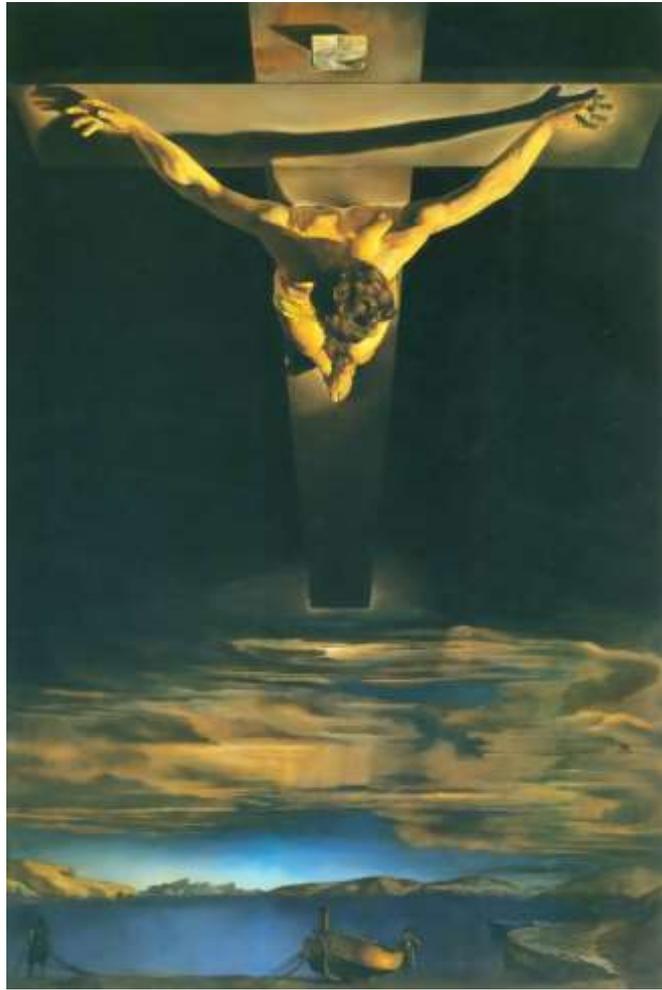


Christ the Saviour, Ealing



Spiritual Resources for Lent 2022

Week II

*Sunday 13th March -
Saturday 19th March 2022*

Lent 2022

The season of Lent offers an opportunity for us to journey together as a community, and we hope that the resources we offer each week will be of help as we explore our faith and our commitment to Christ and his Church. This year we began by reflecting on the nature of *The Journey*, and this week we are looking at the key Christian virtue of *Faith*. In subsequent weeks we will be reflecting on *Hope* and *Love*, and our concluding week will focus on *The Journey's End* before we move into the solemn days of Holy Week, leading us through Christ's Passion to the glories of the resurrection which we celebrate at Easter.

This year our resources are produced in conjunction with the parish of Christ the Saviour, Ealing. I'm grateful to colleagues for the considerable help given to make this weekly production possible, and pray that it may be a blessing to us all as we follow Our Lord through these holy days.

Fr Richard

Introduction to Lent

Lent is a season of forty days, not counting Sundays, which begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Saturday. The English word *Lent* comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *lencten*, which means *lengthen* and refers to the lengthening days of spring. In many other languages, the word used for this season refers to the 40-day length of the season (*cuaresma* in Spanish, *carême* in French, *quaresima* in Italian) or to the fasting that characterizes it (*Fastenzeit* in German, *fastan* in Swedish, *paasto* in Finnish).

Historically, Lent began as a period of fasting and preparation for baptism by converts and then became a time for penance by all Christians. The first Sunday of Lent describes Jesus' temptation by Satan; and the sixth Sunday (Palm Sunday), Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem and his subsequent passion and death. Note that the readings during Lent, until Palm Sunday, focus primarily on the meaning of baptism and discipleship, in continuity with the season's original purpose. Because Sundays are always little Easters, the penitential spirit of Lent is tempered with joyful expectation of the Resurrection.

Holy Week is the final week of Lent, beginning with Palm Sunday and concluding with Holy Saturday. It is during these days that the readings focus primarily on the last days and suffering and death of Jesus.

The Great Three Days – also called the Triduum or Pasch – from sunset Maundy Thursday to sunset Easter Day are the climax of Lent and of the whole Christian year and a bridge into the Easter Season. This holy season proclaims the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ's passion, death, and resurrection. During these days, the community journeys with Jesus from the upper room, to the cross, to the tomb, and to the garden. They should be seen as a great and single unified service beginning with the Mass of the Last Supper on Maundy Thursday and concluding with the services of Easter Day.

Second Sunday of Lent

March 13th

Each Sunday in Lent Fr Jonathan Aitken introduces one of the Penitential Psalms. This week he looks at Psalm 51.

Psalm 51 is the best known and the most powerful of the Penitential Psalms.

It tells the story of a King under pressure from the guilt of his terrible wickedness. Yet the voice of his conscience leads him towards a profound and penitent intimacy with God, which in turn leads to inner transformation.

The title of the psalm gives its historical background. At the height of his royal power King David looked out from the roof of his palace one spring evening and saw a beautiful woman called Bathsheba bathing on her roof. David lusted after her and committed adultery with her. Wanting to steal her permanently, David arranged for her husband, Uriah the Hittite, to be sent into the most dangerous part of a battle against the Ammonites. As intended, Uriah was killed and David was free to marry Bathsheba. Only when Nathan the prophet was sent by God to confront the newly wedded king did David recognise his guilt, confess his sin and plead for mercy.

Although David's murder of Uriah was appalling, and although the surrounding sins of adultery, theft and conspiracy were hardly private wrongs, nevertheless the psalm goes to the heart of the matter when it suggests that the worst aspect of the king's evil-doing was the magnitude of his sin against God. Against you, you only, have I sinned (verse 4).

David had broken the last five of the ten commandments. He knew he was under God's judgement and that he needed God's mercy. He also recognised that his wickedness is called 'original sin' - the inherently sinful nature, which all human beings are born with and which makes us all potential rebels against God. The rather puzzling words; Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from time my mother conceived me (verse 5), do not of course mean that the beautiful processes of conception and birth are sinful. They are a reference to the universal tendency of humanity towards sinfulness or original sin.

Many people remain, throughout their lives, in a state of denial about their own sinfulness. Perhaps we all need a wake-up call to alert us to this fault line in the human character. Feeling conscience-stricken about a serious sin is one way of hearing the wake-up call from God.

David's response was to pray for pardon and purification. He asked to be cleansed, washed and to have his iniquity blotted out (verses 7-8). Then he prayed; Create in me a pure heart O God (verse 10). He wanted the new beginning that only his creator could give him. He pleaded for spiritual renewal making the first reference in the Old Testament to the power of the Holy Spirit (verse 12) several centuries before it was fully revealed in the New Testament.

Up to this point, the tone of the psalm is remorseful and penitential. To this day it is sung to doleful chants in most churches. Yet paradoxically the psalm is also one of gladness and rejoicing (verse 8). Before we reach the end we enter the realm of joy (verse 12), praise (verse 15), and the potential happiness of serving God as a teacher (verse 13).

The greatness of this psalm lies in the beautiful language of penitence with which it tracks David's spiritual journey from the deep mineshaft of guilt to the high mountain of salvation. Many of the Davidic poems devote verses to blaming enemies or rivals. This one is unique in its introspective intimacy before God and in its haunting words of unconditional remorse.

As 21st century readers of the psalm we can discern its voice of inner conscience reaching out in prayer to God who responds by giving inner transformation to the broken and contrite heart (verse 17). Those who feel under pressure from the burden of their own guilt are recommended to make a similar following in King David's footsteps.

Prayer

Jesus said:

Come to me all who labour and are heavy laden,
and I will give you rest.

We are drawn.

We come with the dust of the earth upon our hands,
carrying the squalor,
the potential and the glory of the world we share.

We come together to make this offering to our Father,
to receive the body and blood of the Son,
to be taken and transformed in the fire of the Spirit;
And so to join in creating life anew.

Tense and hasty,
we have come to be still before God;
Possessing joy and light,
to drink the cup of Gethsemane;
Or wandering in exile,
to grasp the life of the kingdom:
Divided and scattered we are all made one body;
Broken and torn we receive our true selves.

We are accepted.

Teach us, O Lord, stillness and confident peace
In your perfect will.
Deep calm of soul, and content
In what you will do with these lives you have given.
Teach us to wait and be still,
To rest in yourself,
To hush this clamorous anxiety,
To lay in your arms all this wealth you have given.

After J.S. Hoyland

II - Faith

Monday March 14th

Reading

So, we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord – for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So, whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.

2 Corinthians 5.6-9

Introduction to Week II : Faith

A wise priest once said to that the opposite of faith in God is not doubt but indifference. He meant that periods of doubt are a natural part of our journey with God. At times, it may even be that we need to doubt – that we need to feel that God is far away – in order to grow as Christians.

An example might help: if we are ruthlessly ambitious at work, we might try to bring that same ambition to our faith. We might want our prayers to be answered immediately; we might want to be part of a parish that is outwardly successful; we might want to be a ‘successful Christian.’ Now, out of love for us, God might gently pull down this idol-success – until it falls over! We would lose our bearings and instead of feeling ‘successful’ in our faith, we might become uncertain and tentative. In this case, our doubts become part of our journey of faith – they are the route that God takes to bring us closer to Christ. In time, we will find that we can leave behind our need to be successful, and a sense of God’s presence will return.

When we have doubts, it’s very important to be honest with ourselves, and face the doubts head on. We need to bring our doubts to God, and tell God that we are finding it hard to believe. You may find that attending Mass helps you particularly in times of doubt. The actions of kneeling, standing for the Gospel, singing hymns, and the prayers of the congregation, all help to root us physically in the faith.

Now if our doubts come from anger at God, if we are withholding our trust because we are hot with fury at God, it’s even more important to tell God how we feel. Holy Scripture is full of people who are angry and full of doubt. Think of Mary and Martha blaming Jesus for being late, ‘If you had been on time, Lazarus would not have died.’ Or the disciples sullenly complaining, ‘What’s the point in going back out to sea if we have been fishing ALL DAY LONG and caught nothing?’

Again, the way through doubt caused by our anger is simply to be honest with God, to let God have the full force of our fury and spite. Rant away to God! When we have nothing more to say, listen in silence to the Lord. God can bear our anger, and we can trust that however God responds is best for us. Perhaps God will say nothing immediately, but allow our anger gradually to fade away; perhaps we will have a sense of healing and acceptance; perhaps we will find our anger growing again, and we need to bring it back into our prayer.

If we want our faith to deepen this Lent, our challenge is to be as honest as we can with the Lord.

Tuesday March 15th

Reading

Jesus answered them, 'Have faith in God. Truly I tell you, if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea', and if you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you. So, I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

St Mark 11. 22-24

Reflection

Not knowing or uncertainty is a kind of darkness that many people find unbearable. Those who demand certitude out of life will insist on it even if it doesn't fit the facts. Logic and truth have nothing to do with it. If you require certitude, you will surround yourself with your own conclusions and dismiss or ignore any evidence to the contrary.

The very meaning of faith stands in stark contrast to this mindset. We have to live in exquisite, terrible humility before reality. In this space, God gives us a spirit of questing, a desire for understanding. In some ways it is like learning to 'see in the dark.' We can't be certain of what's in front of us, but with some time and patience, our eyes adjust, and we can make the next right move.

The Gospel doesn't promise us complete clarity. If God wanted us to have irrefutable proof, the incarnation of Jesus would have been delayed until technology and science could confirm it.

Scriptures do not offer rational certitude. They offer us something much better, an entirely different way of knowing: an intimate relationship, a dark journey, a path where we must discover for ourselves that grace, love, mercy, and forgiveness are absolutely necessary for survival in an uncertain world. You only need enough clarity to know how to live without certitude! Yes, we really are saved by faith. People who live in this way never stop growing, are not easily defeated, are wise and compassionate, and frankly, are fun to live with. They have a quiet and confident joy. Infantile religion insists on certainty every step of the way and thus is not very happy.

Richard Rohr, American Franciscan priest (b 1943)

Prayer

Almighty God,
whose love has called us from the beginning of time,
and who in Christ brought light and life to a dark and weary world:
Shed upon us the light of your love,
that our understanding may be deepened,
our faith strengthened,
and our lives transformed
by the redeeming presence of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Wednesday March 16th

Reading

When they came to the crowd, a man came to Jesus, knelt before him, and said, 'Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic, and he suffers terribly; he often falls into the fire and often into the water. And I brought him to your disciples, but they could not cure him.' Jesus answered, 'You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him here to me.' And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and the boy was cured instantly. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, 'Why could we not cast it out?' He said to them, 'Because of your little faith. For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there', and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.'

St Matthew 17. 14-20

Reflection

There's a reason we refer to 'leaps of faith' - because the decision to consent to any notion of divinity is a mighty jump from the rational over to the unknowable, and I don't care how diligently scholars of every religion will try to sit you down with their stacks of books and prove to you through scripture that their faith is indeed rational; it isn't. If faith were rational, it wouldn't be - by definition - faith. Faith is belief in what you cannot see or prove or touch. Faith is walking face-first and full-speed into the dark. If we truly knew all the answers in advance as to the meaning of life and the nature of God and the destiny of our souls, our belief would not be a leap of faith and it would not be a courageous act of humanity; it would just be... a prudent insurance policy.

Elizabeth Gilbert, author of

Eat, Pray, Love: One Woman's Search for Everything Across Italy, India and Indonesia

Prayer

For behold, you were within me, and I outside; and I sought you outside
and in my ugliness fell upon those lovely things that you have made.
You were with me and I was not with you.
I was kept from you by those things,
yet had they not been in you,
they would not have been at all.
You called and cried to me and broke upon my deafness;
and you sent forth your light and shone upon me,
and chased away my blindness;
You breathed fragrance upon me,
and I drew in my breath and did not pant for you;
you touched me, and I have burned for your peace.

St Augustine of Hippo (354-430)

Thursday March 17th

Reading

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old – and Sarah herself was barren – because he considered him faithful who had promised.* Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, ‘as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.’

All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.

Hebrews 11.8-16

Reflection

The faith that is needed is not a faith that exists only in the mind, but a faith that has taken hold of the heart – the unshakeable conviction that God is, and that God loves, and that God can and will deliver us and see us through any trouble.

*Br. David Vryhof SSJE
The Cowley Fathers, Massachusetts*

Prayer

O thou, in whom all things live,
Who commandest us to seek thee and art ready to be found:
to know thee is life, to serve thee is freedom,
to praise thee is our souls' joy.
We bless thee and adore thee, we worship thee and glorify thee,
we give thanks to thee for thy great glory.
Maker and preserver of all things visible and invisible,
keep, we beseech thee,
the work of thine own hands, now and at all times;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

St Augustine of Hippo (354-430)

Friday March 18th

Reading

But what does it say? 'The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart', that is, the word of faith that we proclaim; because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. The scripture says, 'No one who believes in him will be put to shame.' For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

Romans 10. 8-13

Reflection

Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,
 Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
 From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning
 If I lacked anything.

'A guest,' I answered, 'worthy to be here':
 Love said, 'You shall be he.'
'I, the unkind, ungrateful? Ah, my dear,
 I cannot look on thee.'
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
 'Who made the eyes but I?'

'Truth, Lord; but I have marred them; let my shame
 Go where it doth deserve.'
'And know you not,' says Love, 'who bore the blame?'
 'My dear, then I will serve.'
'You must sit down,' says Love, 'and taste my meat.'
 So I did sit and eat.

George Herbert (1593-1633)
Anglican priest & poet

Prayer

Alone with none but thee, my God,
I journey on my way.
What need I fear when thou art near,
Oh king of night and day?
More safe am I within thy hand
Than if a host did round me stand.

St Columba (521-597)

Saturday March 19th

Reading

For through the law, I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Galatians 2. 19-20

Reflection

Where fear imprisons, faith liberates;
Where fear paralyzes, faith empowers;
Where fear disheartens, faith encourages;
Where fear sickens, faith heals;
Where fear makes useless, faith makes beautiful;
Where fear puts hopelessness at the heart of life,
faith opens the windows into life with God.

Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878-1969)
American pastor, founder of Riverside Church, New York

Prayer

O Lord my God,
Teach my heart this day where and how to see you,
Where and how to find you.
You have made me and remade me,
And you have bestowed on me
All the good things I possess,
And still I do not know you.
I have not yet done that
For which I was made.
Teach me to seek you,
For I cannot seek you
Unless you teach me,
Or find you
Unless you show yourself to me.
Let me seek you in my desire,
Let me desire you in my seeking.
Let me find you by loving you,
Let me love you when I find you.

St Anselm (1033-1109)
Archbishop of Canterbury, Benedictine monk,
philosopher & theologian