

# **THE THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT**



**SUN**            **THE THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT**  
**Feb. 28**        **The Cross We Bear in Waiting for the Lord**  
                      A reflection based on a text by Carroll Stuhlmueller

**MON**            **Monday of the Third Week in Lent**  
**29**                **The Grace of Walking the Way of Love**  
                      A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Augustine of Hippo

**TUES**           **Tuesday of the Third Week in Lent**  
**March 1**        **How Faith Faces Evil**  
                      A reflection based on a text by the Daughters of St. Paul

**WED**            **Wednesday of the Third Week in Lent**  
**2**                 **The Task God Shares with Us**  
                      A reflection taken from a sermon by St. John Chrysostom

**THURS**         **Thursday of the Third Week in Lent**  
**3**                 **Confessing our Faith in the Lord Jesus**  
                      A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Pope Leo the Great

## **MONASTIC DESERT DAY**

**FRI**             **Friday of the Third Week in Lent**  
**4**                 **The Offering that is Prayer**  
                      A reflection from a treatise by Tertullian

**SAT**             **Saturday of the Third Week in Lent**  
**5**                 **How We Glimpse the Secrets of God's Mercy**  
                      A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Bernard



# **The Cross We Bear in Waiting for the Lord**

A reflection based on a text by Carroll Stuhlmueller

The second reading of this Sunday's Eucharist forces us to listen to St. Paul twice summoning us to remember that what Scripture tells us about Israel applies to us, both as a warning and a positive example. Take the story of the Burning Bush that Moses saw as he pastured his father-in-law's sheep. The Lord used the impossibility of a bush being on fire without burning up to call Moses to do seemingly impossible things. He had to persuade Israel to leave Egypt, he had to force the Egyptians to let them go, and he had to lead them to God and so to a Promised Land. Indeed, in his lifetime he never made it to the Promised Land but only saw it from a distance.

What was difficult for Moses was persuading the group of individuals and clans we call "Israel" to unite behind a hope that often seemed "pie in the sky". Indeed, only miracles kept them on the path of God's will. It would lead ultimately to the salvation of the whole world. But God didn't say that—it would be the crowning impossibility convincing Moses and Israel the Divine voice was an hallucination. So Moses, and Israel with him, were constantly faced with the fact of unfulfilled hopes. They had to "wait upon the Lord"; i.e., wait until the time and place and the circumstances God had chosen for the fulfillment of hope.

To fail to see that we are in the same sort of situation is to fail to face facts. The Bible frequently presents "waiting on the Lord" as the fundamental virtue of those who are faithful. One has to keep hoping, even when what one hopes for seems impossible, and one has to do it with optimism! How often have we heard Isaiah tell us: "*By waiting and by calm you shall be saved, in quiet and in trust lies your strength .. the Lord is waiting to show you favor .. blessed those who wait for the Lord*".

Our hope, like an ordinary bush, easily burns to ashes while we wait for a fulfillment whose time never seems to come. Jesus uses a parable about a sterile fig tree to make this point. We have to wait without cutting down the tree that is faith and trust in the Lord, and put our time and effort to "better" uses. Moses asked the Lord's name—our ancestors thought knowing a god's name meant the god had to be present to one's requests. God responded to the impertinent request by giving a name that probably means: I am always with you. It throws Moses, and Israel, and us as well, back into the posture of waiting on God to fulfill the promises already made, and doing it with trusting faith.

Every time we hear about terrorist attacks or about people—including faithful Christians—being driven from their homes and left with nothing but their lives, we have to renew our trust, and hope. That is what those people have to do, and as members of the same family, the Body of Christ. We suffer with them and say: There but for the inscrutable grace of God go I. Perhaps for most of us it is only a matter of trusting that our trust in those we love and depend on will not prove futile. Perhaps it is a matter of trusting God to see that we do not fail those who trust in us. Jesus trusted even to the cross and death. We are Jesus' followers, every day.

# **The Grace of Walking the Way of Love**

A reflection derived from a homily by Augustine of Hippo

*“It is my Father’s glory that you bear much fruit and become my disciples”.* This is what Jesus tells us as an undeniable fact. Yet when we follow Jesus and do bear fruit for God’s Kingdom we acquire no right to claim credit for doing so. To carry out the work of love that Jesus commands supposes the grace God gives us so we can do it. So the glory is all God’s. Jesus reminds us of this when he says: *“Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and give glory to your Heavenly Father.”*

It gives the Heavenly Father glory that we become and remain Jesus’ disciples and do the good works that he commands us. What is more, it is only through the mercy of our God that these things are done. We are God’s handiwork, created in Jesus Christ for the doing of good works. But even when we do as Jesus commands what is the source of these good works? God’s love. Jesus said: *“As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love”.* There we see the source of every good work. It comes to be only because a gift of faith is active in love. But how could we love if we had not ourselves first been loved? In the First Letter of John this is made quite clear: *“Let us love God because God first loved us”.*

The Heavenly Father loves us and loves us in the Son. We glorify God by bearing the sort of fruit Jesus bore, and we can do it because we are branches on the vine that is the Son. This is what it means to become Jesus’ disciples. So we must abide in Jesus’ love. How can we do that? Jesus tells us: *“If you observe what I command you then you will truly abide in my love”.* Further, it is love that makes us keep those commands; there is no doubt that love comes first. Anyone without love lacks the incentive needed to keep the commands. So when Christ says, *“if you keep my commands you will abide in my love”*, he tells us that the keeping of the commands is not the source of love but is the gauge and proof of love.

It is as though Jesus had said to us: Don’t suppose you are abiding in my love if you are not keeping my commands, for it is by keeping them that you abide in that love. Your observance is the proof, the outward manifestation, of the fact that you abide in his love. You can’t declare “I love God” without keeping God’s commands. To do that would be to deceive yourself. The great and new command of Jesus is to love as he has loved. It is only to the extent that we keep this command that we “abide” in Jesus’ love, and the love of the Heavenly Father. To fail to keep the command to love is to fail to love. So we cannot keep the command in order to make God love us but we keep the command because the Heavenly Father already loves us and gives us the gift that is grace—the gift of divine mercy. It is a grace always there for the humble of heart. It is beyond the reach of the proud and the self-reliant. To love like Jesus is to rejoice in God’s love, and to abide in it. This is the love that is our God and the love that makes us one with our God.

# **How Faith Faces Evil**

**A reflection based on a text by the Daughters of St. Paul**

Reports of disasters and violence frightened the people of Jesus' time just as they do us. People wanted to make sense of what happened to seemingly innocent people. So Jesus asks about the by-standers killed when a tower collapsed or the worshipers killed by command of the governor while they were offering sacrifice. He reminds us that if we try to explain such things by thinking only guilty people were killed or injured then what about us? Were the injured or killed any guiltier than we are?

Two thousand years have passed and we are still fascinated and horrified by terrorist violence as well as natural and humanly caused disasters. Pilate's brutality is no worse than the genocide, the inhumane treatment of detainees, and all the abuses of power that go on in today's world.

To many people the power which does evil is actually seductive. It not only manipulates them by catching them in its fantasy that violence can make things better, but attracts them to become perpetrators and feel the rush of seemingly absolute power over another's life or a community's future. Such people are victims themselves.

Perhaps this can help us see why Jesus responded to such events by saying: Unless you turn to God you will all perish as did those you're talking about. To turn to God is to turn to love and mercy as the solution to evil. Blaming someone for particular evil deeds doesn't get to the root of the problem.

This can be read as a reminder to look to our own hearts first—before we start looking for guilty parties. It's also a reminder that the web of evil, and the fantasy that violence can make things better, finds echoes in us as well as in others. We may not be able to do anything about large scale disasters—except to help the survivors—but we definitely can do something about the seeds of injustice, intolerance, and insensitivity, etc. that lie ready to sprout in our own hearts and minds. These can choke off acts of goodness, mercy and Christ-like love.

The Gospels of Lent, taken together, remind us to use our energies to bear good fruit, and not to remain paralyzed or passive in the face of misfortunes or misdeeds. We begin Lent with a cross traced on our forehead and the words, "Turn to God; repent and believe in the Gospel". Turn to God and believe! Turn to God and bear the fruits that are the evidence of genuine belief.

Lord, we so often hear such tragic news of terrible accidents and disasters and even of the horror that is inhumanity deliberately caused. Jesus, help us keep our focus. Teach us to see the world through your eyes, with your compassion and mercy. Give us—give me—an attentive spirit that seeks to root out the causes of evil in my life as well as in the lives of others. Help me bear the fruits that are patience, kindness, goodness, peace-seeking, and mercy. Teach me to turn to God in every circumstance and begin again to actively believe and live the Good News that is Jesus Christ and his love.

# **The Task God Shares with Us**

**A reflection taken from a homily by St. John Chrysostom**

**In the beginning God said, “Let there be light”! St. John’s Gospel adds that God created all things through the Word, the Only Begotten Son. The Letter to the Hebrews spells this out by reminding us that the Son of God sustains the whole universe by his word of power—it preserves the world. This is no less a task than creating it; indeed, it is an even greater task! Things created from nothing are prevented from falling apart and from then returning to non-existence. We have a share in this task.**

**In saying that the Word sustains the whole universe Scripture is telling us that the Lord makes light of the burden of creating and preserving all things. We need to remember that saying the Lord sustains everything by his Word of Power is equivalent to saying that “in Him is life”. Scripture goes on to say that the Word, in his own person, has “purified” us from all sin. The preservation of all things is God’s providential care in action and God’s Providence also looks to the good and perfection of all creatures. This includes the salvation offered to all. This too is a task God would share with us.**

**This task comes through the Son, who is God’s Word. Not only is life in the Son: the Son is light. God cares for us and shows us how to share divine care for others, and it is through this caring that we enter fully into reconciliation with our God and are purified. That is what the Son and Word shows us how to do, and what he accomplishes in us, as well as himself by his life, death and resurrection.**

**In hearing this we cannot help thinking of the Lord’s cross. We are called to share that too! We share it as we participate in God’s providential care for all peoples, and in the work of giving them the light to see the path of purification. This is especially so in the case of those with whom we live and work daily.**

**How do you view yourself from the perspective of all these marvelous gifts you have received from your God? You mustn’t be ashamed of what you were or presumptuous by reason of God’s gifts. The Only Begotten Son is Lord and God. This Son did not refuse to accept the condition of a mere slave. He did not turn away from any task the Heavenly Father asked of him. Surely, then, we ought to embrace every task which the Lord Jesus lays upon us. No matter how humble or distasteful, it is not to be refused.**

**What are these tasks? They are the works of caring for one another, works of love and of mercy extended to whoever we meet. We do not meet anyone apart from the Providence of our God. So to meet another, to live and work with another, is to receive a task from God. It cannot be too lowly for us or too insignificant. Jesus washed the disciples’ feet and told them that they cannot be his if they do not imitate him in doing such services. Whatever you are called upon to do, you do with Jesus. This is to be our joy and glory.**

# **Confessing Our Faith in the Lord Jesus**

**A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Pope Leo the Great**

Genuine reverence for the Lord's Passion means fixing one's heart on Jesus and recognizing our own humanity in his. If you are buried in your mortality, come forth and appear in the Holy City that is God's Church showing by your deeds that you have risen with Christ. Even the weakest can share in the Lord's victory; no one is beyond the help of his power and mercy. The flaming sword that bared the way to the Tree of Life has been extinguished by Christ's sacred blood. Night has yielded to day, we can see to walk straight, and the way to our lost homeland is open.

Do not allow present business to fill you with anxiety, or pride, but strive with your whole heart to be like your Redeemer and to follow his example. The sole aim of all he did and suffered was our salvation. Was anyone excluded from the mercy shown to our race? No, the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us and only those who refuse to believe fail to share with Him the gift of being born again. We are given rebirth by the same Spirit by whom Christ was conceived.

Is there anyone who cannot recognize personal weakness in those weaknesses born by Christ? Our nature cried out for the healing of its age-old wounds and the cleansing of the stains of sin which befouled it, so our God's Only Son became the Son of Man having the full reality of our humanity and the plenitude of Godhood. The body that lay lifeless in the tomb, that rose again on the third day, and that ascended above the Heavens to the Father's right hand—that body belongs to us.

If we walk in the way of Christ's commands, and if we are not ashamed to confess that we belong to Christ, and if we acknowledge the price Christ paid for our salvation in his humiliation, then we too shall be raised up to share Christ's glory. All creation will see the fulfillment of God's promises. *"Everyone who acknowledges me in the presence of others will be acknowledged by me in the presence of my Heavenly Father."*

How do we acknowledge Christ? How do we confess that we belong to Christ? We do this by our deeds of love and mercy. To those who are on the way to destruction the message of Christ is foolishness. To those who are on the way to salvation, it is a proof of God's power. We show God's power, and its triumph over all the powers of death and hell, when we imitate Christ's deeds of love and mercy. Don't we see unnumbered opportunities to do this, and every day? We preach a crucified Christ who teaches us wisdom. When we do Christ's deeds we show ourselves wise. When we let him open our eyes to the needs of our neighbors we begin to live by that wisdom. When we reach out to them in mercy that wisdom is fulfilled. We have received Christ's light. Let us now walk by it to the homeland prepared for us by our Risen Lord.

# **The Offering that is Prayer**

**A reflection taken from a treatise by Tertullian**

Prayer is the spiritual offering that has replaced the ancient sacrifices. What good do I receive from the multiplicity of your sacrifices? asks the Lord. What God asks for we learn from the Gospel. "True worshipers will worship the Heavenly Father in spirit and in truth". God is spirit and so God looks for worshipers who are or are willing to become like-God. We Christians are the true worshipers and priests of God. We pray in spirit and we offer prayer to God as a spiritual sacrifice.

Prayer is a most appropriate and acceptable sacrifice to God. It is the offering God has asked for and the one God expects. We have to make this offering with our entire heart. It needs to be fattened on faith, prepared by truth, kept unblemished by innocence, spotless by chastity and must be crowned by love. We escort this offering to God's altar in a procession of good works and to the sound of psalms and hymns. This gains for us all that we ask of God.

What can God refuse to such an offering presented in spirit and in truth, especially when God asks for just such prayer? Of old prayer brought deliverance from fire and beasts and hunger, and this even before it received its perfect pattern from Christ. So how much greater is the power of Christian prayer! The grace it wins doesn't remove all sense of pain but it does endow those who suffer with the capacity to endure and the faith to know what the Lord will give to those who suffer for the sake of the Name.

We are told that in the past prayer ended plagues, routed armies and brought rain. The prayer of good people turns away the wrath of God, keeps vigil even for enemies and pleads even for persecutors. It once brought down fire from heaven so should we wonder that it calls down the waters of grace? Prayer is the one thing that can overcome God.

Christ has willed that it should work no evil but that all its power should be for the good. So prayer's power is to call people back from the gates of death, give strength to the weak, heal the sick, drive devils from the possessed, open the doors of prisons, and free the innocent from chains. Prayer cleanses from sin, drives away temptations, stamps out persecutions, comforts the timorous, gives additional strength to the courageous, brings travelers safely home, feeds the poor, lifts up the fallen, supports the faltering and sustains those who stand firm.

The Lord prayed. All angels pray. Every creature prays in its own ways, as birds open their wings in the form of a cross and give voice to seeming prayers. What more is there to say about prayer? Is there need to emphasize that prayer is a duty? The Lord himself prayed. Our prayer gives him honor and glory and recognizes the Divine Power. There is no greater good work than to lead others to prayer. There is no finer way of showing love for others than to pray for them. Greater love than this no one has, to pray even to the point of laying down one's life out of love for God and for God's children. Praying in Spirit and truth we can pray always and so always find ourselves offering the most acceptable of sacrifices to our God.

# **How We Glimpse the Secrets of God's Mercy**

**A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Bernard**

Is there a place where all can find perfect safety? Yes, all can find it in the wounds of our Savior. The measure of one's security is Christ's power to save. The world may rage, my weaknesses may weigh me down, the devil may lay snares for me, but I won't fall because my feet are planted firmly on a solid rock. If I had sinned gravely my conscience would be troubled but I would not despair—for I would call to mind the wounds of my Lord. Scripture says that Christ was wounded for our iniquities. What sin is so death-dealing that it cannot be forgiven because of the death of Christ? If I remember this powerful and effective medicine for the malignancy that is sin, then it can no longer terrify me.

Someone said: My sin is too great to be pardoned! That person was wrong! Whoever is a member of Christ can always obtain pardon. Such a person has a personal claim on Christ's own merits. Any member of the body can claim a share in what belongs to the body's head. I confidently seek all I lack in the heart of the Lord. That heart overflows with mercy.

And there are openings in the Body through which that mercy pours out. Christ's hands and feet and side were pierced and through these clefts I may suck honey from the rock and oil from the hardest stone, as Scripture says. In other words, I am able to taste and see that the Lord is sweet. We are to be other openings for love and mercy.

My Lord was thinking thoughts of peace and I was not aware of it. After all, who knows the mind of the Lord or who has been the Lord's counselor? But the piercing nails became so many keys to unlock the door so that I might see the Lord's will. What did I see? Both the nails and the wound in the Lord's side cry out that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. Christ's soul itself was pierced and the lance opened his heart. It was so that the Lord might feel compassion for us in our weakness.

Through the sacred wounds the secret of the Lord's heart lies open. The great mystery of love is revealed. It was the tender mercy of our God that caused the Dayspring from On High to visit us. This is manifested through Christ's wounds. Where have God's mercy, compassion, and love shown out more luminously than from these wounds?

O sweet and gentle Lord of Mercy, greater mercy than this no one has, than to lay down life itself for those doomed to death. My every claim to merit comes from your mercy, so I lack nothing so long as you don't lack pity. If your mercies are so many, then I am rich. So what if I am aware of many sins? Where sin abounded there grace has abounded all the more. Your mercies, Lord, are eternal and so I will sing your mercies forever. O Lord, our God has made you my hope and confidence and righteousness; I will not remember my sin but I will be ever mindful of you, my Savior.