

THE FOURTH WEEK IN LENT

10-16 March 2024

Sun. **THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT (*Laetare Sunday*)**

March 10 **REJOICE , JERUSALEM**

From the Angelus Message of Pope Francis, 4th Sunday of Lent, 14 March 2021

Mon. **Monday of the Fourth Week of Lent**

11 **LORD, GRANT US TRUSTING FAITH**

A Reflection adapted from a text by Anselm Romb

Tues. **Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Lent**

12 **HOW THE LORD LEADS US TO HEALING**

A Reflection excerpted from a homily by St. Bede the Venerable

Wed. **Wednesday of the Fourth Week of Lent**

13 **THE DAILY DEMAND OF BELIEVING**

A teaching by Symeon the New Theologian

Thurs. **Thursday of the Fourth Week of Lent**

14 **THE FOLLOWING OF CHRIST IN SPIRIT**

Extracted from [The Imitation of Christ](#) by Thomas a Kempis

Fri. **Friday of the Fourth Week of Lent**

15 **THE GIFT OF WAITING FOR GOD**

A reflection developed from [The Virtue of Patience](#) by St. Cyprian

Sat. **Saturday of the Fourth Week of Lent**

16 **JOHN PAUL 2 AND THE NEW EVANGELIZATION**

from a lecture at Fordham University in 1991 by Avery Cardinal Dulles

Sunday

REJOICE , JERUSALEM

From the Angelus Message of Pope Francis, 4th Sunday of Lent, 14 March 2021

On this fourth Sunday of Lent, the Eucharistic liturgy begins with this invitation: “Rejoice, Jerusalem...”. (cf. Is 66:10). What is the reason for this joy? In the middle of Lent, what is the reason for this joy? Today’s Gospel tells us: God “so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (Jn 3:16). This joyful message is the heart of the Christian faith: God’s love found its summit in the gift of his Son to a weak and sinful humanity. He gave his Son to us, to all of us.

This is what appears in the nocturnal dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus, a part of which is described in the same Gospel passage (cf. Jn 3:14-21). Nicodemus, like every member of the people of Israel, awaited the Messiah, identifying him as a strong man who would judge the world with power. Instead, Jesus challenges this expectation by presenting himself in three forms: the Son of man exalted on the cross; the Son of God sent into the world for salvation; and that of the light that distinguishes those who follow the truth from those who follow lies. Let us take a look at these three aspects: Son of man, Son of God, and light.

Jesus presents himself first of all as the Son of man (vv. 14-15). The text alludes to the account of the bronze serpent (cf. Num 21:4-9), which, by God’s will, was mounted by Moses in the desert when the people were attacked by poisonous snakes; whoever had been bitten and looked at the bronze serpent was healed. Similarly, Jesus was lifted up on the cross and those who believe in him are healed of sin and live.

The second aspect is that of the Son of God (Jn 3:16-18). God the Father loves humanity to the point of “giving” his Son: he gave him in the Incarnation and he gave him in handing him over to death. The purpose of God’s gift is the eternal life of every person: in fact, God sends his Son into the world not to condemn it, but so that the world that it might be saved through Jesus. Jesus’ mission is a mission of salvation, of salvation for everyone.

The third name that Jesus gives himself is “light” (vv. 19-21). The Gospel says: “The light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light” (v. 19). The coming of Jesus into the world leads to a choice: whoever chooses darkness will face a judgment of condemnation; whoever chooses light will have a judgment of salvation. The judgment is always the consequence of the free choice of each person: whoever practices evil seeks the darkness; evil always hides, it covers itself. Whoever seeks the truth, that is, who practices what is good, comes to the light, illuminates the paths of life. Whoever walks in the light, whoever approaches the light, cannot but do good works. The light leads us to do good works. This is what we are called to do with greater dedication during Lent: to welcome the light into our conscience, to open our hearts to God’s infinite love, to his mercy full of tenderness and goodness, to his forgiveness. Do not forget that God always forgives, always, if we humbly ask for forgiveness. It is enough just to ask for forgiveness, and he forgives. In this way, we will find true joy and will be able to rejoice in God’s forgiveness, which regenerates and gives life.

May Mary Most Holy help us not to be afraid to let ourselves be “thrown into crisis” by Jesus. It is a healthy crisis, for our healing: so that our joy may be full.

Monday

LORD, GRANT US TRUSTING FAITH

A Reflection adapted from a text by Anselm Romb

Do you take Isaiah's prophecies literally or do you think of them as just hyperbolic ways of calling us to trust in God's love? "Lo, I am about to create a new heaven and a new earth..". What will it be like? It appears that no infant will die without growing up and adults who die without reaching 100 will be thought accursed. People will live at peace in their homes and eat the produce they raise because there will be no war to destroy homes and exile people and make their lives miserable. It will be a kind of paradise.

Some very optimistic people think that the behavioral and natural sciences combined with technology will bring in a Golden Age. Our new ability to engineer the genetic codes and manipulate biological processes and the endless energy from fusion power will, they think, make a life good physically while psychologists heal our emotional and mental wounds so we can love one another and eliminate crime, and so on. Unfortunately, these powers seem to be taking us farther from paradise rather than bringing us closer to it.

In the Gospel we hear about a royal official, in other Gospels said to be a centurion, whose son is mortally ill. The man has come a good distance to ask Jesus to heal his son. Jesus simply tells him: "Go home. Your son is well." He believes Jesus! He turns around and begins the journey home believing that all is as Jesus said.

What has been missing in our planning for an earthly paradise is the invitation to Jesus to become part of our lives. The royal official didn't make fancy requests or construct arguments. He only pleaded for the life and health of his child. He sought out Jesus and asked him to become part of his life by sharing his concern for the sick child. When Jesus did, the man accepted the fact and headed home. He was met on the road and told that his child was well.

When we become concerned about the sick state of our world to whom do we turn? If we turn to Jesus what is our response when he tells us: I'm taking care of it. It will all be well. Do we take him literally or do we interpret him like many do Isaiah's prophecies, as hyperbole? The royal official whose story we heard took Jesus' statement literally and went back to his home and work sure that he would find all was well.

We believe that Isaiah prophesied in the name of God and that what he says will prove true—even if we're not sure just how to understand the process by which God will set things right, or the part we have to play in it. God has given us our orders: "Go about the work of your vocation. I have given it to you. Live your work in faith and do it in compassion and love. I will deal with what is too great for you." Is that what we're doing? We aren't to stop caring but only to stop trying. We believe that Isaiah prophesied in the name of God and that what he says will prove true—even if we're not sure just how to understand the process by which God will set things right, or the part we have to play in it. God has given us our orders: "Go about the work of your vocation. I have given it to you. Live your work in faith and do it in compassion and love. I will deal with what is too great for you." Is that what we're doing? We aren't to stop caring but only to stop trying to make good things happen in our human way rather than relying on God.

Tuesday

HOW THE LORD LEADS US TO HEALING

A Reflection excerpted from a homily by St. Bede the Venerable

Jesus had come to the pool named Probatica, and he saw there a person who had been sick for 38 years. The pool had five porticoes, reminding one of the five books of the Torah and so of the Law of Moses intended to protect people from sinning. He had not been protected. It was likely also a pool where priests washed sacrificial offerings before burning them on the altar. In such a holy place of cleansing, it was believed, that an angel came at times to stir the water and the first to enter after that stirring would be healed. But all the ill lying in the porticoes had been unable to get healed, just as they had failed to find the strength to avoid sin. They recognized their sin and Jesus had come to give the grace of forgiveness and inner healing. This applies to us as well.

Jesus came to one who had lain for 38 years unable to get the help needed to enter the waters and find healing. The number 38 is two short of 40, which is the symbol for an entire lifetime, tells us how long it felt. How many of us are in this situation? Listen to the Lord, *"Get up, take your pallet and leave."* If one has been waiting so long then it is time to listen to the Lord and do penance and find healing. What is the cure? One must help others as one needs others' help. No one had helped that poor man but now Jesus makes him able to help others. In doing this all the sins of his lifetime will be gradually healed.

Jesus' words mean we should renew our love for God. Love God with all your heart and soul and strength, and so make daily strides by good works. Never desert brothers or sisters in faith but try to help them toward the love of God and neighbor. *"Take up your pallet"* indicates that we should leave behind earlier sins and come to the aid of those who need our help. Be filled with hope for the coming of the glory of our Great God.

Yet some didn't help but only criticized. It was the Sabbath and they thought the healed one shouldn't "carry his pallet" on that day. They couldn't see a spiritual way of keeping the Law. By what he did the Lord suggested that whoever has been wasting away from a long-lasting habit of sin should take up the love of God and of neighbor. If you have suffered in this way, the gift of the Holy Spirit will enable you to rise up, especially on the Sabbath. Sin is what is most forbidden on the Sabbath; virtue is a path toward the healing of sinful ways.

Notice that later the Lord came into the Temple and saw the person who had been healed. Listen to his words, *"Look, you are healed! Sin no more lest something worse happen to you."* He is not threatening or suggesting his illness was punishment for sin; Jesus points out that there are much worse things than physical infirmity. Sin leads to them. Do not torment yourself out of fear that every physical infirmity convicts you of sin. The Lord has forgiven your sin. He asks only that you cease to be paralyzed and unable to love God and neighbor. Do that and indeed you will live.

Wednesday

THE DAILY DEMAND OF BELIEVING

A teaching by Symeon the New Theologian

Many often say: If only we had lived in the days of the apostles and been counted worthy to gaze upon Christ as they did, we should have become holy like them. Such people do not realize that the Christ who spoke then and the Christ who speaks now, throughout the whole world, is one and the same Christ. If he were not the same then and now, God in every respect, in his operations as in the sacraments, how would it be seen that the Father is always in the Son and the Son in the Father, according to the words Christ himself spoke through the Spirit: "My Father is still working and so am I"?

No doubt someone will say that merely to hear his words now and to be taught about him and his kingdom is not the same thing as to have seen him then in the body. I answer that indeed the position now is not the same as it was then, but that our situation now, in the present day, is very much better. It leads us more easily to a deeper faith and conviction than seeing and hearing him in the flesh would have done.

Then he appeared to the uncomprehending people of Nazareth as a man of lowly station. Now he is proclaimed to us as true God. Then he associated with tax collectors and sinners and ate with them. Now he is seated at the right hand of God the Father and is never in any way separated from Him. Now we are firmly persuaded that it is he who feeds the entire world, and we declare—at least if we are believers—that without Him nothing came into being. Then even the lowliest held him in contempt, saying: "Isn't this the son of Mary and of Joseph the carpenter?" Now kings and rulers worship him as Son of the True God, and himself as True God. Now he has glorified, and continues to glorify, those who worship him in spirit and in truth—although he often punishes them when they sin.

Now he transforms us, more than could all the nations under heaven, from clay into iron. Then he was thought to be mortal and corruptible like the rest of humankind, for he was no different in appearance from others. The formless and invisible God, without change or alteration, assumed a human form and showed himself a normal human being. He ate, he drank, he slept, he sweated, and he grew weary; he did everything other people do except that he did not sin. So for anyone to recognize him and to believe that he was the God, who made heaven and earth and everything in them, that was very exceptional.

It is certain that anyone who now hears Christ cries out daily through the Holy Gospels to proclaim the will of his blessed Father, but does not obey him with fear and trembling and keep his commandments—such a person might have refused to believe in him then. If that person had been present and seen him and heard him teach, there is indeed reason to fear that he would have regarded Christ not as true God but as an enemy of God. Indeed, we are blessed! Let us walk daily in this blessing and so in faith.

Thursday

THE FOLLOWING OF CHRIST IN SPIRIT

Extracted from The Imitation of Christ by Thomas a Kempis

“One who follows me”, says Christ our Savior, *“doesn’t walk in darkness but has the light of life”*. These are the words of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are being admonished to follow his teachings and his manner of living. If we would truly be enlightened and delivered from all blindness of heart we must do this.

Let us all the fervor of our hearts be from now on directed to meditating on the life of Christ. His holy teachings are of more strength and helpfulness than the words of all the angels and saints together. Whoever, through grace, has the inner openness of soul for true contemplation of the Gospel of Christ will find in these words a hidden manna.

It often seems that people who hear the Gospel and do no more find little sweetness in what they hear. The reason is that they don’t listen with the spirit of Christ. Do you desire to have a right understanding of Scripture, especially of the Gospels? Then you must dedicate yourself to conforming your life as much as you can to Christ’s life.

What good will it be for anyone to reason about lofty and hidden mysteries, like that of the Trinity, if that person lacks humility? Such a one is displeasing the Holy Trinity rather than being drawn near. In very truth, such a path is useless. You can’t make yourself holy by deeply questioning and reasoning. It is a good life that makes one righteous and holy and beloved of God. I would rather feel compunction of heart for my sins than merely know the correct definition of compunction.

If you know all the books of the Bible by memory, and if you know all the sayings of the philosophers by heart, what good can this do you unless you receive grace and charity? Except for loving God and serving God, there is nothing but emptiness in the world. Realizing this is the noblest and most excellent wisdom any creature can have. By putting the world down to its true value, one draws nearer and nearer to the Kingdom of Heaven.

It is a very empty thing to labor inordinately for worldly wealth, which will perish in no long time. It is similarly empty to covet honor or any out-of-order pleasure or merely fleshly delights. Do this in the present life and you will be bitterly punished. It is a supreme vanity to desire a long life while caring little about living a good life. You are paying attention to present things rather than what is coming. You are loving what will shortly be gone.

Dedicate yourself to withdrawing your love from what is merely visible and turning it to the invisible realities. Those who follow only what they sense hurt themselves and lose the grace of God. The eye is not satisfied or pleased just by seeing, nor is the ear satisfied by mere hearing. That is proverbial wisdom and to be kept always in your mind. True satisfaction is found only in love for God.

Friday

THE GIFT OF WAITING FOR GOD

A reflection developed from The Virtue of Patience by St. Cyprian

Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, said that he had come to earth to do the Heavenly Father's will. Among the virtues that best revealed his divine majesty was that of waiting upon the Father's will. We call it "patience" or "endurance". We human beings have to wait patiently for the times and circumstances that the Heavenly Father has appointed to come, though we find it hard not to have him grant our petitions immediately. The Eternal Son became human and bore with these as well as all the other frustrating and difficult aspects of being human.

Think of how Christ bore reviling and reproach, insult and mockery, and even crucifixion and the shedding of his blood, and all for offenses he was not guilty of committing. Tormentors spit in his face and scourged him and denied the truth of almost all he had taught. He, the innocent one, the just one, was treated as an evil-doer, was slandered, and treated as of no worth because he would not defend himself immediately, as would most humans if they could. In short, he acted as though he were powerless and helpless because that is what human beings are like.

Every act that Jesus performed, from the moment of his appearing among us, bore the stamp of human endurance and patience, as though he were not capable of putting to confusion and defeating those who wronged him. He did not disdain the human condition but showed all human beings that it is possible to please and trust God utterly no matter what may happen to one or to that one loves. He saved us by doing what the Heavenly Father asks all of us to do. It is, after all, an especially wonderful way to show one's utter dependence upon God. It is a particularly marvelous way of entrusting oneself and one's future to the loving providence of God.

Jesus fasted for forty days precisely to show that we live primarily by the Word of God and have it most richly when it seems human to be wholly absent. He went to John the Baptist to show us all how to turn wholly to God and how to renounce everything that doesn't turn us to God from the depths of our hearts. When he had to contend with the devil he did it with mere words, as we humans have to do. And in all these things he conquered. Thus, most of all, he showed us the path to victory in all things.

Christ didn't treat his disciples as masters treat their slaves but was kind and gentle, and even declared us his friends. He showed how we should deal with both peers and those of lesser station. He bore with people like Judas, even though he knew Judas would betray him, and with a kiss. He gave us a wonderful example of how to wait upon the times determined by our God and to do it with love. We have only to follow his example.

Saturday

JOHN PAUL 2 AND THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

from a lecture at Fordham University in 1991 by Avery Cardinal Dulles

The majority of Catholics are not strongly inclined toward evangelization. The very term for them has a Protestant ring. Absorbed in the inner problems of the Church, and occasionally in issues of justice and peace, contemporary Catholics feel relatively little responsibility for spreading the faith. Even at times when Catholics were seeking converts, the thrust was not evangelical; the Gospel was hardly at the center.

Pope John Paul 2 has challenged these assumptions, building on the legacy of his predecessors, especially Paul IV. He places a particular emphasis on the evangelization of culture. Faith cannot take root, express itself, and grow unless it incarnates itself in cultural forms. In every culture, there are seeds of the Word that tend to bear fruit in harmony with the gospel. Whoever seeks to evangelize must understand the mentality and attitude of the modern world, to illuminate them from the perspective of the Gospel, and purify and elevate the sound elements in the light of Christian revelation. The missionaries of the past, the Pope reminds us, did much to raise the level of the arts, including music, dance and the theater. They rightly saw this as falling within their evangelizing mission. This is a very broad understanding of evangelization. The monk in the monastery is as much an evangelizer as the person working with poor in the barrios, as the composer working on a classical religious song.

John Paul is quite aware of the problems inherent in the modern means of communication and of the incapacity of mass media to take the place of direct contact between persons. But notwithstanding their limitations, the new media must be responsibly used in the service of truth, solidarity and peace, and thereby contributes to evangelization. The media has a wonderful power, John Paul teaches, to bring people together. All Christians should use the media to make the Gospel and its values more present in the world. Each Christian and each Christian community must find the appropriate way for them to do that.

All of this constitutes a remarkable shift in the Catholic tradition. For centuries evangelization has been a poor stepchild. Even when the term was used, evangelization was treated as a secondary matter, the special vocation of a few priests and religious. Today we seem to be witnessing the birth of a new Catholicism, which without loss of its institutional, sacramental, and social dimensions, is authentically evangelical. No Christian, no community is exempt from this responsibility. The Church is of crucial importance but it cannot be self-centered. The first and foremost priority for the Church is to proclaim the Good News concerning Jesus Christ as a joyful message to all the world. Pope John Paul 2 encourages each of us to find our way to do it.