

First Sunday of Lent

February 18, 2024

Repent

The thing about the gospel is that you don't have to be a genius to understand it. It's so simple. Just turn around: repent.

Repentance implies course correction. It doesn't necessitate beating your breast, although that can be a useful ritual if your heart needs a good thumping. Often, course correction doesn't involve how we feel, but rather how we think. Still, I don't recommend hitting yourself over the head. While we can't force ourselves to feel anything, we can reconsider our attitudes, thoughts, and opinions. This allows a new breath to in-spirit us and redirect our behavior. In time, our emotions will catch up.

Jesus tells us the promised kingdom is already at hand. If we want in, we have to turn around. Because the kingdom turns everything around: the last become first, mourners laugh, the poor are blessed, and the dead rise. If we live as if we believe all this, our path will seem peculiar to people around us. Consider a raised eyebrow a good sign!

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Questions To Ponder:

What is something in your life that you need to change?
How will you go about making that change?

What does the Kingdom of God look like to you? How will you continue to work toward the Kingdom of God as this Lenten Season begins?

Lectio Divina: Read Matthew 1:14-15

Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

What word or phrase from this Scripture passage most resonates with you?

How will this reading shape your life this week as you begin your Lenten journey?

Challenge for the Week:

As you begin this journey of Lent, create a plan to pray a little differently, give a little more, and share of your gifts a little more generously. Write them here to solidify your plan:

Second Sunday of Lent

February 25, 2024

Offer

What do you offer to special guests in your home? Do you prepare the best meal in your repertoire or heat up leftovers from the back of the fridge? Do you put your beloved grandmother in the sewing closet for overnight stays or dislodge yourself from your own bedroom to make a privileged place for her? When a close friend calls in distress, do you let his anguished words go to voicemail. Or do you pick up and give him your full attention?

We know how to treat the people who matter most to us.

We offer them our finest and serve them selflessly.

Abraham seeks to do the same with God, even when his sovereign Lord asks for Abraham's only son—the very son who was a miraculous gift. There's horror in this ancient story. And pathos. But also an indelible picture of what it means to make a genuine offering of ourselves and all we possess to the God who first gives us everything. The limits of any relationship are described by what we withhold.

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Questions To Ponder:

When is a time that you have welcomed another into your home? How did you make that person feel welcomed?

What is the greatest sacrifice that you have made in your lifetime? What did it feel like to make this act of self-giving?

Lectio Divina: Read Mark 2:7-8

Then a cloud came, casting a shadow over them; from the cloud came a voice, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him." Suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone but Jesus alone with them.

What word or phrase from this Scripture passage most resonates with you?

How will this reading shape your life this week as you continue your Lenten journey?

Challenge for the Week:

Look in your closets and drawers. What can you sacrifice from your storehouse of possessions? Fill a box with items that you commit to donate and bring it to the local thrift store or service organization.

Third Sunday of Lent

March 3, 2024

Question

In high school religion class, our young teacher was a newly professed sister. Instead of telling us what to believe or else—which is what previous years of religion class seemed all about—this sister asked us questions and invited us to ask our own. Someone asked why women couldn't be priests. Instead of putting a lid on this apparently dangerous line of thought, Sister smiled. "I wonder that myself," she said. We all relaxed. This religion class was going to be different.

It's clear from the biblical tradition that asking questions is essential to the journey of faith. Patriarchs and matriarchs, prophets and sages put hard questions before rulers, crowds, even God. Especially God. Seeking clarification is how we learn and grow. The spirit of inquiry brings wisdom if we listen, ponder, and accept correction when needed. This is why the religious leaders in one of this week's gospel options misread Jesus completely. The Samaritan woman in the other story gets him totally.

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Questions To Ponder:

Who is the best teacher that you have had in your life? How did he or she help you to ask the great questions of living and loving?

What is a faith question that you have pondered throughout your lifetime?

A mystery is not only something that cannot be easily solved. It is a question that has layers to peel in terms of deeper and deeper meaning. What is a mystery of our faith that you continually ponder?

Lectio Divina: Read John 2:13-16

Since the Passover of the Jews was near, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. He found in the temple area those who sold oxen, sheep, and doves, as well as the money changers seated there. He made a whip out of cords and drove them all out of the temple area, with the sheep and oxen, and spilled the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables, and to those who sold doves he said, "Take these out of here, and stop making my Father's house a marketplace."

What word or phrase from this Scripture passage most resonates with you?

How will this reading shape your life this week as you continue your Lenten journey?

Challenge for the Week:

Commit to learning something new this week. Read a book. Take an online mini-course. Read an article. Attend a lecture. Anything to expand your mind and help you to ask questions.

Fourth Sunday of Lent

March 10, 2024

Awaken

My eldest sister, Luci, visited my home last summer for the first time in our adulthood. Luci's in her 70s and I'm in my 60s. It's been a half-century since we spent a whole week together like this. That's how life goes: marriages, distances, and years can keep us busy and apart from people who are important to us.

Having adventures with my big sister again last year made me feel like the young girl I was the last time we did such things. Time has passed, and our bodies let us know that we can't stay up all night talking like we used to. But while I was smiling back at my smiling sister for days on end after all these years, something woke up in me. I woke up to the central truth that love really is what lasts, just like Saint Paul says. Time, distance—these are petty things in the light of love. Like the man born blind who sees, or like Nicodemus standing in the radiance of true teaching let yourself awaken again to the light.

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Questions To Ponder:

Who is a person who you have lost contact with in your life?
What would it mean to re-establish a relationship?

If you needed to define love to another person in just a couple of sentences, what would you say?

What do you need to awaken to in your life? How will you manage that?

Lectio Divina: Read John 3:16-18

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him will not be condemned, but whoever does not believe has already been condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

What word or phrase from this Scripture passage most resonates with you?

How will this reading shape your life this week as you continue your Lenten journey?

Challenge for the Week:

Reconnect with a person whom you have lost contact over the years. Send an email. Make a phone call. Better yet—do it the old-fashioned way and write a letter!

Fifth Sunday of Lent

March 17, 2024

See

I've had glasses since I was nine. Some children need to wear corrective lenses even earlier. This isn't a burden: if your vision can be enhanced, it's a blessing. One of my sisters was born with greatly reduced eyesight. I'm always aware that her view of the world has been very different from mine.

What we see with our eyes is one thing; what we perceive with mind, heart, and instinct is a more significant perspective. We wonder what the Greeks who wanted to "see" Jesus as he taught in Jerusalem were really looking for. Surely it didn't matter to them what he was wearing, whether he was handsome, how tall he was. They wanted to perceive for themselves if he was an astounding teacher—or perhaps more. Maybe they hoped to see what Martha professed at Lazarus' tomb: that Jesus was the anointed of God. My sister with limited vision has always appreciated the beauty of this truth. She sees more than many.

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Questions To Ponder:

Recall a time that you were in total darkness with absolutely no light. What did that "blindness" feel like?

What are some blind spots that you have in your life? How did these develop? How can they be overcome?

What do you hope to "see" in your faith journey over these remaining two weeks of Lent?

Lectio Divina: Read John 20:23-26

Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life.

What word or phrase from this Scripture passage most resonates with you?

How will this reading shape your life this week as you continue your Lenten journey?

Challenge for the Week:

Discover some new gift or talent in your life. Try out a new hobby, artwork, musical instrument, exercise or whatever will awaken a new insight into yourself.

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion

March 24, 2024

Watch

A certain vigilance is required if we're to be counted among the friends of Jesus. I don't mean the kind of paranoia that comes of imagining enemies behind every tree. But when the hour of crisis comes, as it always does, we have to be prepared. The time for reciting creeds, learning lessons, practicing virtues, and performing rituals will be past. When the hour comes, it is time to act.

All the rest—the creeds, lessons, virtues, and rituals—are meant to fortify us for the critical hour. They aren't ends in themselves. We aren't meant to warehouse our religious training and practices like shares in stock that reap eternal rewards. Religious practices are like the copybooks of children who rehearse the alphabet for future and more creative uses. Watch for the hour when all you've learned and all you believe summons you to take the actions you were born for.

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Questions to Ponder:

What is a crisis that you have encountered and lived through in your lifetime? How did you make it through the crisis?

What is a religious practice that you rely on when you face the challenges of life? Who taught you that practice and why does it give you comfort and strength?

How have you grown through these past six weeks of Lent?
How will you take this growth into the Easter Season?

Lectio Divina: Read Mark 11:7-10

So they brought the colt to Jesus and put their cloaks over it. And he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields. Those preceding him as well as those following kept crying out: "Hosana! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is to come! Hosanna in the highest!"

What word or phrase from this Scripture passage most resonates with you?

How will this reading shape your life this week as you prepare for the most sacred celebrations of our faith?

Challenge for the Week: As you enter this holiest of weeks, keep your eyes, ears, and heart open for those in need of having their feet washed. What will your response be? Bring all of this to Mass on Holy Thursday.