

Third Week of Lent

March 12 – 18, 2023

- Sun **Third Sunday of Lent**
12 **DESIRE SYMBOLIZED BY THE THIRST FOR WATER**
From Fr. John Foley on the *Sunday Website of St Louis University*
- Mon **Monday of 3rd Week of Lent**
13 **FAILURE IS OUR PRIVILEGE**
From *Approach to Calvary* by Dom Hubert Zeller
- Tue **Tuesday of 3rd Week of Lent**
14 **FORGIVENESS**
From Scott Hoozee on the *Center for Excellence in Preaching* website
- Wed **Wednesday of 3rd Week of Lent**
15 **SAYINGS OF ABBA ARSENIUS**
From *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*
- Thu **Thursday of 3rd Week of Lent**
16 **DISCIPLINE AND THE SPIRITUAL LIFE**
From *Show Me the Way* by Henri Nouwen
- Fri **Friday of 3rd Week of Lent - Commemoration of St Patrick, bishop**
17 **THE BREASTPLATE OF ST PATRICK**
- Sat **Saturday of 3rd Week of Lent**
18 **GOD'S ENTRY INTO OUR HEARTS**
From the *Essential Writings* of Ruth Burrows

Sunday, March 12

DESIRE SYMBOLIZED BY THE THIRST FOR WATER

From Fr. John Foley on the *Sunday Website of St Louis University*

The readings for Sunday speak of a key desire within us, a longing, a craving. The best symbol for this desire is the thirst for water.

I remember bicycling with a friend out in the countryside on a very hot day. We had not counted on one particular hill that would rise up and up before us, a very long and unremitting one. We worked and worked and worked and at last achieved the top. Hurray! But the heat and humidity had perspired the water out of us and we were thirsty. I felt like a paper copy of myself. We debated what to do. There was a farmhouse or residence of some kind just off to the left. Why not go ask for a drink of water?

Because the house itself was at the top of another hill, and there were possibly four hundred steps leading up to it. Ok, not four hundred, but it seemed like that to us. Could we possibly put ourselves through still another Olympic ordeal and clamber up the steep steps just in order to subject some innocent citizen to our begging?

Yes, indeed. We marched up, knocked on the door, were greeted by a most gracious lady who could think of nothing more delightful than to bring us each a big glass of cool, wet water. Aaaaahhhhhh. Drink it to the bottom. Thanks. Easy trip down the steps. Off and away.

You can fast from food for but not from water. In the Gospel Jesus uses a water as a symbol to the Samaritan woman about slaking her thirst forever, about putting a flowing fountain of water right inside her. He is talking about the longing each of us has deep within for "the love poured forth from God in Jesus through the Holy Spirit." That is the way Paul puts it in the second reading. This need of ours is much like thirst except that it is more subtle. We use many other substitutes to fill it. Food, work, looks, accomplishment, alcohol, other persons, sexual satisfaction, and so on. They do not work. They leave us croaking the famous line "Is that all there is?"

It is not. We are constructed in such a way that without real love we die. St. Ignatius points to this fact again and again. Our small selves are constructed with a soul that can open wide enough to admit even the very presence of God himself. And God is able to become whatever size will fit us. Tagore, a non-Christian poet, put it this way:

"What is there but the sky, O Sun, that can hold thine image? I dream of thee, but to serve thee I can never hope," the dewdrop wept and said; "I am too small to take thee unto me, great lord, and my life is all tears."

"I illumine the limitless sky, yet I can yield myself up to a tiny drop of dew," thus the Sun said; "I shall become but a sparkle of light and fill you, and your little life will be a laughing orb."

Nothing else can slake our heart's thirst for God except God. Jesus, take your staff, strike our hearts of stone, and cause a fountain of God-love to spring forth within us.

We pray with the Samaritan woman, "Sir, give me this water."

Monday, March 13

FAILURE IS OUR PRIVILEGE

From *Approach to Calvary* by Dom Hubert Zeller

It is possible to know Christ as the perfect model, as the leader, as the moral and spiritual teacher, but not to know him as one who, to outward appearances, was a failure. In the eyes of the world his mission, as it was seen at the time, came to nothing. Even in the eyes of his friends, as they saw him led away to death, the gospel hope which he had preached had let them down. If the agony in the garden was the sign of his defeat to his disciples, the first fall on the way to Calvary was the sign of his defeat to the outside world. Both to his own in private and to the others in public Christ willed to appear as a failure. It was his desire that all should imagine him to be without further resources, should think that he did not know what to do next. When a man falls to the ground it means that his strength has given out; the strain has been more than he was able to bear, and he is forced to show his weakness. For Christ to have endured the scourging was sign of strength – was perhaps grounds for believing that he might yet surmount his difficulties and outmatch his enemies – but to have been seen falling was the sign that he was done for, that he had given in. Like the rest of men he was weak after all, and there were limits beyond which even he could not go. So it must have seemed to those who watched.

Thus if we are to resemble Christ we should expect to resemble him in failure. Failure is not our punishment but our privilege. We are never nearer to Christ than when we are beaten by the weight of life. It is when we are flattened and helpless that we can trust not in our power any more but in the power of God. When I am weak, then am I strong – because at last I can draw upon the source of strength which is God. God expresses himself in the helplessness of man: it is the Father's prerogative to come to the rescue of his children. If failure had no other value than that of making us childlike it would justify itself, but in fact its good effects can be seen in every aspect of the spiritual life. It teaches humility, compassion, and the need for perseverance, hope, faith, and a spirit of penance. Failure opens the door to the graces which follow upon the nights of the soul. The nights of the soul are, in fact, little else than an awareness of failure.

It is only when we have failed, uniting our frustrations with the frustrations of Christ, that we come to see the overall pattern of the gospel. The sermon on the mount is at last felt to be the only possible answer to the problems of man. The cross not only reconcilable but right – necessary and right. The Passion, because it is life, is a matter of falling and being dragged up again. Our own story and Christ's are seen to have this unexpected affinity of weakness and renewal, repeated until the final revelation of grace.

And in the meantime? What do we make out of our falls, of the occasions when we are blocked, of the enterprises which help such promise but which have come to nothing? Even those collapses for which we are manifestly to blame – even our sins – can be turned to good account. There is nothing so bad that it cannot be taken up by grace and made into a potential good. If the knowledge of our moral failures can become material for compunction, dependence of God, charity towards those who have been tempted and who have fallen in some way, then certainly the frustrations to which we are liable in the unfolding of events must readily admit of supernaturalization.

Tuesday, March 14

FORGIVENESS

From Scott Hoezee on the *Center for Excellence in Preaching* website

Matthew 18 reminds us of a core Christian conviction: Forgiveness is something we live, something we embody, every moment. But that only stands to reason. After all, the very foundation on which our identity as Christians is built is on nothing less than the death and resurrection of Jesus and the flood of gracious forgiveness which that grand sacrifice unleashed.

“Forgiven” is who and what we just *are*. Forgiveness is not a tool you need just once in a while. Forgiveness is not like that Phillips screwdriver that you keep out in the garage and that you fetch now and then when a kitchen cabinet is loose (and when a regular flat-head screwdriver won’t work). Forgiveness is not a specialty tool to be utilized occasionally.

Forgiveness is more like the clothes on your back. You don’t generally walk around the house naked and you surely never leave the house without some kind of attire covering you. Forgiveness is more like that: it goes with you, accompanies you, and is needed by you everywhere you go.

So what does this imply?

For one thing it implies that each and every one of us needs to *be* forgiven by God, and by others, every day. We need to *be* forgiven about as often, if not more often, as we need to eat. True, most days we are not guilty of anything huge. Most days we are not carrying around with us the burden of having committed adultery, of having embezzled money from our company, or of having been convicted of drunk driving. But there are always a slew of smaller sins, lapses, and faults. There are always those dark thoughts we’re glad no one else can see.

Seeing forgiveness as every much a daily matter as eating and drinking puts each of us into perspective. As Lewis B. Smedes once put it in a burst of alliteration: Forgiveness Fits Faulty Folks. The more keenly aware you are of your getting that gift every day, the more inclined you will be to distribute it to those who are in need of a healing, restorative word from *you*.

Someone once said that the scariest word in the entire New Testament is that tiny little word “as” in the Lord’s Prayer: “Forgive us our sins **as** we forgive those who sin against us.” That vital connection between God’s abiding forgiveness of us and of our in turn forgiving others tells us that we must forgive. It’s the family style for the family of God and it starts with the Father and goes on down from there. This is not some weird demand on God’s part, however. This is not some hoop we must jump through to earn our salvation or to perform like some trained dog just because God enjoys watching us do tricks. No, the reason for the connection between God’s forgiving us and our forgiving others is because of the sheer *power* of God’s forgiveness. It is so great that it simply *must and will* change us.

The reason God expects us to forgive as a result of our being forgiven is the same reason you can expect to be wet after diving into a lake: water is wet and when you immerse yourself in it, *you* get wet. So also with forgiving grace: grace is magnetic and beautiful. When God immerses you in grace and saves your life eternally by it, you will be dripping with grace yourself. You will be full of grace and truth and so spread it to others. God forgives us daily. We forgive others daily. Forgiveness is our lifestyle. It’s our habit.

Wednesday, March 15

SAYINGS OF ABBA ARSENIUS

From *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

Arsenius was born in Rome about 360. A well-educated man, of senatorial rank, he was appointed by the Emperor Theodosius as tutor to the princes Arcadius and Honorius. He left the palace in 394 and sailed secretly to Alexandria. From there he went to Scetis and placed himself under the guidance of Abba John the Dwarf. He became an anchorite near Petra in Scetis. He was renowned for his austerity and silence. After the second devastation of Scetis in 434 he went to the mountain of Troe where he died in 449. It was said of Arsenius that, just as none in the palace had worn more splendid garments than he, when he lived there, so no one in the Church wore such poor clothing.

1. The alphabet of this peasant

Someone said to blessed Arsenius, 'How is it that we, with all our education and our wide knowledge get nowhere, while these Egyptian peasants acquire so many virtues?' Abba Arsenius said to him, 'We indeed get nothing from our secular education, but these Egyptian peasants acquire the virtues by hard work.' One day Abba Arsenius consulted an old Egyptian monk about his own thoughts. Someone noticed this and said to him, 'Abba Arsenius, how is it that you with such a good Latin and Greek education ask this peasant about your thoughts?' He replied, 'I have indeed been taught Latin and Greek, but I do not know even the alphabet of this peasant.'

2. Only do not leave your cell

Someone said to Abba Arsenius, 'My thoughts trouble me, saying, "You can neither fast nor work; at least go and visit the sick, for that is also charity."' But the old man, recognising the suggestions of the demons, said to him, 'Go, eat, drink, sleep, do no work, only do not leave your cell.' For he knew that steadfastness in the cell keeps a monk in the right way.

3. The dried figs

The old man used to tell how one day someone handed round a few dried figs in Scetis. Because they were not worth anything, no one took any to Abba Arsenius in order not to offend him. Learning of it, the old man did not come to the liturgical office saying, 'You have cast me out by not giving me a share of the blessing which God had given the brethren and which I was not worthy to receive.' Everyone heard of this and was edified at the old man's humility. Then the priest went to take him the small dried figs and brought him to the liturgical office with joy.

4. Thanksgiving

Abba Daniel used to tell how when Abba Arsenius learned that all the varieties of fruit were ripe he would say, 'Bring me some.' He would taste a very little of each, just once, giving thanks to God. Once at Scetis Abba Arsenius was ill and he was without even a scrap of linen. As he had nothing with which to buy any, he received some through another's charity and he said, 'I give you thanks, Lord, for having considered me worthy to receive this charity in your name.'

5. According to a man's capacity

Abba Mark asked Abba Arsenius 'Is it good to have nothing extra in the cell? I know a brother who had some vegetables and he has pulled them up.' Abba Arsenius replied, 'Undoubtedly that is good but it must be done according to a man's capacity. For if he does not have the strength for such a practice he will soon plant others.'

Thursday, March 16

DISCIPLINE AND THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

From *Show Me the Way* by Henri Nouwen

The spiritual life is a gift. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit, who lifts us up into the kingdom of God's love. But to say that being lifted up to the kingdom of love is a divine gift does not mean that we wait passively until the gift is offered to us. Jesus tells us to set our hearts on the kingdom. Setting our hearts on something involves not only serious aspiration but also strong determination. A spiritual life requires human effort. The forces that keep pulling us back into a worry-filled life are far from easy to overcome.

"How hard it is," Jesus exclaims, "... to enter the kingdom of God!" And to convince us of the need for hard work, he says, "If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me."

Here we touch the question of discipline in the spiritual life. A spiritual life without discipline is impossible. Discipline is the other side of discipleship. The practice of a spiritual discipline makes us even more sensitive to the small, gentle voice of God. The prophet Elijah did not encounter God in the mighty wind or in the earthquake or in the fire, but in the small voice. Through the practice of a spiritual discipline we become attentive to that small voice and willing to respond when we hear it.

From all that I said about our worried, over-filled lives, it is clear that we are usually surrounded by so much inner and outer noise that it is hard to truly hear our God when he is speaking to us. We have often become deaf, unable to know when God calls us and unable to understand in which direction he calls us. Thus our lives have become absurd. In the word *absurd* we find the Latin word *surdus*, which means "deaf." A spiritual life requires discipline because we need to learn to listen to God, who constantly speaks but whom we seldom hear. When, however, we learn to listen, our lives become obedient lives. The word *obedient* comes from the Latin word *audire*, which means "listening." A spiritual discipline is necessary in order to move slowly from an absurd to an obedient life, from a life filled with noisy worries to a life in which there is some free inner space where we can listen to the Father, always attentive to his voice, always alert for his directions. Jesus was "all ear." That is true prayer: being all ear for God. The core of all prayer is indeed listening, obediently standing in the presence of God.

A spiritual discipline, therefore, is the concentrated effort to create some inner and outer space in our lives, where this obedience can be practiced. Through a spiritual discipline we prevent the world from filling our lives to such an extent that there is no place left to listen. A spiritual discipline sets us free to pray or, to say it better, allows the Spirit of God to pray in us.

Friday, March 17

The Breastplate of St. Patrick

I arise today
Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the
Trinity,
Through belief in the Threeness,
Through confession of the Oneness
of the Creator of creation.

I arise today
Through the strength of Christ's birth with His
baptism,
Through the strength of His crucifixion with His
burial,
Through the strength of His resurrection with His
ascension,
Through the strength of His descent for the
judgment of doom.

I arise today
Through the strength of the love of cherubim,
In the obedience of angels,
In the service of archangels,
In the hope of resurrection to meet with reward,
In the prayers of patriarchs,
In the predictions of prophets,
In the preaching of apostles,
In the faith of confessors,
In the innocence of holy virgins,
In the deeds of righteous men.

I arise today, through
The strength of heaven,
The light of the sun,
The radiance of the moon,
The splendor of fire,
The speed of lightning,
The swiftness of wind,
The depth of the sea,
The stability of the earth,
The firmness of rock.

I arise today, through
God's strength to pilot me,
God's might to uphold me,
God's wisdom to guide me,
God's eye to look before me,
God's ear to hear me,
God's word to speak for me,

God's hand to guard me,
God's shield to protect me,
God's host to save me
From snares of devils,
From temptation of vices,
From everyone who shall wish me ill,
afar and near.

I summon today
All these powers between me and those evils,
Against every cruel and merciless power
that may oppose my body and soul,
Against incantations of false prophets,
Against black laws of pagandom,
Against false laws of heretics,
Against craft of idolatry,
Against spells of witches and smiths and wizards,
Against every knowledge that corrupts man's body
and soul;
Christ to shield me today
Against poison, against burning,
Against drowning, against wounding,
So that there may come to me an abundance of
reward.

Christ with me,
Christ before me,
Christ behind me,
Christ in me,
Christ beneath me,
Christ above me,
Christ on my right,
Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down,
Christ when I sit down,
Christ when I arise,
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.

I arise today
Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the
Trinity,
Through belief in the Threeness,
Through confession of the Oneness
of the Creator of creation.

Saturday, March 18

GOD'S ENTRY INTO OUR HEARTS

From the Essential Writings of Ruth Burrows

God is always working to bring us to an awareness and acceptance of our poverty, which is the essential condition of our being able to receive him, and the petty frustrations, the restrictions, humiliations, the occasions when we are made to feel poignantly and distressingly hedged around, not in control of the world, not even in control of that tiny corner of it we are supposed to call our own, are his chosen channel into the soul. It is the one who has learned to bow his head, to accept the yoke, who knows what freedom is. There is so much that we must take whether we like it or not; what I am urging is a wholehearted acceptance, a positive appreciation and choosing of this bitter ingredient of life.

No one claims that of itself suffering purifies, but suffering patiently and bravely borne plays an indispensable role in human development. God offers himself to us at every moment, in our joys as well as in our sorrows, nevertheless there is a sense in which he offers himself more intimately in suffering. It is because in difficulty and suffering our hearts can be more open to receive him. We are painfully aware of our limitations and our need. Suffering creates a loneliness which others cannot penetrate; our sense of emptiness brings the realization that we can find no answer to the mystery of ourselves in this world. We are more likely to feel the need of a savior and open our hearts to him.

Long drawn out suffering that carries with it no element of self-satisfaction can be a special channel of God's entry into our hearts. Living for a long time with a difficult person, which demands a constant effort to be loving and understanding; temperamental difficulties which dog our footsteps, overshadowing us even on our brightest days; perseverance in a dull, demanding job, not merely for the sake of it but because duty demands. Then the still deeper suffering of seeing those we love in pain; lingering illness; anxiety about those we love; anxiety about our means of livelihood, fear of losing our job; bereavement which leaves an aching void for the rest of life. It is not the spectacular occasion which really costs, the sort of thing that suddenly lifts out of routine and gives us the opportunity for splendid courage. It is amazing to what heroic heights ordinary people attain in time of crisis. But does this tell us much about the moral stamina of those involved? People who show up splendidly in crises can prove self-centered and childish in the ordinary rough and tumble of life. If we are looking for real heroism, the sort of heroism Jesus displayed, then we are likely to find it in some very ordinary man or woman, getting on with the job of living, totally unaware that they are doing anything remarkable, and completely without pretension.