



Bringing Home the Word

Second Sunday of Lent (A)
March 5, 2023

What a Blessing!

By Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA

Today's readings don't seem Lenten. They are uplifting, not penitential. God makes promises to Abram of extraordinary good fortune, political protection, and international status. The man must have been thrilled. Paul reminds Timothy that the life of holiness and blessing to which we have been called is a gift from God; always available to us, and not a reward for any good works we might have performed. And then we hear of Jesus' transfiguration in the sight of a few disciples. They were so overwhelmed by that spectacular experience they wanted to pitch tents so they wouldn't have to

leave the place. How are such wondrous ideas penitential?

While God's marvelous blessings are free gifts, we are expected to respond to them appropriately, to accept them and use them for the common good. Abram's blessings were not simply for him and his family. "All the families of the earth will find blessing in you" (Genesis 12:3). His blessings would open a door to others—other nations, other ethnic groups, other religious communities. Abram was not simply chosen by God. He was chosen so that others might be blessed through him.

Timothy was instructed to "bear your share of hardship for the gospel" (2 Timothy 1:8). The blessing might be a gift, but it carried the responsibilities of discipleship. The voice from heaven told the disciples, "Listen to him" (Matthew 17:5). Being chosen by God or having seen the glory of Jesus calls for a change of mind and heart. This change isn't easy to accomplish. It is the reason for penance. †

*While God's marvelous
blessings are free gifts, we
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Sunday Readings

Genesis 12:1–4a

The LORD said to Abram...I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you.

2 Timothy 1:8b–10

Bear your share of hardship for the gospel with the strength that comes from God.

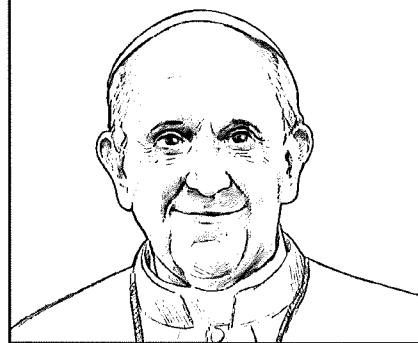
Matthew 17:1–9

And he was transfigured before them; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light.

A Word from Pope Francis

We have not seen with our own eyes the face of Jesus shining like the sun. However, we too were given the Word of Salvation, faith was given to us, and we have experienced the joy of meeting Jesus in different ways. Jesus also says to us: "Rise, and have no fear" (Matthew 17:7).

ANGELUS, ROME, MARCH 8, 2020



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What God-given blessings am I called to share today?
- How have others blessed me?

Share the Mission

By Fr. Daniel P. Horan, OFM

On March 24, 1980, Archbishop Óscar Romero of San Salvador was assassinated by those who wished to silence him for preaching the good news of justice and peace to his people who were being abused and oppressed by the government of El Salvador and the oligarchic class that supported it. Romero was not always such a courageous preacher, one unafraid to call out the injustices and crimes in his midst, but over time he became increasingly aware of the hardship that the gospel demanded in living an authentic Christian life—especially as the leader of the Church in San Salvador.

The hardship that the Second Letter to Timothy is talking about here is not reserved simply for official leaders in the Church like Archbishop Romero, but is instead a reality that all the baptized are called to embrace. Jesus says as much in the Gospels when he tells us that part of discipleship requires us to “take up [your] cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24) and that we may even have to “lay down [our] life” (John 15:13).

Archbishop Romero understood this and, in a homily a year before his martyrdom, said: “Because it is God’s work, we don’t fear the prophetic mission the Lord has entrusted to us...every baptized person has received a share in the prophetic mission of Christ” (July 8, 1979). He said we don’t do the difficult work of the gospel by living alone but with the strength that relies on the power of God. †

These reflections were excerpted from Daybreaks: Daily Reflections for Lent and Easter by Fr. Daniel P. Horan, OFM, available from Liguori Publications. To learn more and review our complete list of Daybreaks authors, including Fr. Ron Rolheiser, OMI; Fr. Byron Miller, CSsR; Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA; and others, visit Liguori.org.

Run the Race

By Fr. Daniel P. Horan, OFM

As a longtime competitive runner, I really appreciate St. Paul’s metaphor about the Christian life of discipleship being like a race (1 Corinthians 9:24). Whereas St. Paul likely had in mind Greek athletics (think of the ancient Olympic Games) where there is indeed a greater sense of competition—“the award goes to one person”—I would invite us to think of those community fun runs or even major modern events like the Boston Marathon instead. Indeed, some people run the race to win, but that is a comparatively small percentage of the population. Most people are out not to win an award but to enjoy the event itself.

The nice thing about road races as a metaphor for Christian living is that they include all people—fast runners, slow runners, walkers, spectators, and volunteers. Races are activities that involve all women and men moving as one community in the same direction toward a shared finish line.

Furthermore, they often involve many people cheering the participants from the sidelines. One might even think of this group as similar to the saints that intercede for us, cheer us on, and coach us toward our goal.

May this Lent be a time for us to consider where we are and how we participate in the race of Christian discipleship, moving with the community, and cheering one another onward toward the kingdom of God. †



So that the world may know you by our words and actions, we pray—Lord, let us be like you.

The Redemptorists

WEEKDAY READINGS

March 6–11

Monday, Lenten Weekday:
Dn 9:4b–10 / Lk 6:36–38


Tuesday, Lenten Weekday:
Is 1:10, 16–20 / Mt 23:1–12

Wednesday, Lenten Weekday:
Jer 18:18–20 / Mt 20:17–28

Thursday, Lenten Weekday:
Jer 17:5–10 / Lk 16:19–31

Friday, Lenten Weekday: Gn 37:3–4, 12–13a, 17b–28a / Mt 21:33–43, 45–46

Saturday, Lenten Weekday:
Mi 7:14–15, 18–20 / Lk 15:1–3, 11–32

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Bringing Home the Word

Third Sunday of Lent (A)

March 12, 2023

Water for Living, or Living Water?

By Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA

Water flows through this Sunday's readings. In the passage from Exodus, the Hebrews cry out for the water so necessary for life. In the Gospel, Jesus speaks of living water that provides eternal life.

The exchange between the Hebrews and Moses is straightforward and startling. Physical thirst led them to question the divine care that miraculously delivered them from the hands of Egyptian oppressors. We shouldn't be too quick to shake our fingers at them. How many times have we

looked past blessings we take for granted, only to focus on lesser immediate needs? These desert people are our ancestors in more ways than one.

The Gospel of John is most interesting. Jesus is in Samaria, a land hated by the Jews. There he initiates a conversation with an inhabitant of the town of Sychar, someone who is an outcast in three major ways. She is a woman—no self-respecting man would be alone with a woman he didn't know. She is a Samaritan—Jews considered Samaritans unclean. And she is promiscuous—his own honor might be at risk. The woman's questionable social status does not prevent Jesus from engaging her, first in social etiquette ("Give me a drink" [4:7]), then in a theological exchange ("Whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst" [4:14]).

The Hebrews experienced God's saving action in their exodus, but they lacked trust. The woman, hated by the Jews, was an outcast of her own people, yet she believed. How do we respond to the water? †

*How many times have
we looked past blessings
we take for granted,
only to focus on lesser
immediate needs?*

A Word from Pope Francis

Like the Samaritan woman, whoever personally encounters the living Jesus feels the need to talk about him to others, so that everyone might reach the point of proclaiming that Jesus "is truly the savior of the world" (Jn 4:42), as the woman's fellow townspeople later said....[W]e too are called to witness the life and hope that are within us.

ANGELUS, ROME, MARCH 15, 2020



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- What is the deepest longing of my heart?
- Have I overlooked a blessing, an answer to a prayer?

Sunday Readings

Exodus 17:3–7

The LORD answered..., "Strike the rock, and the water will flow from it for the people to drink."

Romans 5:1–2, 5–8

The love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the holy Spirit.

John 4:5–42 or John 4:5–15, 19b–26, 39a, 40–42

[Jesus said,] "The water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

Foreign Encounter

By Fr. Byron Miller, CSsR

“Y’all mind sharing a table with these folks?” asked the attendant as we wandered into a dueling piano bar in the French Quarter. Our group was one or two years past the legal drinking age; they were elderly couples who were one or two drinks past the legal alcohol limit. The couples were from California visiting New Orleans for an Elks Convention. My Cajun friends and I had limited experience with elks—or their conventions—but thirst knew no boundaries, and lasting friendships with these strangers was formed.

In John’s Gospel, two strangers meet at a well on the outskirts of town. Their peoples—the Jews and the Samaritans—had been estranged from each other for generations. Thirst, however, knows no boundaries.

“The woman is taken aback that a Jew, no matter how thirsty, would ask a Samaritan for a drink,” writes Denis McBride, CSsR. Yet, she “has a thirst for meeting Mr. Right” that hadn’t been satisfied after five husbands and the man she’s living with. Then the buckets are turned, when Jesus tells her he is the Christ, and “at long last she has met the right man.” †




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WEEKDAY READINGS

March 13–18

Monday, Lenten Weekday:
2 Kgs 5:1–15ab / Lk 4:24–30
Tuesday, Lenten Weekday:
Dn 3:25, 34–43 / Mt 18:21–35
Wednesday, Lenten Weekday:
Dt 4:1, 5–9 / Mt 5:17–19

Thursday, Lenten Weekday:
Jer 7:23–28 / Lk 11:14–23
Friday, Lenten Weekday:
Hos 14:2–10 / Mk 12:28–34
Saturday, Lenten Weekday:
Hos 6:1–6 / Lk 18:9–14

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Finding Redemption

By Amy Welborn

As John narrates the encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman at the well, we witness one more fascinating conversation that seems circuitous, but by the end, homes in on the truth.



It begins in the heat of the day, the point at which the light is strongest, and into this light steps a woman. An ordinary chat turns into a moment of profound self-knowledge. She is confronted with her flaws and comes away with understanding. How instructive that, faced with embarrassing and awkward news about her life, she experiences it as good. Good news. She meets Jesus as she is, and in that truthful, painful space she finds redemption.

A friend fought cancer for years. At some point between her diagnosis and her death she said to me with complete conviction, “Thank God for my cancer.”

Cancer had ravaged her body and was cutting her physical life short, but my friend felt strongly that cancer had also stripped her of pretense and forced her to confront herself and God on spare, honest terms. There, in that bright, painful light, she was brought face to face with Jesus through a winding, wandering path. She saw herself as she really was, flawed, yes, but most of all, loved. †



So that we may recognize you wherever we are and proclaim your presence to all those we meet, we pray—Lord, let us be like you.

The Redemptorists



Bringing Home the Word

Fourth Sunday of Lent (A)

March 19, 2023

I See

By Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA

Do we? Do we really see? Do we understand? There is so much that is simply misunderstood or unnoticed. Little about life is uncomplicated, and even that which is uncomplicated so often slips right by us. This is true about a life lived alone or with others. It is also true about our life with God.

The first reading is an example of this. God will choose one of the sons of Jesse to be king. Will it be the eldest, the rightful heir? If not him, perhaps it will be the brightest one or the most pious. All of these highly valued characteristics would certainly be necessary for one

to be an effective king. However, Jesse and his sons did not see in the same way as God. Their youngest brother, the one tending the sheep, would be God's choice. He was the one God wanted, and so David was anointed in the presence of his family.

The Gospel tells another story about seeing. In it, Jesus restores a man's sight. What began as a story about physical blindness and sight then becomes a lesson about seeing and understanding the mystery of God's power as opposed to refusing to see and understand it. No one in the story could claim that the man had not really been blind. Then why did they refuse to acknowledge that God's power had done something marvelous in their presence? But they did refuse. We can, indeed, choose to be blind. †

Sunday Readings

1 Samuel 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a

God does not see as a mortal,
who sees the appearance.
The LORD looks into the heart.

Ephesians 5:8-14

Take no part in the fruitless works
of darkness; rather expose them.

**John 9:1-41 or
John 9:1, 6-9, 13-17, 34-38**

Jesus said, "I came into this world
for judgment, so that those who
do not see might see, and those
who do see might become blind."



*There is so much that
is simply misunderstood
or unnoticed.*

A Word from Pope Francis

The first Christians...used to say that the community of Christians, that is the Church, is the "mystery of the moon," because it gave light but it was not its own light, it was the light it received from Christ. We too can be "mystery of the moon:" giving light received from the sun, which is Christ, the Lord.

ANGELUS, ROME, MARCH 22, 2020



REFLECTION
QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS
REFLECTION

- Do I blame others for their ill-health or misfortune?
- Does bias or prejudice make me blind to the gifts of others?

Uncontrollable Joy!

By Fr. Byron Miller, CSsR

Mark Twain is thought to have once quipped: “A German joke is no laughing matter,” which speaks to the untrue notion that Germans aren’t funny.

While our faith is meant to be a serious endeavor, it’s not defined as “no laughing matter.” On the contrary: joyfulness is not a hindrance to holiness, it’s an expression of it! *Laetare* means “to rejoice.” A spirituality that radiates the joy of Easter is every bit as authentic as one that reflects the severity of Lent, and all the more inviting, too! A Redemptorist classmate of mine liked to say, “None of us are baptized in pickle juice.”

According to Karl Rahner, the German Jesuit theologian, “Only the person who has a gift for affection can have a true sense of humor. A good laugh is a sign of love; it may be said to give us a glimpse of, or a first lesson in, the love that God bears for every one of us.” Another theologian, Karl Barth, stated simply: “Laughter is the closest thing to the grace of God.”

Imagine what it’s like to see for the first time after being blind from birth. How could the blind man in John’s Gospel refrain from laughing at the awesome blessing he received when Christ restored his sight? How could his eyes not weep tears of unspeakable joy at his good fortune?

An ancient Greek Orthodox tradition sets aside Easter Monday for jokes and laughter to celebrate Christ’s triumph over death. It may be rooted in St. John Chrysostom’s vivid image of the risen Christ laughing at the devil, who is at his wit’s end. They rejoice! †

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Abundant Laughter

By Fr. Byron Miller, CSsR

In *Between Heaven and Mirth* (HarperOne, 2012), Jesuit Fr. James Martin recounts a story by Margaret Silf of two friends who mourned the death of a mutual friend. At her gravesite, they planted what they thought were daffodil bulbs. Imagine their surprise when they returned in the spring to pay their respects and found a crop of onions! They laughed until they cried—and they felt certain their friend was right in there laughing with them.

At the beginning of Lent—the name is derived from the word *spring*—we solemnly soil our foreheads in remembrance of the Garden of Eden. With ashen faces and grave Lenten disciplines, we till our hardened hearts through purposeful penance, fasting, and almsgiving, and bury the guilt that we won’t let die. Then, when we’re born anew, our tears of sorrow are transplanted into tears of joy and laughter!

According to Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, “In hell there is no hope and no laughter. In purgatory there is no laughter, but there is hope. In heaven, hope is no longer necessary because laughter reigns.” Our faith assures us of a God who takes pleasure in his people and delights in being with us! †



So that our eyes may be open to your presence everywhere and in everyone, we pray—Lord, let us be like you.

The Redemptorists

WEEKDAY READINGS

March 20–25

Monday, St. Joseph: 2 Sm 7:4–5a, 12–14a, 16 / Rom 4:13, 16–18, 22 / Mt 1:16, 18–21, 24a or Lk 2:41–51a

Tuesday, Lenten Weekday: Ez 47:1–9, 12 / Jn 5:1–16

Wednesday, Lenten Weekday: Is 49:8–15 / Jn 5:17–30

Thursday, Lenten Weekday: Ex 32:7–14 / Jn 5:31–47

Friday, Lenten Weekday: Wis 2:1a, 12–22 / Jn 7:1–2, 10, 25–30

Saturday, Annunciation of the Lord: Is 7:10–14; 8:10 / Heb 10:4–10 / Lk 1:26–38

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March 19, 2023

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Bringing Home the Word

Fifth Sunday of Lent (A)

March 26, 2023

God Opens Our Graves

By Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA

It is not ghosts that come out of these graves, but a second chance at life. Ezekiel compares the reestablishment of ancient Israel after the exile with the dead rising alive from their graves. They are filled with God's spirit, God's power of life, and they have a second chance at living. Only the graciousness of God could imagine such a marvel; only the power of God could accomplish it. Jesus performs an even greater marvel. He actually brings Lazarus back from death, giving him a second chance at living.

Sunday Readings

Ezekiel 37:12–14

You shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and make you come up out of them, my people!

Romans 8:8–11

The one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through his Spirit that dwells in you.

John 11:1–45 or John 11:3–7, 17, 20–27, 33b–45

Jesus told [Martha], "I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live."

Once again, only the graciousness of God could imagine such a marvel; only the power of God could accomplish it. Jesus is that graciousness and that power, as he declares: "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25).

After its reestablishment, Israel was not immune to failure, nor was Lazarus exempt from eventual death. That was not the point. The point was a demonstration of divine generosity at that particular moment. As seen in the Gospel reading, the point is Jesus' self-identification: "I am the resurrection and the life." What follows is paradox: Those who live in him will not die; even if they die, they will live.

Joined to the one who is the resurrection and the life, we too will be raised from our graves and be transformed into a new life. We will never again face failure, as did the Israelites, or death, as did Lazarus, for the Spirit of Jesus will live in us. †

***Joined to the one
who is the resurrection
and the life, we also will
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and be transformed
into a new life.***

A Word from Pope Francis

I invite you to think for a moment, in silence, here: Where is my interior necrosis? Where is the dead part of my soul? Where is my tomb? ...And to remove the stone, to take away the stone of shame and allow the Lord to say to us, as he said to Lazarus: "Come out!"

HOMILY, ROME, APRIL 6, 2014



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What darkness—a grudge? resentment? old wound?—am I holding on to?
- What would it cost me to welcome God's invitation to let it go?

New Life Awaits

By Fr. Paul Turner

Phil was recruiting fellow travelers for the missionary trip to Guatemala he made a few times a year. He wanted his friends and acquaintances at home to experience the discomforts of poverty in another part of the world. He wanted the poor of Guatemala to receive the compassion and help of the faithful from the North.

People who responded to him opened their wallets to provide water filtration systems and other projects, but Phil wanted more than their money. He wanted their hearts. He wanted to build relationships.

He succeeded. Over the years, he introduced hundreds of people to the plight of Guatemalans. He opened the eyes of people in the first world to the difficult demands of life in the third. People came home from his trips with a new sense of their priorities.

Once, when asked why he did this, Phil told a story. He was planning a trip with friends, and their connecting flight in Newark was delayed. The airline found seats on another flight for them to take. He doesn't know why, but the switch didn't feel right to him. He talked his friends out of getting on that plane.

It was United Airlines Flight 93. The day was September 11, 2001.

After escaping a horrifying death at the hands of terrorists, Phil decided he should do something positive with his life.

He wanted others to have a chance at living better, too. He got inspired to help the poor in Guatemala. Once he made the trip, he fell in love with the country and its people. He knew that if he could get others to go, they would have the same experience. They did. Some people get a second chance at life. When that happens, they often suspect God has a grander purpose in mind for them.

When Jerusalem was ransacked by Babylon, the people went into exile, and their city was destroyed. But they were invited to return to their homeland to rebuild it again. Suddenly they had a new purpose. They began to spread God's word through a message of hope.

When we witness someone's loss, we mourn with them. When we witness their surprising gain, we rejoice. After a horrifying experience, when people have a new mission for their lives, they may extend an invitation

for others to see the world as they do. It can open eyes.

We don't know what Lazarus did after he was brought out of the tomb. His home with Mary and Martha was a haven of hospitality for Jesus. Perhaps they continued to welcome Jesus' followers, disciples who needed rest and respite. We don't know, but it seems likely that it was a life well-lived. †



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PRAYER

So that we may have the courage to heed your call to come out of the darkness, we pray—Lord, let us be like you.

The Redemptorists

WEEKDAY READINGS

March 27—April 1

Monday, Lenten Weekday: Dn 13:1–9, 15–17, 19–30, 33–62 or 13:41c–62 / Jn 8:1–11


Tuesday, Lenten Weekday: Nm 21:4–9 / Jn 8:21–30

Wednesday, Lenten Weekday: Dn 3:14–20, 91–92, 95 / Jn 8:31–42

Thursday, Lenten Weekday: Gn 17:3–9 / Jn 8:51–59

Friday, Lenten Weekday: Jer 20:10–13 / Jn 10:31–42

Saturday, Lenten Weekday: Ez 37:21–28 / Jn 11:45–56

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