

# St Matthew's Westminster



## Lent Booklet Week III

*Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> March -  
Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> March 2023*



## An Introduction to Lent

Lent is a season of forty days, not counting Sundays, which begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Saturday. The English word *Lent* comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *lencten*, which means *lengthen* and refers to the lengthening days of spring. In many other languages, the word used for this season refers to the 40-day length of the season (*cuaresma* in Spanish, *carême* in French, *quaresima* in Italian) or to the fasting that characterizes it (*Fastenzeit* in German, *fastan* in Swedish, *paasto* in Finnish).

Historically, Lent began as a period of fasting and preparation for baptism by converts and then became a time for penance by all Christians. The first Sunday of Lent describes Jesus' temptation by Satan; and the sixth Sunday (Palm Sunday), Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem and his subsequent passion and death. Note that the readings during Lent, until Palm Sunday, focus primarily on the meaning of baptism and discipleship, in continuity with the season's original purpose. Because Sundays are always little Easters, the penitential spirit of Lent is tempered with joyful expectation of the Resurrection.

## Week 3 | Mercy

During Lent, we have traditionally asked Christians to focus on the *seven acts of mercy* during Lent. These are: to feed the hungry, to give water to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to shelter the homeless, to visit those in prison, and to comfort the bereaved and afflicted. These are, of course, based on the teaching of Jesus in St Matthew 25. They paint a picture of Christians going outwards to serve the wider community.

During the past ten years, Pope Francis has put mercy at the centre of his vision for the Church. Rather than being seen as judgmental or inflexible, the Pope wants Christians to be known for our compassionate love for others. He writes, 'God's mercy can make even the driest land become a garden, can restore life to dry bones (Ezekiel 37.1-14) ... Let us be renewed by God's mercy, let us be loved by Jesus, let us enable the power of his love to transform our lives too, and let us become agents of this mercy, channels through which God can water the earth, protect all creation, and make justice and peace flourish.'

Pope Francis is surely correct. In our broken world, the gift of kindness may seem so weak and insignificant, but it is gentle mercy that opens our hearts to God.

Cover: *Jacob and the Angel*, Sir Jacob Epstein 1940-41 (Tate Britain)

## Sunday March 12<sup>th</sup> *Third Sunday of Lent*

### Reading

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

*1 Peter 1. 3-5*

### Reflection

Mercy is the very foundation of the Church's life ... The Church's very credibility is seen in how she shows merciful and compassionate love ... Mercy is the force that reawakens us to new life and instills in us the courage to look to the future with hope.

*Pope Francis*

### Prayer

Almighty and most merciful Father; we have erred, and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against thy holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; and we have done those things which we ought not to have done; and there is no health in us.

But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders. Spare thou those, O God, who confess their faults. Restore thou those who are penitent; according to thy promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake; that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of thy holy Name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Book of Common Prayer*

## Monday March 13<sup>th</sup>

### Reading

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

*Lamentations 3. 22-23*

### Reflection

For language to have meaning, there must be intervals of silence somewhere, to divide word from word and utterance from utterance. They who retire into silence do not necessarily hate language. Perhaps it is love and respect for language which imposes silence upon them. For the mercy of God is not heard in words unless it is heard, both before and after the words are spoken, in silence.

*Thomas Merton (1915-1968)*

### Prayer

Thank you dear Lord for this day, and every day.  
For eyes to see, mouth to speak and ears to hear.  
Guide and direct my thoughts and actions throughout this day.  
Encourage me to help, not hinder,  
Praise, not slander.  
To use my strength, energy and knowledge  
in a positive direction  
to be supportive to those around me and those I shall meet.  
Instil in me patience and kindness  
for every situation I shall encounter today.  
I am grateful for every day.  
Help me to find the right path to be on  
and complete the work you would have me do.  
I could never make it without you, dear Lord,  
nor would I ever want to try.

*Michael Leppen*

## Tuesday March 14<sup>th</sup>

### Reading

God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved.

*Ephesians 2. 4-5*

### Reflection

Again and again the Sermon on the Mount calls and challenges us to a life of radical discipleship. Note: when Jesus says *Blessed are the merciful, peacemakers*, and so on, he doesn't just mean that they themselves are blessed. He means that the blessing of God's kingdom works precisely through those people into the wider world. That is how God's kingdom comes.

That's one thing to hear afresh.

*N. T. Wright (b 1948)*

### Prayer

When the heart is hard and parched up  
come upon me with a shower of mercy.

When grace is lost from life,  
come with a burst of song.

When tumultuous work raises its din on all sides  
shutting me out from beyond,  
come to me, my Lord of silence,  
with thy peace and rest.

When my beggarly heart sits crouched,  
shut up in a corner,  
break open the door my King,  
and come with the ceremony of a king.

When desire blinds the mind  
with delusion and dust,  
O thou holy one, thou wakeful,  
come with thy light and thy thunder.

*Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941)*

## Wednesday March 15<sup>th</sup>

### Reading

Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show mercy to you. For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him.

*Isaiah 30. 18*

### Reflection

The quality of mercy is not strain'd.  
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.  
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes  
The thronèd monarch better than his crown.  
His scepter shows the force of temporal power,  
The attribute to awe and majesty  
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;  
But mercy is above this scepter'd sway.  
It is enthronèd in the hearts of kings;  
It is an attribute to God Himself;  
And earthly power doth then show likest God's  
When mercy seasons justice.

*The Merchant of Venice, William Shakespeare (1564-1616)*

### Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God,  
who art always more ready to hear than we to pray,  
and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve,  
pour down upon us the abundance of thy mercy,  
forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid,  
and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask,  
but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ,  
thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

*Leonine Sacramentary*

## Thursday March 16<sup>th</sup>

### Reading

He saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

*Titus 3.5*

### Reflection

What art thou then, my God? what, but the Lord God? For who is Lord but the Lord? or who is God save our God? Most highest, most good, most potent, most omnipotent; most merciful, yet most just; most hidden, yet most present; most beautiful, yet most strong; stable, yet incomprehensible; unchangeable, yet all-changing; never new, never old; all-renewing, and bringing age upon the proud, and they know it not; ever working, ever at rest; still gathering, yet nothing lacking; supporting, filling, and overspreading; creating, nourishing, and maturing; seeking, yet having all things.

*Saint Augustine (354-430)*

### Prayer

O God, my God, give me a heart to thank thee;  
lift up my heart above myself, to thee and thine eternal throne;  
let it not linger here among the toils and turmoils of this lower world;  
let it not be oppressed by any earth-born clouds of care  
or anxiety or fear or suspicion; but bind it wholly to thee and to thy love;  
give me eyes to see thy love in all things, and thy grace in all around me;  
make me to thank thee for thy love and thy grace to all and in all;  
give me wings of love, that I may soar up to thee, and cling to thee,  
and adore thee, and praise thee more and more,  
until I be fitted to enter into the joys of thine everlasting love,  
everlastingly to love thee and thy grace,  
whereby thou didst make me such as thou couldst love,  
such as could love thee, O God, my God. Amen.

*Fr Edward Bouverie Pusey (1800-82)*



## Friday March 17<sup>th</sup>

### Reading

No one who conceals transgressions will prosper, but one who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.

*Proverbs 28.13*

### Reflection

So long as we judge ourselves by human comparisons, there is plenty of room for self-satisfaction, and self-satisfaction kills faith, for faith is born of the sense of need. But when we compare ourselves with Jesus Christ, and through Him, with God, we are humbled to the dust, and then faith is born, for there is nothing left to do but to trust to the mercy of God.

*William Barclay (1907-78)*

### Prayer

*The Prayer of a French Bishop for The Church*

May she be a Church where it's good to live,  
where you can breathe, and say what you think.

A Church of freedom

A Church which listens before speaking  
which welcomes instead of judging,  
which forgives without wishing to condemn,  
which announces rather than denounces.

A Church of mercy.

A Church where the Holy Spirit  
will be able to feel at home  
because everything hasn't been foreseen,  
settled in advance.

An open Church.

A Church of which people will say  
not 'see how well-organized they are'  
but 'see how they love one another'.

Amen.

## Saturday March 18<sup>th</sup>

### Reading

The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy.

*James 3.17*

### Reflection

The person who is not afraid to admit everything that he sees to be wrong with himself, and yet recognizes that he may be the object of God's love precisely because of his shortcomings, can begin to be sincere. His sincerity is based on confidence, not in his own illusions about himself, but in the endless, unfailing mercy of God.

*Thomas Merton (1915-1968)*

### Prayer

Father of all,  
we pray for the world you have created,  
in all its beauty and fragility.  
In Jesus Christ you have taken the world's need,  
confronted the world's evil  
and, by the self-offering of Calvary,  
have transfigured the world's despair.  
As we look upon our world today  
be with all who struggle for peace and justice at cost to themselves,  
and all who suffer in the most violent and impoverished places on the earth.  
Be with all who suffer unjustly for the sake of conscience,  
and inspire us, through the teaching and example of Jesus,  
to walk alongside the prisoners, the naked, the hungry,  
the thirsty, the voiceless and the infirm;  
for, as we serve these our brothers and sisters,  
we are serving you, our God for ever and ever.  
Amen.



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