



Bringing Home the Word

Third Sunday of Lent (B)

March 7, 2021

Wisdom, Strength

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

The ceiling painting by Laureti, *The Triumph of Religion*, is found in the Constantine Room of the Vatican papal apartments. It is a symbolic celebration of the triumph of Christianity over paganism, set in a classical architectural space. The remains of a crushed Hermes lie broken in pieces on the floor, while a crucifix of Jesus Christ sits upon the pedestal.

It is fitting that this painting crowns the papal hall honoring Constantine, the first Roman emperor to leave paganism and be baptized a Christian. Constantine had four basilicas built in Rome—including St. Peter's—and gave

Christians freedom of religion in the Roman Empire.

The message is clear. The Romans worshiped statues of gods who were mere human creations and projections. In the statue's place is not just another statue but a crucifix that reminds us of a reality, a historical event. God himself became human in Jesus Christ and showed his divine strength by emptying himself and being crushed by our sins in order to forgive and win back a rebellious humanity.

This show of godly power through weakness is foolishness to the Gentiles and inconceivable to the Jews. Yet this humility and love is the wisdom that confounds and the strength that saves.

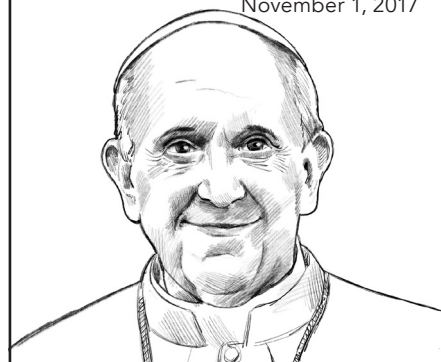
Religion isn't a business or human invention for personal enthronement. Jesus overturns this idea like he overturns the moneychangers' tables. Worship of God is all about accepting his initiative and humbly responding in the obedience of faith and the purifying joy of love. +

***Religion isn't a business
or human invention for
personal enthronement.***

A Word from Pope Francis

I urge the members of the Church to take up the Lenten journey with enthusiasm, sustained by almsgiving, fasting, and prayer. If, at times, the flame of charity seems to die in our own hearts, know that this is never the case in the heart of God! He constantly gives us a chance to begin loving anew.

—Lenten message for 2018,
November 1, 2017



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- How does my faith foster humility in me?
- Are my Lenten practices helping me to be purified from sin?

Sunday Readings

**Exodus 20:1–17 or
Exodus 20:1–3, 7–8, 12–17**

You shall not have other gods beside me.

1 Corinthians 1:22–25

Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified.

John 2:13–25

[Jesus said,] "Take these out of here, and stop making my Father's house a marketplace."

God Behind the Scenes

By Kathleen M. Basi

Several times in the past few years, I've made major life shifts on the spur of the moment. For instance, starting a weight-loss program for myself, or potty training a toddler. One day, without any discussion or preparation, I said, "That's it, I'm doing this now." And I did.

As time passes, though, I'm beginning to realize that these seemingly abrupt direction changes aren't as sudden as they appear on the surface. Always, in the weeks or months before the turning point, there's an undercurrent of awareness buried deep down, where I'm not always cognizant of it. Quiet questions form in unguarded moments but go unanswered. Solutions whisper, but I resist. Around and around it goes, until the day when, without realizing it, I reach a fork in the road and—as Yogi Berra advised—take it.

Weight loss and toilet training may seem like trivial examples, but I think they illustrate a deeper truth. God is always working in the background, like a computer processor that whirs and whirs. You don't always know what it's doing. Actually, you hardly ever know what it's doing! But you understand it's doing something that keeps the whole system running, and when it needs your attention it's going to throw a pop-up in your face, and you'll be forced to respond.



Likewise, God will eventually punch through our distractions and nudge us in a new direction.

That's not to say we can just sit by complacently and wait for God to beat through the tangled web of busyness we build around our consciousness. It's our job to clear the roadblocks; to navigate the "undercurrent" until it melds into smoother waters. We have to nurture the spiritual life and be open to God's guidance—on his timeline, not ours. The most important insights and decisions in life cannot be rushed. God works through processes, and there just aren't any shortcuts.

Embrace these times, even when they make life uncomfortable. There's a purity of mind in discerning and pursuing new directions that automatically brings our focus toward God. In these moments, when we become aware of that deep, quiet current running beneath the clutter and static of life, we can feel—really feel and not just know—that God abides within us. And that is a great blessing. +

Often, seemingly abrupt decisions aren't as sudden as they appear.

PRAYER

Lord, you instill within me your power and wisdom. Help me to discern more clearly how to use your power and wisdom in service of my brothers and sisters.

—From *Mindful Meditations for Every Day of Lent and Easter*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

March 8–13

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

Bringing Home
the Word 

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Bringing Home the Word

Fourth Sunday of Lent (B)

March 14, 2021

Healed through His Wounds

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

Jesus refers to the story Michelangelo painted into a corner of the Sistine Chapel, *The Brazen Serpent*. It is about the time the Chosen People were attacked by serpents and many were dying. God instructed Moses to place two serpents on a staff and lift it up over the people. All they had to do was look at the serpents to be miraculously healed of their bite wounds.

We have all been bitten by sin. This can be our own self-destructive choices and attitudes, or we can be victims of other's sins. Yet sin and suffering doesn't

need to have the last word. We can overcome if we choose to look at Christ crucified and learn his lesson of love. Jesus teaches us to not be defined by our ugly choices or the wounds we suffer. Our wounds and weaknesses can become the place of our healing. Jesus wants to heal us. That is why he let himself be lifted up!

To embrace this healing is simple yet challenging. First it requires simple faith to believe you are loved by the Father, no matter what. Second, we need a constant, often-denied effort on our part to sincerely repent and work with God's grace to transform self-limiting attitudes and habits into virtues.

Even if you feel dead in your transgressions now, Jesus has already secured your path to life. Grace awaits you. The first step is to accept the love from he who is lifted up with arms outstretched to receive you. +

Sunday Readings

2 Chronicles 36:14–16, 19–23

They mocked God's messengers, despised his words, and scoffed at his prophets, until the LORD's anger against his people blazed up.

Ephesians 2:4–10

By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God; it is not from works, so no one may boast.

John 3:14–21

[Jesus said,] "Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up."

We have all been bitten by sin. This can be our own self-destructive choices and attitudes.

A Word from Pope Francis

Saint Joseph appears as a strong and courageous man, a working man, yet in his heart we see great tenderness, which is not the virtue of the weak but rather a sign of strength of spirit and a capacity for concern, for compassion, for genuine openness to others, for love. We must not be afraid of goodness, of tenderness!

—Solemnity of St. Joseph, March 19, 2013



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Do I have any unspoken beliefs that I am unlovable?
- Can I repent from attitudes or actions that distance me from God's love?

Conscience-informed Speech

By Fr. Bruce Lewandowski, CSSR

Our high school forensics team didn't win many awards, if memory serves. However, we did learn a lot about speaking in public. We studied and put into practice simple rules for public speaking and debate. We were told to check our content and make sure it was accurate. We were warned about misinterpreting and fabricating information. We were taught the skill of being adversarial and competitive without name-calling. Debate is public, not private or personal. We were instructed that it is never appropriate to demean, belittle, degrade, or dehumanize the opponent. What we didn't know was that we were being taught to reason and think critically and exercise sound judgment.

High school forensics taught me that I shouldn't say everything that I think. There is a difference between personal thought and public opinion. And while personal thought can contribute to the formation of public opinion, some personal thoughts should remain just that, personal, internal, and most importantly, unspoken. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians encourages this: "No foul language should come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for needed edification, that it may impart grace to those who hear" (Ephesians 4:29). Many parents have said it this way, "If you have nothing nice to say, say nothing at all."

Say nothing. That's the key. How



many of us speak and then regret what we've said? How many people in public life have been caught in the act of misspeaking, exaggerating, mixing truth with lies, and fabricating stories about themselves or others? Saying nothing is a valid response—at times the most appropriate response. It's even a holy response, especially if the alternative is a lie or words that will wound.

It is very important to stop and think about the language we use when speaking about people, especially in terms of race, immigration, human sexuality, religion, and politics. I am not advocating political correctness. Sometimes political correctness runs and hides from the truth. I'm looking for a place in the

middle of the road, somewhere between the shield of political correctness and license that permits unapologetically brutal and inflammatory expression.

That place is called conscience-informed speech. It goes beyond self-censure, beyond reasoning and critical thinking; it goes even further than the exercise of sound judgment. Conscience-informed speech asks one to stop and weigh the moral value and implications of one's words. It means speaking with moral judgment enlightened by God and the Word, especially in important moments: political debates, campaign speeches, teaching, preaching, and conversations in the public square. We should not underestimate the ethical responsibility of the speaker. There is a duty to say the right thing or say nothing at all. +

***Sometimes the best response
is no response.***


PRAYER

***Lord, you are the source of love,
peace, and justice in the world.
Help me to live in communion
with you and all people.***

—From *Mindful Meditations for Every Day*
of Lent and Easter, Rev. Warren J. Savage
and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

March 15–20

Monday, Lenten Weekday:
Is 65:17–21 / Jn 4:43–54

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, 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

Saturday, Lenten Weekday:
Jer 11:18–20 / Jn 7:40–53

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Bringing Home the Word

Fifth Sunday of Lent (B)

March 21, 2021

The Meaning of the Gardens of Scripture

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

Focus on the painting, Sebastiano Conca's *Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane*, and you will be drawn across the space between the gaze of Jesus and the chalice the angel offers. Sebastiano understands the essence of the agony in the Garden—the loneliness of Jesus before the bitter cup the Father extends to him via the hands of an angel.

Jesus' attitude in receiving this passion is evident in his open arms. Like the posture he will assume when

nailed to the cross, he shows his humble acceptance and abandonment.

Gardens don't appear often in Scripture, but they are important. There is the Garden of Eden, the place of God's creative love and man's original sin. There is the garden in the Song of Songs—a garden of passion, possession, and life-giving union. Where is Jesus' tomb, and where does Mary Magdalene, the transformed lover, find Jesus on Easter morning? In the Scriptures, gardens are a place of new life, sin, and redemption. It's where lovers go; where love is declared and tested.

This is important in understanding the drama of our Lord's agony in the Garden. It is the drama inside of love. It is the drama of acceptance and abandonment, trust and generosity, life and death.

Jesus knows this and goes into the Garden to do what Adam failed to do in the first Garden. He goes to pay the price of love. He engenders new life by giving his own. He looks at the chalice, the price of our salvation, and with a heart full of generous, uncomplicated love, accepts the Father's invitation. "Not my will but yours be done." +

In the Scriptures, gardens are a place of new life, sin, and redemption. It's where love is tested.

A Word from Pope Francis

By visiting the tombs of our loved ones we remember that we have a multitude of saints who before God intercede for our needs. Let us not forget, however, that so many deceased also await our spiritual support. Let us remember them in our prayers...asking that they be welcomed into the ranks of the elect in heaven.

—General Audience, October 31, 2018



Sunday Readings

Jeremiah 21:31–34

Everyone...shall know me—oracle of the LORD—for I will forgive their iniquity and no longer remember their sin.

Hebrews 5:7–9

[Christ Jesus] offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears.

John 12:20–33

[Jesus said,] "Yet what should I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But it was for this purpose that I came to this hour."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS REFLECTION

- How can I receive Jesus' self-giving love for me more deeply?
- How should I imitate Jesus' self-giving love in my relationships?

"You Visited Me"

By Fr. Bruce Lewandowski, CSSR

My neighbor's son, Joe, didn't last one week. He was only out of prison for a few days when he knowingly broke his probation so he could go back. He couldn't find anything to hold onto on the outside. Joe felt the life waiting for him after prison was devoid of meaning. The unfortunate reality is, many find it difficult to reenter the "world" after spending time in prison. Critics are quick to say it's because prison is too comfortable. The inmates are treated too well. Many end up back in prison, not because they miss their cell or their high-school-equivalency classes or the predictability of it all, but because they miss their friends. They have no social network on the "outside." Though not the sole cause, loneliness and isolation contribute greatly to recidivism.

Pope Francis, during a visit to Philadelphia's Curran-Fromhold Correctional Facility said:

This time in your life can only have one purpose: to give you a hand in getting back on the right road, to give you a hand to help you rejoin society. All of us are part of that effort, all of us are invited to encourage, help and enable your rehabilitation. A rehabilitation, which everyone seeks and desires: inmates and their families, correctional authorities, social and educational programs. A rehabilitation, which benefits and elevates the morale of the entire community.



I was Sally's neighbor. I knew she had a son in prison. She shared his letters with me. She worried about what would happen when he got out. I tried to comfort and assure her that everything would be all right. I was Sally's pastor. It never occurred to me that I could be her son's pastor, too. If I had visited Joe, met him in prison, offered him the ministry and friendship of our parish while he was doing time, maybe he would have had something to come home to: a church, friends, the prospect of a new life.

In the inner-city parish where I was the pastor for six years, almost 50 percent of the parishioners knew someone in prison: a brother, mother, son, former classmate, or a neighbor. No one ever

spoke about it. No one ever asked the priest to visit. No one ever had a Mass said on behalf of the imprisoned. Fear and shame made us think that we couldn't make a difference. What if our friendship and love could have made all the difference in the life of an ex-offender?

If you know someone in prison, if you know someone who knows someone in prison, write a letter, call, and visit. "I was in prison and you visited me" and gave me something to look forward to after prison: a new life (Matthew 25:36). +

We can make a difference in the life of someone in prison.



Lord, your love is written on my heart. May your love inspire and empower me to love people from all walks of life.

—From *Mindful Meditations for Every Day of Lent and Easter*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

March 22–27

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

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

Saturday, Lenten Weekday:
Ez 37:21–28 / Jn 11:45–5

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Bringing Home the Word

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion (B)

March 28, 2021

Acceptance of the Passion

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

There is a sharp contrast between Jesus' and Peter's acceptance of Christ's passion. Both are afraid, but while Jesus faces and embraces, Peter hides and denies.

We understand Peter's gloomy darkness and identify with the confusion and weakness leading to his failure. Like us, he tries to follow Jesus, but at a safe distance. He wants to be close, but not too close. He wants to feel he hasn't abandoned him, to be there—but remains on the fringe.

But following Jesus always leads to moments of truth. Jesus and life have a way of bringing us full circle to face our true selves. Are we in or out? How deep is our love? This time, Peter's love for Jesus fails. But like us, Jesus looks at him with understanding and gives him a chance to be honest, repent, and follow him once again.

Jesus' acceptance of his passion is our example. First, he suffers freely. He's not being forced into a fate he cannot escape. As a result, he is calm, self-possessed, in control of his heart, and patient. Second, he suffers peacefully without resentment. He isn't constantly recriminating against Judas, Peter, or John during his trial or flagellation. He doesn't seek blame or payback.

Not only is he not bitter or resentful, but he is full of compassion and focused on others: on the elderly women, his Mother, John the Apostle, forgiving his tormenters, and leading the good thief to heaven. Let's enter this holiest week following our Redeemer and imitating his example. +

*Not only is Jesus
not bitter or resentful,
but he is full of compassion
and focused on others.*

A Word from Pope Francis

This celebration seems to combine stories of joy and suffering, mistakes and successes, which are part of our daily lives as disciples. It somehow expresses the contradictory feelings that we too, the men and women of today, experience: the capacity for great love...but also the ability to "wash our hands" at the right moment.

—Palm Sunday Homily, March 25, 2018



Sunday Readings

Mark 11:1–10 or John 12:12–16

Those preceding him as well as those following kept crying out: "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

Isaiah 50:4–7; Philippians 2:6–11

Rather, he emptied himself... becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

Mark 14:1—15:47 or 15:1–39

It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews."

REFLECTION
QUESTIONS
QUESTIONS
REFLECTION

- Do I value the infinite mercy of Jesus, who forgives me whenever I turn to him sincerely?

Journey to Joy

By Kathleen M. Basi

I first noticed it at Thanksgiving several years ago when everyone was posting what-I'm-thankful-for lists. Counting my blessings only seemed to underscore the sadness I was feeling on behalf of the multitudes whose lives consisted of suffering: refugees, sick children, communities torn apart by racism, and worlds blown apart by gunfire and suicide bombs. I felt powerless—and at the same time deeply aware that I really wasn't trying very hard to make a difference, especially considering how much I have been given.

Opening ourselves to joy also sensitizes us to sorrow—and vice versa. The two go hand in hand.

Holy Week illustrates this in a profound way. In a handful of days, we travel from the bleakest stage of the Christian journey to its most glorious. In fact, the power of the latter depends upon the apparent hopelessness of the former.

If we want to live the joy of the resurrection to its fullest, we have to be willing to shine a light on the dark underbelly of our own lives and clean up our acts. To recognize the ways in which our actions—or lack thereof—contribute to the pain of the world. We need to be willing to acknowledge that, all too often, we're part of the problem.



But wait—didn't we just spend all of Lent doing exactly that? It's Easter now. Isn't it time to move beyond penance and focus on, you know...joy?

The potential for great good and for great evil resides within every heart, and the opportunity to choose comes to us every day, regardless of the season. Jesus didn't endure the Way of the Cross to give us a fifty-day vacation from examining our consciences. He went through it to show us that the pathway to the fullness of life passes through pain: through dying to our sins, our selfishness, the grudges we hold, and the

preconceived lenses through which we view the world and the people in it.

To grieve for the suffering of others and acknowledge the ways in which our own failure to act can contribute to that suffering joins us to the heart of God. When we unite ourselves to the heart of God, we feel compelled to change—to act as God's hands and feet in the world. And it is through this action that we discover the full joy of the resurrection. +

*With all the bleakness,
how do we get to
the feast of joy that is
the resurrection?*

PRAYER

*Lord, you empty yourself out
in loving service to all people.
Give me a selfless spirit that
I may be of service to others.*

—From *Mindful Meditations for Every Day of Lent and Easter*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

March 29–April 3

Monday of Holy Week:

Is 42:1–7 / Jn 12:1–11

Tuesday of Holy Week:

Is 49:1–6 / Jn 13:21–33, 36–38

Wednesday of Holy Week:

Is 50:4–9a / Mt 26:14–25

Holy Thursday: Ex 12:1–8, 11–14 /

1 Cor 11:23–26 / Jn 13:1–15

Good Friday: Is 52:13–53:12 /

Heb 4:14–16, 5:7–9 / Jn 18:1–19:42


Holy Saturday: Gn 1:1–2:2 or 1:1, 26–31a /

Gn 22:1–18 or 22:1–2, 9a, 10–13, 15–18 /

Ex 14:15–15:1 / Is 54:5–14 / Is 55:1–11 /

Bar 3:9–15, 32–4:4 / Ez 36:16–17a, 18–28 /

Rom 6:3–11 / Mk 16:1–7

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