

St Matthew's
Westminster



Lent Booklet
Week 1

*Ash Wednesday –
Saturday March 4th*

The season of Lent offers an opportunity for us to journey together as a community, and we hope that the resources we offer each week will be of help as we explore our faith and our commitment to Christ and his Church. Once our resources are produced in conjunction with the parish of Christ the Saviour, Ealing and their Vicar, Fr Richard Collins. I'm grateful to colleagues at St Matthew's for the considerable help given to make this weekly production possible, and pray that it may be a blessing to us all as we walk with Our Lord through these holy days.

Fr Philip Chester

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.

Holy Week is the final week of Lent, beginning with Palm Sunday and concluding with Holy Saturday. It is during these days that the readings focus primarily on the last days and suffering and death of Jesus. The Great Three Days – also called the Triduum or Pasch – from sunset Maundy Thursday to sunset Easter Day are the climax of Lent and of the whole Christian year and a bridge into the Easter Season. This holy season proclaims the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ's passion, death, and resurrection. During these days, the community journeys with Jesus from the upper room, to the cross, to the tomb, and to the garden. They should be seen as a great and single unified service beginning with the Mass of the Last Supper on Maundy Thursday and concluding with the services of Easter Day.

Ash Wednesday

Reading

Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing. *Joel 2. 12-13*

Reflection

The season of Lent beginning with Ash Wednesday is something like F. Scott Fitzgerald's tale of Benjamin Button in which the protagonist presents the curious case of 'ageing backwards'; he begins his life an old man and ends up a baby. The Liturgy's movement, leading us from Ash Wednesday through Lent and into Eastertide is something like this too. For today we begin with a burial. Just as funerals are performed in public, so we will (in seeming contradiction to the Gospel) wear ashes on our forehead very publicly, to be seen by all. Hence the words from Genesis 3.19, 'Remember that you are dust and to dust you will return', are said during the imposition of ashes; they are reminiscent of the words in the funeral rites: 'Ashes to ashes, dust to dust'. Hence the ashes were traced in the form of a cross, for Lent is the time of dying with Christ. As St Paul said: 'I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live' (Galatians 2.20).

Fr John O'Connor O.P.

Prayer

*The Ash Wednesday Collect
(traditionally this prayer is said every day in Lent)*

Almighty and everlasting God,
you hate nothing that you have made
and forgive the sins of all those who are penitent:
create and make in us new and contrite hearts
that we, worthily lamenting our sins
and acknowledging our wretchedness,
may receive from you, the God of all mercy,
perfect remission and forgiveness;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Thursday February 23rd

Reading

If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself.

2 Corinthians 5. 17-19

Reflection

We see in the Gospels that it's the lame, the poor, the blind, the prostitutes, the drunkards, the tax collectors, the sinners, the outsiders, and the foreigners who tend to follow Jesus. It is those on the inside and the top who crucify him (elders, chief priests, teachers of the Law, and Roman occupiers). Shouldn't that tell us something really important about perspective? Every viewpoint is a view from a point, and we need to critique our own perspective and privilege if we are to see truth. Once Christianity became the established religion of the Roman Empire (313), we largely stopped reading the Bible from the side of the poor and the oppressed. We read it from the side of the political establishment and, I am sorry to say, from the priesthood side ... instead of from the side of people hungry for justice and truth. No wonder Jesus said, 'I did not come for the healthy but for the sick' (St Mark 2.17). This priority has the power to constantly detach religion from its common marriage to power, money, and self-importance.

Fr Richard Rohr (n 1943)

Prayer

Almighty and eternal God,
when your people wandered in the desert
you drew a living fountain from a rock;
draw tears of repentance from our hard hearts,
that we may return to you, trusting in your compassion,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

14th century

Friday February 24th

Reading

Jesus entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.' But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.'

St Luke 10. 38-end

Reflection

The image of God is to be seen in us-as it was in Jesus-equally in our *active* lives, in our work and our creativity, and in our *passive* lives, by the way in which we accept and respond to the things that are done to us. Or indeed, as we grow old, or as we endure illness, by our response to the things which are done for us. This means that those forced to be inactive by lack of work or handicap or illness or old age need not feel they are of any less value as human beings. Rather, this time can be seen as a true and creative sharing in the nature of a God who himself became powerless and vulnerable.

Michael Mayne, A Year Lost And Found

Prayer

Heavenly Father,
your Son battled with the powers of darkness,
and grew closer to you in the desert:
help us to use these days to grow in wisdom and prayer
that we may witness to your saving love
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Saturday February 25th

Reading

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

Romans 6. 3-5

Reflection

It is not working too hard that makes us weary. It is rather, I submit, living a life that is against the grain of our true creatureliness, living a ministry that is against the grain of our true vocation, being placed in a false position so that our day-to-day operation requires us to contradict what we know best about ourselves and what we love most about our life as children of God.

Exhaustion comes from the demand that we be, in some measure, other than we truly are.

Walter Brueggemann (b 1933)

Prayer

Almighty and most merciful God, we acknowledge and confess that we have sinned against thee in thought, word, and deed; that we have not loved thee with all our heart and soul, with all our mind and strength; and that we have not loved our neighbour as ourselves. We beseech thee, O God, to be forgiving to what we have been, to help us to amend what we are, and of thy mercy to direct what we shall be, so that the love of goodness may ever be first in our hearts, that we may always walk in thy commandments and ordinances blameless, and follow unto our life's end in the footsteps of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Sunday February 26th

First Sunday of Lent

Reading

Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it. Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable garland, but we an imperishable one. So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air; but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified.

I Corinthians 9. 24-end

Reflection

When we struggle for human rights, for freedom, for dignity, when we feel that it is a ministry of the church to concern itself for those who are hungry, for those who have no schools, for those who are deprived, we are not departing from God's promise. He comes to free us from sin, and the church knows that sin's consequences are all such injustices and abuses. The church knows it is saving the world when it undertakes to speak also of such things.

St Oscar Romero (1917-80)

Prayer

O Lord,

I am two people; and one is filled with longing to serve you utterly,
and one is afraid.

O Lord, have compassion upon me.

I am two people; and one will labour to the end,
and one is weary already.

O Lord, have compassion upon me.

I am two people; and one knows the suffering of the world,
and one knows only their own.

O Lord, have compassion upon me

and may the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ
fill my heart and the hearts of all people everywhere.

A Prayer of St Martin-in-the-Fields

Monday February 27th

Reading

So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

2 Corinthians 5.20

Reflection

We are made for goodness. We are made for love. We are made for friendliness. We are made for togetherness. We are made for all of the beautiful things that you and I know. We are made to tell the world that there are no outsiders. All are welcome: black, white, red, yellow, rich, poor, educated, not educated, male, female, gay, straight, all, all, all. We all belong to this family, this human family, God's family.

Bishop Desmond Tutu (1931-2021)

Prayer

Batter my heart, three-person'd God, for you
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
Your force, to break, blow, burn and make me new.
I, like an usurp'd town, to another due,
Labor to admit you, but Oh, to no end,
Reason your viceroy in me, me should defend,
But is captiv'd, and proves weak or untrue.
Yet dearly I love you, and would be loved fain,
But am betroth'd unto your enemy:
Divorce me, untie, or break that knot again,
Take me to you, imprison me, for I
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

John Donne (1572 – 1631)

Dean of St Paul's

Tuesday February 28th

Reading

I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Romans 7.21-25

Reflection

Every day Christ's Kingdom may be carried forward by the men and women of hope, for hope is the strong awakening from the spells of discouragement and listlessness of despair. It is the refusal to be weighed down and depressed by evil; a refusal because it is not right to indulge in the melancholy pleasure of looking at the dark. Hope calls us to the light as hope fights with such power on the side of God. For it not only receives, not only welcomes, not only trusts in God's promises, but it throws them into light and reality- so that they become not words, but things of substance.'

George Congreve, SSJE (1835-1918)

Prayer

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this, you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

Thomas Merton (1915-1968)

Wednesday March 1st

Reading

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.

Isaiah 58. 6-9

Reflection

One of the great tragedies and errors of the way people have understood the Bible has been the assumption that what people did in the Old Testament must have been right 'because it's in the Bible'. It has justified violence, enslavement, abuse and suppression of women, murderous prejudice against gay people; it has justified all manner of things we now cannot but as Christians regard as evil. But they are not there in the Bible because God is telling us, 'That's good.' They are there because God is telling us, 'You need to know that that is how some people responded. You need to know that when I speak to human beings things can go very wrong as well as very wonderfully.' God tells us, 'You need to know that when I speak, it isn't always simple to hear, because of what human beings are like.' We need, in other words, to guard against the temptation to take just a bit of the whole story and treat it as somehow a model for our own behaviour. Christians have often been down that road and it has not been a pretty sight. We need rather to approach the Bible as if it were a parable of Jesus. The whole thing is a gift, a challenge and an invitation into a new world, seeing yourself afresh and more truthfully.

Bishop Rowan Williams

Prayer

Let nothing disturb you, let nothing dismay you. All things pass: God never changes. Patience attains all that it strives for. Whoever has God finds they lack nothing. God alone suffices.

St Teresa of Avila (1515-82)

Thursday March 2nd

Reading

Jesus said to the disciples, 'Beware of practising your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.'

St Matthew 6. 1-4

Reflection

Hope is a completely confident expectation; that sureness and certitude with which the awakened soul aims at God and rests in God. It is the source of that living peace; that zest and alertness, that power of carrying on, which gives its special colour to the genuine Christian life.

Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941)

Prayer

A Prayer for Peace

Eternal God,
in your perfect realm no sword is drawn
but the sword of righteousness,
and there is no strength but the strength of love.
So mightily spread abroad your Spirit,
that all peoples may be gathered
under the banner of the Prince of Peace,
as your children;
to you be dominion and glory,
now and forever. Amen.

Brother Roger of Taizé

Friday March 3rd

Reading

Jesus said, 'There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance.'

St Luke 15.7

Reflection

Prayer is an entering into glory. It is particularly necessary today to give warning of a narrowing of vision in much of our approach to prayer, worship and liturgy, so that we come to see prayer in functional terms, or as excessively verbal, a kind of liturgical chat show. We need to restore the centrality of mystery in our worship. In prayer we enter into glory.

Fr Kenneth Leech (1939-2015)

Prayer

O God,
make the door of this house wide enough
to receive all who need human love and
fellowship, and a heavenly father's care;
and narrow enough to shut out
all envy, pride and hate.
Make its threshold smooth enough
to be no stumbling block to children,
nor to straying feet,
but rugged enough to turn back
the tempter's power:
make it a gateway
to thine eternal kingdom.

Bishop Thomas Ken, 1637-1711

Saturday March 4th

Reading

Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Saviour, and my hope is in you all day long.

Psalm 25.5

Reflection

Keep a clear eye toward life's end. Do not forget your purpose and destiny as God's creature. What you are in his sight is what you are and nothing more. Remember that when you leave this earth, you can take nothing that you have received... but only what you have given; a full heart enriched by honest service, love, sacrifice, and courage.

St Francis of Assisi (1181-1226)

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.

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