



SUNDAY REFLECTION

Year A of Lent has a very distinctive series of Gospel readings that are perhaps the oldest grouping in the entire lectionary. They are geared to the training of the catechumens preparing for baptism on Holy Saturday. The series begins with the temptation story, followed by the transfiguration, and now in week three by the power of the water symbolism in baptism; and these will be followed in the second three weeks by the story of the blind man receiving sight, Lazarus receiving life from the dead, and finally by the source of it all: the passion of Jesus Himself. Thus the new Christian is led to the recognition of cleaning from sin in water, knowledge of God in the giving of sight, and the hope of immortality with God in the raising of Lazarus. These are the foundations of the Christian life.

Most importantly for our understanding of John's story of the woman at the well today is that connection between the flowing of water and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This 'living water' not only brings awareness of her sin to the woman, but forgiveness, hope in the person of Jesus as the messiah, and faith in His words. These are intended as lessons for us who follow in her footsteps to the well of baptism. The links between this Gospel message and the readings from Exodus and Paul help us to realize that this baptismal journey of faith has its moments of hardship and doubt and even grumbling; but that the way through the difficult times of faith is found in keeping our focus clearly on the loving goodness of God that saved Israel and on Jesus who gave His life for all people.

STEWARDSHIP: When Jesus asked the Samaritan woman for a drink of water, He opened the door for a life-changing relationship with Him. Scripture says her testimony drew many others to Him as well. We, too, must be ready to respond whenever and wherever the Lord speaks to us and be prepared for it to change our lives!

READING FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

22 MAR '20

1 Sm. 16:1, 6-7, 10-13: God gives Samuel a special insight to choose Jesse's son David.

Eph. 5:8-14: God has brought us out of darkness so we can live in the light of the Lord.

Jm. 9:1-41: A blind man is healed and, in the face of opposition, comes to faith by seeing Jesus as his savior.

ST. JOSEPH'S TABLE:

Next weekend, 21-22 Mar., you are invited to partake in a practice that was introduced to our parish several years ago; that is the St. Joseph Table. We have simplified the tradition to that of asking you to bring in bread which after the Masses of the weekend will be distributed to the local food banks to help in feeding those in need. In this way we carry on one component of the ancient tradition, charity for those in need. The table for the collection will be in the corner of the Commons by the pass-through for the kitchen.

Saint Joseph, even though he doesn't speak a word in Sacred Scripture, has been deeply loved by Christians since the very beginning of the Church. It did not take long for Saint Joseph, on account of his role as the protector of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Child Jesus, to become known as the principal patron of the Universal Church and by extension a quiet protector of all Christ's faithful.

Since the 15th century his feast day has been celebrated on March 19, a day that typically falls right in the middle of Lent, but that hasn't stopped the laity from orchestrating a great feast in his honor. In particular, Italians have had a special love of Saint Joseph, and a famous miracle

led the people of Sicily to begin a tradition known as the *Tavola di San Giuseppe* (Table of Saint Joseph).

What is the origin of this practice?

During a time of drought and famine, no rain fell on Medieval Sicily. Food crops for both people and livestock withered and died. The people prayed to St. Joseph for help.

When the clouds opened, pouring the desperately needed rain, there was rejoicing. After the harvest, to show their gratitude, they prepared a table with special foods to honor St. Joseph and to share with the poor. After thanking and honoring the saint, they distributed the food to the less fortunate.

In its most traditional form a parish St. Joseph's Table would be a three-tiered display representing the Holy Trinity. A statue of St. Joseph is placed on the top tier. A special smaller table is set for the Holy Family at the front of the display. The tables are filled with food, flowers, candles and "zepolla," pasta. Giving food to the needy is an important part of the tradition.

Small at first, as time went by, the tables grew larger, more ornate, beautiful and bountiful. Brought here to America by Italian immigrants the practice has migrated out from those ethnic communities to be embraced by other groups and denominations, and so the tradition has been adapted, modified and continues.

In its purest form the decorated tables are blessed by the parish priest, and the parish and larger community is invited to see the table and share a meal.

Many symbols are found on a St. Joseph's Table. Bread crumbs on spaghetti represent saw dust on a carpenter's workshop floor. White lilies which are traditionally associated with St. Joseph, symbolize transformation and purity. Breads may be baked in the shapes of carpenter's tools, canes or chalices. Wine recalls both the miracle at Cana and, with bread, the Last Supper. Pineapples on the table symbolize hospitality and 12 fish represent the 12 apostles.

The wearing of red clothing is traditional, symbolizing charity and strength.

Blessed fava beans are often given out at St. Joseph's Tables. Once considered cattle feed, fava beans survived the Sicilian drought, sustained the people, and saved them from starvation. It is believed that if these beans are carried in a coin purse all year, one is never without resources. Blessed, dried beans are also kept in the pantry, so there will always be food in the home.

The table's breads, cookies and pastries are often sold to raise funds for the parish or for charity. A traditional spaghetti or pasta Milanese (fish sauce) dinner is often served.

Today, St. Joseph is honored by Catholic communities worldwide as well as members of the Anglican and Lutheran faith communities. The saint is a patron of the Universal Church, unborn children, fathers, immigrants, workers, employment, travelers, carpenters, realtors, as well as against doubt and hesitation, and of a happy death, and his feast is honored in many parishes with a St. Joseph Table, pasta dinner and charity to the poor.

CONFIRMATION Continued

There is very definitely a close relationship between the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation.

While Confirmation is a distinct and complete sacrament in its own right, its purpose is to

perfect in us that which was begun in Baptism. We might say—in a sense—that we are baptized in order to be confirmed.

As we are well aware with Baptism we are born spiritually. We become sharers in the divine life of the most Blessed Trinity. We begin to live a supernatural life. As we practice the virtues of faith and hope and love and as we unite with Christ in His Church in offering worship to God, we also grow in grace and goodness.

But at this stage our spiritual life, like the life of a child, is largely self-centered. We tend to be preoccupied with the needs of our own soul, with the effort to “be good.” We cannot be wholly self-centered, of course—not if we understand what it means to be a member of Christ’s

Mystical Body, and not if we understand the significance of the Mass. But in general our religious life does revolve around self.

But then we are confirmed. We receive a special grace by which our faith is deepened and strengthened, so that it will be strong enough not only for our own needs but for the needs of others with whom we shall try to share it.

With the onset of adolescence a child begins to assume, progressively more and more, the responsibilities of adulthood. He or she begins to see their place in the total family picture and in the community at large. Similarly, the confirmed Christian begins to see more clearly (or ought to) his or her responsibility to Christ for their neighbor. They becomes deeply concerned (or ought to) with the welfare of Christ-in-the-world—which is the Church—and the welfare of Christ-in-the-neighbor.

It is in this sense that Confirmation is a spiritual “growing up.”

In order that we may have such a concern for Church and neighbor, in deed as well as in feeling, the sacrament of Confirmation gives us a special grace and a special power.

Just as the “mark” or character of Baptism made us sharers with Christ in His role of priest, giving us the power to participate with Him in divine worship, so also the character of Confirmation makes us sharers with Christ in His role of prophet or teacher.

We now participate with Him in the task of extending His kingdom, of adding new souls to His Mystical Body. Our words and our works are directed not merely to our own sanctification but also to the purpose of making Christ’s truths alive and real for those around us. The

Catechism’s section on Confirmation says that Confirmation is the special outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Its effects are to:

Root us more deeply in divine filiation (being children of God)

- Unites us more firmly to Christ
- Increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us
- Strengthens our bond with the Church
- Associates us more closely to her mission of bearing witness to Christ
- Helps us and more strictly obliges us to spread and defend the faith by word and deed

A generation ago, we said that confirmed Catholics were “soldiers of Christ.” This indicates Confirmation’s effects: it configures us for a full & active mission of service to Christ.

The confirmed Christian—whether we call them spiritual soldiers or spiritual adults—goes forth joyfully in the fulfillment of their vocation.

Strong in faith and with an ardent love for souls which stems from their love for Christ, they feel a continual concern for others. The confirmed Christian feels a restless discontent unless they are doing something worthwhile for others—something to ease their burdens in this life, and something to make more secure their promise of life eternal.

Their words and actions proclaim to those around them: “Christ lives, and He lives for you” The grace to do this is the grace which Jesus promised to His Apostles (and to us) when He said: “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be witnesses for Me... . even to the very ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

In Confirmation, the bishop or priest places his hand upon our head and calls down upon us the Holy Spirit Who can, if we will let Him, transform our lives.

Without Confirmation we can get to heaven, but the going will be much rougher. In fact, without Confirmation it would be easy to lose our way entirely, easy to lose our faith. That is why it is of obligation for every baptized person to be also confirmed if they have the opportunity of receiving the sacrament of Confirmation.

We know that Jesus did not institute any of the sacraments on a whim. Jesus instituted each individual sacrament because He foresaw, in His infinite wisdom, that we would have need of certain special graces under certain particular circumstances. He foresaw, among other things, the dangers to which our faith would be exposed. Some of the dangers would be from within, as when passion or self-will wars with belief. Sometimes the dangers to our faith are from without.

In all of these circumstances, the grace of Confirmation comes to our aid (if we will let it) and irresistibly pushes back the urgings of self-will, helps us to preserve our sense of values, and keep us on an even keel so that faith may triumph. The peace we find then is a real peace.

LENTEN DISCIPLINES

Prayer: Read the Gospel for each day this week. Ask yourself what point in it you would preach on if you were giving the homily at Mass. Then practice what you would preach.

Fasting: Ask if there is any sacrifice you could make which would let God work through you better at home, at work, at school in your social life.

Almsgiving: Each day share with another person the living water you receive from Jesus Christ.

LENTEN WEEKDAY REFLECTIONS

Monday 16 Mar

‘My soul is thirsting for God, the God of my life; when can I enter and see the face of God?’

2Kgs. 5:1-15: Naaman, a ‘pagan’ foreigner, is cured of leprosy by the prophet Elisha, and so comes to praise the God of the Israelites.

Lk. 4:24-30: Jesus in the Gospel alludes to the foreigner Naaman’s cure in the context of Israelite lack of acceptance of Jesus. This provokes the audience to seek to kill Him.

Both readings reflect human dimwitted attitudes before God, based on excessive self-importance and preoccupation. The Israelite King thinks that Naaman is trying to insult him; Naaman thinks that Elisha is not taking him seriously because he is not to be cured in some grandiose manner. The Gospel audience takes offence because Jesus indicates their past hard-heartedness towards God, which the present Gospel audience re-enact.

Tuesday 17 Mar

'Remember Your mercy, Lord.'

Dan. 3:25, 34-43: From the midst of the fire, Azariah prays on behalf of his people, offering to God not animal sacrifice or other rituals by a contrite heart and a humble spirit.

Mt. 18:21-35: One is to forgive not seven times but seventy times seven. Seven represents totality so the Gospel asks us to be limitless in our forgiveness, as God is with us.

While one needs to ask God for forgiveness, one expresses that in the measure of one's forgiveness of others.

Wednesday 18 Mar

'O praise the Lord, Jerusalem'

Deut. 4:1, 5-9: What does the nation have, says Moses, except that God has chosen and enlightened it. But with that is the burden to so live as to be a universal light to other nations.

Mt. 5:17-19: Jesus comes as the fulfilment of the law and the prophets.

How does one walk the line between (Jewish) legalism and (Gentile) laxism? This was a question for Matthew's Gospel community. This is really a question as regards the nature of freedom: In the Christian tradition freedom is not absolute in the sense of being free to do what is possible, rather freedom is to do the good (and not so much my good). Thus freedom is expressed in responsible action, which obligates myself and others in service.

Thursday 19 Mar St. Joseph

'His dynasty shall last for ever.'

2 Sam. 7:4-5, 12-4, 16: This is one of the great promises in the Bible. David can be sure that his descendants will have a secure relationship with God for all time.

Rom. 4:13, 16-18, 22: The interplay between faith and what can be seen is touched on here. Joseph saw with his eyes a young boy. With the eyes of faith he learned to see more. Abraham had the same experience. His faith became the basis for our faith.

Mt. 1:16, 18-21, 24: Joseph, the Just Man, takes Mary as his wife and accepts responsibility for her Child.

Lk. 2:41-51: Jesus gives us a lesson in obedience. He listened to His parents and accepted their authority and He also wanted to be in His Father's house. This involves a death to self, which is painful but bears much fruit.

St. Joseph's place in the story of our salvation is highlighted as he is placed with Abraham and David. His dignity and importance come, as did theirs, from his relationship to the promised

Savior. Joseph's very name links him with the Joseph who fed his father and brothers in the time of famine in Egypt. St. Joseph, who cared for Mary and Joseph, is seen as the natural protector of Christian families and of those whose daily bread is uncertain. His is the ordinary man's holiness. He was told to arise and flee from the evil and temptations that threatened them. He had to take Mary and the Child with him in the isolation of Egypt. His life has inspired many to lead a retired, silent life in intimacy with Mary and Jesus.

Friday 20 Mar

'I am the Lord Your God; listen to my warning'.

Hos. 14:2-10: In lyrical language, Hosea urges a return to God, who will warmly respond.

Mk. 12:28-34: In response to a question asking about the priority of the commands, Jesus reiterates the two great commands – love of God, and of neighbor.

Jesus quotes the great *Shema* (Deut. 6:4ff) in which worship of the ONE God is affirmed. This was the pivotal obligation of the covenant that made the people God's people. Yet conjoined to monotheism, was the obligation to act in a covenanted manner to those in need, marked out then as the poor, the widowed and the orphan. In this sense the two great commandments are linked and in the Christian perspective, service to the other is service to Christ.

Saturday 21 Mar

'What I want is love, not sacrifice.'

Hos. 6:1-6: In the image of a father's love, Hosea reminds that he who rends, is he who heals. But the return must be wholehearted.

Lk. 18:9-14: the parable of the Pharisee and tax collector demonstrates what genuine repentance consists of.

While again the Pharisees get unfair press, the universal point remains – sincere repentance begins with an honest acknowledgement of one's need for God. This is not some type of self-degradation but acknowledges rather that human fulfilment is not self-generated but is received as a gift (as grace).

PASTOR'S SCHEDULE EVENTS WEEK OF 14 - 22 MAR

Saturday 14 Mar

8:30 a.m. Mass

9:30 a.m. Appointment

1:30 p.m. Confession

5:00 p.m. Vigil Mass 3rd Sunday of Lent

7:00 p.m. Meeting

Sunday 15 Mar 3rd Sunday of Lent

7:00 a.m., 8:30 a.m., 11:30 a.m. Masses

1:00 p.m. Appointment

Monday 16 Mar Day Off

6:30 a.m. Mass

7:00 a.m. Confession

8:30 a.m. Mass

Tuesday 17 Mar

6:30 a.m. Mass

7:00 a.m. Confession

8:30 a.m. Mass

Wednesday 18 Mar

6:30 a.m. Mass

7:00 a.m. Confession

8:30 a.m. Mass

11:00 a.m. Gray's Mass

Thursday 19 Mar

6:30 a.m. Mass

7:00 a.m. Confession

8:30 a.m. Mass

5:00 p.m. Confessions

6:30 p.m. Mass

Friday 20 Mar

6:30 a.m. Mass

7:00 a.m. Confession

8:30 a.m. Mass

12:00 p.m. Appointment

5:00 – 7:00 p.m. Adoration & Confessions

7:00 p.m. Stations of the Cross

Saturday 21 Mar

8:30 a.m. Mass

1:30 -4:30 p.m. Confessions

5:00 p.m. Vigil Mass 4th Sunday of Lent

Sunday 22 Mar 4th Sunday of Lent

7:00 a.m. 8:30 a.m. 11:30 a.m. Masses



"These are vegetables, mother. You wouldn't want me to eat something I've given up for Lent, would you?"

Next sunday:



Bishop Knestout Authorizes Further Safety Guidelines in Response to the Coronavirus

For Immediate Release: March 11, 2020

Bishop Knestout Authorizes Further Safety Guidelines in Response to the Coronavirus

The Most Rev. Barry C. Knestout, bishop of Richmond, approved additional directives for the Catholic Diocese of Richmond as a result of the rapidly changing circumstances involving the coronavirus (COVID-19) affecting the United States. The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) has now confirmed multiple cases within the Commonwealth.

Bishop Knestout is instructing the following liturgical guidelines to take effect immediately in all parishes, schools, residential adult care centers, and campus ministries within the diocese:

- Cease distribution of the Precious Blood (Christ is fully present under both species of the Blessed Sacrament).
- Refrain from shaking hands during the Sign of Peace (bow or verbal gesture is appropriate).
- Refrain from holding hands during the Lord's Prayer.
- Remove holy water from the baptismal and holy water fonts.

The diocese continues to urge anyone who is ill to stay home and avoid attending Sunday Mass out of charity and concern for others. The guidelines have been sent to all clergy, parishes, and schools within our diocese.

Individuals can read up-to-date information from the state and health-related facts about the coronavirus: <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/surveillance-and-investigation/novel-coronavirus/>

The diocese has created a webpage with information, helpful resources and communications within the diocese that you may be looking for, you can find the information at <https://richmonddiocese.org/coronavirus>

We pray for all who are sick and the healthcare professionals caring for those affected.

St. Stephen, Martyr, Roman Catholic Church

DATE: Tuesday 10 March 2020

TO: Rev. S. Prince
Office of Worship

FROM: Rev. B. Rafferty
St. Stephen, Martyr

SUBJECT: Distribution Under Both Species

For the foreseeable short term future, defined by the gradual spread of the coronavirus we will be discontinuing the distribution of Holy Communion under the species of the Blood of Christ. I have taken this action based on the advice of several doctors, following the reports of the CDC, as well as other Federal health agencies the experience gained from my former career. The parish is situated adjacent to some major North-South routes and we receive a large number of visitors each weekend. It would seem the time is right to be proactive as opposed to reactive if the virus continues its gradual progression or mutation.

The congregation has also been advised against shaking hands at the Sign of Peace or holding hands during the Lord's Prayer. This advice is given every year during flu season. The elderly and those with compromised immune systems have also been advised to stay away from crowds including Mass and classes during this time.