



The Lenten Journey

Using the Scriptures of Sunday & Daily Mass



The Daily Good News Reflections for the Season of Lent and Holy Week

Liturgical Year 2 & Sunday Cycle B - 2012

By Terry A. Modica

In meditation we find the strength to bring Christ to birth
in ourselves and in others. - *Saint Charles Borromeo*

Ash Wednesday February 22

Joel 2:12-18
Ps 51:3-6, 12-14, 17
2 Corinthians 5:20 -- 6:2
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18
www.usccb.org/bible/readings/022212.cfm

Taking the first step: How healing will your Lent be?

What victory do you need? What needs to be resurrected in your life?

For Easter to be more than just a day of colored eggs, fattening chocolates and big dinners, Lent needs to be more than just 40 days of obligatory sacrifices like meatless pizza on Fridays.

To experience the joy and power of resurrection, we have to take a journey through the experience of mourning and repentance. We have to experience the powerlessness of death: the death of our selfishness, the death of our worldliness, the death of behaviors that are not Christ-like.

In today's first reading, God beckons: "Return to me with your whole heart, with fasting, and weeping, and mourning." Fasting is worthwhile only if it improves our self-discipline so that we can resist sin and grow in holiness. We're hypocrites, like Jesus describes in in today's Gospel passage, if fasting produces no inner changes.

What will your journey through Lent be like this year? What daily exercises will promote greater holiness? Here's a suggestion: Identify one fault – just one for starters – and choose a daily activity or an abstinence for the duration of Lent that will help you overcome this behavior.

Tell God about this fault. He is beckoning: "Return to me with your whole heart, with fasting, and weeping, and mourning."

The readings from Joel and Psalm 51 remind us that God is merciful toward those who recognize their sinfulness and regret it so much that they're truly motivated to change. Dealing with our need to change can feel overwhelming and shameful, but if we keep



our focus on God's mercy, we feel helped, healed, and finally resurrected.

By identifying and working on just one sinful tendency (choosing one selfish behavior or one fear or one flaw or one unloving habit as our Lenten project), we can give it to Jesus, and by the end of Lent nail it to his cross and hear him offer it to God as he cries out, "Father forgive them....!" It will die with Jesus, and we'll be resurrected to a new life, a new level of holiness with Jesus.

On Ash Wednesday, as you receive and wear your ashes, do it fully awake and aware of your need for forgiveness and your goal of overcoming a significant sin by Easter.

Why do we keep the black smudges on our foreheads all day? Not to win the admiration of others. It's a sign that we know we need to change! Otherwise, we should do as Jesus said: "When you fast, see to it that you ... wash your face" so that no one but God will know what you are doing.

This Lent, I will overcome the sin of:

Through the frequent exercise of:

Thursday - February 23

St. Polycarp: Pray to see Jesus as he really is

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Ps 1:1-4, 6

Luke 9:22-25

www.usccb.org/bible/readings/022312.cfm

Journeying with Jesus on the road to new life

On our Lenten road to greater holiness, with Jesus as our companion on the path of self-denial, we pass by those who are taking a different road. Both roads lead to death. One takes us through death to new life. The other is the deadly path of the world; the companions are addiction, greed, anger, and disobedience.

As Moses said in today's first reading, by loving God, heeding his voice, and holding fast to him, we choose the path of life. Psalm 1 points out that when we delight in the law of the Lord, we're like a tree planted near running water – full of life, yielding good fruit, never withering; whatever we do, through, and with the Lord always prospers.

Jesus says in the Gospel passage that on the life-giving journey of following him, we carry the cross of self-denial, i.e., we deny the desires that are contrary to God's desires.

Fasting during Lent is meant to help with this. By saying no to eating foods that we desire, we grow stronger in the self-discipline that enables us to say no to more difficult temptations.

Giving in to stubborn sins or bad habits while putting off new, good habits is how we keep one foot on the wrong road. Even though we don't believe that it's destructive, it *is* destroying us. Sooner or later, we lose our balance and fall. In the first reading, God is pleading: "I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life!"

Jesus longs to rescue us from our self-destructive curses. While he waits for us to humbly seek his help, he weeps for us, because he can see the damage that we're causing with our lack of self-denial.

Think of someone you know who's been self-destructive. Perhaps it's a family member who's sink-

ing spiritually by no longer going to church, or a friend who needs therapy but is not seeking help. Why do you feel bad about it? Does it pain you to think of the harm that such people are doing to themselves? Of course it does! You care! Now multiply those feelings ten times, a thousand times, a gazillion times! That's how much God feels pain, because God cares far more than you do. This is how much he cares about *you*.

The pain we suffer as we watch our loved ones continue down the wrong road feels even worse if we try to help them but are unable to redirect them onto the right path. God, too, keeps trying to help us avoid sin. He keeps trying to hold our hand and lead us farther down the path of life. But the choice is ours. "Choose life," he pleads.

Holiness is a decision to obey God no matter what. This is easier to do when we remember that Jesus is eager to give us his supernatural help. We can't succeed by our own efforts; it's a partnership. When we follow Jesus, we are journeying *with* him.

Lord Jesus, what I need your help with is:

Friday - February 24

St. Luke Belludi: Pray for caregivers

Isaiah 58:1-9

Ps 51:3-6, 18-19

Matthew 9:14-15

www.usccb.org/bible/readings/022412.cfm

How does your fasting affect the world?

Today is the first Friday of Lent, a day of fasting and conscious self-purification. If for some reason you are not physically able to fast from food, you can fast from something else, such as television or a bad habit or a favorite activity.

How does your fasting affect the world? What difference does it make? Does it have a good impact or a bad one?

Fasting can make us grouchy! Today's first reading reminds us that fasting is worthless if we're unkind to others and if the focus is only on ourselves: for example, if we're not releasing those bound by injustices, setting free the oppressed, sharing our bread with the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, and doing good to our family and friends and fellow parishioners.

Fasting is beneficial only if it helps us put aside our selfish desires so that we hunger only for God. It has no lasting value if it does not help us become more Christ-like to others.

Either we're Christian for the sake of duty and obligation or we're a Christian of devotion. The dutiful Christian obeys God to the letter of the law. He or she goes to Mass to save themselves from hell. This is a business relationship with God. Our part of the contract would be to obey God and his part of the contract would be to accept us into heaven. But that's self-focused. And it ignores that Jesus is the only true Savior and that salvation is a gift, which he freely and generously gives to everyone who truly wants it.

The devotional Christian obeys God because of a loving desire to serve him *and also* because this love infects others. Our obedience gives others an experience of Christ.

DOing devotions (the Rosary, the Divine Mercy Chaplet, the Stations of the Cross, etc.) doesn't make us devotional. True devotion is an exciting love affair with God in a way that benefits others. True devotion is a love so strong that we cannot look at a person who's suffering without wanting to help. It's a love so strong that even when others hurt us, we hurt *for* them because they have turned away from God, and if we can, we do something that gives them a dose of God's love.

To have this kind of devotion, we have to first know – really know – that God is devoted to us. To the extent that we fail to understand how wonderfully God loves us, that's how much we fail to love God, and to the extent that we fail to love God, that's how much we fail to love others.

The more we really believe in our hearts that we are lovable and loved by God, the easier it is to love others. This is the spirit of devotion. Everything else we do as a Christian is only obligation and duty.

My reason for fasting today is:

Saturday - February 25

St. Walburga: Pray for witches and satanists

Isaiah 58:9-14

Ps 86:1-6 (with 11ab)

Luke 5:27-32

www.usccb.org/bible/readings/022512.cfm

Feeling depressed?

"Follow me," says Jesus in today's Gospel reading. And the other readings tell us how:

Remove oppression, false accusation and malicious speech; share your food with the hungry and satisfy the afflicted; honor the Lord, not following your own ways.

Then light shall replace your darkness. What makes you feel gloomy? Follow the Lord and he will guide you and will lead you to his abundance, even in the midst of parched and desert-like conditions. Following Jesus takes us to the purifying cross, but it also leads us to the fruits of purification, i.e., the benefits of being a child of God.

Teach me your ways, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth.



MY OWN CRUCIFIXION

Darkness closes in upon me,
And hopelessness is near;
This pain I cannot bear much longer --
Why me, O God, why me?

My hands are nailed in bondage;
I am not free to live.
My feet are fastened firm;
I am not free to move.
Why me, O God, why me?

My life has not happened as it should;
Not as I want it to.
People mock me for believing
that this Christian life is good.
Why me, O God, why me?

I try to love my brother,
but he spits into my face.
I try to teach the truth of God,
but no one wants to hear.
I try to raise my children right,
but rebellion rules their heart.
I try to serve my spouse with love,
but pride in me
demands that I be served.

Why me, O God, why me?

Love your enemy, You said, my Lord.
Do good to those who hurt you.
Be persistent in the Christian life,
and your reward will be great in Heaven.

What about now, O Lord?
Where is my reward?
Darkness closes in on me,
and hopelessness is near.

My arms are stretched upon Your cross;
I feel the crown of thorns.
This is my reward, O Lord?
Yes, this is my reward!

I share Your pain, I share Your death.
For when I stretch upon Your cross,
You and I are one, O Lord,
You and I are one.

Never else have I felt this close to You,
and together we shall rise
to victory
in the glory of my crucifixion!

First Sunday of Lent February 26

Genesis 9:8-15

Ps 25:4-9

1 Peter 3:18-22

Mark 1:12-15

www.usccb.org/bible/readings/022612.cfm



Today's Gospel reading shows us the first thing that Jesus did after his baptismal anointing in the Jordan River: He wrestled with temptation.

His baptism had marked the moment of his complete surrender to the Father's will. As he arose from the water, he left behind his old life and began a new life of ministry.

The Father responded by telling him that he was very pleased, and the Holy Spirit filled his humanness. Jesus as God already had the Holy Spirit (one hundred percent, he and the Spirit were the same God), but Jesus the Son, who was also fully human, now came fully alive in the Spirit. We can imagine how this experience in the Jordan River gave him the feeling of an elated spiritual high. And the next thing that happens is an attack of the devil.

The same pattern repeats itself in our lives. As soon as we experience new growth in our faith, or a new purpose for our faith with a calling to do the Father's will in a wonderful new work of God's kingdom, we run smack into a situation that tests the strength and sincerity of our faith. However, if this didn't happen, how would we know that our faith is strong enough for our daily needs? How would we find out that we've spiritually matured? How would we know that we are ready to make a significant difference working for the kingdom of God?

Sometimes without consciously thinking it, we decide that new growth isn't worth the aftermath. If we're going to be tested, and if we fear that we might lose our battle against evil, wouldn't it be better not to grow, not to partner with Christ in serving God's kingdom, not to aim for spiritual highs?

Well, there's another temptation!

Lent is the perfect time to examine the temptations that we face every day and turn them into new growth that will strengthen our faith.

Every time we face a sin and seek God's forgiveness, we become stronger. And if we take it a step farther by walking into the confessional with it, we also receive powerful graces directly from Jesus, through the priest, that will render temptations much more powerless.

And this makes us more useful to God in the mission of conquering evil in the world and helping his kingdom spread into the lives of the people around us.

Think of temptations as blessings in disguise: Use them as opportunities to purify your life, become more like Jesus, and grow powerful in the faith.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. How well do you recognize temptation?
2. How quickly do you rely on the faith that God has given you to say no to the devil's tricks?
3. What temptation are you saying yes to right now? Are you willing to give it up as your Lenten sacrifice?

Questions for Family or Group Faith Sharing:

1. Describe a time when you experienced a spiritual high and then faced a strong temptation.
2. How did you handle it?
3. What role did (or will) Jesus play in overcoming this temptation?