ezekiel 18:21-28; Matthew 5:20-29



We usually think of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in terms of the Beatitudes, so we may be surprised to discover it takes up three chapters in Matthew's gospel, and includes today's stern admonition, which sounds a great deal like the motto of General Electric: "Good Enough Isn't."

Matthew tells us that Jesus addresses his words to his disciples, but the sight of the crowds inspires him to speak. In either case, Jesus has *us* in his sight, and we have no place to hide. That's the bad news. The good news is that today's warning follows immediately upon Jesus' observation that we are the light of the world, and that cities built on hill tops cannot be hidden. The reason they cannot, of course, is that they display so many lights.

The same is the case with us. We are called to greater holiness than Jesus' opponents, but – and we must be grateful for this – this is not a solitary vocation. Lent is a time to remember that Jesus' words call us to corporate and personal action, and to corporate and personal humility. Our light and our virtue are only borrowed from Jesus, so Lent is a time to reach out for whatever assistance we need, and to offer whatever assistance we can.

We all know the word "parable," and probably think of parables as the stories Jesus relates to get his hearers' attention. In fact, these stories are *examples* of parables. Parables are standards by which we measure something. Ultimately, these days of Lent are a parable that describes the pilgrimage we make through Life. Their goal is the perfection that leads to heaven. Along the way, we must shine for – and with – others.

Reginald Martin, OP
Western Dominican Province

Saturday, First Week of Lent

Deuteronomy 26:16-19, Mathew 5:43-48

“Paradoxes fit not in boxes nor mysteries in treasuries.”

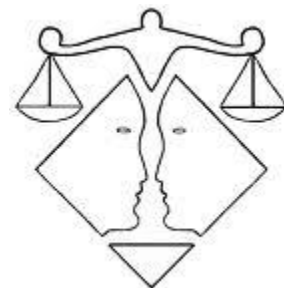
I have an acquaintance who said to me once that he'd like to be a father. His own father, a man about 60 years old, recently adopted an eight-year-old boy from China. The boy had been rejected by his parents because of a minor skin condition on his shoulder. Two men, one a natural and adoptive father, and the other, a father of the future, can learn much from our saint celebrated today, Joseph.

Joseph could have said “No” to accepting Mary as his wife under the condition of her pregnancy. Because he saw beyond the apparent, and was open to dreams and visions as vehicles of God's grace in his life, he said “Yes.” and became the role model, teacher, protector, and nurturer of the child, Jesus. His whole life was already one of righteousness and acceptance of the profound call God gives us to share in the very Spirit of God, one of creativity and gratuitous love, seeing a bigger view as God does. Joseph was able to put together seeming contradictions (beloved Mary, my betrothed, and pregnant Mary, an embarrassment), and find a unifying depth of wisdom and strength which made him able to meet the challenges of being Mary's husband and Jesus' father. Jan Phillips has a way of saying something of this sort: To be a visionary . . . “requires the capacity to not simply withstand the tension of opposites, but to become the mechanism for their transformation, to contain and direct the power that is generated as they fuse and ignite.” (p. 96, The Art of Original Thinking.)

I believe that Joseph was creative not only in working with wood but also in his carpentry of the soul, building strong “joints” uniting the seeming opposites of spiritual, political, and mental realities. He was thus a man of peace. That is what we are called to do: Allow ourselves to be containers of polar opposites and the unifying reconcilers of paradoxes. These challenges take every ounce of generosity and radical receptivity to God's grace within us, and then some. No small task, but an opportunity for life eternal.

My acquaintance would do well to think on these things as he contemplates being a father. Together with a wife of similar righteousness, they, too, can parent a child of God. Our share in being co-creators goes beyond physically bearing and raising children to every endeavor of creativity, love, compassion, reconciliation, peace, and justice. Joseph's verbal words did not make it into the Scriptures, but the words of his life of faith are as beautiful and strong as the creations of his workshop.

Patty Morisset, OP
Tacoma Dominicans



March 19