



DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

DAILY
REFLECTIONS
FOR THE
SEASON OF LENT

2024

PART TWO

10 MARCH
- 31 MARCH

Lenten Reflections 2024

An Introduction

Welcome to these Lent resources, and our grateful thanks to those around the Diocese who have contributed so generously to them.

Pope Francis asks for 2024 to be a year of prayer, as preparation for the Jubilee Year in 2025 – Pilgrims of Hope. During this year, we are invited to promote individual prayer and community prayer within ourselves and our communities. This Lent, we open our hearts and our parishes to be servants of the Suffering Servant, Jesus, who poured out his life for us. Lent is when our heavenly Father invites us to return to him with all our heart and is an opportunity to seek healing and to know the transforming mercy of God. We walk these forty Lent days with Jesus on a pilgrimage of grace and hope and look to Him for healing and new direction.

Our sharing in Jesus' way of the cross is walked in weakness and need, and paced by the patient love He shows us on the way. As you walk the path ahead, lean on these resources for support, guidance and inspiration. Worry less about the pace you set for yourself and be open to the stirrings of the Holy Spirit in the silence this holy season gives to our suffering and search for healing. We walk together the way of the cross as pilgrims of hope, open to the prayer the Holy Spirit stirs in us.

May God's mercy flow like mountain streams, falling like the morning dew. May the healing balm of forgiveness wash away our iniquity, cleanse us from our sin and lead us to a joyful celebration of the Risen Lord on Easter Sunday and the days ahead.



Monsignor Andrew Faley
Episcopal Vicar for the Vicariate for Faith & Mission

Fourth Sunday of Lent

Sunday 10 March 2024

First Reading: 2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23; Psalm: Psalms 136:1-6;

Second Reading: Ephesians 2:4-10, Gospel: John 3:14-21

"Help for Heroes" was the slogan on the man's jacket. He rattled a collection tin and called out something about sacrifice.

Name any area of life and we hopefully accept sooner or later that success is not achieved without sacrifice. Life is generated, protected and enhanced by those who go the extra mile and habitually give over the odds – you may recognise yourself here.

Love costs. We get very used to familiar terms like 'the love of God', but we need to unpack how simple phrases are often very limited shorthand for a wealth of costly stories that should stir the imagination. 'God loved the world so much that he gave his only son.' Would you give yours? For this world?

Pausing to ponder on those who spend themselves, despite opposition, to effect great change for the benefit of people unable to help themselves, we meet pale replicas of a God who is the definition of love itself. The life of Jesus is for us required reading if we are to keep ourselves sharp and make our own the command, 'love one another as I have loved you'. Study his style, his prayer, his company and keep on learning.

It's so easy to get stuck in our own routines and be bound by our own agendas. To miss the Gospel message because it has a familiar ring to it and doesn't shock anymore would look like awful complacency.

That's why the "Help for Heroes" man felt obliged to shout.

**Reflection written by: Fr Dennis Tindall, St Mary's &
St Wilfrid's, Bishop Auckland**

Fourth Week of Lent
Monday 11 March 2024

First Reading: Isaiah 65:17-21; Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 29:2, 4-6, 11-13;

Gospel: John 4:43-54

The Gospel today tells the story of Jesus curing the son of a Jewish nobleman in Cana, the town where he had previously changed water into wine. In John's Gospel, this story follows on from the meeting between Jesus and the woman at the well in Sychar, in Samaria. Both were chance meetings for Jesus: he was having a rest by the well when the woman came along; and the nobleman sought Jesus out to ask him to heal his son who was dying in Capernaum about 20 miles away. Two different stories about people from different backgrounds, but both stories have some similarities as well.

Each character has an encounter with Jesus which transforms their lives. For the woman at the well, the meeting led to her asking Jesus for living water so that she might never become thirsty again. She then went and spread the word about Jesus so that many others also came to believe in him. The nobleman believed Jesus when he told him that his son would live and on his way home his servants met him with the news that the boy was alive and then the nobleman and his whole household came to believe.

Jesus never leaves people the way he finds them. A true encounter with Jesus always brings about change. The Gospels describe Jesus as a compassionate healer who sides with the poor and the marginalised – but he is also someone who challenges people to change. He confronts the woman at the well about her relationships and he questions the motivation behind the nobleman's request. And yet, the outcome is the same – God's grace is given and lives are transformed.

In our Lenten journey, we are invited to encounter Jesus in a new way. With faith in his compassion and love, we are asked to be attentive to the promptings of the Spirit about the parts of our lives which are holding us back from experiencing freedom. As we open up these parts of ourselves to Jesus, he will transform us like the two characters in John's Gospel so that we can live our lives more fully and become whole once more.

**Reflection written by: Frank O'Neill, St John XXIII Parish,
Washington**

Fourth Week of Lent
Tuesday 12 March 2024

First Reading: Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12; Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 45:2-3, 5-6, 8-9;

Gospel: John 5:1-3, 5-16

The Gospel reading today prompts a deeper level of reflection the more the account unfolds, and we cannot fail to be inspired by it.

Jesus saw the man next to the pool of Bethesda and knowing that he had been unwell for a long time asked, 'Do you want to be well again?' The man was thus given a choice which placed a responsibility on him alone to respond. He could have said an outright "no" or a resounding "yes", yet instead he goes to great lengths to explain that there is never anyone to help him get to the pool of water in time. Undeterred by the man's response, Jesus instructs him to get up, pick up his own mat and walk around to which the man unquestioningly obeyed.

Having a multitude of choices in life places a personal obligation on us all to decide which route to follow and sometimes the easiest solution can be to remain in that middle ground of indecision. This Gospel highlights for me the importance of making informed choices rather than merely justifying what would prevent me from answering God's call to live as a missionary disciple.

However, this story does not end there. When the man was asked why he was carrying his mat on the Sabbath, he once again justifies his actions and blames the unknown man who healed him for making him carry his own sleeping mat rather than simply expressing his delight at being healed.

He was given another opportunity to investigate further what he could do to remain well in body and spirit when he met Jesus in the Temple later, yet he chose a more unfavourable path, returning to those who had confronted him earlier to tell them the name of him who had healed him on the Sabbath.

During this season of Lent we have once again been given the opportunity to acknowledge our own indecisiveness. We have been given the chance to get up, acknowledge our own burdens and come to God in repentance so that we can rejoice in the light of healing rather than live life enveloped in darkness. However, we have to be ready to say "yes" to God – yes we want to be healed and that we are ready to proclaim the Gospel to help others experience the unconditional love of our Trinitarian God, who is, and always will be, at the centre of our lives.

Reflection written by: Trisha Tindall, St Mary's, Forest Hall

Fourth Week of Lent
Wednesday 13 March 2024

First Reading: Isaiah 49:8-15; Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 144:8-9, 13-14, 17-18;

Gospel: John 5:17-30

I am always grateful for poets and composers who help me to plumb the depths of Gospel passages such as today's. From Bach and Handel to Rachmaninoff, and even Lloyd Webber, their insight and inspiration open the way for my heart and brain to engage in and to stay with the event as the phrases continue to resonate during the day.

With Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber, in the film of their musical, Jesus Christ Superstar, I hear and see vividly the taunting Temple officials denounce Jesus for his work and witness among the Jews. Contrasting, and cleverly interwoven scenes have the followers of Jesus, on the one hand, full of faith and enthusiasm and mounting expectation, while, on the other, angry Jewish leaders condemn him for breaking the Sabbath Law; then, more seriously, for blasphemy. 'He is d-an-gerous...Like John before him, this Jesus must die.' (J.C.S. Rice/Lloyd Webber)

The season of Lent mirrors this same mounting tension as we approach nearer to Holy Week. The drama played out in the Gospel readings, especially when Jesus visits Jerusalem for the Feasts, shows the Jewish leaders evermore determined to bring him down. 'My Father goes on working and so do I.' But that only made the Jews even more intent on killing him, because, not content with breaking the Sabbath, he spoke of God as his own Father, and so made himself God's equal. (*Jn. 5: 17-18*)

And Jesus does not seek to appease them: 'Amen, Amen, I say to you', or 'I tell you most solemnly...whatever the Father does, the Son does too.' (*Jn. 5:19*)

In the love of the Father for the Son, nothing is withheld: source of life and life-giving, '...whoever believes in the one who sent me, has eternal life...For the Father, who is the source of life, has made the Son the source of life...and has appointed him supreme judge...and my judging is just, because my aim is to do not my own will, but the will of him who sent me.' (*cf. Jn. 5:21-30*)

Jesus has already set his face toward the cross and beyond. What of us?

Reflection written by: Sr Maureen Limer, St Mary's, Sunderland

Fourth Week of Lent
Thursday 14 March 2024

First Reading: Exodus 32:7-14; Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 105:19-23;

Gospel: John 5:31-47

Today's Gospel reading is profound, and quite complex, but entirely relevant to 21st-century life. Jesus speaks harsh words of criticism to those in positions of authority who refused to believe in him, and who – perhaps after some initial curiosity – also discarded the message of John the Baptist, who pointed to Jesus as the saviour and the expected Messiah. Jesus' strident language does not suggest that their standpoint was an honest mistake, or some kind of natural confusion, but a wilful, deliberate decision based on personal hostility. They likely perceived Jesus as a threat to their own authority and status.

Today's first reading, from Exodus, describes how the Israelites quickly espoused worship of a golden calf which they had made, despite Moses' teaching and leadership, and at the very time he was in the presence of the Living God on the mountain. It seems almost inexplicable that the people would do this so quickly, especially in the context of their deliverance from slavery in Egypt.

It is said that in the 21st century we live in a 'post-truth' era. Strong beliefs are expressed forcefully; beliefs which have their basis not in facts, evidence or genuine discernment, but rather the hostile, aggressive, and sometimes frankly bizarre, worldview of those who express them. For them, it's the message, not the truth, that counts. Social media posts are able to 'turbocharge' the dissemination of these false and corrosive ideas, and spread them to millions around the world in an instant. Then, some people believe these ideas because they correspond with their own, flawed, worldview.

How then, as Christians, are we to hold fast the truth? Jesus gives us the key, when he says to the Jewish leaders '...you do not have the love of God in you...' For it is ultimately God's love which underpins the Gospel message. And it is hate, greed and selfishness which lay beneath the authorities' attitudes (and, equally, lies beneath the false and forceful statements of our post-truth era). We are called to bring God's love to the world, by our lives and by our actions.

**Reflection written by: Tim Fetherston, Our Lady of Mercy Parish,
Sunderland**

Fourth Week of Lent

Friday 15 March 2024

First Reading: Wisdom 2:1, 12-22; Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 33:16, 18, 19-21, 23;

Gospel: John 7:1-2, 10, 25-30

Jesus of Nazareth they called him. Not Jesus the Prophet, Jesus the Miracle Worker, Jesus the Healer, Jesus the Teacher, but Jesus of Nazareth. Maybe it was always a put down in Jerusalem. Nazareth was a despised village, small and insignificant, so how could the Messiah come from there? Anyway, the Messiah, they had been taught, would just appear suddenly, out of the blue, from nowhere at all.

'I am from Him and He sent me.' said Jesus.

This was the unexpected and tremendous thing. The Messiah was not to be a stranger from a strange land, or someone to be judged as false because of where he was born. The Messiah, Christ Jesus, came from the Creator, the Truth, from where all things are created and held – from the perfect Hands of God.

But Jesus also said, 'He sent me.' The incredible truth is that the Wonder, that Perfect Love, sent Jesus to show us how to live our own lives, in love and joy and contentment with Him and with one another. He came to tell us we must feed the hungry, clothe the naked, care for the sick, the prisoner, the stranger. He loved us so much he even taught us how to be holy.

Can we ever understand why He would care so much about us, the cruel and shocking things we do, the evil we perpetrate, the wars we fight, the bloodshed we cause, the terrible pain we inflict on our brothers and sisters, on creation, on the world?

All we can know is that God is so good, and that, amazingly, He loves us all more than we can ever love our own. How can we not love Him back?

Reflection written by: Sue Oxley, Cullercoats

Fourth Week of Lent
Saturday 16 March 2024

First Reading: Jeremiah 11:18-20

Responsorial Psalm: Psalms 7:2-3, 9-12; Gospel: John 7:40-52

Jesus had gone to Galilee for safety because the Jews in Judea were out to kill Him. The Jewish people were about to celebrate The Feast of Tabernacles which lasted for seven days. This is one of the major feasts in the Jewish calendar and one of the prayers that had to be recited was that of the saving acts by which Yahweh had delivered His people from slavery in Egypt. His disciples began urging him to go back to Judea so that people could see and hear what He was teaching and preaching. Jesus told them that He was not going to go because His time had not yet come. We can imagine the disciples shrugging their shoulders and saying, "Well...we're going." and they do. Jesus quietly decided that He would go and did so halfway through the festival. When He arrived, He began preaching and healing.

Now, whenever Jesus preaches and teaches there is often disquiet amongst His hearers, and this occasion is no different. His hearers immediately start questioning, 'Where does He get his knowledge from? Is He a prophet?' Other hearers say, 'He is the Christ' (the Messiah). The Temple Police are sent to "calm things down" by arresting and removing Jesus. But the police return empty handed and when the Police explain that they have never heard such wonderful and powerful teaching they too are accused of falling under the influence of Jesus' teaching.

A common reason given by those in "authority" for not accepting Jesus' teaching is that Jesus comes from Galilee and everyone knows that 'prophets do not come out of Galilee'. In fact, nothing good can come out of Galilee. And so His teachings are dismissed.

There are none so righteous as the self-righteous. Do I dismiss people because I don't like what they say? Do I dismiss people because I don't like where someone comes from?

Jesus Himself tells us 'Do not keep judging according to appearance; let your judgement be according to what is right.' (Jn. 7:24)

**Reflection written by: Deacon Jude Newton, St Ninian's Church,
Wooler**

Fifth Sunday of Lent
Sunday 17 March 2024

First Reading: Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm: Psalms 50:3-4, 12-15;

Second Reading: Hebrews 5:7-9; Gospel: John 12:20-33

God Glorifies Himself in Us

Have you ever been in a situation where you have this feeling that you have experienced a particular thing before but you cannot tell how or when? It might be like a feeling of *déjà vu*. Or have you ever felt so sure about knowing the answer to a question but still able not to say it? Like something you remember and forget at the same time, looks simple and difficult altogether. This is always an interesting feeling. I remember in the first economics class I had in high school, when the teacher asked the question, "Who is a consumer?" And we all were acting like we wanted to answer, but never said a word. Of course we knew what the word "consumer" meant but we were trying to articulate a technical definition. Then one of my classmates said with an unconvincing voice, "I am a consumer." To our great surprise, the teacher applauded this simple response to be correct. I marvelled at this answer not just because it was simple but because we felt we knew it at that moment, yet we kept searching it. We never looked within to see that this answer was in our everyday life because we often seek answers to situations in a blowing wind out there, even when it is lurking within us. Most difficult situations in life are resolved by simple available truths. The problem is in where we begin the search.

God chose Israel to demonstrate His love to the world, but Israel never recognised this love for what it is. Israel broke God's covenants through constant disobedience and negligence of the commandments. Maybe because they considered these love codes as external impositions that are not naturally deduced. They seem not to relate these guidelines to the flourishing of their lives, and so these commandments became burdens and obstructions to their free life. When we externalise good instructions on life they become obstructions to us.

But God, in Jesus Christ, has demonstrated that the flourishing of life begins with the recognition that its meaning is found from within and expressed through our actions. For we, like planted seeds, cannot grow without crushing ourselves from within and following the reflection of God's light. When we look inwards, we discover that this very law of Love, that seemed to be a burden from outside, is already in us and the strength to follow these guidelines comes from within. God has planted his love in our hearts making us capable of loving as Christ loved; by looking beyond the sufferings of obedience and looking up to Him who learnt obedience through suffering and has become for us, who obey, the source of eternal salvation. This is why the Father used the cross to glorify His son, to summarise the questions of life in this act of obedience which draws all people to God.

Little wonder, the Greeks kept seeking Him in their quest for wisdom and sinners keep finding Him in their need for forgiveness. He has made God's love available in our everyday life, and we are sure of His forgiveness whenever we ask because the answer is within and not an outside burden. He has shown us that life is not so complicated, for He was lifted up to draw all people, so that we live by obedience and rise by lifting others as He did.



**Reflection written by: Fr Anthony C Ohaekwusi, St Charles'
Parish, Tudhoe, Spennymoor**

Fifth Week of Lent
Monday 18 March 2024

First Reading: Daniel 13:1-9, 15-17, 19-30, 33-62; Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 22;

Gospel: John 8:1-11

Be still. You are invited to take some moments to enter into this Gospel scene. Imagine yourself in a large crowd of people in the Temple. Look around you and see who else is there – scribes, Pharisees, other people you recognise. See Jesus seated in the middle of this crowd. What are you thinking and feeling as you watch him and listen to him? You notice a disturbance happening, a woman has been brought in. She is accused of adultery. Look at her, see her expression, what atmosphere does she create in the Temple? The teachers of the Law goad Jesus into judging and condemning her. Instead of replying, he writes in the sand. What do you think he was writing?

When you hear Jesus say, 'Let anyone who is without sin cast the first stone', what, in your own life, does it make you reflect on? Like me, you might find yourself having judgemental thoughts or attitudes towards others. How might Jesus' challenging words affect you? Notice those around you in the scene slowly dropping their stones and walking away.

Watch Jesus looking at the woman. What is happening in that gaze? – compassion, forgiveness, tolerance, generosity? Hear his voice as he says, 'Neither do I condemn you. Go and leave your life of wrong choices.' As you leave the scene behind, what message are you taking from this story? What does the woman teach you? What is Jesus teaching you about how he wants you to live this Lent, and always? What might you want to say to him having prayed with this Gospel passage? Is there any action you might be called to after this time of reflection? Be still.

**Reflection written by: Sr Sheila McNamara, Sacred Heart
Community, Fenham**

Fifth Week of Lent
Tuesday 19 March 2024

First Reading: 2 Samuel 7:4-5, 12-14, 16; Psalm: Psalms 88:2-5, 27, 29;

Second Reading: Romans 4:13, 16-18, 22; Gospel: Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24

By law, Joseph could have reported Mary for adultery, asking for her to be stoned. But he didn't.

Why not?

Matthew tells us that he 'was a man of honour'. It's likely that for many (perhaps most) of his family, friends and community, the honourable thing to do would have been to follow through on that right of the law and so protect himself and his family from scandal. Instead, he chose to go against the tide and quietly end their betrothal in order to spare Mary (and her family) the publicity. Not only that – he went even further and had faith in an unlikely sounding message in a dream and went ahead with the marriage. Did he have doubts, think he must be mad? Probably. And goodness knows what the people around him thought or how they reacted.

We don't know why Joseph took this course, perhaps he didn't quite know why himself. What we do know is that by having the humility and courage to go out on a limb, following what appeared to him to be the will of God, scripture was fulfilled and Jesus was brought into the world to be God among us for always.

Someone once said to me that the choices for most of us are always going to be between what is good and what is better. Sometimes choosing what is better can involve going against the tide, going out on a limb, walking into the unknown with courage, faith, hope and humility – and perhaps just a little bit of apprehension.

**Reflection written by: Frances Martin, St Peter & Paul,
Tyne Dock**

Fifth Week of Lent

Wednesday 20 March 2024

First Reading: Exodus 32:7-14; Psalm: Psalms 88:2-5, 21-22, 25, 27;

Gospel: Matthew 9:35-37

In this passage, we read that Jesus was relentless in his work by visiting cities and villages. He was constantly preaching and proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom whilst curing the sick everywhere he went. Jesus cared for all the people he encountered. We are also given a beautiful image of Jesus having compassion for the people. Why does he have compassion? Because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

Two things struck me. Firstly, the compassion of Jesus. How do we react to anyone we see in need? Do we feel compassion? Do we want to reach out and help? Do we think, not today, but may be tomorrow? Maybe we think we are compassionate enough already and we have no more to give.

The second thing to make me ponder was the image of sheep without a shepherd. A community gathered wandering aimlessly. It made me think that purpose is what drives people. Always the element of why are doing something. Put the two together, the question could be: is the purpose of the sheep to be compassionate to others? To find purpose in the support and help of others? Possibly.

The whole of this passage says, there is work to be done. All are invited to join this workforce. It is not an easy task but a truly rewarding one. Actions speak louder than words. Sometimes words are not even needed.

Lent is a journey and although I have been through many seasons of Lent, each one has been different. What is the saying? – ‘It is not the destination but how you get there.’ The same is true for me and Lent. I also tend to think that the journey is the easiest part, it is what happens afterwards where it gets tricky. Like Lent, the work begins at Easter. Lent is the preparation for the work to come. We are the labourers being sent into the harvest. We do not do this alone and so we become sheep with a shepherd guiding us to reap our rewards and inviting others to do the same.

**Reflection written by: Rachael Blackburn, St Gregory's,
South Shields**

Fifth Week of Lent

Thursday 21 March 2024

First Reading: Genesis 17:3-9; Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 104:4-9;

Gospel: John 8:51-59

I often ask myself this question: had I been living in first century Palestine what would my reaction to Jesus have been? Without the benefit of knowing the full account of Christ's passion, death, and resurrection, as we are privileged to know today, I fear that it may well have been the same as the listeners in today's Gospel: a stone poised in each hand ready to hurl.

To the listeners, Jesus' words were astonishing, delusional, fanatical, unthinkable, crazy, and offensive. Jesus existed before Abraham? If one truly keeps his word, one will never experience death? Using the phrase, 'I am', the same emphatic declaration echoing God's great affirmations in Exodus? What was Jesus thinking? Imagine how astounded everyone must have been at Jesus' words, him just another itinerant preacher.

There are a lot of nuggets in this passage. Look again at what Jesus is claiming: his own eternity, and he does this in three ways. By claiming that Abraham 'saw his Day', that is, the general joy experienced by Abraham in the fulfilling of the purposes of God in the Messiah, by which all nations on earth would receive blessing. Secondly, Jesus adopts as his own the divine Name, 'I am', expressing both his eternity and his oneness with the Father. And finally, Jesus claims glory conferred by the Father, another way of expressing the divinity of Christ.

Today might be a good day, in the light of today's Gospel passage, for us to examine our own reaction to Jesus' teaching. Are there areas of our hearts and minds that we have closed to Jesus perhaps because his teaching is too much of a challenge, or because life is painful, or a struggle and we blame Jesus for this reality?

There is an extraordinary paradox at the heart of our faith: the crucified one is none other than the Word who was with God in the beginning, before Abraham was. Next week is Holy Week when we reflect on this paradox and bow before its mystery.

Reflection written by: Jem Wynne, Holy Name, Jesmond

Fifth Week of Lent

Friday 22 March 2024

First Reading: Jeremiah 20:10-13; Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 17:2-7;

Gospel: John 10:31-42

Reading Scripture is not always easy, because divine revelation and teaching can be hidden behind a veil that is the limitations of human emotion and language. You do have to have some sympathy for the Jews in today's Gospel. What would we have done if Jesus had chosen this age to reveal himself and declare himself to be the Son of God? Our culture and our rules have developed in a way that means gathering stones for a stoning is now not the reaction of the law-abiding citizen. However, how many of us would have completely ignored him, thrown him a quizzical look or passed him a sarcastic comment? If not a Christian reaction, an understandably human one, nonetheless.

Jesus asks the Jews to go beyond human emotion and language and to use the visual evidence in front of them. If they cannot accept that Jesus is indeed the Son of God, he asks them to at least believe in the good works that they have seen him perform – evidence that God's love is in action upon the earth.

Approaching the end of our Lenten journey, we are reminded to do the same. Our emotions and our words may not always be enough to persuade others that God is present among them. To believe in the divinity of Christ may be too much for those who are yet to be graced with the gift of faith. Yet, it is in the good works we perform – the smile to a stranger, the offer of a hot drink on a cold day, the willingness to help someone who is in difficulty, the support offered to someone who is grieving – that we convince people that, through, with and in us, the Holy Spirit is present and at work building the kingdom. In other words, we show rather than tell others that we are daughters and sons of God.

**Reflection written by: Deacon Patrick Rutherford, Blessed
Edmund Duke Parish, Coxhoe, Sedgefield and Trimdon**

Fifth Week of Lent
Saturday 23 March 2024

First Reading: Ezekiel 37:21-28; Responsorial Psalm: Jeremiah 31:10-13;

Gospel: John 11:45-56

Lazarus lies in his tomb of darkness – alone – separated. A place where many find themselves today – often me. I need to ask myself where am I locked in? What do I need to come into the light, to breathe the life of God in this situation? Holding on to bitterness, anger, resentment, loneliness – rather than letting go of my pride, myself in control – admit my failings etc. I need the grace to reach out in healing and love, accepting guilt and responsibility. I need to forgive myself, accept that I am love-worthy, accept God's grace of enlightenment, to let go the signs of death and reach for life.

On arriving, Jesus asks Martha and Mary, 'Where have you put him?' 'Come and see', they replied. The same words He said to the two disciples who asked where he lived. (*Jn. 1:39*) Jesus also is inviting us to new life.

They bring Him to the tomb. John, at the beginning of this Gospel, reminds us that Jesus brings His light to shine in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome Him. Lazarus hears His name, hears Jesus' voice, responds, and comes out of his darkness into new life. We see Lazarus given new life and God moving among us, today, healing grief and sorrow, but as with Lazarus, finding joy, hope, new life in Him.

Jesus ignores the threats to himself. He reaches out to Lazarus – enabling all there to believe in Him, ready for a time when He is no longer present.

John (11:41-42) calls me in faith to believe, by grace and love in my having been raised many times in my life also. Father thank you for hearing my prayer – for those in need also.

When Lazarus emerged, it was to those around him that Jesus called upon to unbind him and to set him free. This is what Jesus calls us to do, to allow Him, firstly, to set us free so that we then may go forth and do the same for others in His name.


Reflection written by: Pat Kennedy, St Cuthbert's, Kenton



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Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord

Sunday 24 March 2024

Procession: Mark 11:1-10; First Reading: Isaiah 50:4-7; Psalm: Psalms 21:8-9, 17-20, 23-24;
Second Reading: Philippians 2:6-11; Gospel: Mark 14:1-15:47

We begin Holy Week with the Solemn Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Passion Sunday, with a procession of palm branches. The people of Jerusalem welcome Jesus into the holy city shouting, 'Hosanna! Blessings on him who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessings on the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!'

At the end of the week on Good Friday, we hear the same crowd shouting, 'Crucify him, crucify him.' When we look into people's expectations at the time, we realise that when they shouted, 'Hosanna', they were actually acknowledging Jesus as the one who has come to save them now.

There is certainly a challenge here: do we welcome Jesus into our lives and then immediately turn around and say, "Crucify him?" The letter to the Hebrews says, 'we crucify him afresh when we wilfully knowingly commit sin'. (*Heb. 10:26*).

In our today's world, we forget easily. We seem to celebrate people when it suits us. But when trouble comes, we turn our back on them even when we know they are standing for the truth. We are willing to sacrifice the truth to save our "own skin". That is why it is difficult to achieve justice. As a matter of fact, the world is groaning to be saved from such hypocrisy.

Many of those people who were shouting, 'Crucify him...' might have been touched by his life, but because of fear and jealousy, they joined those who opposed the truth, and encouraged evil to prevail temporarily. This often happens in our human interaction among Christians. They say, "the majority wins" because we are afraid to stand on the truth and remain alone.

The triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem is the inauguration of the true Messiah of the humanity that rejects their saviour, who is the true king of the world. Hence, at the mention of his name, 'every knee must bend, and every tongue must confess that he is Lord, to the glory of God.' (*Phil. 2:9-11*)

Let us make this journey solemnly, appreciatively and let it change our lives.

**Reflection written by: Fr Emmanuel Kabinga, CP,
Minsteracres Retreat Centre, St Elizabeth's Parish**

Holy Week

Monday 25 March 2024

First Reading: Isaiah 42:1-7; Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 26:1-3, 13-14;

Gospel: John 12:1-11

Martha and Mary had great reasons to be joyful, as Jesus had brought their brother back to life. They didn't hide their gratitude, but organised a meal in His honour and lavished expensive perfume on Him. They had it saved to tend to His body after death, but they chose to use it to celebrate Him alive, and everyone in the house got the benefit of the perfume. Even better, many people came to see Lazarus, the man who was dead and had been raised to life, and on account of him they believed in Jesus too.

But those with greed in their heart can never rejoice. Judas didn't complain about the free meal, but about the money he couldn't pilfer because it had been spent on the Lord. The chief priests didn't approve of a man raised to life, so they planned to return him to death (talk about a cancel culture!).

Reading this Gospel, I couldn't help but think of Holy Mass. The fragrant incense, the beautiful altar cloths and vestments, and, above all, Jesus truly present and being honoured by us, His people who draw our life from Him. If only more people could see the love in the faces of the congregation when the Eucharist is lifted up, they would witness the light that removes blindness, the truth that brings freedom, the power that doesn't need to shout to fill the earth and the heavens.

Of course there is corruption in the world and in the Church, but God is our light while the world lives in darkness, our salvation when Christians are attacked. We, who by our baptism have been freed and raised to life in Him, shouldn't be afraid to celebrate Him, because our visible joy can bring His light and salvation to others.

**Reflection written by: Frederique Gill, Blessed Edmund Duke,
Coxhoe, Sedgfield and Trimdon**

Holy Week
Tuesday 26 March 2024

First Reading: Isaiah 49:1-6; Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 70:1-6, 15, 17;

Gospel: John 13:21-33, 36-38

Betrayal by a work colleague, betrayal by a friend or betrayal by a family member! All are incomprehensible and hurtful. They say friends are the family we choose, so does that make betrayal by a friend more painful than betrayal in any other form?

In the Gospel reading today we discover Jesus is aware of a traitor amongst his friends. He reveals the traitor's identity to Peter, but we also see the calm and almost understanding way Jesus accepts the oncoming betrayal by his friend Judas. Why was he so accepting and calm? Jesus trusted everyone around him, why wouldn't he? They left their families, friends and livelihood behind to be with Jesus, to serve and help speak his word. But here he is sitting amongst friends aware that there is a traitor in their midst! A traitor of the worst. A traitor that would commit an act that will sentence Jesus to death! Judas will hand Jesus to the Pharisees. But ask yourself this: does Judas have a choice in this? Or does Jesus mark Judas as the one who will betray him to fulfil the written word and bring about the death of Jesus and, in that, bring redemption for all people? If this is the case does Jesus feel the full pain of this betrayal or does he see it as his destiny and a fulfilment of need?

I can't answer these questions but what I believe is that Jesus is comforted in the knowledge of the betrayal because he has his Father with him. He trusts in what needs to happen for the "greater good". The love of God helped Jesus stay calm and collected. It helped him continue to treat Judas as a friend and equal. He accepted the fate and recognised the good that would come from his own pain and eventual death. If we carry the love of God it can help even in the most difficult and painful of times. Remembering Jesus' sacrifice for us reminds us we're never alone in our hurt. Jesus and God are with all of us.

**Reflection written by: Laura Young, St John Boste Church,
Parish of St John XXIII**

Holy Week
Wednesday 27 March 2024

First Reading: Isaiah 50:4-9; Psalm: Psalms 68:8-10, 21-22, 31, 33-34,
Gospel: Matthew 26:14-25

Judas Iscariot is a tragic figure, reviled by his erstwhile companions and by the Church down the generations as the betrayer of Jesus; the villain who precipitated the Passion and Death of God the Son. Yet Judas had been one of Jesus' chosen close companions, in line to be an apostle and a saint. What went wrong?

Was it avarice? John (12:6) says that Judas was a thief, but the small amount that he was promised was surely not what tempted him to betray his Teacher.

Was he disappointed in Jesus? Did he think that Jesus was acting in a stupidly ineffective way for a Messiah, and had he therefore lost faith in him?

Or, believing in Jesus, was he impatient with the Messiah for not precipitating the final confrontation, and did he think that he could hurry matters along? This seems more plausible. When he saw Jesus condemned to death he was filled with remorse, threw the money back at the chief priests and then committed the final act of infidelity, hanging himself in despair.

What went wrong was that he lost faith; firstly in Christ's role in God's plan of salvation, but then in His infinite capacity to forgive. What might have happened if he had followed Jesus on the road to Calvary, stepped out and asked for forgiveness? When Jesus, being nailed to the cross, prayed, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not understand what they are doing', what hurt most, the nails or the kiss? Was His heart also aching for Judas?

Betrayal is the most harmful of acts against any relationship. It wounds the betrayed but much more corrupts the betrayer. Every sin is a betrayal of Jesus Christ. Yet His response is to pray for us, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not understand what they are doing.'

Repentance takes courage. This Holy Week, let us accept that however grave our sin has been, the crucified arms of Christ show us God dying for us to hold on to our faith in Him. He keeps those arms open to welcome us back.

**Reflection written by: Joe James, Our Lady Star of the Sea,
Backworth, West Monkseaton and Whitley Bay**

Maundy Thursday

Thursday 28 March 2024

First Reading: Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14; Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 115:12-13, 15-18;

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Gospel: John 13:1-15

Maundy Thursday gets its name from the Latin word for command. As we celebrate this day in Holy Week, we share in Jesus' command to the disciples to 'love one another, as I have loved you'. Jesus has perfectly modelled to his followers that love involves service and humility. He asks us to do likewise.

On this day we are invited to enter into the ritual of foot washing. In a hot Mediterranean country foot washing would have been a common practice, a sign of hospitality. It was often the chore of slaves, particularly women slaves, as it was considered lowly work. It would have been a recognisable act for the disciples at the time that wasn't recognisable, respectable or comfortable for them here with Jesus, their Lord, doing the washing.

Jesus takes what is familiar but then radically alters it. We see in John's Gospel that the disciples have already eaten before the foot washing takes place. In Roman society a basin of cold water would be offered to guests during a banquet to increase their appetite and refresh them. Here, perhaps Jesus is preparing them for an increase in their spiritual appetite to take on their role as disciples after his death – we don't know. What we do know is that Jesus is modelling that love is about service and that both love and service need to involve humility and action.

All of the readings today point to Jesus' New Covenant. The readings link us back to the covenant with Moses and then move us on to this last evening with Jesus before his crucifixion. This is the last time Jesus will command his disciples before his death; it is his last moment to cement their faith before they have to face the devastating reality of his death. He uses these moments to speak of love, to offer sacrament, ritual, service and hospitality as a living embodiment of this love that he wants us to do for one another. As we celebrate Maundy Thursday today, we are invited to follow Jesus' command: 'Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.' (*Jn. 13:14-15*)

**Reflection written by: Amy Cameron, Our Lady & St Cuthbert's,
Prudhoe**

Good Friday
Friday 29 March 2024

First Reading: Isaiah 52:13–53:12; Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 30:2, 6, 12–13, 15–17, 25;

Second Reading: Hebrews 4:14–16, 5:7–9; Gospel: John 18:1–19:42

Prophecy and Reality, Good Versus Evil, Theodrama (Drama Involving God at its Centre) Versus Ego Drama

Today, as we listen to the fate of the Suffering Servant of God, the suffering and death of Jesus, the sacrifice of an innocent man, Immanuel, God-with-us, we come face-to-face with prophecy and the raw reality of evil against the good and the innocent. I always find myself so unnerved and wishing Jesus wouldn't be killed, wishing someone (Pilate, Judas, Pharisees, Jews) would defend him; wishing someone changes his mind and the story – the tragedy.

It is the same sentiment when a dear friend or relative is doomed, dying, persecuted unjustly – or even deservedly – or guilty; you wish he/she is exonerated, pitied, mercied upon.

Today we come face-to-face with Hans Urs von Balthasar's theory which Bishop Robert Barron describes as theodrama versus ego drama. How God's plans and Divine Will is accomplished in the life of Jesus (and indeed his followers and many an innocent victim) in His infinite Wisdom, over and against man/humanity's selfish, diabolic plots and wishes.

The big message of Good Friday is about how the evil in our hearts, minds, families, community and society is put out there, nailed up there and reflected back to us. How God again, who is always in charge of good over evil, love over hatred, patience over complacency, joy over sorrow, glory over pain, knew it and allowed it. And how He will see through a bounce back (as He did with Joseph, Job, Jonah and many in the Old Testament) to renew, correct, forgive and transform all who are destined to be saved – all who cooperate with the message of repentance like the good thief or Peter, to say nothing of our Blessed Mother and those who stood by and beat their breasts.

If Jesus prayed earlier on in John's Gospel, just before his arrest, saying: 'Father, Glorify your Son', and the voice came saying, 'I have glorified him and will glorify him again', then ours is to actively, remorsefully, serenely, watch the crucifixion and wait for the resurrection.

**Reflection written by: Fr Emmanuel N Mbeh, MHM,
St Mary's Church, Sunderland**

Holy Saturday

Saturday 30 March 2024

First Reading: Genesis 1:1-2:2; Psalm: Psalms 103:1-2, 5-6, 10, 12-14, 24, 35;

Second Reading: Genesis 22:1-18; Psalm: Psalms 15:5, 8-11; Third Reading: Exodus 14:15-15:1;

Canticle: Exodus 15; Fourth Reading: Isaiah 54:5-14; Psalm: Psalms 29:2, 4-6, 11-13;

Fifth Reading: Isaiah 55:1-11; Canticle: Isaiah 12; Sixth Reading: Baruch 3:9-15, 32-4: 4;

Psalm: Psalms 18:8-11; Seventh Reading: Ezekiel 36:16-17, 18-28;

Psalm: Psalms 41:2-3, 5, 42:3-4; Epistle Reading: Romans 6: 3-11;

Psalm: Psalms 117:1-2, 16-17, 22-23; Gospel: Mark 16:1-8

We've walked the Lent path; forty desert days and nights to Holy Week, and the saving events of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Today is silent and still. Good Friday's crowds, dim and disaster have passed. The intimacy of Thursday's Supper, the horror of arrest, trial and execution stand like guards before the closed tomb. Dust settles like hopeful manna. We turn from the week, uncertain about the way ahead.

Silent and empty, we listen to the stillness of the dead. Jesus, our King, sleeps. God has died in our flesh. Hell, harrowed by His cross, trembles with fear. Between death and resurrection, Jesus works. He seeks Adam and Eve and calls them, and all held in sin's darkness, into light and life. Betrayed in a garden, crucified and buried in a garden, Jesus saves all from sin. Spat on by the soldiers, Jesus restores the life breathed into us at creation. Shattered by the soldiers' blows, Jesus refashions our broken nature in his image. Torn by the scourge, Jesus strips away the sin that weighs us down. His hands were nailed to the tree for those whose hands stole fruit from the tree in Eden. Led out of Eden by the devil, Jesus enthrones us in heaven. Our sin forbade us the tree of life. Now, Jesus who is life, is one with us.

The Church calls us to wait silently for Jesus who calls us to new life. In these still hours, we rest, gather ourselves, and wait in prayer for the light of resurrection to dawn.

**Reflection written by: Mgr Andrew Faley,
St Edward's Church, Whitley Bay**

Easter Sunday

Sunday 31 March 2024

First Reading: Acts 10:34, 37-43; Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 117:1-2, 16-17, 22-23;

Second Reading: Colossians 3:1-4; Gospel: John 20:1-9

C.S. Lewis is often summarised as saying, in Mere Christianity, 'The fact that our heart yearns for something Earth can't supply is proof that Heaven must be our home.' St Augustine of Hippo, one of my favourite saints, said something similar, 'You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.' Today our yearning and our restlessness cease in the risen Lord. He is my true home. In Him we find eternal rest.

The Church only, really, has one word for today: "Alleluia!" – it is a beautiful sounding word. I suggest it is better not to try to define it or translate it. It is the sound we humans make when our restlessness ceases, our yearning ceases. It is the human sound of spontaneous, unexpected, joy. The joy of being loved perfectly. It is, if you like, the sound we humans make when we are speechless in joy.

I recall being present when one of my nieces tasted chocolate for the first time. As the chocolate went in and the taste buds kicked in, she shook with joy and pleasure. Her whole body was filled with "I want this, and I want more", as she reached out. Today the Church shakes with joy as her Saviour is risen. Death is conquered. Sin is conquered. Today we reach out to the Lord. We want Him and we want more, to be with our loved ones who we pray share fully in the Resurrection and are with the Lord.

I have no doubt plenty of chocolate will be eaten today. We crisp connoisseurs will partake too. It has been a while. But our Resurrection Food is of course the Eucharist at Mass. If only I shook with joy for it, the Risen Lord given to me Sunday after Sunday.

We have fifty days to celebrate Easter. Plenty of time. Just one word is needed today, which really is a human sound of joy: "Alleluia!" – what more needs to be said or sung. Alleluia! the Lord is risen. May I wish you all a joyful Easter Season.

**Reflection written by: Bishop Stephen Wright,
Diocese of Hexham & Newcastle**

Year of Prayer

The Holy Father has asked that 2024 be a year of prayer, as a preparatory year for the 2025 Jubilee Year 'Pilgrims of Hope'.

In preparation for the Jubilee, dioceses are invited to promote initiatives to remind people of the centrality of both individual prayer and community prayer.

For further information and prayer resources please visit:

<https://www.bit.ly/DHN-YOP24>





DIOCESE OF **Hexham & Newcastle**
— VICARIATE FOR FAITH & MISSION —

With sincere thanks to everyone who has contributed to these wonderful Reflections throughout the Season of Lent.

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