

Thursday, February 1, 2018

1 Kgs 2:1-4, 10-12; 1 Chr 29; Mk 6:7-13

Jeanne Lischer

He instructed them to take nothing for the journey but a walking stick – no food, no sack, no money in their belts.

Last summer, my daughter and I packed twelve years of accumulated belongings and moved across the state. In the months before we moved, we also donated or sold furniture, clothes and other household items that we decided we didn't need anymore. Even so, it took three men over four hours to load the moving truck with all our stuff. Our bags were definitely not empty! Are Jesus' instructions realistic for disciples today? What was Jesus trying to teach his disciples? Like the Israelites in the desert, Jesus wanted them to trust God to provide what they needed. For us today, perhaps this story is a reminder to let go of stuff and depend more fully on God. *Holy God, help us understand that our possessions may keep us from fully responding to your call.*

Friday, February 2, 2018

Mal 3:1-4; Ps 24; Heb 2:14-18; Lk 2:22-40

Presentation of the Lord

Jeanne Lischer

Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation.

Christmas was a little over a month ago, but today we hear of Mary and Joseph taking the baby Jesus to the Temple for the rites of purification. So yes, Christmas is over, but Christmas is much more than a single day or season. God's coming into the world in human form means that celebrating Christmas should help us learn to recognize Christ, just as the shepherds did, just as the Magi did, just as Anna and Simeon did. Did any of them expect God to come as a baby? A baby born to poor parents? Probably not. But because they were nonetheless ready and willing to see God in unexpected people and places, the world will never be the same. We will never be the same.

God of love and light, open our eyes to recognize Christ in our midst.

Saturday, February 3, 2018

1 Kgs 3:4-13; Ps 119; Mk 6:30-34

Jeanne Lischer

Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.

Getting away from it all, that's all Jesus wanted to do. I have days like that, and I bet you do, too. Days when the calendar is just too full, when the needs are too many, when there's not enough of you to go around. Discipleship and ministry are demanding. Jesus and his disciples do get away, but their rest doesn't last very long; the crowds follow, people who were sick and hungry and in every kind of need. Remarkably, Jesus isn't annoyed or resentful; his heart is "moved with pity for them." A little later in Mark's Gospel, Jesus is finally able to get away from the crowds and renew his spirit. Perhaps we need to add to our calendars specific times for prayer and rest.

When we are feeling overwhelmed, O God, grant us rest and peace.

Sunday, February 4, 2018
Daily Bread - February 4, 2018

Mark Bartholomew



He approached, grasped her hand, and helped her up. - *Mark 1:31*

Monday, February 5, 2018
1 Kgs 8:1-7, 9-13; Ps 132; Mk 6:53-56
Saint Agatha, virgin and martyr
Mary Joshi

They began to bring in the sick on mats to wherever they heard Jesus was.

Jesus has barely set foot on land when he is inundated with people looking to be cured of their physical ailments. Filled with pity for their pain, Jesus heals as many as he can, but he wants to heal their spirit and their deeper sorrows, too. Often the sheer numbers of those begging to be healed prevent him from delivering his greater message. I am like those people. I beg God (or my doctor) to quickly relieve my immediate problems, but am not always willing to make the more difficult lifestyle changes that would improve my well-being at a much deeper level.

Healing God, may I be more willing to invest time and energy into becoming the whole person, both in body and in spirit, that you created me to be.

Tuesday, February 6, 2018
1 Kgs 8:22-23, 27-30; Ps 84; Mk 7:1-13
Saint Paul Miki and companions, martyrs
Mary Joshi

I had rather one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere.

Anyone who has lain awake with regret for actions done or words spoken, knows the truth of today's psalm. When your heart and mind are at odds with your conscience it is difficult to find any kind of peace or comfort. Forgiving from the heart all the hurts inflicted upon you by others, or receiving forgiveness for injuries you've inflicted, or simply taking the first steps on a path you know you need to be on, can give such a feeling of relief that there is no desire to be anywhere else. We may not always be able to control the reactions of others, but knowing in our hearts that we have done and said all that God asks of us, grants a peace that only God can give.

How lovely is your dwelling place, almighty God, when I am at peace with you.

Wednesday, February 7, 2018
1 Kgs 10:1-10; Ps 37; Mk 7:14-23

Mary Joshi

Nothing that enters one from outside can defile that person; but the things that come out from within are what defile.

Jesus was referring to the strict Jewish dietary laws that listed many foods as unclean and that rendered the person who ate them unclean. He criticized those who publically obeyed the dietary laws, but failed to obey the more important command to treat their fellow humans or their own bodies with their God-given dignity. Every day, our world presents us with images and ideals that are tempting, but upon closer examination, do not promote respect for ourselves or one another. They may in and of themselves seem harmless, but how we react, internalize or act upon them can diminish the worth and dignity that God implanted within us all.

May the law of God be in our hearts and may our steps never falter.

Thursday, February 8, 2018
1 Kgs 11:4-13; Ps 106; Mk 7:24-30

Mary Joshi

Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children's scraps.

Under Roman rule, the Hebrews may not have held political power, but they were fiercely proud and protective of their God and their identity as God's chosen ones. Knowing that his authority and power come from this God, Jesus is hesitant to share his healing power with a Gentile woman. She respectfully challenges Jesus, however, by seemingly asking for the leftovers of God's abundance. I'm reminded of refugees who come to our country, challenging our attitudes that want to deny them from sharing in our many privileges. We guard those privileges as though they are our God-given right. The Gentile's woman persistence gains Jesus' respect. Jesus' change of heart reminds us that God provides an abundance that is not ours to hoard.

In your generosity, God, you have graced us with many blessings. May we be generous in turn to those in need.

Friday, February 9, 2018
1 Kgs 11:29-32, 12:19; Ps 81; Mk 7:31-37

Mary Joshi

The more he ordered them not to, the more they proclaimed it.

We often hear Jesus, in Mark's Gospel, order those whom he has healed not to tell anyone. Most often, however, in the excitement of being healthy again, they proclaim it to anyone who is willing to listen. Jesus knew that although they may have experienced his healing power, they didn't know the whole story of his true identity or his ultimate purpose. How often have I passed on skewed information when I only knew part of the story? How often do I convince myself that I know someone's character and motive when I pass on a juicy tidbit of gossip? An emotional gut reaction to an experience should never be taken as proof of its truth.

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord.

Saturday, February 10, 2018

1 Kgs 12:26-32, 13:33-34; Ps 106; Mk 8:1-10

Saint Scholastica, virgin

Mary Joshi

They ate and were satisfied. They picked up the fragments left over — seven baskets.

I wish I would remember more readily and with greater clarity, the many times that God has blessed my life in the past, when I'm confronted with a call to step out of my comfort zone to serve on God's behalf. More often than not, when I've overcome my initial reluctance to help others, I've been rewarded seven-fold. Each time we are willing to offer with a sincere heart even a small loaf of God's kindness to those in need, God's abundant grace is bestowed upon our lives and the lives of those we've had the courage to serve. We may not always immediately recognize the leftovers that spill out from our actions, but God promises that an act of love is never in vain.

I commit myself to you Lord and to your way; I trust in you knowing you will act.

Sunday, February 11, 2018

Daily Bread - February 11, 2018

Mark Bartholomew



"If you wish, you can make me clean." - *Mark 1:40*

Monday, February 12, 2018

Jas 1:1-11; Ps 119; Mk 8:11-13

Miguel Dulick

The brother (or sister) in lowly circumstances should take pride in high standing, and the rich one in his lowliness.

It's as if James knows that Lent is about to begin. His jabs are softening us up for the 40 days of calls to conversion. A typical Jamesian thwack: "The sun comes up with its scorching heat and dries up the grass; so will the rich person fade away in the midst of his pursuits." Jesus is impatient, too, for some break in the routine. "He sighed from the depth of his spirit" when the Pharisees asked for "a sign from heaven." NO! "No sign will be given," at least not until Ash Wednesday, we might say. Just be ready.

Before I was afflicted, O Lord, I went astray, but now I hold to your promise!

Tuesday, February 13, 2018
Jas 1:12-18; Ps 94; Mk 8:14-21

Miguel Dulick

Desire conceives and brings forth sin, and when sin reaches maturity it gives birth to death.
Thus, James throws cold water on anyone trying to celebrate Mardi Gras! Nowhere else in the Christian Scriptures do we get such unrelenting sin-shaming! Some scholars think the Letter of James is, in fact, a pre-Christian text that slipped through the cracks. On the other hand, it's important to know that we are playing with fire, when we pretend that temptation is no big deal. Jesus tries to right the apostles' minds when they miss the meaning of the multiplication of the loaves, asking if their hearts are "hardened." You know what? We have got a lot of work to do. We better get started!

When I say, "My foot is slipping," your mercy, O Lord sustains me!

Wednesday, February 14, 2018
Jl 2:12-18; Ps 51; 2 Cor 5:20--6:2; Mt 6:1-6, 16-18
Ash Wednesday
Miguel Dulick

Even now, says the Lord, return to me with your whole heart, with fasting, and weeping, and mourning.

How are these readings for Valentine's Day! But no one should use Ash Wednesday as an excuse to ditch their due diligence of chocolates and roses for their Beloved! Actually, maybe Ash Wednesday and Valentine's Day have something in common. After all, the liturgy calls Lent "this joyful season," and in both cases, we wear our heart on our sleeve — or on our forehead. The heart knows what it wants, so they say, and today, as Jesus suggests, our heart wants heaven. "When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites." Instead, "Anoint your head and wash your face." In other words, spruce up as if it were Valentine's Day!

A clean heart create for me, O God, and a steadfast spirit renew within me.

Thursday, February 15, 2018
Dt 30:15-20; Ps 1; Lk 9:22-25

Miguel Dulick

What profit is there for one to gain the whole world yet lose or forfeit oneself?

The Lenten Lectionary wastes no time in getting down to business. We have a choice. Moses calls it "life and death, the blessing and the curse." Jesus sees the contest as between the authorities of his day who will kill him, and "the Son of Man." Whatever the case, our choice is crucial, no turning back. Obviously, we would choose good over evil, yes? Well, if we're even a little honest with ourselves, we know experience tells us differently. That's why we need Lent! Just follow these marvelous readings — each day another chance to find ourselves on the road to mercy.

Merciful God, let me be like a tree planted near running water, that yields its fruit in due season, and whose leaves never fade.

Friday, February 16, 2018
Is 58:1-9a; Ps 51; Mt 9:14-15

Miguel Dulick

This, rather, is the fasting that I wish: releasing those bound unjustly....

Fasting is not dieting. Fasting, above all, is abstaining from sin, which has made us spiritually fat. Fasting is not stopping something, like not eating; it's starting something, like moving out of our comfort zone to free the oppressed, feed the poor, shelter the homeless, clothe the naked and open our hearts. This should keep us busy for the next 40 days! But in a way, fasting is self-discipline, as when Cesar Chavez went on a hunger strike, not to pressure the growers to negotiate, but to purify the motives of his own followers, who suddenly found violence irresistible. It was non-violence or nothing, Chavez insisted. So fast for life!

My sacrifice, O God, is a contrite spirit; a heart contrite and humbled, O God, you will not spurn!

Saturday, February 17, 2018
Is 58:9b-14; Ps 86; Lk 5:27-32

Miguel Dulick

Those who are healthy do not need a physician, but the sick do.

Lent is like a secret garden. Every day brings fresh finds to keep us touring the premises, inspecting every corner of our lives, looking for some new growth. Saturday is usually a day off, but the care with which the readings were chosen and planned for Lent makes even a negligible pastime a potential turning point. Two words: "Follow me," and Matthew's life (here "Levi") changes forever. He threw a party to thank Jesus and invited those considered the scum of the earth, just the way Jesus likes it! If only we could all be so degenerate! The Pharisees throw a hissy fit, but, you know, they are showing the signs of sickness.

Incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me, for I am afflicted and poor.

Sunday, February 18, 2018
Daily Bread - February 18, 2018

Mark Bartholomew



The Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert... - *Mark 1:12*

Monday, February 19, 2018
Lv 19:1-2, 11-18; Ps 19; Mt 25:31-46

Patricia Russell

You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

We focus a lot on the “Thou shall nots.” In the moral life, law and responsibility go hand-in-hand. It’s important to know the norms of proper behavior. We can better stay on the right path if we know the boundaries. So the Lord begins his instructions to Moses regarding how to speak to the children of Israel with a detailed listing of bad conduct. Moral teaching is full of precise examples of how not to act, but the Lord doesn’t neglect clearly addressing what we also should do. Simply avoiding evil isn’t enough. The Lord asks more of us than to grudgingly adhere to minimal obligations of decent behavior. We must act purposely, continually doing good. The attitudes that precede our actions are just as telling as the acts themselves.

Gentle Teacher, guide me to joyfully live your law of love.

Tuesday, February 20, 2018
Is 55:10-11; Ps 34; Mt 6:7-15

Patricia Russell

This is how you are to pray:

What are you doing for Lent? Acts of fasting and almsgiving tend to receive our greatest focus during Lent. It’s a season of denying ourselves and doing good works. Some of us traditionally discipline ourselves to limit our intake of sweets and increase our works of mercy. These are easily identifiable practices. We can quickly see progress as we put the money saved from giving up that daily latte into the rice bowl. Prayer, however, is a little more daunting, as its effects are not always immediately visible. The season of Lent calls us to reconnect with our prayer life. We must discipline ourselves to spend daily time with the Lord in prayer; doing so will develop a beneficial practice that will not end at Easter.

Loving Savior, thank you for giving us the words to confidently and continually call on you.

Wednesday, February 21, 2018
Jon 3:1-10; PS 51; Lk 11:29-32

Patricia Russell

...and all of them, great and small, put on sackcloth.

Images of an angry God can be found in the Hebrew Scriptures. This is somewhat deceptive. God doesn't want to punish us. He has the right and option, but not the desire. Images of his blazing wrath are mercifully, frequently countered with his loving forgiveness. If we sincerely seek the Lord's compassion, he withdraws his warning and cleanses us of our offenses. Even when we think we are seemingly beyond what we feel is the reach of redemption, the Lord reaches further with another opportunity to return to him. When the people of Nineveh were mired in sin, God sent Jonah to warn them so they would not perish. They turned from their evil ways, and God lovingly forgave them. Lent comes as a messenger like Jonah, calling us to repentance.

Gracious and merciful Father, I come to you with a humble and contrite heart.

Thursday, February 22, 2018
1 Pt 5:1-4; Ps 23; Mt 16:13-19
Chair of Saint Peter, Apostle
Patricia Russell

Tend to the flock in your midst.

Christ chose Peter to feed his flock, naming him to sit in his place as a servant-authority and a visible foundation of the unity of the whole church. The feast of the chair of Peter commemorates its occupant through acknowledging not only papal authority but also the vital mission entrusted to Peter to provide spiritual guidance to the faithful. This celebration of the papacy's authority, therefore, is not about pomp. As the *servus servorum Dei* — the servant of the servants of God—the pope is called to humble leadership, not superiority. At the 2013 Chrism Mass, Pope Francis called on the world's priests to “be shepherds with the smell of sheep.” Like Jesus, they're to mingle with the lowly, offering the healing power of grace to the marginalized.

Obedient Savior, give me the modesty to follow your example of servant leadership.

Friday, February 23, 2018
Ez 18:21-28; Ps 130; Mt 5:20-26

Patricia Russell

Do I indeed derive any pleasure from the death of the wicked?

It's a sad that some people take pleasure in seeing others fail—especially those whom they deem deserving some form of divine retribution. Humans can be petty and mean-spirited, refusing to let go of past offenses, delighting in others receiving their comeuppance. However, our God, who has the right to judge our wrongdoing, prefers rejoicing in our returning to him. In fact, we are assured that when we turn away from sin and practice virtue our wrongdoing is forgotten. That unsettles the grudge-holders. God's law, however, is a law of love. A lack of charity toward others struggling with sin, frustrates the nature of love. We must allow others, and ourselves, to reforge bonds, not smugly triumph at their struggle.

Merciful Lord, may we genuinely seek and eagerly celebrate every sincere desire to return to you.

Saturday, February 24, 2018
Dt 26:16-19; Ps 119; Mt 5:43-48

Patricia Russell

But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you.

All people, even those we find least lovable, are children of God. Even if we're bitterly separated by ideology or even bloodshed, we share a common humanity. Loving those who wish us harm is not a simplistic proposition of forgive and forget. Forgiveness isn't weakness. We claim the power to allow all parties to move forward in humility and grace. Forgetting doesn't deny remembrance. Some things shouldn't be forgotten. Remembrance fuels a commitment to justice and fights rationalization and complicity. The love Jesus promotes is all embracing. If we withhold it from one of his children, the omission extends to all. God's mercy is infinite, and so is the need for love in this divided world.

Almighty and all-forgiving Father, grant all your children the capacity for compassion that you bestowed upon your beloved Son Jesus.

Sunday, February 25, 2018
Daily Bread - February 25, 2018
Mark Bartholomew



"This is my beloved Son. Listen to him." - *Mark 9:7*

Monday, February 26, 2018
Dn 9:4b-10; Ps 79; Lk 6:36-38

Paige Byrne Shortal

The measure with which you measure will in turn be measured out to you.

What you give, God will give you? What you do to others, God will do to you? That sounds a little quid pro quo and not like the God that Jesus calls “Abba.” Or could it be that this “measure for measure” indicates something more basic, more intrinsic to the human makeup? Expending energy gives us more energy. Generosity makes us receptive to the many gifts of this life. Honesty makes us more trusting. Forgiving others helps us accept forgiveness and even forgive ourselves. Loving opens us to love. We’re made in God’s image to be like God — offering not grudging little trickles of mercy, but gushing waterfalls, testifying to the abundance, the bounty, of God.

Creator God, you who made us in your image and know us completely, give us the grace this day to reach farther, dig deeper, listen longer, and love without measure.

Tuesday, February 27, 2018
Is 1:10, 16-20; Ps 50; Mt 23:1-12

Paige Byrne Shortal

Do what they tell you, but do not follow their example.

Jesus has one message for those who do not practice what they preach and it’s harsh. (Hint: It starts out with, “Woe to you!”) He has very little patience with hypocrites. But today’s message is for those who would ignore a good teaching because the teacher doesn’t follow it. It is natural to imitate what we see, what we know. It’s also natural to let ourselves off the hook. But Jesus says, “I don’t think so.” Today’s lesson can be distilled to this: Another person’s bad behavior is not an excuse for yours. And this is true even if that other person is your parent or pastor or president.

Loving and nurturing God, grant me the grace to be the kind of person I wish others would be; to do for others what I wish others would do for me.

Wednesday, February 28, 2018
Jer 18:18-20; Ps 31; Mt 20:17-28

Paige Byrne Shortal

You do not know what you are asking.

“Be careful what you ask for!” is the old adage. How often when we pray do we ask for what is not good for us, for what will not, in the long run, make us wiser or healthier or closer to God? And parents, isn't that so true of what we wish for our children? How many well-meaning parents lead (or push!) their child toward music or sports or science without letting the child's calling surface? The child we hope will be a doctor or a concert pianist might very well have a vocation as a teacher or a cook. The problem is we tend to focus on attaining what we have prayed for and thereby may fail to see the opportunity, the good, that comes our way. Perhaps the best prayer is, “Your will be done, O God.”

Open my eyes, O God, to your plan for me, to your face in everyone I meet, to your presence in this world.