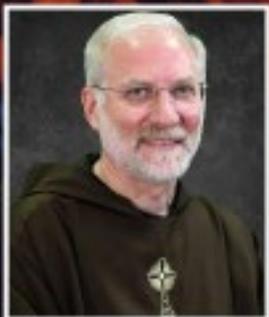




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2021 LENTEN REFLECTIONS



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2021 Lenten Reflections



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Wednesday, February 17, 2021

Ash Wednesday

Returning to the LORD

Once again, it is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of the Lenten season. Today we begin a journey that will prepare our hearts for Jesus' sacrifice on Calvary and His Resurrection from the dead. Often, in our spiritual lives we grow lazy. For this reason, the Church has given us this solemn season, a time that reenergizes us with spiritual fervor.

Each week through Lent, I will share with you a devotional, along with Sunday's Mass readings, to help you prepare for a glorious celebration of Easter.

Today's Readings

First reading: Joel 2:12-18

Psalm: 51:3-6, 12-14, 17

Second reading: 2 Cor 5:20 – 6:2

Gospel: St. Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

The readings for Ash Wednesday remind us of God's longing for us and the undeserved mercy that He gives to all who ask. Every one of us sins, but God waits for us to return to Him. There are only two paths in this life: one leading to destruction and the other to life. When we confess our sins and turn our hearts to God, we choose the path of life.

Today's readings also remind us to fast in a way that honors God, not ourselves. Instead of complaining about our hunger, we can happily offer this small sacrifice to the Lord. Instead of allowing our passions to lead us, the act of fasting helps us control our passions, as well as redirect our gaze to the Lord. As we spend this time in self-denial, we grow in our love of the Lord and in our understanding of the Gospel.



Sunday, February 21, 2021

First Sunday of Lent

Facing Temptations

All of us suffer through temptations, including Jesus. How can we avoid sin as we face the traps of Satan?

Today's Readings

First reading: Genesis 9:8-15

Psalm: 25:4-9

Second reading: 1 Peter 3:18-22

Gospel: St. Mark 1:12-15

Today's Gospel mentions the temptation of Jesus in the desert, which immediately followed His Baptism in the Jordan River.

We might wonder why God the Father allowed His Son to be tempted by Satan, but temptation is part of the experience of life. As Jesus felt pain, sorrow, and even death, He was not immune to the temptations of the world.

Unlike us, when He was tempted, He resisted every trick of the devil. Hebrews 4:15 tells us:

For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning.

If we face temptations, it doesn't mean that God has abandoned us. Temptation actually gives us an opportunity to answer the question: Whom will we serve? When we overcome temptation, we grow in virtue. Each time that we resist these temptations, we become stronger in our faith. This is why God allows these tests in our spiritual lives.

Christ won the victory over sin and temptation, which is why we need Him as we face the devil's snares. Jesus courageously stood up to Satan with the Truth of Scripture. As we journey through this Lenten season, we can follow Jesus in His holy example of a prayerful, brave refusal of sin.



Sunday, February 28, 2021 *Second Sunday of Lent* Preparing for Glory

Am I living life courageously in the Lord?

Today's Readings

First reading: Genesis 22:1-2, 9-13, 15-18

Psalm: 116:10, 15-19

Second reading: Romans 8:31-34

Gospel: St. Mark 9:2-10

In the Gospel today, we hear the story of the Transfiguration, where Jesus revealed His glory to Peter, James, and John. A few days prior to this event, Jesus had predicted His Passion. He gave His disciples this revelation of glory to give them strength on the journey they would undertake.

The Transfiguration gives us courage, too. As we face hardships in our lives, we know the end of the story. It may not always be easy for us to be faithful to the Lord, but we know that there will be a peace and strength that the Lord will give us, even in this valley of tears.

One of Mother Angelica's favorite Scripture passages was 2 Corinthians 3:17-18:

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Even now, we are being transfigured, transformed by the Spirit Who is at work in us, preparing us for eternal life. The Transfiguration is an exhortation to be courageous. We will have our own cross, our own Calvary. We know that the glory that is prepared for us will far surpass any of this. The hope of eternal life can never be extinguished.



Sunday, March 7, 2021 *Third Sunday of Lent* Pursuing a Life of Virtue

Do I pursue a life of virtue, a life that is framed by the Ten Commandments?

Today's Readings

First reading: Exodus 20:1-17 or Exodus 20:1-3, 7-8, 12-17

Psalm: 19:8-11

Second reading: 1 Corinthians 1:22-25

Gospel: St. John 2:13-25

In the first reading today, we hear the list of the Ten Commandments. Also known as the Decalogue, the commandments form the framework for our moral lives.

Not to observe these is to choose our ultimate destruction because God Himself has told us that these are grave obligations. We cannot pick and choose the commandments we want to keep, and there is no excuse to reject them, even if everyone else does.

But how can we possibly do this? We can only be faithful with God's Grace, which is given to us in abundance. In every generation, Jesus calls people to be saints, including you and me. In addition, we are called to be part of a renewal for the Church and for the world.

This does not mean that we are called to be unhappy. On the contrary, living in virtue ensures happiness. Our natural state is in communion with God, and we are happiest when we are living in accordance with His Will.

The love of God and the love of neighbor is the summary of the Ten Commandments. As we journey through Lent, may Jesus help us to live those Ten Commandments fully in our lives and be joyful witnesses so that others may also find the joy of Jesus.



Sunday, March 14, 2021 *Fourth Sunday of Lent* **Being Transformed by the Light**

The Gospel reading explains the great love of God for His people. Do I love Him in return?

Today's Readings

First reading: 2 Chronicles 36:14-17, 19-23

Psalm: 137:1-6

Second reading: Ephesians 2:4-10

Gospel: St. John 3:14-21

In today's Gospel reading, we hear one of the most beloved verses in Sacred Scripture:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

- St. John 3:16

Maybe we have heard these words so often that they are not surprising anymore, but if we stop to reflect on this verse, it is the very definition of the "Good News." God Himself gave His Son for you and for me. God, who made Heaven and earth, loves us.

How do I respond to this love? Do I follow His commands? Do I pray often? God has given us a gift that we can never repay. But like a child who makes simple presents for his parents, we can love Him as much as we are able.

In this Gospel passage, Jesus goes on to say that some prefer the darkness to the light. As Christ is the Light of the World, some people did not—and some still do not—want His Light to expose them or their sins. As Christians, we must love the Light, love the Truth, and be transformed by the Light. Do I allow God to transform me with His Light?



Sunday, March 21, 2021 *Fifth Sunday of Lent* Having the Law in our Hearts

The readings this week discuss our hearts, our interior lives. As we move closer to Holy Week, is my heart prepared for the journey to Calvary?

Today's Readings

First reading: Jeremiah 31:31-34

Psalm: 51:3-4, 12-15

Second reading: Hebrews 5:7-9

Gospel: St. John 12:20-33

In today's first reading, we hear about the new covenant that God promised to make. This covenant was eventually fulfilled in Jesus. In this new law, God says,

I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

- Jeremiah 31:33

This is a beautiful verse. Instead of only teaching us through prophets and Sacred Scripture, Our Lord is also writing the law on our hearts. This passage is very intimate because He truly outlines the relationship of Himself with His people. He claims us as His own. He is our God. We are His people.

Then in the Responsorial Psalm, King David pleads with God to give him a clean heart. In King David's time, of course there was no sacramental Confession. However, in modern times, we have no reason to avoid the gift of Confession. There is no easier way for God to "create a clean heart" in us than by a visit to the confessional. In preparation for Easter, it is a good idea for us to go to Confession in order to grow even closer to Our Lord and to receive more graces from Him.



Sunday, March 28, 2021 *Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion* **Knowing Jesus, the Suffering Servant**

Today, we remember both Palm Sunday and the Passion of Our Lord. How has God's sacrificial love changed me this Lent?

Today's Readings

At the Procession with Palms: St. Mark 11:1-10 or St. John 12:12-16

First reading: Isaiah 50:4-7

Psalm: 22:8-9, 17-20, 23-24

Second reading: Philippians 2:6-11

Gospel: St. Mark 14:1-15:47 or St. Mark 15:1-39

Over the past few weeks, the readings have taken us through salvation history, which clearly shows us how God worked in the history of mankind, eventually culminating in the birth, life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus.

In the reading from Isaiah today, we see one of the prophecies that tells us about Jesus many years before He was born:

**I gave my back to the smiters,
and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard;
I hid not my face
from shame and spitting.
- Isaiah 50:6**

And as we read through the Gospel today, we should remember that the events that are mentioned, the stories that are told, are historical events that happened in historical locations. Jesus Christ truly lived, truly suffered, and truly died in the Holy Land. To this day, we can still see places that point to the authenticity of the Gospel narrative.

As we look back, almost 2000 years later, we know that Jesus, the Suffering Servant, died so that we could be forgiven of our sins and learn the lessons of His Love. This Holy Week, we can walk with Him on the Way of His Cross, as we try to understand the depth of His Love for each one of us.



Sunday, April 4, 2021 *Easter Sunday* Proclaiming “Christ is Risen!”

Happy Easter, Family! This is the most joyful day of the year, a day in which we celebrate the greatest event in human history—the Resurrection of the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

Today’s Readings

First reading: Acts 10:34, 37-43

Psalm: 118:1-2, 16-17, 22-23

Second reading: Colossians 3:1-4 or 1 Corinthians 5:6-8

Gospel: St. John 20:1-9

Easter Sunday is the high point of the year, the day that recalls Our Savior’s Resurrection. Can you imagine the emotions that the women and the disciples felt at the tomb? Initially, they would have been confused and dejected. But this was soon replaced with incredible thanksgiving as they witnessed history’s greatest event. Jesus turned their profound grief into utter joy.

If we are ever tempted to despair in our own lives, just remember that God Himself opened the gates of Heaven for us. No matter the problems we face, no matter the state of the world, we should not fear.

As we celebrate this glorious day, let us remember that we meet Our Savior many ways. We encounter the Risen Lord every time that two or three are gathered. We encounter Him in Sacred Scripture. But we especially encounter Him in the Most Blessed Sacrament. He is still here for us every day, every moment, out of love for us.

This is a reason to rejoice. He is Risen Indeed! As Pope St. John Paul II proclaimed years ago:

“We are an Easter People and Alleluia is our song!”

