



Bringing Home the Word

Third Sunday of Lent (A)

March 15, 2020

Evil Exchanged for Good

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

There is a detail in today's first reading that you shouldn't miss. After hearing Moses and his people complain, God stands in front of Moses on the rock and asks Moses to strike toward him. God knows the Israelites' anger directed at Moses is really meant for God himself. God takes the blow and responds with flowing water. He accepts violent rejection and grants us life in return. He exchanges evil for good.

God had already guaranteed the Promised Land, but the Israelites feared to enter it. God had done many

miracles for them already, yet they still didn't trust him. In spite of it all, God understands they strike out of their own dissatisfaction, fear, and interior slavery. In the same way, Jesus knows we will strike out at him, yet he responds with love. Nowhere is this truer than on the cross. Christ allows the soldiers to strike, crown, and kill him, saying, "Father, forgive them..." He is whipped and made to carry a cross, yet he consoles the women of Jerusalem. When his side is pierced, living water flows.

When we complain against God, he offers us mercy and salvation. Rather than blame, assault, or reject, let us do as the penitential act calls—strike our own breast and cry, "I have greatly sinned... Have mercy..." God will respond as he always does, by pouring forth the water of his Spirit which never runs dry into our hearts. +

Sunday Readings

Exodus 17:3-7

[The LORD said,] "Strike the rock, and the water will flow from it for the people to drink."

Romans 5:1-2, 5-8

The love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the holy Spirit.

John 4:5-42 or John 4:5-15, 19b-26, 39a, 40-42

[Jesus said,] "The water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

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strike out at him,
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with love.*

A Word from Pope Francis

This season of Lent is a good occasion to draw near to [Jesus], to encounter him in prayer in a heart-to-heart dialogue; to speak with him, to listen to him....In this way we can renew in ourselves the grace of baptism, quench our thirst at the wellspring of the Word of God.

—Angelus, March 19, 2017



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- What are my usual complaints against God?
- What responses of mercy does God show me?

Social Sin, Social Responsibility

By Jim and Susan Vogt

When our children were young, we frequently heard, “It wasn’t me. I didn’t do it!” As adults, insisting on our innocence is still second nature: “If I didn’t start the fight, pollute the river, or own a slave, why should I take responsibility?”

The answer is at the foot of the cross. Who killed Jesus? Not you or me. Pontius Pilate gave the command. Soldiers nailed him to the cross. And religious leaders incited the crowd. But we can’t lay blame on one individual or group. Rather, we all participate in the evil of the crucifixion because we, too, sin.

Sin infects our attitudes, institutions, corporations, and politics. It’s called social sin, and it’s something for which we all are responsible. Social sin is evident when we see poverty. Human nature often leads the privileged to assume that less privileged people are where they are because of laziness, a poor work ethic, or lack of ability. We saw this error of thinking in our kids and their questions.

When our children were young, we used to ride bicycles through different neighborhoods. As we rode, our children would ask questions like: “Why don’t these families fix up their homes?” or “Why can’t they get a good job?”



Our family didn’t cause our neighbors’ poverty. But as Christ’s followers, we must take responsibility to do something about it. Christ’s parable of the last judgment doesn’t leave wiggle room when the Lord says, “Depart from me...for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave

me nothing to drink, a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you did not give me clothing...What you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me” (Matthew 25:41–45).

So, does this mean all will be right if we donate our old clothes to Goodwill, help build a Habitat for Humanity house, work at a soup kitchen, and visit the sick—or all of the above? Yes and no. These actions are necessary but not sufficient.

No matter how many mouths we feed at the soup kitchen, we must ask ourselves why, when we’re capable of eliminating hunger, do we lack the political will to do so? Why, in this rich country, is there still poverty? The answer often lies in our isolation from the needy. Direct service increases our awareness of needs around us, but then we must take the next step to change the system that allows these needs to continue. Following are ways in which Catholics can make a difference:

- **Purify your soul by prayer and fasting.** The prayer must be genuine, not self-righteous. Fasting puts us in solidarity with those who don’t have the luxury to voluntarily forego food or drink.
- **Don’t engage in anonymous sinfulness.** Racism isn’t always a result of deliberate maliciousness, but rather a result of allowing an unjust system to continue. By sitting on the sidelines and doing nothing, we are complicit in the neglect of our neighbor.
- **Get to know someone who is poor, a minority, or oppressed.** It’s difficult to move beyond superficial contact to immerse yourself in someone’s story and struggles, but it will sensitize your conscience and give you perspective.
- **Use this heightened awareness to propel you into social justice.** You don’t have to tackle everything. Commit to taking a first step, getting involved in one cause that contributes to systemic change for the common good.

Once you know the right thing to do, it is wrong to ignore your responsibility. “It wasn’t me” will be your condemnation. +

PRAYER

Lord, you created me to be a member of the human family. Empower me to show respect and love to all people regardless of their racial, cultural, religious, and social background.

—From *Mindful Meditations for Every Day of Lent and Easter*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

March 16–21

Monday, Lenten Weekday:
2 Kgs 5:1–15b / Lk 4:24–30

Tuesday, Lenten Weekday:
Dn 3:25, 34–43 / Mt 18:21–35

Wednesday, Lenten Weekday:
Dt 4:1, 5–9 / Mt 5:17–19

Thursday, St. Joseph: 2 Sm 7:4–5a,
12–14a, 16 / Rom 4:13, 16–18, 22 /
Mt 1:16, 18–21, 24a or Lk 2:41–51a

Friday, Lenten Weekday:
Hos 14:2–10 / Mk 12:28–34

Saturday, Lenten Weekday:
Hos 6:1–6 / Lk 18:9–14

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