

SUNDAY REFLECTION

Lord Jesus, You are the Prince of Peace. Our world needs the peace only You can give. We are caught up in power and prestige. You died in shame on the cross. We find it had to die to self.

You died for our sakes. Give us eyes to see Your ways. Give us ears to hear what Your Spirit is saying to the Churches. Give us hearts designed for peace, reconciliation and forgiveness.

The Church must consider it one of her principal duties – at every stage of history and especially in our modern age – to proclaim and to introduce into life the mystery of mercy, supremely revealed in Jesus Christ. Not only for the Church herself as the community of believers but also in a certain sense for all humanity, this mystery is the source of a life different from the life which can be built by man ... It is precisely in the name of this mystery that Christ teaches us to forgive always.

(Adapted from St. John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*, par 14)

The quality of mercy is not strained:

It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven

Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest;

It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.

(Merchant of Venice, Act IV, Scene 1)

STEWARDSHIP: Today's Gospel has encouraging words for good stewards – "Give and it shall be given to you. For the measure you measure with will be measured back to you." What encouragement to give generously of the resources entrusted to our care!

Second Vatican Council '*The Church Today*'

Respect and love ought to be extended also to those who think or act differently than we do in social political, and religious matters, too. In fact, the more deeply we come to understand their ways of thinking through such courtesy and love, the more easily will we be able to enter into dialogue with them.

READINGS EIGHTH SUNDAY

3 MAR 19

Sir. 27:4-7: The wise author reflects on the weakness of human thought and speech.

Ps. 92:2-3, 13-16:

1 Cor. 15:54-58: Paul brings his reflections on the resurrection to a close by exhorting his readers to remain firm in their trust in the life-giving power of the risen Lord while living in the weakness of human existence.

Lk. 6:39-45: Jesus alerts the disciples to the danger of condemnation and advises patience as the tree is only truly judged in the fruit it produces.

Publius Syrus

Conversation is the image of the mind. As the man is, so is his talk.

ALTAR:

The altar is the meeting point between God and mankind, the true center of all religious buildings, positioned at the heart of the sanctuary, raised up on a few steps so that the architecture is drawn towards it. The word "altar" is derived from the Latin adjective *altus*, meaning "high". Humanity has invariably been led to put places of worship on high. Mount Olympus was the dwelling-place of the Greek gods. When no natural heights were available,

the sanctuary is placed on the top of an artificial structure, as can be seen in the ziggurats of Mesopotamia. When man wanted to force his way into the holy kingdom, he thought up the Tower of Babel. Jewish tradition considers that mountains are the natural places to meet God, there, where heaven and earth touch. It was at the summit of Mount Sinai that Yahweh spoke to Moses.

As a sign of respect for divine transcendence, the smoke of offerings was first made to “go up” towards God who “smelt the pleasing smell” (Gn. 8:21). This is the tradition of sacrifice by fire, the holocaust (from the Greek *holokaustos*, “entirely burnt”). In the rite inspired by the Covenant on Mount Sinai, Moses shared the blood of the victims between the altar he has just built, which represents God, and the people whom he sprinkled with it. Yahweh and Israel thus became “of one blood.” The New Christian Covenant continues this “consanguinity” and makes us into God’s table guests, since the sacrifice of the communion feeds the congregation with the very body and blood of Christ Himself. The altars in our churches are tables where these offerings are laid out. They are symbols of God, who receives the gifts which are offered by the congregation of the faithful. But the altar is also a communal table at which the guests share the sacred meal. Christ is, at once the altar, as God who receives the sacrifice, the priest, and the victim, as the man who offers it and who offers himself.

During the dedication of churches, the first thing is to seal up relics of saints – or, originally, of martyrs – inside the altar in order to mark the continuity between Christ’s sacrifice and that of his faithful. The altar is then consecrated with an anointment of holy chrism. After that, it is illuminated by the burning of incense, which is the sign of the Holy Spirit’s taking possession of it. Finally, it is laid with altar cloths.

The altar is, then, the most elevated symbol of Christ in the church. Even before the cross, it is the first object which we venerate when entering. The priest kisses it at the beginning and the end of the Mass as a sign of respect.



LENT:

YES! Once again it has snuck up on us. In just over two weeks we enter into the season of Lent. Will it merely be a six week period of groaning over the lack of meat on Fridays and sparse decorations in the Church or will it be a period of true renewal of the Church both the structure but also of its building block; you and me.

History of Lent

Lent is a special time of prayer, penance, sacrifice and good works in preparation of the celebration of Easter. In the desire to renew the liturgical practices of the Church. *The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* of Vatican Council II stated: "The two elements which are especially characteristic of Lent – the recalling of baptism or the preparation for it, and penance – should be given greater emphasis in the liturgy and in liturgical catechesis. It is by means of them that the Church prepares the faithful for the celebration of Easter, while they hear God's word more frequently and devote more time to prayer" (No. 109). The word *Lent* itself is derived from the Anglo-Saxon words *lencten* meaning "Spring" and *lenctentid*, which literally means not only "Springtide" but also was the word for "March," the month in which the majority of Lent falls.

Since the earliest times of the Church, there is evidence of some kind of Lenten preparation for Easter. For instance, St. Irenaeus (d. 203) wrote to Pope St. Victor I, commenting on the celebration of Easter and the differences between practices in the East and the West: "The dispute is not only about the day, but also about the actual character of the fast. Some think that they ought to fast for one day, some for two, others for still more; some make their 'day' last 40 hours on end. Such variation in the observance did not originate in our own day, but very much earlier, in the time of our forefathers" (Eusebius, *History of the Church*, V, 24). When Rufinus translated this passage from Greek into Latin, the punctuation made between "40" and "hours" made the meaning to appear to be "40 days, twenty-four hours a day." The importance of the passage, nevertheless, remains that since the time of "our forefathers" – always an expression for the apostles – a 40-day period of Lenten preparation existed. However, the actual practices and duration of Lent were still not homogenous throughout the Church.

Lent becomes more regularized after the legalization of Christianity in A.D. 313. The Council of Nicea (325), in its disciplinary canons, noted that two provincial synods should be held each year "one before the 40 days of Lent." St. Athanasius (d. 373) in his "Festal Letters" implored his congregation to make a 40 day fast prior to the more intense fasting of Holy Week. St. Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 386) in his *Catechetical Lectures*, which are the paradigm for our current RCIA programs, had 18 pre-baptismal instructions given to the catechumens during Lent. St. Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444) in his series of "Festal Letters" also noted the practices and duration of Lent, emphasizing the 40-day period of fasting. Finally, Pope St. Leo (d. 461) preached that the faithful must "fulfill with their fasts the Apostolic institution of the 40 days," again noting the apostolic origins of Lent. One can safely conclude that by the end of the fourth century, the 40-day period of Easter preparation known as Lent existed, and that prayer and fasting constituted its primary spiritual exercises.

Of course, the number "40" has always had special spiritual significance regarding preparation. On Mount Sinai, preparing to receive the Ten Commandments, "Moses stayed there with the Lord for 40 days and 40 nights, without eating any food or drinking any water" (Ex. 34:28). Elijah walked "40 days and 40 nights" to the

mountain of the Lord, Mount Horeb (another name for Sinai) (1 Kgs. 19:8). Most importantly, Jesus fasted and prayed for “40 days and 40 nights” in the desert before He began His public ministry (Mt. 4:2).

Once the 40 days of Lent were established, the next development concerned how much fasting was to be done. In Jerusalem, for instance, people fasted for 40 days, Monday through Friday, but not on Saturday or Sunday, thereby making Lent last for eight weeks. In Rome and in the West, people fasted from Monday through Saturday, thereby making Lent last for six weeks. Eventually, the practice prevailed of fasting for six days a week over the course of six weeks, and Ash Wednesday was instituted to bring the number of fast days before Easter to 40. The rules of fasting varied. First, some areas of the Church abstained from all forms of meat and animal products, while others made exceptions for food like fish. For example, Pope St. Gregory (d. 604), writing to St. Augustine of Canterbury, issued the following rule: “We abstain from flesh, meat, and from all things that come from flesh, as milk, cheese and eggs.” Second, the general rule was for a person to have one meal a day, in the evening or at 3 p.m. These Lenten fasting rules also evolved. Eventually, a smaller repast was allowed during the day to keep up one’s strength for manual labor. Eating fish was allowed, and later eating meat was also allowed through the week except on Ash Wednesday and Friday. Dispensations were given for eating dairy products if a pious work was performed, and eventually this rule was relaxed totally. (However, the abstinence from even dairy products led to the practice of blessing Easter eggs and eating pancakes on Shrove Tuesday, the day before Ash Wednesday.) Over the years, modification have been made to the Lenten observances, making our practices not only simple but also easy. Ash Wednesday still marks the beginning of Lent, which lasts for 40 days, not including Sundays. The present fasting and abstinence laws are very simple: ON Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, the faithful fast (having only one full meal a day and smaller snacks to keep up one’s strength) and abstain from meat; on the other Fridays of Lent, the faithful abstain from meat. People are still encouraged “to give up something” for Lent as a sacrifice. (An interesting note is that technically on Sundays and solemnities like T. Joseph’ Day (March 19) and the Annunciation (March 25), one is exempt and can partake of whatever has been offered up for Lent. (it should be noted for consideration that if one breaks the fast that has been self imposed for Sundays and solemnities, restarting on the following day is just as difficult as it was at the beginning of Lent.)

An emphasis must be placed on performing spiritual works, like attending the Stations of the Cross, attending Mass, making a weekly holy hour before the Blessed Sacrament, taking time for personal prayer and spiritual reading and most especially making a good confession and receiving sacramental absolution. Although the practices may have evolved over the centuries, the focus remains the same: to repent of sin, to renew our faith and to prepare to celebrate joyfully the mysteries of our salvation.



A FEW BASIC QUESTIONS ABOUT LENT

Q. Why do we say that there are forty days of Lent? When you count all the days from Ash Wednesday through Holy Saturday, there are 46.

A. It might be more accurate to say that there is the "forty day fast within Lent." Historically, Lent has varied from a week to three weeks to the present configuration of 46 days. The forty day fast, however, has been more stable. The Sundays of Lent are certainly part of the Time of Lent, but they are not prescribed days of fast and abstinence.

Q. So does that mean that when we give something up for Lent, such as candy, we can have it on Sundays?

A. Apart from the prescribed days of fast and abstinence on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, and the days of abstinence every Friday of Lent, Catholics have traditionally chosen additional penitential practices for the whole Time of Lent. These practices are disciplinary in nature and often more effective if they are continuous, i.e., kept on Sundays as well. That being said, such practices are not regulated by the Church, but by individual conscience.

Q. I understand that all the Fridays of Lent are days of abstinence from meat, but I'm not sure what is classified as meat. Does meat include chicken and dairy products?

A. Abstinence laws consider that meat comes only from animals such as chickens, cows, sheep or pigs --- all of which live on land. Birds are also considered meat. Abstinence does not include meat juices and liquid foods made from meat. Thus, such foods as chicken broth, consomme, soups cooked or flavored with meat, meat gravies or sauces, as well as seasonings or condiments made from animal fat are technically not forbidden. However, moral theologians have traditionally taught that we should abstain from all animal-derived products (except foods such as gelatin, butter, cheese and eggs, which do not have any meat taste). Fish are a different category of animal. Salt and freshwater species of fish, amphibians, reptiles, (cold-blooded animals) and shellfish are permitted.

Q. I've noticed that restaurants and grocery stores advertise specials on expensive types of fish and seafood on Fridays during Lent. Some of my Catholic friends take advantage of these deals, but somehow I don't feel right treating myself to the lobster special on Fridays during Lent.

A. While fish, lobster and other shellfish are not considered meat and can be consumed on days of abstinence, indulging in the lavish buffet at your favorite seafood place sort of misses the point. Abstaining from meat and other indulgences during Lent is a penitential practice. On the Fridays of Lent, we remember the sacrifice of Christ on Good Friday and unite ourselves with that sacrifice through abstinence and prayer.

Q. I understand that Catholics ages 18 to 59 should fast on Ash Wednesday and on Good Friday, but what exactly are the rules for these fasts?

A. Fasting on these days means we can have only one full, meatless meal. Some food can be taken at the other regular meal times if necessary, *but combined they should be less than a full meal*. Liquids are allowed at any time, but no solid food should be consumed between meals.

Q. Are there exemptions other than for age from the requirement to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday?

A. Those that are excused from fast and abstinence outside the age limits include the physically or mentally ill including individuals suffering from chronic illnesses such as diabetes. Also excluded are pregnant or nursing women. In all cases, common sense should prevail, and ill persons should not further jeopardize their health by fasting.

LENTEN FAST AND ABSTINENCE RULES

Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are obligatory days of fasting and abstinence for Catholics. In addition, Fridays during Lent are obligatory days of abstinence.

For members of the Latin Catholic Church, the norms on fasting are obligatory from age 18 until age 59. When fasting, a person is permitted to eat one full meal, as well as two smaller meals that together are not equal to a full meal. The norms concerning abstinence from meat are binding upon members of the Latin Catholic Church from age 14 onwards.

Members of the Eastern Catholic Churches are to observe the particular law of their own *sui iuris* Church.

A Reflection on Lenten Fasting

If possible, the fast on Good Friday is continued until the Easter Vigil (on Holy Saturday night) as the "paschal fast" to honor the suffering and death of the Lord Jesus, and to prepare ourselves to share more fully and to celebrate more readily his Resurrection.

SAINT OF THE WEEK: BLESSED MARK BARKWORTH 1572-1601 27 FEB

Martyr of England, the first Benedictine to die at Tyburn. Born in Lincolnshire, he was a Protestant educated at Oxford. While in Europe, Mark visited Douai, France, and became a Catholic. He was ordained in Valladolid, Spain, in 1599, and became a Benedictine in Navarre while on his return to England. Mark was arrested soon after his return to his homeland, and three apostates testified against him. With Fr. Richard Filcock he was hanged, drawn, and quartered at Tyburn on 27 Feb.

PRAYERS

A PRAYER AFTER CONFESSION BY ST. FRANCES XAVIER CABRINI

My dearest Jesus, I have told all my sins as well as I could. I tried hard to make a good confession. I feel sure that you have forgiven me. I thank You. It is only because of all Your sufferings that I can go to confession and free myself from my sins. Your Heart is full of love and mercy for poor sinners. I love You because You are so good to me. My loving Savior, I shall try to keep from sin and to love You more each day. My dear Mother Mary, pray for me and help me to keep my promises. Protect me and do not let me fall back into sin. Almighty God, kneeling before Your Divine Majesty, I adore You and because You command me, I dare approach Your divine Heart. But what shall I say if You do not enlighten me with a ray of Your divine light?

Speak to my soul, O Lord, and command me to listen to Your voice. Enlighten my will to put Your words into practice. Pour Your grace into my heart; lift up my soul weighed down by my sins; raise my mind to heavenly things, so that earthly desires may no longer appeal to me. Speak to my soul with Your divine omnipotence, for You are my salvation, my life, and my peace, in time and in eternity. Strengthen me with the grace of Your Holy Spirit and give Your peace to my soul that I may be free from all needless worry and care. Help me to desire always that which is pleasing and acceptable to You so that Your Will may be my will, Grant that I may rid myself of all unholy desires, and that for Your love I may remain unknown in this world, and be known only to You.

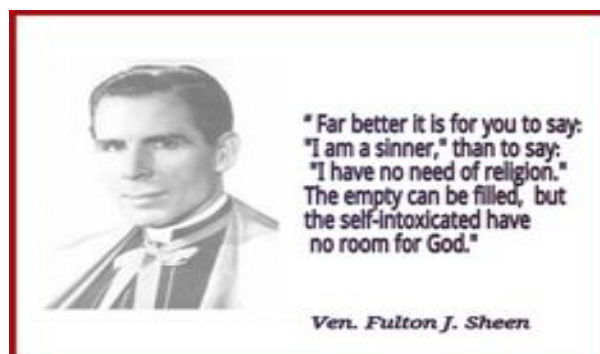
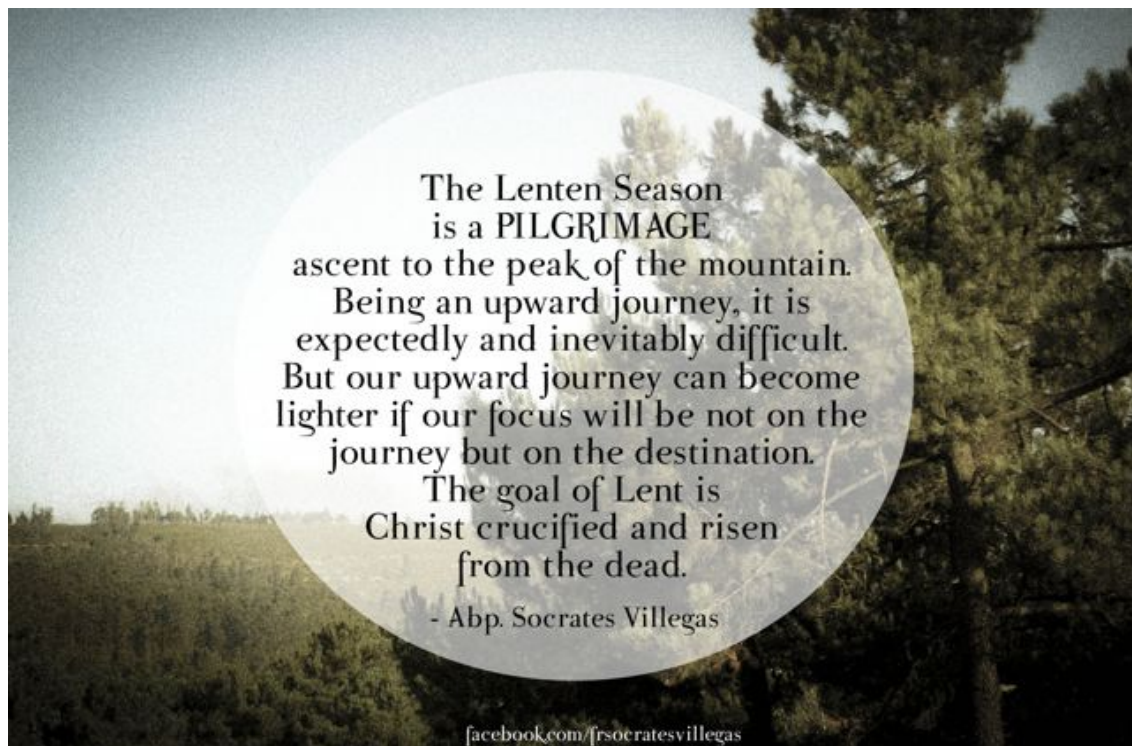
Do not permit me to attribute to myself the good that You perform in me and through me, but rather, referring all honor to Your majesty, may I glory only in my weakness, so that renouncing sincerely all vain glory which comes from the world, I may aspire to the true and lasting glory which comes from you. Amen.

Speak to my soul, O Lord, and command me to listen to Your voice. Enlighten my will to put Your words into practice. Pour Your grace into my heart; lift up my soul weighed down by my sins; raise my mind to heavenly things, so that earthly desires may no longer appeal to me. Speak to my soul with Your divine omnipotence, for You are my salvation, my life, and my peace, in time and in eternity. Strengthen me with the grace of Your Holy Spirit and give Your peace to my soul that I may be free from all needless worry and care. Help me to desire always that which is pleasing and acceptable to You so that Your Will may be my will, Grant that I may rid myself of all unholy desires, and that for Your love I may remain unknown in this world, and be known only to You.

Do not permit me to attribute to myself the good that You perform in me and through me, but rather, referring all honor to Your majesty, may I glory only in my weakness, so that renouncing sincerely all vain glory which comes from the world, I may aspire to the true and lasting glory which comes from you. Amen.

Prayer in preparation for Lent

Merciful God, You created us from the dust of the earth, And breathed your own life into our very being. You recreated us in Christ through the waters of Baptism, That we might share as a people your fullness of life. As we prepare to enter these forty days, May our fasting strengthen us to seek your justice, May our prayer lead us to become makers of peace, And may our sharing quicken the seeds of your Reign, Present in all human hearts, and growing in mystery, As we await with joyful anticipation, the resurrection of Jesus your Son. We make this prayer to you in his name.



A Catholic Guide to Ashes, *Extended Edition*

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