

Second Week of Lent

March 5 – 11, 2023

- Sun **Second Sunday of Lent**
5 **MATTHEW'S ACCOUNT OF THE TRANFIGURATION**
From Rev. Judith Jones on *Working Preacher* website
- Mon **Monday of 2nd Week of Lent**
6 **WHAT SHOWING MERCY MEANS**
From Rev. George Toews on *FaithLifeSermons* website
- Tue **Tuesday of 2nd Week of Lent**
7 **POPE FRANCIS' THOUGHTS ON TODAY'S SCRIPTURES**
From a morning meditation of Pope Francis on March 14, 2017
- Wed **Wednesday of 2nd Week of Lent**
8 **WISDOM FROM ST. ANTHONY OF THE DESERT**
From the sayings of the Desert Fathers
- Thu **Thursday of 2nd Week of Lent**
9 **LAZARUS IS AT THE GATE**
From Msgr. Arthur Holquin at his website *Rector Emeritus*
- Fri **Friday of 2nd Week of Lent**
10 **WHAT DOES JOSEPH'S TALE TEACH US?**
From Rabbi Larry Steidman writing in the Orange County Register
- Sat **Saturday of 2nd Week of Lent**
11 **PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON**
From a homily of Fr. Eric Hollas, OSB

Sunday, March 5

MATTHEW'S ACCOUNT OF THE TRANFIGURATION

From Rev. Judith Jones on *Working Preacher* website

The transfiguration marks the midpoint in a series of scenes that define who Jesus is. At both his baptism and transfiguration the heavenly voice announces that he is God's son. At his temptation, in Gethsemane, and at his crucifixion, Jesus wrestles with the humiliation, suffering, and abandonment that he, as Son of God, must endure. Finally the resurrected Jesus claims his identity, sending his disciples out to teach and baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

In the scenes leading up to the transfiguration, the disciples worship the Jesus who walks on water as the Son of God, but they cannot yet imagine what it means for Jesus to claim this title. Although Peter identifies Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of the living God, he utterly rejects Jesus' announcement that he will suffer and die. Jesus affirms Peter's insight but rejects his protest, calling him Satan for tempting the Son of God to define himself by glory but not by suffering. Furthermore, he calls Peter and anyone else who wants to be his disciple to follow him on the road that leads to the cross.

Six days later, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up onto a high mountain. There he is transformed before them. His face shines like the sun, and his clothes become white as light (descriptions unique to Matthew). Moses and Elijah appear and talk to Jesus. As in Mark and Luke, Peter says, "It is good for us to be here," and suggests building tents for each of the three, but Matthew treats Peter differently here than the other Gospels do: Peter calls Jesus "Lord," the title that in Matthew indicates faith; he defers to Jesus' will ("if you wish"); he offers to undertake the construction of tents there alone ("I will build here"); and there is no indication at this point that he is afraid or does not know what he is saying.

The whole scene resonates with allusions to the Old Testament. It recalls Elijah's encounter with God on the holy mountain. It brings to mind the revelation at Mt. Sinai and the cloud of God's glory overshadowing both the mountain and the tent where Moses met with God. And it evokes Malachi 4, in which God commands the people to remember Moses' words and says that Elijah will be sent on a mission of restoration before the day of the LORD.

It is no wonder that the disciples are terrified by this theophany. As Malachi says, "Who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?" Then Jesus approaches his frightened followers, touches them, and tells them not to be afraid. Though they cannot bear to hear God speak from the cloud, they can listen to Jesus. The word of God comes to them now, not as a thunderous voice from heaven or letters written on tablets of stone, but in the words and actions of Jesus. The Son of God speaks to them as one human speaks to another, and they rise and follow him.

The story of the transfiguration directs us away from trying to understand Jesus only as he is revealed in glory. It points us down the mountain and invites us to walk with Jesus into the suffering, hungry crowds. The divine voice commands us to listen to Jesus. But listening is more than hearing. As Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, building on the rock means not only hearing his words, but acting on them. Hearing without obeying leads to catastrophe.

Monday, March 6

WHAT SHOWING MERCY MEANS

From the Rev. George Toews on *FaithLifeSermons* website

The first thing showing mercy means is that we will not judge another person. Making a judgment means assessing a situation and making assumptions about it. Recall the story of four Black men who on February 1, 1960, a time when segregation was still entrenched in law, sat at a white's only lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina. One of them told how they saw an older white woman sitting near them and looking at them. This person thought that she was upset with them and against what they were doing. By thinking this they were judging her. They were assigning motives to her. How surprised they were when she came up to them and put her hands on their shoulders and told them she was proud of them. When they judged her, they were violating God's command to show mercy.

Another way we judge people is by categorizing them. If we believe that because someone is a certain way just because of their race or because their whole family is like that or because they have been like that in the past we are judging them. If we then make negative comments about them because of those prejudices, we assassinate their character and are guilty of judging them. Jesus is very clear in telling us "do not judge."

In Romans 14 Paul discussed eating meat sacrificed to idols. In that context in verses 3 & 4, he speaks about two sides of judging when he says, "The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge someone else's servant?" In this story those who had freedom were warned not to judge by looking down on those who did not have freedom. At the same time, those who did not have that freedom were warned not to judge those who did by considering them unfaithful.

Next Jesus says, "Do not condemn." Although similar to judging, condemnation has the added feature of passing sentence. Judging is the first step in which we make assumptions, and condemning takes it one step further when we decide the consequence.

Many years ago I attended a convention. One of the people speaking was representing the school which was supported by the conference. He was a young man and had shaved his head bald. At that time, only very rebellious people did that, not everyone, like today. I heard dismissive comments about him from some people who condemned the school for letting such a person represent them. What they did not know was that he had just finished chemotherapy and was bald because of the effects of it.

There are many ways in which we condemn people. Sometimes we stop talking to them, or we talk about them, or we avoid them. Jesus warns us that we must not do so. Even if people have sinned and we believe that condemnation is appropriate, I believe this warning from Jesus applies. People who have sinned do not need us to be critical because they know in their own hearts that they have done wrong. It is the work of the Spirit to convict a person of sin. It is our job to show compassion and extend forgiveness because that is what it means to show mercy as God shows mercy.

Tuesday, March 6

POPE FRANCIS' THOUGHTS ON TODAY'S SCRIPTURES

From a morning meditation of Pope Francis on March 14, 2017

Pope Francis singled out two expressions that “attract attention” in this passage from Isaiah; “cease to do evil” and “learn to do good.” In fact, he continued, this is precisely what the “journey of conversion” consists in. “It is simple.” These guidelines depend on what each person experiences personally. “Each of us does something bad every day: the Bible says that the holiest man sins seven times a day.” But it is important not to become accustomed to living a bad life, he explained. “If I do something bad, I notice it and I want to distance myself,” Pope Francis stressed. On this topic, he continued, Isaiah says you should “distance yourself from evil,” from “that which poisons the soul, which reduces the soul, which sickens you.” This, therefore, is the first step needed: to “distance yourself from evil.”

But, Francis continued, this is not enough, as the passage continues: “learn to do good”, because “it is not easy to do good: we have to learn to do so, always,” he added. Fortunately, there is the Lord who “teaches” us and therefore, we must be like children, and “learn.” Indeed, “in the journey of life, of Christian life, we learn every day. We must learn to do something each day, to be better than the day before,” Francis stressed. This then, is the “rule of conversion: to distance yourself from evil and to learn to do good ... Converting oneself is not like going to a fairy who converts us with her magic wand, no! It is a journey. It is a journey of distancing yourself and of learning.” It is a journey which requires “courage, to remove yourself” from evil and “humility to learn” to do good. And above all, it requires concrete acts, he explained.

It is no coincidence, the Pope said, that the Lord mentions several concrete examples through the words of the Prophet: “seek justice, correct oppression, defend the fatherless, plead for the widow;” there is an entire list of examples, but what is important, Francis said, is understanding that “we learn to do good with concrete acts, not with words.” And in fact as we read in the Gospel of the day Jesus “scolds this ruling class of the people of Israel, for they ‘preach but do not practice’; they do not know concreteness. And if there is no concreteness, there can be no conversion,” the Holy Father added.

After identifying ‘what’ to do on the path to conversion, the Pope moved on to reflect on ‘how’ we should behave. Thus, he returned to the day’s reading from Isaiah, which states: “Come now, let us reason together.” The Lord therefore, “first invites us and then he helps us,” Francis explained. He reflected on the language chosen by Jesus: “come now,” as we read in Isaiah, and “rise” as he says to the paralytic: “Rise, take up your pallet and walk,” the same expression used with Jairus’ daughter and with the widow’s son at the doors of Nain.

God always invites us to rise, but he always “lends his hand,” and he does this with his characteristic humility, Pope Francis said. In the passage of Isaiah, He says, “Come now, and let us reason together.” Thus, “He lowers himself to our level, as one of us; our God is humble”, the Pope added.

Wednesday, March 7

WISDOM FROM ST. ANTHONY OF THE DESERT

From the sayings of the Desert Fathers

The hunter and the bow

A hunter in the desert saw Abba Anthony enjoying himself with the brethren and he was shocked. Wanting to show him that it was necessary sometimes to meet the needs of the brethren, the old man said to him, 'Put an arrow in your bow and shoot it.' So he did. The old man then said, 'Shoot another,' and he did so. Then the old man said, 'Shoot yet again and the hunter replied, 'If I bend my bow so much I will break it.' Then the old man said to him, 'It is the same with the work of God. If we stretch the brethren beyond measure they will soon break. Sometimes it is necessary to come down to meet their needs.' When he heard these words the hunter was pierced by compunction and, greatly edified by the old man, he went away. As for the brethren, they went home strengthened.

What shall I keep, that I may please God?

A man asked abbot Antony, "What shall I keep, that I may please God?" Anthony said: "Wherever you go, have God ever before your eyes. In whatever you do, hold by the example of the Holy Scriptures; and in whatever place you abide, don't be swift to leave [out of restlessness]. These three things keep, and you will be saved."

Monks like the fish

He said also, 'Just as fish die if they stay too long out of water, so the monks who loiter outside their cells or pass their time with men of the world lose the intensity of inner peace. So like a fish going towards the sea, we must hurry to reach our cell, for fear that if we delay outside we will lose our interior watchfulness.' He said also, 'He who wishes to live in solitude in the desert is delivered from three conflicts: hearing, speech, and sight; there is only one conflict for him and that is with fornication.'

Monk like a house without a door

Some brothers were coming from Scetis to see Abba Anthony. When they were getting into a boat to go there, they found an old man who also wanted to go there. The brothers did not know him. They sat in the boat, occupied by turns with the words of the Fathers, Scripture and their manual work. As for the old man, he remained silent. When they arrived on shore they found that the old man was going to the cell of Abba Anthony too. When they reached the place, Anthony said to them, 'You found this old man a good companion for the journey?' Then he said to the old man, 'You have brought many good brethren with you, father.' The old man said, 'No doubt they are good, but they do not have a door to their house and anyone who wishes can enter the stable and loose the ass.' He meant that the brethren said whatever came into their mouths.

Thursday, March 8

LAZARUS IS AT THE GATE

From Msgr. Arthur Holquin at his website *Rector Emeritus*

Lazarus is at the gate. What is this gate? A gate denotes access; a gate means security, boundaries. People build gates not so much to keep themselves in as to keep others out. You know, we human beings are master gate builders. We have spent the whole history of our human species building gates. Who's in and who's out, who's acceptable and who's unacceptable, who's worthy and who's unworthy.

My sisters and brothers, I want you to struggle with me as we see Lazarus at the gate, existing there in the shadow of such plenty. What if the gate in the story is any barrier we put around our lives? And what if Lazarus is someone with sores, dressed in rags, not so much someone who lived back there, but someone wounded and destitute, needy and hungry, sitting just outside our self-made, carefully watched gate?

One thinks immediately of the poor, the homeless, indeed all dehumanized human beings. I can't read the teachings of Jesus and overlook that our Lord was proactive when it came to the poor. Jesus was the one who ate with the poor, who touched the poor, who put his loving hands on those whom no one else would ever touch.

No, I am troubled today because so often, so many of us put gates around our lives that keep us from the poor. We don't see the poor. But, like Lazarus, they have names. We simply don't know them or see them.

Lazarus is at the gate.

I think of the countless immigrants that are escaping their homeland because of violence or exploitation. I think of the divorced, the widowed, the abandoned. I am haunted by these others, all with names but who are nameless to me and to you. We do not see them. We may not want to see them, those who wait at the gate. There are folks you and I pass by every day who are sitting at a gate who need good news. But our gates are there, keeping them at bay, out of reach, out of sight, out of mind. And the gates go by several names.

I am thinking of gates we construct called "tradition," "bigotry," and all too often, "ignorance." We inherit old gates from well-meaning elders who, in our formative years, told us to keep certain kinds of people at a distance. For some, those consigned to the gate were people of color, or those who speak another language, or, in some communities, those who lived "on the other side of the tracks." Such gates are not so much built as they are passed on from one generation to another in a vain attempt to keep us safe.

And yes, perhaps the thickest and highest gate erected outside our lives, keeping Lazarus at a distance is boredom, what the mystics used to call, *acedia*, which is ennui, disinterest, the idea captured by the phrase, "Who cares?" We who now see that it is Lazarus at the gate must ever be vigilant against the toxic and numbing virus of our own apathy.

A long time ago, the One who told us this story saw the gate from a long way off. God the Father had a conversation with God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. It was decided that God the Son would come in human flesh and walk among us. God not only saw the gate, God became the gate so much so that Jesus said in the Gospel of John, "*I am the gate and whoever comes and goes through me will have everlasting life.*"

And, so friends, let us listen attentively with our ears and our heart today. Lazarus is at the gate. And we of faith who feast at God's table are called by the Lord who gave us this feast to meet Lazarus and to invite him or her to come through the Gate that is Jesus and to join us at this table. Such is the work to which our Lord calls us. Amen.

Friday, March 9

WHAT DOES JOSEPH'S TALE TEACH US?

From Rabbi Larry Steidman writing in the Orange County Register

There are many lessons we can learn from the story of Joseph. We could focus on the transformation of Joseph. He starts as an arrogant young man. He is abused by his family and he spends much of his life in jail on false charges. But years later, the sight of his brothers brings him to uncontrollable weeping. He brings all the resources of Egypt to make his family comfortable. He has become a sensitive, family-oriented man.

We could understand the story as an illustration of how God works in the world. Dreams are a way to communicate with the Divine, or a way to communicate with the deepest parts of ourselves. Joseph's dreams first get him into trouble, but his ability to understand them leads him to be chosen by the Pharaoh and to save the world. We could learn a lesson about the mysteries of how the world works.

Believers and non-believers can see it as an illustration of the need to keep trying and persevere. Joseph shows that the worst conditions possible may not be final. We never know when the next step will lead to success.

Lovers of literature will admire the writer's skill in constructing a story of adventure. Several times, the story of Joseph seems to be at an end. Yet somehow, a way out appears. And, in accord with the overall architecture of the Bible, the descendants of Abraham have transitioned from the land of Canaan to the land of Egypt. This sets the stage for the next story, the slavery in Egypt and the exodus.

Let's focus here on the aspect of the story as a beautiful example of forgiveness. Joseph's brothers are guilty of kidnapping, enslavement and attempted murder. In the Bible, they are totally forgiven. Is this the example we are to follow? What do you think about forgiveness for serious crimes?

Perhaps you see Joseph modeling the correct practice of always forgiving, and not punishing, crimes. **Option 1: We should always forgive and forget.**

Joseph explains in verse 45:5 that "God sent me ahead." Is the attempt to murder Joseph justified by the belief that it was part of God's plan? Is that a rule we should apply to our lives today? **Option 2: Crime should be forgiven when we believe it furthers God's plan.**

A key aspect of this story is that the victim, Joseph, ends up on top of the world. If he had not been kidnapped, he could be a starving shepherd in Canaan. **Option 3: Crime should be forgiven if the victim is not complaining.**

In our legal system, the complaint of the victim is not required. The law has been broken and the state must try and punish the criminal. **Option 4: Crimes must be punished in accordance with the law.**

And of course, **Option 5: None of the above reflects my view of forgiveness and punishment.** I am looking forward to discussing this with you.

Saturday, March 11

PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON

From a homily of Fr. Eric Hollas, OSB

The parable of the prodigal son is a story in which one person desperately wants forgiveness; a second wants to give it freely; and a third begrudges the easy forgiveness that the undeserving brother gets. But therein is the struggle that goes on daily in our lives.

Just for today let's pretend that we are not the generous father. Let's pretend that we are not the virtuous older brother who does everything right and gets so little recognition in return. For a moment, let's pretend, hypothetically of course, that we are the younger brother – the sinner, the wastrel, the guy who needs to turn his life around. If you have to, stretch your imagination on this, even if you've never been there.

For years there was an element in this parable that had never occurred to me, until someone pointed out to me how unconditional the father's love really is. There is no sequel to this parable, but if there were, it would not include a scene like this. Having forgiven his son on Monday, the father wakes up on Tuesday and begins a lifetime of nagging his son – a lifetime of reminding his son of how much he had forgiven him. On the contrary, the parable assumes there will be no daily reminders of the ridiculous life his son had led, because the father has moved on emotionally. He's wiped the son's slate clean, but the father has also rid himself of any memory of disappointment that could haunt him for the rest of his life. He counts his blessings and leaves the burden of his son's sins behind him.

And so for the father this story of forgiveness is wonderfully liberating. But it is liberating for the son too. For the son the reconciliation is genuine. There is no burden of sin to contend with. There is the joy of having a clean slate on which to write the next stage of his life, and an appreciation of how generous his father had been. And while the absence of a sequel to the parable lets us guess, I'd like to think that on Tuesday the prodigal son starts his life all over – with a vengeance. We have to assume that after forgiveness on Monday, he does not resume his old ways on Tuesday. Instead, there is a genuine conversion experience. He's gotten another chance, and with forgiveness has come responsibility. With his father's forgiveness and love, he now can't go back. His commitment must be total and complete and be lived out every day. He must be a new man, building on the gifts that were already there but never used before.

At the welcome home, after the son has repented and committed himself to a new life, the father clothes him in a colorful robe. Whatever else that robing accomplished, it most definitely was not meant to honor his son's past life. Rather, it was a sign to the son and to everyone else that something important had taken place. He was the same old son, but he is a new son, and acceptance of the robe is a sign of a covenant between the repentant son and the loving father. The son cannot go back to the old ways, because the robe is a reminder to everyone of the new responsibility that the son accepts.

You and I are repentant sons and daughters as we approach the altar this afternoon. God is our loving father, and we know that his forgiveness is complete. We should also know that if today we are the perfect and aggrieved elder brother, then we don't need the robe that symbolizes a change of life. The robe is for those who need to repent; the robe is for those who commit their lives in response to a loving father.