

Taking Our Hearts to the Lord

Scripture Sharing Group Resource, Lent 2019.

WEEK 1

Reader 1

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke (4:1-13)

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit through the wilderness, being tempted there by the devil for forty days. During that time he ate nothing and at the end he was hungry.

Then the devil said to him 'If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to turn into a loaf'. But Jesus replied, 'Scripture says: *Man does not live on bread alone*'.

Then leading him to a height, the devil showed him in a moment of time all the kingdoms of the world and said to him, 'I will give you all this power and the glory of these kingdoms, for it has been committed to me and I give it to anyone I choose, worship me then, and it shall all be yours'. But Jesus answered him, 'Scripture says: *You must worship the Lord your God, and serve him alone*'.

Then he led him to Jerusalem and made him stand on the parapet of the Temple. 'If you are the Son of God', he said to him 'throw yourself down from here, for Scripture says: *He will put his angels in charge of you to guard you, and again: They will hold you up on their hands in case you hurt your foot against a stone*'. But Jesus answered him, 'It has been said: *You must not put the Lord your God to the test*.' Having exhausted all these ways of tempting him, the devil left him, to return at the appointed time.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Silence

Leader

Let us read the Gospel passage aloud together

Everyone

A Reading from the Holy Gospel

Silence

Leader

Let us listen to a short reflection on this Gospel passage.

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Reader 2

Lent is upon us and we begin by recalling Jesus' battle with temptation in the wilderness. Each of the instances put before us carry a shared and fundamental temptation, i.e. to lose trust in God. This is something which can befall all of us and is something Jesus resists but not without personal cost or implication for the future shape of his ministry and mission.

Clearly, what is important to Jesus, is remaining true to God the Father. As followers of Christ is this among our criteria? We live at a time when temptations to lose trust in God and to abandon a genuine Christian way of life abound. There is much today, crafted and honed through the prisms of individualism and consumerism that would have us put ourselves first.

Lord, as we gather this Lent, help us to be accepting of the wildernesses to which your Spirit will lead us this Lent. Help us to recognise our need for time away from the many influences that detract from our relationship with you. Grant us the grace to recognise the subtle temptations that present themselves on a daily basis and to remain strong to the glory of your name. Amen.

Leader

I invite you to share any thought or consideration prompted by the Gospel passage and /or the reflection.

Sharing

Leader

Let us return to our Lenten Prayer.

Group returns to Lenten Scripture Sharing Booklet.

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WEEK 2

Reader 1

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke (9:28-36)

Jesus took with him Peter and John and James and went up the mountain to pray. As he prayed, the aspect of his face was changed and his clothing became brilliant as lightening.

Suddenly there were two men there talking to him; they were Moses and Elijah appearing in glory, and they were speaking of his passing which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem.

Peter and his companions were heavy with sleep but they kept awake and saw his glory and the two men standing with him.

As these were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is wonderful for us to be here; so let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah". - He did not know what he was saying.

As he spoke a cloud came and covered them with shadow; and when they went into the cloud the disciples were afraid. And a voice came from the cloud saying, "This is my Son, the Chosen One. Listen to him".

And after the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone.

The disciples kept silence and, at that time, told no one what they had seen.

The Gospel of the Lord.

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Reader 2

The story of Jesus' transfiguration follows Luke's account of Peter's profession of faith in Jesus as "the Christ of God" (Lk 9: 18-21). Here Jesus discloses his divine glory, confirming Peter's profession. The passage also informs us of his topic of conversation with Moses and Elijah, 'his passing, which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem.' This is a veiled reference to his forthcoming passion, death and resurrection, events that impact profoundly on Jesus, his disciples and human history. We also encounter the Father's authentication, 'This is my Son, the Chosen One. Listen to him'.

Jesus' transfiguration communicates his divine glory. On Calvary he shall be deformed by abject suffering and death. Both series of events are like two sides of the one coin. The God who loves us is no stranger to the darker side of human existence. In fact this loving community inhabits them more than we realise. *Lord, help us be mindful this Lent that you, in all your glory, embraced the cross for our salvation, and delight when your disciples do the same. Grant us the grace to put our troubles in perspective and to follow your lead in being love in our broken world. Amen.*

Silence

Leader

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Sharing

Leader

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WEEK 3

Reader 1

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke (13:1-9)

Some people arrived and told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with that of their sacrifices. At this he said to them, 'Do you suppose those Galileans who suffered like that were greater sinners than any other Galileans? They were not, I tell you. No; but unless you repent you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen on whom the tower at Siloam fell and killed them? Do you suppose that they were more guilty than all the other people living in Jerusalem? They were not I tell you. No, but unless you repent you will all perish as they did'.

He told this parable: 'A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came looking for fruit on it but found none. He said to the man who looked after the vineyard 'Look here, for three years now I have been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and finding none. Cut it down: why should it be taking up the ground?' 'Sir', the man replied 'leave it one more year and give me time to dig round it and manure it; it may bear fruit next year; if not, then you can cut it down'.

The Gospel of the Lord.

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Reader 2

In telling us personal misfortune is not God's punishment for sin Jesus is inviting us to reflect on how we exercise our freedom. He is unambiguous. Certain disasters are a sign of the need for repentance. The message is simple; sin unchecked leads to immense suffering. In matters of love and compassion, God, to use a speech parlance, will be the last man standing, but he does not force our hand or nullify the consequences of sins of omission or neglect. Our freedom comes with responsibility.

Note too how he follows up. The parable focuses on the planting of a fig tree among vines in a vineyard. Is this significant? Let's look at it this way: the fig tree is placed among vines whose delicacy is known and respected by the vineyard owner, in a place where trees are assured of care over and above their counterparts growing in the wild.

Lord, help us recognise the Church as the vineyard to which we belong. Stir our minds and hearts to engage worthily in the sacraments, particularly Eucharist and Penance this Lenten season. Help us to be open to the many graces you desire to bestow upon us, for our good and the good of our communities and country. Amen.

Silence

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WEEK 4

Reader 1

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke (15:1-3.11-32)

The tax collectors and the sinners, meanwhile, were all seeking his company to hear what he had to say, and the Pharisees and the scribes complained, 'This man' they said 'welcomes sinners and eats with them'. So he spoke this parable to them:

'A man had two sons. The younger said to his father, 'Father, let me have the share of the estate that would come to me'. So the father divided the property between them. A few days later, the younger son got together everything he had and left for a distant country where he squandered his money on a life of debauchery.

When he had spent it all, that country experienced a severe famine, and now he began to feel the pinch, so he hired himself out to one of the local inhabitants who put him on his farm to feed the pigs. And he would willingly have filled his belly with the husks the pigs were eating but no one offered him anything. Then he came to his senses and said 'How many of my father's paid servants have more food than they want, and here am I dying of hunger! I will leave this place and go to my father and say: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son: treat me as one of your paid servants'. So he left the place and went back to his father.

While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity. He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him tenderly. Then his son said 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son'. But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him, put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the calf we have been fattening, and kill it: we are going to have a feast, a celebration, because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life: he was lost and is found'. And they began to celebrate.

'Now the elder son was out in the fields, and on his way back, as he drew near the house, he could hear music and dancing. Calling one of the servants he asked what it was all about. 'Your brother has come' replied the servant 'and your father has killed the calf we had fattened because he has got him back safe and sound'. He was very angry then and refused to go in, and his father came out to plead with him; but he answered his father, 'Look, all these years I have slaved for you and never once disobeyed your orders, yet you never offered so much as a kid for me to celebrate with my friends. But, for this son of yours, when he comes back after swallowing up your property - he and his women - you kill the calf we had been fattening'.

The father said 'My son, you are with me always and all I have is yours. But it was only right we should celebrate and rejoice, because your brother here was dead and has come to life; he was lost and is found'.

The Gospel of the Lord.

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Reader 2

This great story communicates the unfathomable riches of God's mercy. In the process it also illuminates the substantial risk God is willing to take with every human person. In this context there are a few points pertinent to our reflection today.

Note, for example, how the Father does not coerce or beg the younger son to stay ... even at the risk of losing him forever. Note too how he does not take offence at his son's decision or judge him harshly for it. Rather, true to his loving nature, he remains open to loving his son to the point of being moved with pity on seeing him.

More than ever we need, as Christians, to ponder how we are perceived by others? Can it be said of us, for example, that we are welcoming of people who, for whatever reason, don't hold to our Christian values? Can we also be found among them, present in a spirit of genuine friendship and care?

Lord, help us to examine our attitudes and the often unconscious considerations that influence our communication. Grant us the humility to let go, trusting in your providence and call to be a blessing in the lives of people who differ from us. Amen.

Silence

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WEEK 5

Reader 1

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to John (8:1-11)

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. At daybreak he appeared in the Temple again; and as all the people came to him, he sat down and began to teach them.

The scribes and Pharisees brought a woman along who had been caught committing adultery; and making her stand there in full view of everybody, they said to Jesus, 'Master, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery, and Moses has ordered us in the Law to condemn women like this to death by stoning. What have you to say?'

They asked him this as a test, looking for something to use against him.

But Jesus bent down and started writing on the ground with his finger. As they persisted with their question, he looked up and said, 'If there is one of you who has not sinned, let him be the first to throw a stone at her'. Then he bent down and wrote on the ground again. When they heard this they went away one by one, beginning with the eldest until Jesus was left alone with the woman, who remained standing there. He looked up and said, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' 'No one, sir' she replied. 'Neither do I condemn you', said Jesus, 'go away, and don't sin anymore'.

The Gospel of the Lord.

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Reader 2

Holy Week will soon be upon us and we advance toward it mindful of Jesus' desire to see us all grow in holiness. In the matter of on-going conversation today's gospel passage is particularly poignant, especially Jesus' remark, 'If there is one of you who has not sinned, let him be the first to throw a stone at her' and his subsequent question to the woman, 'Has no one condemned you?'

Like it or not we are the descendants in faith of those who had stones in their hands. These upholders of God's law needed to be helped examine their understanding of it, as well as their perceived right to be its arbitrators.

Jesus, inspired by the Holy Spirit, finds a means of speaking to their hearts and minds, beginning with the simple non-threatening act of bending down. See too how he honours a woman, no doubt traumatised by her ordeal, with words of affirmation and challenge, words pertinent to us all?

Lord, over the coming fortnight, grant us the grace to recognise both the good intentions and ill-will we harbour in our hearts. Help us to be open to your teaching and acceptance and to give witness to both in the manner we live our daily lives. Amen.

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HOLY WEEK

Reader 1

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke (19:28-40)

Jesus went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. Now when he was near Bethpage and Bethany, close by the Mount of Olives as it is called, he sent two of the disciples, telling them, "Go off to the village opposite, and as you enter it you will find a tethered colt that no one has yet ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, "Why are you untying it?" you are to say this, "The Master needs it". The messengers went off and found everything just as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owner said, "Why are you untying that colt?" and they answered, "The Master needs it."

So they took the colt to Jesus, and throwing their garments over its back they helped Jesus on to it. As he moved off, people spread their cloaks in the road, and now, as he was approaching the downward slope of the Mount of Olives, the whole group of disciples joyfully began to praise God at the top of their voices for all the miracles they had seen. They cried out: "Blessings on the King who comes, in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heavens!"

Some Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Master, check your disciples," but he answered, "I tell you, if these keep silence the stones will cry out."

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Reader 2

For more than a year Jesus has been telling his disciples that he is destined to suffer grievously, die and rise again on the third day (e.g Lk 9:22). They don't get it, anymore than some of us have comprehended the finality of a rapid terminal illness on a part of a much loved family member. Consequently there is a degree to which Jesus is surrounded by his disciples but apart from them, true to his vocation, but, in human terms, alone within it.

What's interesting in Jesus' case, is his humility to the end. The one who was laid in a manger, who opted to stay in accommodation based on the Mount of Olives (cheap accommodation for migrant workers) now opts to enter Jerusalem on a borrowed tethered colt. Is there a message here for us, particularly regarding material possessions in the lead-up to our celebration of the Paschal Mystery? *Lord, you are our way, our truth and our life. Thank you for being our Saviour and Redeemer. Thank you for our time together, our prayer with and for one another, and for the guidance of your Holy Spirit. Grant us the grace to continue to draw near to you and to discard any possessiveness that thwarts our path. Amen.*

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