

Up From The Waters



Lent 2022

Pastoral Office

CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF BUNBURY

TIPS FOR LEADERS

The role of the leader is to help the Lenten group run smoothly. Two hours is a good length of time to allow for each week's gathering. Suggested times to be spent on each part of the program are set out below. Please do not feel as though you must stick to these times though, as each group will operate differently. As the leader, you may like to suggest that the group members invite someone along who is not a regular mass-goer. This is a good way to help people come back to the practice of their Catholic faith.

1. GATHERING TOGETHER:

After welcoming everyone, ask them to make themselves comfortable and pray the GATHERING PRAYER for the week together.

(Suggested time: 10 minutes)

2. PROCLAIMING AND HEARING THE GOSPEL:

One member of the group reads the Gospel reading out loud, either from this text, or from a bible. After reading, pause for silent reflection.

(Suggested time: 15 minutes)

3. REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL:

The REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL section can be read by each person silently or out loud by a volunteer.

4. QUESTIONS FOR GROUP SHARING AND DISCUSSION:

Reflect on each of these questions and allow any group members who wish to share, to do so. It is important that enough time is allowed to ensure that all group members have time to share their thoughts.

(Suggested time: 30 minutes)

5. MEDITATION ON BAPTISM:

This section should be read aloud by a member of the group. Encourage group members to spend some time discussing the questions at the end, making sure that all those who wish to contribute are given the opportunity.

(Suggested time: 30 minutes)

6. CONCLUDE WITH A SENDING PRAYER:

Pray the sending prayer out loud, as a group.

(Suggested time: 5 minutes)

Encourage group members to read and try to implement the LENT IN ACTION suggestions during the week between meetings.

INTRODUCTION

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Welcome to our Diocesan Lenten program for 2022, entitled "UP FROM THE WATERS."

We begin with a slightly humorous story from our Evangelical friends.

"A preacher was completing a temperance sermon. With great expression he said, 'If I had all the beer in the world, I'd take it and throw it in the river.' With even greater emphasis he said, 'and if I had all the wine in the world, I'd take it and throw it in the river.' He sat down.

The song leader then stood very cautiously and announced with a smile, 'For our closing song, let us sing hymn number 365: Shall We Gather at the River.'

Lent prepares us, among other things, to "gather at the river." For 40 days we will prepare ourselves so that we can experience the baptism of new Christians at Easter, and then wholeheartedly renew our own baptismal promises.

It may help us to look at how Lent ever got into the Church!

The first Lenten people were pagans on the way to becoming Christians. They were learners (we call them catechumens) who publicly wore sackcloth and ashes, and with open and repentant hearts prepared themselves for baptism at Easter.

Now, at the eventual Easter baptisms the "long-time" Christians were struck at the sheer joy and radiant faces of the newly baptised. They too longed for an experience of the joy of new birth and new life. They realised that their own faith needed renewing.

This is how Lent got into our Church!

So once again we begin our 40 days, with the Scriptures to nourish us, and our hearts resolved not to let this precious opportunity pass us by.

In this program you will find prayers and reflections on the Sunday Gospels for Lent (Year C), and meditations on the gifts and challenges of our own baptism.

May the Lord lead us to a renewed heart, "up from the waters" of our baptism each day.

God bless you.

Fr, Tony Chiera

Pastoral Office



GATHERING PRAYER

Lord our God,
you formed your people from the clay of the earth
and breathed into them the spirit of life,
but they turned from your face and sinned.
In this time of repentance, we call out for your mercy.
Bring us back to you
and to the life your Son won for us
by his death on the cross,
for he lives and reigns for ever and ever.
Amen

PROCLAIMING AND HEARING THE GOSPEL

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke (4:1-13)

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit through the wilderness, being tempted there by the devil for forty days. During that time he ate nothing and at the end he was hungry. Then the devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to turn into a loaf." But Jesus replied, "Scripture says: Man does not live on bread alone."

Then leading him to a height, the devil showed him in a moment of time all the kingdoms of the world and said to him, "I will give you all this power and the glory of these kingdoms, for it has been committed to me and I give it to anyone I choose. Worship me, then, and it shall all be yours." But Jesus answered him. "Scripture says:

You must worship the Lord your God,
and serve him alone."

Then he led him to Jerusalem and made him stand on the parapet of the Temple. "If you are the Son of God", he said to him "throw yourself down from here for scripture says:

He will put his angels in charge of you
to guard you,

and again:

They will hold you up on their hands
in case you hurt your foot against a stone."

But Jesus answered him, "It has been said:

You must not put the Lord your God to the test."

Having exhausted all these ways of tempting him, the devil left him, to return at the appointed time.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Pause for a few moments of prayerful reflection and allow the Words of the Gospel to speak to you. As I hear this Gospel, which words or phrases stay with me?



LOOKING INTO THE GOSPEL STORY

This testing and testing of Jesus occurs at the beginning of his three years of ministry. Jesus' identity as the Son of God was revealed at his baptism, and following this, he is led into the desert 'by the Spirit'.

In the solitude of the desert, Jesus reflects on his life before the Father, and faces the question of what he will stand for in his life and ministry.

By resisting the devil's temptations, Jesus chooses to be in his life 'the Son of God'.

- Bread does not fill, but the Spirit does.
- Worshipping false gods does not give power, but serving and worshipping the true God does.
- Testing God in false ways does not bring salvation, but relying on God's care does.

What Jesus will stand for throughout his life, as Son of God, is total fidelity to his Father's call. Jesus' very identity is found in listening and responding to His Father's voice in all things.

The setting of these temptations in the desert recalls the experience of Israel in the wilderness. There Israel was tested and failed (Dt.8 etc.). By contrast, Jesus is victorious in these encounters with the devil's testing – even if the final victory is yet to come.

In Luke's Gospel, the temptation in the desert serves as a story of encouragement. Christians are to be heartened by Jesus' victory since the same Spirit that empowered Jesus is given to Christians to strengthen them.

LOOKING INTO OUR LIFE'S STORY

Our Baptism gave us the gifts of being the daughters and sons of God. It is out of this identity that we enter our own Lenten desert, and face our own worse temptations.

By prayer, fasting and almsgiving we seek to renew our heart's commitment to God and others, so that we can sincerely renew our baptismal promises at Easter.

FOR PERSONAL PRAYER AND REFLECTION

- What Lenten practice have I chosen? How is it related to a true renewal and change of heart?
- If the devil had three 'shots' at you, what three temptations would he use?
- What besides 'bread' satisfies the hungers in your life?

FOR GROUP REFLECTION AND SHARING

- How are the three temptations of Jesus relevant to our world today?
- What will encourage you and your Parish on this Lenten journey? Who/what will support you?
- What helps us remember we are daughters and sons of God and to trust God?

MEDITATION ON BAPTISM 1: NOT A ONCE OFF EVENT BUT A LIFELONG PROJECT

Someone once asked Pope St. John Paul II what the most important day in his life was. He replied, "The day I was baptised."

This response may come as a surprise or even a shock to some people. Why would a man who had experienced so much in his lifetime, say such a thing?

If we return to the early church, we find something similar. The decision to ask for baptism during the days of the Roman Empire was revolutionary and fraught with danger. It involved a true transformation of one's life and identity, and often led to one's death! Why do something so radical?

The simple answer is that God draws us to the waters of baptism that we might be filled with God's own life! Baptism is about being alive in God, filled with the Spirit of Christ and living as a vital member of His body. But it remains the pure gift of God, calling us to live the way of faith, hope and love in this world.

Unfortunately, there can be different views of baptism among some, which miss the fulness of this great gift. There is the view that baptism mainly removes original sin (which it does!) and so we are safe to be in this world should something "terrible" happen to us or our children. In this view, once baptism is "done", we are safe and can get on with our lives. Nothing more is asked of us.

There are other reasons that bring people and their children to the baptismal font that do not do full justice to this great sacrament as well. But what they all have in common is the idea that once baptism is "done", that is all we need to do.

We can all be tempted to think of our baptism as something "done" in our past, but little to do with our everyday life. Yet, how far from the truth this really is!

It is true that our baptism is a "one-time event". It happened in a ritual at a certain time and place. But baptism is not just a "one-time event" it is, more importantly, a "life-time project". When the ritual of our baptism is over, we begin to live the sacrament which extends into every moment of our life. Baptism is the life-long sacrament of becoming more alive in God, by living as a member of the Body of Christ. What a blessing and challenge!

1. FOR PERSONAL PRAYER AND REFLECTION:

- Do you know the date of your baptism?
- Do you know the Priest/Minister who baptised you?
- Do you know your Godparents?
- Do you spend time giving thanks to God? (Or to find out more)

2. FOR GROUP REFLECTION AND SHARING:

- Share some memories and experiences of baptism in your life, family or parish. What do you remember? What touched your heart?
- In what ways has being a baptised member of the Body of Christ/Parish been a blessing in your life?

SENDING PRAYER

RESPONSE: *Lord, create a new spirit in us.*

Christ, our life, through baptism we were buried with you and rose in life with you, may we walk today in newness of life. **Response**

Lord, you have brought blessings to all humankind: bring us to share your concern for the good of all. **Response**

May we work together to build up the earthly city, with eyes fixed on the city that lasts forever. **Response**

Healer of body and soul, cure the sickness of our spirit, so that we may grow in holiness through your constant care. **Response**

ALL:

Dear Lord,
Bring us back to you.
Sometimes our hearts turn in every direction except towards you.
Help us to turn our hearts towards you, to gaze upon you in trust
and to seek your kingdom.
Soften our hardened hearts so that we might love others
as a way to glorify and worship you.
We pray for a renewal of our lives. Our desire is clear.
We want the self-sacrificing love of Christ –
which brings us mercy and healing – to be reproduced in our lives.
In our journey, we seek to savour the meaning of Jesus' self-less love,
so that we might reflect that love to others.
We desire nothing less than God's re-creating us -
breathing new life into us.
Grant us this with the ever-present guidance of your spirit.
Amen

LENT IN ACTION

Spiritual Reading

St Benedict, the founder of the Benedictines, saw reading as a prayerful activity. He required each of his monks to read a book during Lent. Anyone can practice spiritual reading in Lent. Select books that deal with Sacred Scripture, biographies of saintly people, books on prayer or sacraments, or ones that deal with developing a deeper spiritual life. Reading has the ability to deepen one's prayer life.

Set aside specific time for spiritual reading this Lent!

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT



GATHERING PRAYER

Father of light,
in you is found no shadow of change
but only the fullness of life and limitless truth.
Open our hearts to the voice of your Word
and free us from the original darkness that shadows our vision.
Restore our sight that we may look upon your Son
who calls us to repentance and a change of heart.
For he lives and reigns with you for ever and ever.
Amen

PROCLAIMING AND HEARING THE GOSPEL

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke (9:28-36)

Jesus took with him Peter and John and James and went up the mountain to pray. As he prayed, the aspect of his face was changed and his clothing became brilliant as lightning.



Suddenly there were two men there talking to him; they were Moses and Elijah appearing in glory, and they were speaking of his passing which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem. Peter and his companions were heavy with sleep, but they kept awake and saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As these were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is wonderful for us to be here; so let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." - He did not know what he was saying. As he spoke, a cloud came and covered them with shadow; and when they went into the cloud the disciples were afraid. And a voice came from the cloud saying, "This is my Son, the Chosen One. Listen to him." And after the voice had spoken, Jesus was found

alone. The disciples kept silence and, at that time, told no one what they had seen.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Pause for a few moments of prayerful reflection and allow the Words of the Gospel to speak to you. As I hear this Gospel which words or phrases stay with me?

LOOKING INTO THE GOSPEL STORY

"Jesus...went up the mountains to pray." Like each of us on this Lenten journey, Jesus sought loving union with his God and Father.

But as he prayed his 'face changed'; he himself changed. Jesus' union with his Father in prayer led to a transformation in himself.

From the evidence in the Gospels, it is clear that Jesus prayed to his father out of his daily life – bringing all its good and bad moments to the Father's heart.

Prior to this event in Luke's Gospel, Jesus had been healing, teaching and experiencing success in his initial mission. But the religious leaders were, for the most part, hostile to Jesus. Tension builds as Jesus continues 'on the road to Jerusalem.'

Jerusalem was the headquarters of religious power and authority. If Jesus went there, it would entail conflict and death. Yet there was so much more for him to do. Should he go? What good would it do his mission to die in Jerusalem?

All this Jesus takes to his Father in prayer.

And there on the mountain top, in the loving gaze of prayer, Jesus tastes a moment of his future glory; and in conversation with Moses and Elijah comes to see his future death as an 'exodus' and liberation of others.

What the Father asked of Jesus was faithfulness; even to the cross. On the mountain of transfiguration Jesus is given 'insight' by the Father into his life's mission, death and resurrection. The joy of union with the Father, and acceptance of his truth, shines on the face of Jesus.

Disciples who share this intimate moment are called to 'listen' and go with him to Jerusalem".

LOOKING INTO OUR LIFE'S STORY

Lent is our mountain that we go up to pray, in order to be changed and transformed in our lives. The more we 'listen' to the voice of Jesus, the more we will discover ourselves before God, and grow into his likeness.

FOR PERSONAL PRAYER AND REFLECTION

- What needs to be transformed in you this Lent?
- How well do you listen to Jesus? What is he telling you and asking of you during THIS Lent?
- What price are you willing to pay to be transformed more closely into the image of the loving and faithful Christ?

FOR GROUP REFLECTION AND SHARING

- Many faces we meet in life shine with the light and love of Christ. Recall and share the story of some of these people.
- What has helped you to carry on through difficult times in your life and faith?
- Following Jesus involves 'everyday dying's' e.g., visiting the lonely, being patient when we are pushed too far, biting our tongue instead of using sharp words. What else?

MEDITATION ON BAPTISM 2: DYING TO LIVE

"...when we were baptised into Christ Jesus, we were baptised into his death. So by our baptism into his death we were buried with him., so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glorious power, we too should begin living a new life" (Romans 6:3-4)

St. Paul struggles to help the Romans (and us) realise that through baptism we are "identified with Christ's death and resurrection and (our) very being or "self" is transformed" (Jerome

Biblical Commentary). The baptismal rite sees the converts descend into the waters that lead them through death into new life with Christ.

This dying and rising with Christ in Baptism, introduces Christians to a pattern and process that will mark their entire lives until death itself. What begins in our baptism, as we are joined to Christ in his death and resurrection, must become the shape of our whole life. As Christians we will spend our entire lives “dying in order to live anew” in Christ.

It may help us to look concretely at what this could mean in my life today!

Each time we choose the ways of love, rather than the ways of non-love such as deceit, the irresponsible use of power, and the greed which ignores the needs of others, we are deepening our “dying and rising” in Christ. As we do this we bring new life to others, and live our baptism.

Each time we embrace self-denial and deliberately serve others using our God-given abilities and gifts, we deepen our union with the “dying and rising” of Christ and give life to others.

Each time we have the courage to look honestly at the workings of pride, selfishness and fear in our hearts we embrace more deeply our dying and rising with Christ which we first shared in Baptism.

We each know from hard experience that the way of love is costly. It's the mother nursing her sick child during the night, and it's the elderly Parish Priest faithfully visiting sick parishioners. Each one letting-go of something in themselves and their life and energy, so that others might have comfort and healing. Dying and rising in Christ.

“Love destroys what we were so that we may become what we were not. Love makes us undergo a certain death.” (Augustine)

1. FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION:

- Where in my life at the moment do I sense a call to “let go”? A call to “die” in some way in order to grow? Talk with Jesus about this struggle.

2. FOR GROUP SHARING:

- Share examples of people you know (family, friends, priests, saints) whose sacrifices and self-less love inspires you.
- Where do you find strength when the cross is very close to you in suffering, illness, conflict and fear?

SENDING PRAYER

RESPONSE: Instruct us, Lord, in the ways of your kingdom.

God of power and mercy, give us the spirit of prayer and repentance with burning love for you and all your people. **Response**

Help us to work with you in making all things new in Christ, and in spreading justice and peace throughout the world. **Response**

Teach us the meaning and value of creation, so that we may join its voice to ours as we sing your praise. **Response**

Forgive us for failing to see Christ in the poor, the distressed and the troublesome, and for our failure to reverence your Son in their persons. **Response**

ALL:

Loving God,
there is so much darkness in my life and I hide from you.
Take my hand and lead me out of the shadows of my fear.
Help me to change my heart.
Bring me to your truth
and help me to respond to your generous love.
Let me recognize the fullness of your love which will fill my life.
Free me from the darkness in my heart.
Your commandment of love is so simple and so challenging.
Help me to let go of my pride, to be humble in my penance.
I want only to live the way you ask me to love,
to love the way you ask me to live.
Amen

LENT IN ACTION

DAILY PRAYER

Lent is a time to pray as an individual, as a family member and as a faith community. Set aside time daily for your own personal prayer time. Pray as a family at meals. Bless one another as you leave your home in the morning and before you go to bed at night. One of the simplest and most natural gestures is to trace a cross on a loved one's forehead. It speaks volumes to a young child when a parent gives him or her this sign of love and prayer.

"A day without prayer is like a sky without the sun, a garden without flowers."

Blessed Pope John XXIII

Set aside specific time for prayer this Lent!

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT



GATHERING PRAYER

God of all compassion, Father of all goodness,
to heal the wounds our sins and selfishness bring upon us
you bid us turn to fasting, prayer, and sharing with our brothers and sisters.
We acknowledge our sinfulness, our guilt is ever before us:
when our weakness causes discouragement,
let your compassion fill us with hope
and lead us through a Lent of repentance to the beauty of Easter joy.
Grant this through Christ our Lord,
Amen.

PROCLAIMING AND HEARING THE GOSPEL

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke (13:1-9)



Some people arrived and told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with that of their sacrifices. At this he said to them, "Do you suppose these Galileans who suffered like that were greater sinners than any other Galileans? They were not, I tell you. No; but unless you repent you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen on whom the tower at Siloam fell and killed them? Do you suppose that they were more guilty than all the other people living in Jerusalem? They were not, I tell you. No; but unless you repent you will all perish as they did."

He told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard and he came looking for fruit on it but found none. He said to the man who looked after the vineyard, "Look here, for three years now I have been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and finding none. Cut it down: why should it be taking up the ground?" "Sir," the man replied, "leave it one more year and give me time to dig round it and manure it: it may bear fruit next year; if not, then cut it down."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Pause for a few moments of prayerful reflection and allow the Words of the Gospel to speak to you. As I hear this Gospel, which words or phrases stay with me?

LOOKING INTO THE GOSPEL STORY

A commonly held belief during Jesus' time was that suffering, either through accident, disease or conflict, was a sign that the sufferers had sinned and were being punished by God.

Jesus declares emphatically that disaster is not the result of sin. There are no grounds for speculating about other people's lives and why disaster befell them. Nor is God anything else except the love, patience and forgiveness revealed by Jesus.

So, instead of speculating about others, Jesus says, "Look at your own lives...and repent." And to drive home this point he tells a parable about the fig tree.

The tree in today's Gospel is barren and fruitless.

To indicate how barren it really was, we are told it is beyond its third year of cultivation – which usually means the tree is beyond restoration and has to be cut down. But the tree is given one more chance for growth. It is spared simply because of the vinedresser's mercy. The tree was allowed to remain simply because of God's mercy.

Jesus is clear and direct. Repent or perish. Bear fruit or be cut down. All must repent, turn from no growth – death, to new growth – life.

As followers of Jesus, we must do our part in response to his patient and merciful love. We must allow Jesus to 'cultivate' and 'fertilise' so that we can bear fruit and live.

The final sign of our true repentance will be the sharing of our lives, food and clothing with the poor and needy.

LOOKING INTO OUR LIFE'S STORY

Sometimes it is not so obvious to us of what we must repent. We get stuck – like the fig tree; it was alive, just wasn't doing much.

Lent challenges us to let Jesus 'cultivate' his life in us, and show us what we need to turn from in order to embrace more of his life and love.

FOR PERSONAL PRAYER AND REFLECTION

- If you had 'one more year' like the fig tree, to turn your life around, what would you do?
- What are some 'fruits' you need to cultivate more carefully in your life? What is keeping you from being productive?
- How is this Lent calling you to look inward and make positive changes in your life?

FOR GROUP REFLECTION AND SHARING

- People often get caught in speculation about the WHY of tragedies. What helps us to focus more on being personally prepared for God each day?
- How do we keep this Lenten season spiritually alive rather than getting lost and tired in the busyness?
- Who are the people whose lives have inspired you to change and grow in your faith? E.g., parents, family, friends, teachers, saints. Share something of their story and its impact on your faith.

MEDITATION ON BAPTISM 3: BORN THROUGH WATER AND THE SPIRIT

Jesus says to Nicodemus, "no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born through water and the Holy Spirit." (JN 3:5)

We become human beings by being born of earthly parents. But Jesus came to bring us more than our blessed earthly existence. "I have come that you may have life and have it to the full" (JN 10:10). Jesus, the crucified and glorious Lord, brings us God's own life. In baptism, by water and the Holy Spirit, we are given a new birth as the daughters and sons of God, filled with God's own life.

The ceremony of baptism speaks after all of “new birth”. Both the blessing of water and the anointing after baptism echo this wonder of our Baptism in words such as “God has given you a new birth by water and the Holy Spirit...” Baptism is our birth in God.

In the history of Christianity this awareness of baptism as new birth in the Spirit has been expressed in architecture (round, womb shaped baptistries), in references to “Mother” Church giving birth to new Christians in Baptism, and in images of the Holy Spirit as the “Mothering Spirit of God”. In the creed we acclaim the Holy Spirit as the “Lord and giver of life”, a reference in which some see a “maternal” image of God's working in our lives.

When a child is born, it is always into a web of relationships. As human beings we never “stand alone”, we are utterly relational through and through! When we are given a “new birth” by water and Holy Spirit, we are born into a new relationship with God and into a new set of relationships with Christ and his Body, the Church. We “live and move and have our being” in this world of relationships, and at the same time we are called to draw others into communion of life and love.

“All who are baptised are plunged into Christ's death, burial and resurrection, and all simultaneously come to new birth, adoption and new life in the womb of the baptismal font through the mothering Spirit of God in the context of Mother Church.” (Maxwell E. Johnson).

1. FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION:

- Prayerfully before God, recall what you know of the place, time and people present at your birth. Give thanks.

2. FOR GROUP SHARING:

- What are some of your experiences of “Mother” Church i.e. the ways the Church and parish nurture you and your faith? Share these and perhaps identify ways we could become better at this as a Church and parish.
- In what ways can we better attract people to the Church today so they may experience this “new life” we share?

SENDING PRAYER

RESPONSE: Lord, guide your people to walk in your ways.

God of mercy, you gave us new life through baptism, make us grow day by day in your likeness. **Response**

May our generosity today bring joy to those in need, and in helping them may we find you. **Response**

Help us to do what is good, right and true in your sight, and to seek you always with undivided hearts. **Response**

Forgive our sins against the unity of your family, make us one in heart and spirit. **Response**

ALL:

Loving Father,
So many times I turn away from you
and always you welcome me back.
Your mercy and love gives me confidence.
Thank you for the invitation to share, fast and pray
so that you can form a new heart within me.
Your powerful compassion for my weaknesses
leads me to ask for mercy
and await with great hope the Easter joy you share with us.

Amen

LENT IN ACTION

TREASURE

How do you share your treasures, both the things you own and the money you earn? Could you live for less if it meant it would feed the hungry of your community? What donations could you make to charity this Lent? Are you keeping up with the pledges you have made to your parish or another charity?

Could you forgive someone a monetary debt they owe you?

Share your treasures with someone this Lent!



GATHERING PRAYER

God our Father,
your Word, Jesus Christ, spoke peace to a sinful world
and brought humankind the gift of reconciliation
by the suffering and death he endured.
Teach us, the people who bear his name,
to follow the example he gave us:
may our faith, hope, and charity
turn hatred to love, conflict to peace, death to eternal life.
We ask this through Christ our Lord,
Amen.

PROCLAIMING AND HEARING THE GOSPEL

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke (15:1-3, 11-32)

The tax collectors and the sinners were all seeking the company of Jesus to hear what he had to say, and the Pharisees and the scribes complained. "This man" they said "welcomes sinners and eats with them." So he spoke this parable to them:

'A man had two sons. The younger said to his father, "Father, let me have the share of the estate that would come to me." So the father divided the property between them. A few days later, the younger son got together everything he had and left for a distant country where he squandered his money on a life of debauchery.

When he had spent it all, that country experienced a severe famine, and now he began to feel the pinch, so he hired himself out to one of the local inhabitants who put him on his farm to feed the pigs. And he would willingly have filled his belly with the husks the pigs were eating but no one offered him anything. Then he came to his senses and said, "How many of my father's paid servants have more food than they want, and here am I dying of hunger! I will leave this place and go to my father and say: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as one of your paid servants." So he left the place and went back to his father.



While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity. He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him tenderly. Then his son said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the calf we have been fattening, and kill it; we are going to have a feast, a celebration, because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found." And they began to celebrate.

Now the elder son was out in the fields, and on his way back, as he drew near the house, he could hear music and dancing. Calling one of the servants he asked what it was all about.

“Your brother has come” replied the servant “and your father has killed the calf we had fattened because he has got him back safe and sound.” He was angry then and refused to go in, and his father came out to plead with him; but he answered his father, “Look, all these years I have slaved for you and never once disobeyed your orders, yet you never offered me so much as a kid for me to celebrate with my friends. But for this son of yours, when he comes back after swallowing up your property – he and his women – you kill the calf we had been fattening.”

The father said, “My son, you are with me always and all I have is yours. But it is only right we should celebrate and rejoice, because your brother here was dead and has come to life; he was lost and is found.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

Pause for a few moments of prayerful reflection and allow the Words of the Gospel to speak to you. As I hear this Gospel, which words or phrases stay with me?

LOOKING INTO THE GOSPEL STORY

The opening scene to this well-known parable, puts the story in a certain light.

The Pharisees and Scribes dedicated their lives to announcing God's high moral standards. But as time went on, their eagerness to condemn sin led some of them to despise sinners and exclude them from respectable society.

The Pharisees and Scribes were gathered around Jesus and were gossiping and complaining about Jesus' questionable dinner companions. Jesus ate with these very same sinners they despised and condemned. He immersed himself in the lives of sinners. He walked into their lives and became as one of them, so he could lift them up to embrace the very life and love of God.

So Jesus tells the parable of the prodigal son (prodigal father?) as a commentary on his own actions at table with sinners. His meals with sinners are a living parable of God's mercy extended to us all.

The God revealed in Jesus' meals with sinners and in this parable, is a God who never ceases to love us 'even when we were in our sins'. This God comes running out to welcome us back, clasping us and kissing us tenderly. He is delighted we have come to our senses. He suffered to watch us going to pieces before his eyes. He welcomes us back as though we had never been away. We are still the apple of his eye. And his home is our only real home; where the joy of loving union is an eternal feast for our hearts.

The parable finally demonstrates the love of God that seeks out sinners and suffers for them in order to reconcile, heal and save them.

LOOKING INTO OUR LIFE'S STORY

Our Lenten repentance challenges us to let go of our self-centeredness and move toward the other-centered generosity and compassion of the Father.

But at the most profound level, Lent calls us to change ourselves and to accept the changes in others.

FOR PERSONAL PRAYER AND REFLECTION

- IN THE MIDST OF OUR OWN SIN AND RECONCILIATION, HOW HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED THE 'EMBRACE' AND 'KISS' OF THE Father? What in your life still needs to be embraced and kissed by the Father?
- Where do you need to cultivate forgiveness in your family, community and parish?

FOR GROUP REFLECTION AND SHARING

- Who are the people who make God's mercy and forgiveness real in your community or our world? Share something of their story that inspires you.
- What helps people find their way back to God after being away from him?
- At times God's mercy surprises us when we see it given to those we consider 'undeserving'. Why are people at times angry and resentful towards the blessings others receive?

MEDITATION ON BAPTISM 4: TEMPLES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

"For we were all baptised by one Spirit so as to form one body...and we are all given the one Spirit to drink...and so your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you." (1 Cor6:19-20, 12:13)

There can be an impression for some of us that Baptism has only to do with the removal of original sin, and that the real gift of the Holy Spirit for a later time is Confirmation. Leaving aside questions of the historical development of Baptism and Confirmation, and their inter-relationship, it is important to recall that Baptism is a true sacrament of the Holy Spirit.

St. Paul makes clear that there is no baptism nor Church without the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In fact, there can be no life in Christ without the presence, guidance and action of the Spirit; and the baptised who become the temple of the Holy Spirit dwelling within them are called to listen and respond to the promptings of the Spirit.

Listening is essential to all relationships, but particularly to our relationship with God. Sometimes however we may find it much easier to talk to God rather than to listen to the Holy Spirit within us. It is a real challenge in our culture to be reflective, and to find moments of silence and listening. But we cannot grow closer to God unless we take time to listen; we cannot respond truly to God in our lives unless we make room to "hear" the promptings of the Spirit.

A simple way to do this is to take a few moments at the end of the day, open our heart to the Holy Spirit, and look over the day in the presence of God. As things come up for you from the day, look at them with the guidance of the Spirit. Did I miss an opportunity somewhere in the day? Did something inspire me and bring me joy? Did I refuse to grow or

love in some way? As I look at my day and listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, I gradually learn to respond more lovingly to God and other people. In this way I am becoming a person who lives more and more as one "born of water and the Holy Spirit", building up God's kingdom of love, truth and justice in this world.

1. FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION:

- If you were to pause a moment, right here and now in the presence of God, and listen deeply to God's Spirit in your heart, what do you hear?

2. FOR GROUP SHARING:

- What are some of the things you do that help you become more aware of God in your life and in your heart? Ways of praying? Places you go? Life-style changes?
- How does the Parish support you to develop your prayer and spirituality? What else could the Parish do?

SENDING PRAYER

RESPONSE: *Kindle in our hearts the fire of your love.*

God of mercy, let today be a day rich in good works, a day of generosity to all we meet.

Response

From the waters of the flood you saved Noah through the ark, from the waters of baptism raise up to new life those under instruction. **Response**

May we live not by bread only, but by every word falling from your lips. **Response**

Help us to do away with all dissension, so that we may rejoice in your gifts of peace and love. **Response**

ALL:

Creator God,
You offer me new life through your Son
and through the gift of your sacraments.
While I see new life all around me,
I don't always recognize the new life you offer me.
Help me to grow this Lent in an awareness of the gifts you place in my life
and in a greater appreciation for your care.
Give me the courage to ask for help.
I know that the tiny sacrifices I make this Lent
can never serve as a real penance in my life.
But help me to make my whole life
one of following your Son.
Thank you for the love you pour out on me so lavishly.
Help me to follow more closely
in the path you have set for me,
the path of your Son.
Amen

LENT IN ACTION

TIME

In our fast-paced world, time is the alms that is hardest to give. It might be a parent or a grandparent giving that form of alms to a child generously and regularly, or a person volunteering time at a homeless or women's shelter, or a person taking time to tutor adults in a literacy program. To give freely and generously of our time is a healthy practice of Lenten almsgiving.

Give aenerously of your time this Lent!

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT



GATHERING PRAYER

Father in heaven,
the love of your Son led him to accept the suffering of the cross
that his brothers and sisters might glory in new life.

Change our selfishness into self-giving.
Help us to embrace the world you have given us,
that we may transform the darkness of its pain
into the life and joy of Easter.

Grant this through Christ our Lord,

Amen.

PROCLAIMING AND HEARING THE GOSPEL

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John (8:1-11)

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. At daybreak he appeared in the Temple again; and as all the people came to him, he sat down and began to teach them.

The scribes and Pharisees brought a woman along who had been caught committing adultery; and making her stand there in full view of everybody, they said to Jesus, 'Master, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery, and Moses has ordered us in the Law to condemn women like this to death by stoning. What have you to say? They asked him this as a test, looking for something to use against him. But Jesus bent down and started writing on the ground with his finger. As they persisted with their question, he looked up and said, 'If there is one of you who has not sinned let him be the first to throw a stone at her.' Then he bent down and wrote on the ground again. When they heard this they went away one by one, beginning with the eldest, until Jesus was left alone with the woman, who remained standing there. He looked up and said, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' 'No one sir,' she replied. 'Neither do I condemn you,' said Jesus 'go away, and don't sin any more.'



The Gospel of the Lord.

Pause for a few moments of prayerful reflection and allow the Words of the Gospel to speak to you. As I hear this Gospel, which words of phrases stay with me?

LOOKING INTO THE GOSPEL STORY

This event takes place after one of Jesus' daily teachings in the temple in Jerusalem. It concerned a married woman caught while sexually involved with a man who was not her husband – but this man was noticeably absent in the 'public trial'.

The Scribes and Pharisees set a trap for Jesus. This unnamed woman had become a pawn in their deadly legalistic game.

The Romans prohibited the Jews from exacting the death penalty when required for transgressions of the Jewish religious laws. So, Jesus is placed in the position of either rejecting Jewish law or the Roman authorities.

If Jesus condemns her, he lacks the compassion that characterises his ministry and would have to contend with the Roman authorities. If he doesn't, he is seen to condone her sin and infringe the Jewish law.

It was a brilliant trap. But Jesus turns the trap on the accusers and the woman is left alone with him. As St. Augustine says: "Only two were left, misery and mercy."

This unnamed woman in misery, meets the merciful face of Christ and becomes a new creation. But her accusers are challenged sharply by Jesus. There is a severe warning to those who would judge another person – you will bring judgement upon yourself!

By pointing one finger at the woman, they were pointing four at themselves.

LOOKING INTO OUR LIFE'S STORY

Repentance means turning away from sinful behaviour because one has encountered the One who is the author of truth and holiness.

Encountering Christ and the desire to respond to his merciful love, and the desire to be more like him, is what calls forth from us a repentant attitude.

FOR PERSONAL PRAYER AND REFLECTION

- Recall times when you have encountered Jesus. How have these experiences changed you? Led you to repentance?
- At whom are you tempted to 'throw a stone' and condemn? How might you share Jesus' merciful truth with them?
- What do you do to keep from judging others as less than yourself?

FOR GROUP REFLECTION AND SHARING

- People can move from being judgemental and critical to even being violent towards others. How can you contribute to the peace of your community and world?
- Encounters with Jesus affect behaviour. Share something of how this Lenten journey has helped you encounter Jesus more deeply.
- Do you think some people, deep inside, feel their sins are bigger than God's mercy? Why? What is the Good News of Jesus?

MEDITATION ON BAPTISM 5: MEMBERS OF THE BODY

"...we were all baptised into one body." (1 Cor. 12:13)

At our baptism we were joined to Christ and to his Body the Church – at the same time. Christ cannot be separated from his Body the Church, so when the Holy Spirit "incorporates" us into Christ through Baptism we are simultaneously "incorporated" into his Body.

The community of the baptised, filled with the Spirit of Christ, is the "bodily" presence of Christ in this world. In this community we encounter the risen Christ; and his love and grace are made visible and tangible in this world. We see this clearly in the celebration of the Eucharist, and in the loving service of others that flows from its celebration.

But there is more to be said of this community of the baptised. It is a Priestly community! It's likely that when we read "Priestly community" our minds turn firstly to the ordained among us. But this is not the first meaning of this title. It is the entire baptised community who constitute a Priestly people in Christ. "Baptism gives a share in the common priesthood of all believers". (Cath. Catechism #1268). This reality was so "alive" in the early Church that sometimes when Christians were baptised they were vested with the clothes of ordained Priests – not to make them ordained priests, but to bring home the fact that they were part of the Priestly people of God!

At our baptism we were anointed with the perfumed holy Chrism, as the minister said "... (God) anoints you with the Chrism of salvation. As Christ was anointed priest, prophet and king so may you live always as a member of his Body..." sharing in Christ's Priestly mission.

What does it mean to be a Priestly people, sharing in Christ's Priestly mission?

Jesus our High Priest did not join the Jewish temple priesthood offering animal sacrifices every day. Jesus our Priest offered himself in order to bring God's love to us, and in his sacrifice of himself he unites us to God. "He embodied God's love for us and our love of God. His only sacrifice was his self-offering." (Timothy Radcliffe)

The Priestly people of God participate in Christ's Priestly mission consecrating the world through bringing God to others by their love and service. They also offer their lives to God in thanksgiving, worship, and loving surrender, gathering up all the longings, sorrows and struggles of humanity and bringing them before God. When Christians celebrate the Eucharist and offer themselves with Christ to the Father, they bring not only themselves but all the hopes, prayers and struggles of the whole of creation. When as Priestly people they gather in thanksgiving at the Eucharist they offer thanks for all they have received, together with thanks for the unacknowledged gifts that God showers on everyone.

The baptised Priestly people are anointed with the oil of gladness and thanksgiving, called to rejoice in God's creation and to give glory to God through living a life of love and self-giving.

1. FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION:

- You are an anointed and Spirit-filled member of the Priestly Body of Christ. Ponder your God-given dignity and vocation. Do you believe in what God has given you? Pray about that.

2. FOR GROUP SHARING:

- The ordained Priesthood is essentially ordered by Christ to the service of the Priestly people of God. They are called to enable, support and activate the Priestly mission of all God's people. Share memories and experiences of Priests who have done this for you, and what impact that has had on your life.
- How can Parishes help our people to realise their priestliness; and foster the contribution of their gifts for the building of God's kingdom in this world?

FOR PRAYER AND MEDITATION BEFORE EASTER AND THE RENEWAL OF BAPTISMAL PROMISES.

Apart from the traditional baptismal promises you will renew this Easter in the light of our deepened understanding of the richness and mystery of what our Baptism means, what particular baptismal promise will you make to the Lord this year?

SENDING PRAYER

RESPONSE: *Jesus, you feed and heal our souls; come to strengthen us.*

Lord, feed us at the banquet of the Eucharist, with all the gifts of your paschal sacrifice.

Response

Give us a perfect heart to receive your word, that we may bring forth fruit in patience.

Response

Make us eager to work with you in building a better world, so that it may listen to your Church and its gospel of peace. **Response**

We confess, Lord, that we have sinned, wash us clean by your gift of salvation. **Response**

ALL:

Most forgiving Lord,
again and again you welcome me back into your loving arms.
Grant me freedom from the heavy burden of sin
that weighs me down
and keeps me so far from you.
Amen

LENT IN ACTION

TALENT

Everyone has been blessed by God with talents. We can practice the talent of alms by cooking a meal for a terminally ill person or an elderly shut-in. We can use the talents of our hands by helping to fix up someone's home or doing some spring cleaning for them. We can drive people to medical appointments or shop for the elderly and infirm. Lent is a time to both inventory the talents we have and to make use of them.

Use one of your talents in a practical way this Lent!



A PRAYER FOR HOLY WEEK

Loving God,
I am just beginning to realize how much you love me.
Your son Jesus was humble and obedient.
He fulfilled your will for him by becoming human and suffering with us.
I ask you for the desire to become more humble,
so that my own life might also bear witness to you.
I want to use the small sufferings I have in this world to give you glory.

Please Lord, guide my mind with your truth.
Strengthen my life by the example of Jesus.
Help me to be with Jesus in this week
as he demonstrates again his total love for me.
He died so that I would no longer be separated from you.
Help me to feel how close you are and to live in union with you.

Amen

