



Bringing Home the Word

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)

February 4, 2024

Grin and Bear It

Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA

This harsh bit of advice is more military than religious. However, it does carry some truth. There are times when there is no way to avoid hardship, so all we can do is find some way of dealing with it. This is the situation in today's reading from Job. He experiences life as burdensome. To make matters worse, life is too short to be able to get beyond the difficulty. So what does he do? What might most of us do in similar situations? Complain.

There is really nothing wrong with complaining. The problem is to whom and for how long. A large number of the psalms are complaints or, to use the

theological term, laments. To complain to God can be a profound prayer, for it admits our human inability to fix everything. And, it presumes that God can and just might fix the problem. The psalm response continues this train of thought with a prayer of confidence that God will fix it. The Gospel reading then provides examples of how Jesus did just that.

These are not merely stories of past events. Rather, they trace a profound yet difficult-to-accept religious belief: when we are overwhelmed by hardship, we should turn to God and place our need in God's care, believing that God wants what is best for us. Perhaps the rest is out of our hands, but we must believe that we are in God's hands and, therefore, safe. †

Sunday Readings

Job 7:1-4, 6-7

Is not life on earth a drudgery, /
its days like those of a hireling?

1 Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23

If I preach the gospel, this is no reason for me to boast, for an obligation has been imposed on me.

Mark 1:29-39

[Jesus] told them, "Let us go on to the nearby villages that I may preach there also. For this purpose have I come."

***To complain to God
can be a profound prayer,
for it admits our human
inability to fix everything.***



A Word from Pope Francis

I turn a grateful thought to all those who, in their life and work, are close to the sick every day....And I pray in a special way for all the sick, in every corner of the world, especially for those who are most alone and have no access to healthcare services.

VIDEO MESSAGE, WORLD DAY
OF THE SICK, FEBRUARY 11, 2022



REFLECTION
QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS
REFLECTION

- Has hardship ever tested your faith?
- How has your faith helped you in difficult times?

Keeping the Sabbath

Paige Byrne Shortal

Let's consider the Sabbath. People identify themselves by the time they keep. The Jewish people observe their Sabbath on Saturday. In the early church, Jewish Christians distinguished themselves from other Jews by observing Sunday as their Sabbath. The Muslim Sabbath is Friday.

Voltaire, a French rationalist philosopher, wrote: "If you wish to destroy the Christian religion, you must first destroy the Christian Sunday." In his book *Waiting for the Weekend*, Witold Rybczynski describes several attempts to destroy the Sabbath. During the French Revolution, they dispensed with *Anno Domini* (AD, the year of the Lord) and instead, pronounced 1792 (the year of the revolution) as "Year One." A ten-day week was instituted with the tenth day as a holiday. But the revolutionaries underestimated the influence of Christian practice, and the Sabbath was celebrated



in secret until the experiment was deemed a failure.

Joseph Stalin, during the days after the Russian Revolution, attempted a similar attack on Sunday. There would be no more universal rest day. Workers labored four days, on staggered shifts, and had every fifth day off. Even though this gave people twenty more days off a year, it

was unpopular. Everyone worked on a different schedule and family members were never at home on the same day. (Sound familiar?)

In our society, we are also experiencing an attack on the Sabbath. Many activities, formerly reserved for weekdays, now occur on Sundays. The days of the week are less and less distinguishable from one another, especially for those in factory or retail work. Our teenagers are especially vulnerable to Sunday work. We've found that simply informing our son's fast-food employer that he is not available to work on Sundays has not only gained respect for him, but for our church as well.

Observing one day of rest a week protects human beings. Nothing is more restorative as a long, slow Sunday afternoon and evening with no projects, no shopping, no games to attend, no meetings, and maybe no television or internet. Just time together around good food, home chores, and rest. †

Source: A Liguori Publications bulletin, June 27, 2004

Wisdom from Catholic UPDATE

Excerpt from Jesus' "Mighty Deeds" of Healing in Mark's Gospel by John R. Barker, OFM

Today we understand the natural world to operate according to impersonal forces or "laws of nature." When someone experiences healing that cannot be explained according to our understanding of these laws, we call it a miracle—as God interfering with the laws of nature. This is not the way people in Jesus' time understood the extraordinary. They believed God's will and purpose supported and guaranteed the world's normal functioning. God's power was always at work, keeping things moving according to divine wisdom. The extraordinary such as a sudden or unexpected healing was considered an eruption of God's power rather than an interruption of the laws of nature. †

PRAYER

Merciful God, encourage those who are facing a long illness, strengthen those who care for the sick, and comfort those who must witness a loved one's suffering. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

The Redemptorists

WEEKDAY READINGS

February 5–10

Monday, St. Agatha:

1 Kgs 8:1–7, 9–13 / Mk 6:53–56

Tuesday, St. Paul Miki and Companions:

1 Kgs 8:22–23, 27–30 / Mk 7:1–13

Wednesday, Weekday:

1 Kgs 10:1–10 / Mk 7:14–23

Thursday, Weekday:


1 Kgs 11:4–13 / Mk 7:24–30

Friday, Weekday:

1 Kgs 11:29–32; 12:19 / Mk 7:31–37

Saturday, St. Scholastica:

1 Kgs 12:26–32; 13:33–34 / Mk 8:1–10

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Bringing Home the Word

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)

February 11, 2024

Jesus Embraces the Culturally Marginalized

Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA

Today's readings are about forced quarantine. On one level they are about diseases that might be contagious. On another level they are about ritual impurity that was contagious. The Israelites believed that to stand before God in worship, one's body had to be physically intact—no fractures or missing body parts, no open wounds, no oozing body fluids. Skin lesions like those associated with leprosy made one ritually unclean or impure. Furthermore, to touch one with such a disease was to become unclean oneself. The ritual impurity was considered contagious, not necessarily the disease. Unclean people were socially and religiously ostracized.

Sunday Readings

Leviticus 13:1–2, 44–46

The individual shall cry out, "Unclean, unclean!"

1 Corinthians 10:31–11:1

Whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.

Mark 1:40–45

"If you wish, you can make me clean." ...[Jesus] said to him, "I do will it. Be made clean."

In the Gospel story, Jesus completely neutralized this practice. Touching the leprous and thus unclean man, Jesus not only didn't become unclean himself, but he actually made the man clean again. The issue here is not merely one of healing. It is a matter of reincorporating the marginalized man into society.

Unfortunately, out of fear or a sense of superiority, some people ostracize or marginalize entire groups of people. This bias might be based on gender, race, culture, sexual preference—almost anything. In this way the benefits of society are denied to those who are marginalized. One characteristic of Jesus, obvious throughout the Gospel stories, is his all-inclusiveness. Jesus rejected no one. He was open to those who society ostracized. He interacted graciously with people with diseases, non-Jews, recognized public sinners, and those working with the Roman occupiers—all people considered ritually unclean. As his disciples, can we do less? †

One characteristic of Jesus, obvious throughout the Gospel stories, is his all-inclusiveness.

A Word from Pope Francis

[Jesus] extends His hand and touches [the leper]....To touch with love means to establish a relationship, to enter into communion, to become involved in the life of another person even to the point of sharing their wounds. With that gesture, Jesus reveals that God, who is not indifferent, does not keep himself at a "safe distance."

ANGELUS, ROME, FEBRUARY 14, 2021



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

ONE QUESTION FOR REFLECTION

- Which groups of people does society tend to ostracize or marginalize?
- Is there someone I fail to recognize as a brother or sister in Christ?

Where Does Hope Come From?

John Shea

Every year I look forward to Lent, although I'm not sure why. I grew up in a Catholic neighborhood where Lent was a community affair. Everyone, adults and children, tried "giving up something." Although one girl in my sixth-grade class gave up her little brother, most people denied themselves some culinary delight. Lent was a deep breath that you took, held for six weeks, and let out at noon on Holy Saturday.

There is also the hope for some slight signs of improvement. I am always on the lookout for a better self. Lent triggers an "I can do better" tape and connects with my early childhood memory of *The Little Engine That Could*: "I think I can, I think I can, I think I can..."

A *New Yorker* cartoon shows two men in a dungeon without windows or doors. They are manacled to the wall by their wrists, ankles, and neck. Both have long beards; they have obviously been there a



while. One is leaning over to the other and whispering, "Now here's my plan."

This cartoon made me laugh and when I have described it to others, they laughed. There is something essentially human about a burst of hope in a hopeless situation. It shows us who we are: people without a way out who are planning a way out.

Where does this deep hope come from?

Václav Havel, the former president of the Czech Republic, was once asked, "Do you see a grain of hope anywhere in the 1980s?" He began his lengthy answer with, "I should probably say first that the kind of hope I often think about, especially in situations that are particularly hopeless, such as prison (e.g., the manacled planner), I understand above all as a state of mind, not a state of the world. Either we have hope within us or we don't; it is a dimension of soul, and it is not essentially dependent on some particular observation of the world or estimate of the situation."

Hope is not a response to what we observe or how we estimate what is going on. Hope is an inner quality we bring to life. †

Source: *Daybreaks: Daily Reflections for Lent and Easter*, 2008

Wisdom from Catholic UPDATE

Excerpt from *Ash Wednesday: Our Shifting Understanding of Lent* by Lawrence E. Mick

We dirty our faces on Ash Wednesday and are cleansed in the waters of the font at Easter.

When we receive ashes on our foreheads, we remember who we are. We remember that we are creatures of the earth ("Remember that you are dust"). We remember that we are mortal beings ("and to dust you will return"). We remember that we are baptized. We remember that we are people on a journey of conversion ("Repent and believe in the Gospel"). We remember that we are members of the body of Christ (and that smudge on our foreheads will proclaim that identity to others, too). †



Loving God, open our eyes to see in every person the face of your son whom you sent to teach us to love as you love. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

The Redemptorists

WEEKDAY READINGS

February 12-17

Monday, Weekday:

Jas 1:1-11 / Mk 8:11-13

Tuesday, Weekday:

Jas 1:12-18 / Mk 8:14-21

Wednesday, Ash Wednesday: Jl 2:12-18 / 2 Cor 5:20-6:2 / Mt 6:1-6, 16-18

Thursday after Ash Wednesday:


Dt 30:15-20 / Lk 9:22-25

Friday after Ash Wednesday:

Is 58:1-9a / Mt 9:14-15

Saturday after Ash Wednesday:

Is 58:9b-14 / Lk 5:27-32

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Bringing Home the Word

First Sunday of Lent (B)

February 18, 2024

Lost at Sea

Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA

We often think that Lent is a time to concentrate on the sufferings of Jesus. Actually, that is the theme of Holy Week. The other readings of Lent suggest another theme—covenant-making. God initiates an intimate relationship with us and calls us to be faithful. This is the good news. Moreover, when we are unfaithful, God gives us another chance.

The first reading recounts God's graciousness in saving humankind from destruction. Noah and his family must have felt that they really were lost at sea. However, God's protection was always

there. In fact, the waters they so feared were destructive only to what was evil. They had been saved and now, through the covenant, all of creation was given a second chance.

One might think that Jesus wouldn't have struggled with temptation. After all, he was God. However, today's Gospel says that he was tempted. He was in the wilderness, a place long known to be a place of temptation because there the supports of normal life are gone. After forty days of fasting, one's defenses would be significantly weakened, if not broken down. In such a situation, the primary thought is survival. This Gospel does not describe the temptation itself, but it does present Jesus as someone like us—weakened, tempted, and perhaps even "lost at sea." However, God's protection was with him, in the guise of angels.

Both stories assure us that God's covenantal care is there supporting us, regardless of the difficulty or our apparent weakness. †

Sunday Readings

Genesis 9:8–15

[God said,] "I set my bow in the clouds to serve as a sign of the covenant between me and the earth."

1 Peter 3:18–22

[Baptism] is not a removal of dirt from the body but an appeal to God for a clear conscience.

Mark 1:12–15

[Jesus said,] "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

God initiates an intimate relationship with us and calls us to be faithful. This is the good news.

A Word from Pope Francis

True happiness and true freedom are not found in possessing, but in sharing; not in taking advantage of others, but in loving them; not in the obsession of power, but in the joy of service....Let us take time for silence and prayer — just a little, it will do us good....

ANGELUS, ROME, MARCH 6, 2022



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

QUESTION REFLECTION

- Where do you look for God when life seems unfair?
- Do you ask for the grace to resist temptation?

What Do I Truly Value?

Paula D'Arcy

Years ago I took voice lessons from an acclaimed musician. He was well-known and highly regarded for his talents, and the lessons were a generous gift. At the time we were both on the faculty of the same college. I scheduled these lessons in between appointments with my students and I was late for my lesson. I could have been on time, actually, but the first time I stopped to speak briefly with another faculty member, the second time I delayed to make a phone call that wasn't critical. The third time my friend said to me, "If you were paying for this hour, you wouldn't be late."

The words stung. I knew he was right, and I instantly saw that my tardiness reflected the value I placed on the opportunity he was offering. I felt ashamed and was never late again. I did value the gift.



Sometimes I remember that moment in regard to my own inner journey. I hear a voice in a whisper, "If you really saw the gift of life you've been given, you wouldn't throw it away." It jolts me from a preoccupation with a thousand peripheral things. It makes me aware of how my default position in life easily

becomes my comfort, my ease, my desire to be appreciated and loved.

For a time I stayed in a European town that was founded in 1338. I walked toward a small stone church on a path that others have walked for centuries. At night I listened to the stories of these villagers, remembrances of fearful years lived under a communist occupation. Outwardly they learned to appear faithful to the government's avowed atheism, safety depending upon this pretense. Children were taught to repeat the lies as well. But their hearts and souls knew differently, and at Easter they closed the curtains and spoke truth in whispers.

"How did you keep joy alive?" I asked. "When you see the value of being alive," one woman answered slowly, "when you know the value of life itself—there is joy." She smiles. "Life is the greatest gift."

I wonder: Do I value what I say I value? ‡

Source: *Daybreaks: Daily Reflections for Lent and Easter*, 2007

Wisdom from Catholic UPDATE

Excerpt from *Lent: Giving Our Hearts to God* by Joyce Rupp, OSM

I used to dread Lent. Then one year it finally dawned on me that this liturgical season gives me a focused opportunity to rearrange my spiritual priorities. Lent helps me gain clarity on how I am living my daily life. It is so easy to get swallowed up by the constant busyness and hectic pace of life. Lent helps me step back for six weeks and look more closely at how I am relating to God and to see who I am becoming. I realize that there is still a part of my heart that forgets, refuses, procrastinates, fears, or is unaware of how much it needs to reflect the goodness of God. ‡

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So that we may enter this season of Lent with minds open to hear your word, and hearts open to the promise of Easter, we pray—Lord, let us be like you.

The Redemptorists

WEEKDAY READINGS

February 19–24

Monday, Lenten Weekday:
Lv 19:1–2, 11–18 / Mt 25:31–46


Tuesday, Lenten Weekday:
Is 55:10–11 / Mt 6:7–15

Wednesday, Lenten Weekday:
Jon 3:1–10 / Lk 11:29–32

Thursday, Chair of Saint Peter the Apostle:
1 Pt 5:1–4 / Mt 16:13–19

Friday, Lenten Weekday:
Ez 18:21–28 / Mt 5:20–26

Saturday, Lenten Weekday:
Dt 26:16–19 / Mt 5:43–48

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Bringing Home the Word

Second Sunday of Lent (B)
February 25, 2024

Future Gazing

Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA

Some spiritual writers and psychologists tell us how important it is to live in the present. Still, many of our decisions are made with an eye toward the future. Life commitments are always future oriented. Each newborn child carries promises for the future. Because we are part of the emerging universe, we are always called into the future. Today's readings also carry implications for the future.

Isaac was not only Abraham's beloved son; he was Abraham's legacy and future dynasty. Isaac's death would have put an end to Abraham's memory in the future.

Sunday Readings

Genesis 22:1–2, 9a, 10–13, 15–18

I will bless you and make your descendants as countless as the stars of the sky and the sands of the seashore.

Romans 8:31b–34

He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all, how will he not also give us everything else along with him?

Mark 9:2–10

And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white.

Consequently, this was more than a test of obedience. Abraham was presented with a choice: Choose Isaac and all that the future might bring to your family and memory through him. Or trust that the promise God made—that your descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky—would be fulfilled even if Isaac dies. God asked Abraham to place his future in God's hands.

Some scholars believe that the real meaning of Jesus' transfiguration lies in its effects on the disciples who witnessed it. In this experience they came to see Jesus in a significantly new way. They saw that he has somehow associated with Moses, an agent of the law, and Elijah, a great prophet. In other words, Jesus was somehow associated with the very core of Jewish religion. The disciples did not understand how, nor did they grasp what "rising from the dead meant." Still, they placed their future in his hands. †

***God asked Abraham
to place his future
in God's hands.***



A Word from Pope Francis

We are called to experience the encounter with Christ so that, enlightened by his light, we might take it and make it shine everywhere. Igniting little lights in people's hearts; being little lamps of the Gospel that bear a bit of love and hope: this is the mission of a Christian.

ANGELUS, ROME, FEBRUARY 28, 2021



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Do you believe that God has a plan for you?
- Do we trust God's plan more than our own?

God Meets Us Where We Are

Nathan D. Mitchell

The great twentieth-century theologian, Karl Barth, once advised Christians to pray with the Bible in one hand and the daily newspaper in the other. He meant, in part, that faith and daily life interpret each another. “Drink deeply of the Word,” St. Ambrose once told his people. “Soon you’ll find yourself craving more.” He was right, of course. God’s word forever illumines our path—a shining “pillar of fire” by night, daily bread for our journey. Yet our experience of the world’s perils and opportunities also shapes our response to that word. We’re reminded that God’s love for the world didn’t result in indifference and neglect, but in the word sent to “pitch a tent among us,” to share our flesh, to taste the world in all its salty, roiling complexity. Word and world: they belong together.



The God of Sarah and Abraham, Rebecca and Isaac, Rachel and Jacob is passionately focused on humankind, intent on participating in our history, hungry for relationship with every person. The God we meet in the stories of creation is a “God with skin on,” one

who understands that our primary mode of perceiving reality—of interacting with God, world, and each other—is flesh and body. Every day we meet the holy in the homely; the divine in the daily; the saving God in blood, sweat, and tears; in soil and labor; in sex, seed, and harvest; in fertility and childbirth.

Lent reminds us that Christians form a community gathered in contemplation around God’s Word—and that means we’re also gathered in meditation on the world, its goodness and grandeur, its beauty and brutality. Lent is a call to pay attention, to see creation as God does, to gather our faith not only from God’s promise (where it begins), but also from God’s presence in the low, vast murmur of human life that tugs at our hearts, heads, and hands. Be prepared for some surprises. †

Source: *Daybreaks: Daily Reflections for Lent and Easter*, 2010

Wisdom from Catholic UPDATE

Excerpt from *Lenten Customs: A Journey to Conversion* by Rev. Lawrence E. Mick

The key to understanding the meaning of Lent is simple: baptism. Preparation for baptism and for renewing baptismal commitment lies at the heart of the season. When the Second Vatican council issued the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy in 1963, the bishops called for the renewal of the season of Lent. Since then, the Church has reemphasized the baptismal character of Lent, especially through the restoration of the catechumenate and its Lenten rituals. Our challenge today is to renew our understanding of this important season of the Church year and to see how we can integrate our personal practices into this renewed perspective. †

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So that we may witness to the light of God’s love and the sacredness of this life, we pray—Lord, let us be like you.

The Redemptorists

WEEKDAY READINGS

February 26—March 2

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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