

MARCH 4/5, 2017

First Sunday of Lent

1. What temptations lure us from the path of discipleship? Possessions? Pride? Power? Oh Lord, create for us a clean heart and renew a steadfast spirit within us!
2. Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert, a place of harshness and solitude, silence and impoverishment. The desert is also depicted by the great spiritual writers as a site for the beginning of conversion, renewal, and new birth. Stewardship begins in conversion; a lifetime of spiritual awakening that moves one to live out the Gospel in a radical way. Set aside time each day during Lent for some small “desert experience” an act of self-denial, to be reminded of the need for conversion in order to draw closer to the Lord.

OR At the beginning of this Lenten season we hear proclaimed the story of Jesus’ temptation in the desert. He responds to the first temptation by saying that one does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes forth from the mouth of God. The season of Lent invites us to consider how we nourish our hearts, how we act as stewards of the Word of God entrusted to us. A good reflection for the week: What do we live on? What keeps us going? Could it be possessions, prestige, the need to be in control, the need for security, addictions? Or the fervent desire to listen to God’s word?

3. **“Command that these stones become bread.”** In Chapter two of his book, Jesus of Nazareth, Pope Benedict XVI reflects on the temptation of Jesus: This demand for proof is a constantly recurring theme in the story of Jesus’ life; again and again he is reproached for having failed to work that great miracle that will remove all ambiguity... And we make the same demand on God and Christ and his Church throughout the whole of history. “If you exist God,” we say, “then you will just have to show yourself.” Then, in a challenge to examine our own conscience, Benedict asks, “Is there anything more opposed to belief in the existence of a good God and a Redeemer of mankind, than world hunger? Jesus left to us the responsibility to preach his message and to carry on his mission. St. Francis of Assisi challenged us to “Preach the Gospel to all the world, and if necessary, use words.” Are we like the devil who tempted Jesus by demanding a sign? Or, are we a living sign that Jesus is the Redeemer – OUR Redeemer?

MARCH 11/12, 2017

Second Sunday of Lent

1. "Bear your share of the hardship for the Gospel," St. Paul tells Timothy in today's second reading. What sacrifice is asked of me for the sake of the Gospel? How willing am I to bear my share?
2. The Gospel story of Jesus' Transfiguration establishes an authentic connection between Jesus and Moses. But the Prophet Elijah is important to the story as well and can offer a reminder that the Christian steward is called to live a prophetic life as well; a life that is counter-cultural, and that challenges the values our society embraces. During this season of Lent, take time to discover how you might live a prophetic life in Jesus' name.

OR Saint Matthew's account of Jesus' transfiguration is a preview of the Resurrection and puts into perspective Jesus' sayings about his suffering, rejection and death, and his role as the light of salvation. With the additional command "Listen to him" from the voice in the heavens the transfiguration is also about the disciples' resurrection, and sheds light on Jesus' previous sayings about the cost of discipleship. Are we willing to "listen to him?" Do we believe Christ's claims for our salvation? Are we willing to accept this cost even if it means rejection by others?

3. **"Rise, and do not be afraid."** Jesus spoke these words to Peter, James, and John who were frightened when they saw Jesus transfigured and conversing with Moses and Elijah. Tradition holds that the Transfiguration occurred atop Mt. Tabor, a cone shaped, craggy, mountain that juts up from the floor of the Jezreel Valley and overlooks Armageddon, the place of the final battle between good and evil. Lest we be too harsh on the three disciples for their fear and misinterpretation of the event, let us confess that we would probably have been half way down that craggy mountain before Peter spoke his first word. The whole event on Mt. Tabor is a reminder to us that we are constantly engaged in our own Armageddon – our personal struggle between good and evil, trying to fulfill our responsibility to be all that God created us to be and to do all that God gave us the talents, abilities, and gifts to do. Sometimes we succeed, sometimes we fail. But when we lay prostrate before Jesus, filled with fear and anxiety, we hope to hear him say, "Good and faithful steward, come into my kingdom."

MARCH 18/19, 2017

Third Sunday of Lent

1. 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!
2. "Is the Lord in our midst or not?" This question from today's first reading was one of seemingly endless protests by those who followed Moses into the desert. Just as it was for the Israelites wandering in the desert, so it is for Christian stewards today who confront those interior struggles that come with living a life of faith. We must remember to exercise good stewardship of our prayer life; to take time to pray, and to ask the Lord for spiritual nourishment and the wisdom to know that the Lord is in our midst.

OR Jesus' longest-recorded conversation with anyone is the one he has with the Samaritan woman at the well. She discovers she can be honest with Jesus and goes and tells others about him. She gives witness. She's not the most certain, thorough or even convincing witness. But her witness is enough. It is inviting, humble, non-judgmental and sincere. What is the quality of our witness? How do our words and actions give daily testimony on behalf of Christ? During the season of Lent, how might we do a better job at proclaiming the risen Lord in word and deed?

3. ***"My food is to do the will of the one who sent me."*** As Jesus was traveling with his disciples between Galilee and Jerusalem they stopped at Jacob's Well at Sychar (Shechem) in the center of Samaria, approximately thirty miles north of Jerusalem. They would have been walking since dawn. The hour was about noon, the hottest part of the day, a good time to stop for food and drink and to seek shade. The disciples go off in search of food while Jesus has a conversation with a woman at the well. He tells her of a "spring of water welling up to eternal life" and that those who drink will never thirst. Naturally, she wants such water. When the disciples return and offer him food, Jesus says, "My food is to do the will of the one who sent me." Those are strange words indeed. But the woman understands that Jesus is the Messiah, that He is the wellspring of eternal life and that He is sustained by discerning and doing the will of God. Have we figured that out? Do we truly desire to drink from the spring of water welling up to eternal life? Do we earnestly try to discern and do the will of God?

MARCH 25/26, 2017

Fourth Sunday of Lent

1. The blind man was willing to let Jesus minister to him and willingly did all Jesus asked of him. The Pharisees were more resistant to his message, spending their time and energy to disprove the miracle. Which am I more like, the man born blind or the Pharisees?
2. Jesus said that the man he sent to wash in the Pool of Siloam was blind so that the works of the Lord might be made visible through him. It is a reminder that although we, as good stewards of God's abundant gifts, are called to recognize our strengths, we should also be ever mindful of our failings and weaknesses. For it is through our infirmities, St. Paul suggests, that we most often find the Lord.

OR Saint Paul gives us a wake-up call. As stewards of the light of Christ, we are to reflect that light with the help of the Holy Spirit. If Christ's work has transformed and illuminated our lives, there should be a change. The light of Christ's active presence should be at work in us. And as the light shines within us, we take on the properties of that light and we shine too. We are used by God to shine the light of Christ in the lives of others. A challenging Lenten reflection: Is the light of Christ shining in our hearts? Is the light of Christ reflecting out from us to others?

3. ***"Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents?"*** Jesus answered: "Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him." Blindness or birth defects were thought to be punishment for either the disabled person or the parents. Most disabled people had to beg. In parts of the world they still do. Jesus cured the man's blindness, which caused fear among the Jewish leaders. They realized Jesus was demonstrating that the man's blindness was not a sign of his sin or his parents, but that his need to beg was a sign of the many people, particularly the Jewish leaders, who refused to share God's gifts to them to help the blind man. Jesus has an unpleasant encounter with the Pharisees and concludes by saying, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, 'We see' so our sin remains." They suffered from a self-inflicted spiritual and moral blindness. **There are none so blind as those who will not see.** Now, do WE see?