

Ash Wednesday: February 17, 2010

Scripture:

Rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to the Lord, your God. For gracious and merciful is God, slow to anger, rich in kindness, and relenting in punishment. Perhaps God will again relent and leave behind a blessing, Offerings and libations for the Lord, your God. Blow the trumpet in Zion! Proclaim a fast, call an assembly; Gather the people, notify the congregation; Assemble the elders, gather the children and the infants at the breast; Let the bridegroom quit his room, and the bride her chamber.

Joel 2:13-16

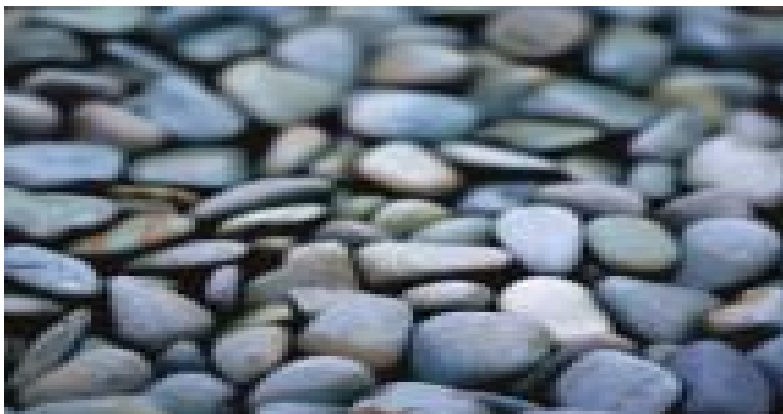
Quote:

There is no justification then for despair or pessimism or inertia. Though it be with sorrow, it must be said that just as one may sin through selfishness and the desire for excessive profit and power, one may also be found wanting with regard to the urgent needs of multitudes of human beings submerged in conditions of underdevelopment, through fear, indecision and, basically, through cowardice. We are all called, indeed obliged, to face the tremendous challenge of . . . a world economic crisis, a war without frontiers . . . Every individual is called upon to play his or her part in this peaceful campaign . . . in order to secure development in peace, in order to safeguard nature itself and the world about us.

Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, #47

Reflection:

Lent is a marvellous invitation to look at the ashes of devastation caused by our failure to love as God wills. How often our good intentions can turn to dust. Resolve and perseverance are sometimes hard to come by. Lent provides a focused time where we can assess where and how we have distanced ourselves from God. But Lent is not just a personal journey. It is a communal one. Historically, penance was not a private matter, but a public act of atonement. Today the ashes on our foreheads make public our faith and our failings. Let us engage in reflection today on the places in our lives and in the world that cry out for the atonement of the misuse of power and influence.



Prayer:

May the ashes we receive today remind us of the invitation to turn away from the destructive nature of sin and trust in Your message of hope. Receive the ashes of our regrets, our failed attempts, our weak resolve, our distracted wanderings, and lead us on this forty-day journey to new life in You. Amen.

Fasting:

- Today, fast from distraction. Give your undivided attention to the person or task in front of you. Listen intently.

Almsgiving:

- Lent is an invitation to assess the current state of our spiritual lives. The consciousness examen provides a very helpful tool in doing just this. Learn about this practice and consider making it a daily part of your Lenten observance.

Web site:

Examen of Consciousness

Address:

www.norprov.org/spirituality/ignatianprayer.htm

For a bookmark summary see: <http://www.norprov.org/spirituality/examenbookmark.pdf>

Thursday, February 18, 2010

Scripture:

“Today I have set before you life and prosperity, death and doom. If you obey the commandments of the LORD, your God, which I enjoin on you today, loving him, and walking in his ways, and keeping his commandments, statutes and decrees, you will live and grow numerous, and the LORD, your God, will bless you in the land you are entering to occupy.

Deut 30: 15-16

Quote:

Solidarity helps us to see the ‘other’ – whether a *person, people of nation* – not just some kind of instrument, with a work capacity and physical strength to be exploited at low cost and then discarded when no longer useful, but as our ‘neighbor’ a ‘helper’, to be made a sharer, on par with ourselves, in the banquet of life to which all are equally invited by God.

Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, #39

Reflection:

Today’s readings issue a challenge to us to, “tend the flock of God in our midst.” We are invited to look at the needs of people in our community and ask ourselves what we are doing to reach out. In a similar way, we are called to examine not just our response, but the underlying motivation that lies beneath our action or inaction.



Prayer:

Good Shepherd, purify our motives and animate our actions that we may respond with real love and compassion to those in need in our midst. Give us courage to work with others who seek systemic changes and address root causes so that together as a community we co-create the Kingdom of God.

Fasting:

- Fast from inaction. Resist the tendency to avoid getting involved. Take one step, make one phone call to respond to a need that you see in your midst. Encourage family and friends to do likewise and multiply the impact of one simple action.

Almsgiving:

- Learn about the needs of the flock in your midst through your state’s Catholic Conference. In each state, the Catholic Bishops follow the legislative efforts before state governments and advocate on behalf of those most in need.

Web Site:

State Catholic Conference Directors

Address:

www.nasccd.org

Friday, February 19, 2010

Scripture:

This, rather, is the fasting that I wish: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the bands of the yoke; Setting free the oppressed, breaking every yoke; Sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless; Clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own. Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your wound shall quickly be healed; Your vindication shall go before you, and the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer, you shall cry for help, and he will say: Here I am! If you remove from your midst oppression, false accusation and malicious speech.

Is. 58:6-9

Quote:

There is a growing awareness of the sublime dignity of human persons, who stand above all things and whose rights and duties are universal and inviolable. They ought, therefore, to have ready access to all that is necessary for living a genuinely human life: for example, food, clothing, housing, ... the right to education, and work...

Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, #26

Reflection:

Fasting is a spiritual discipline which ultimately is about becoming completely free in order to listen and respond more deeply to God's voice within us. It is not so much about avoiding indulgence in our favorite foods as it is about being emptied enough to recognize and listen to our hunger for God. Fasting, then, is an act of liberation. It frees us to listen, to see, to feel, and to respond. This understanding of fasting is what Isaiah is calling for in today's reading. Our acts of penance are meant to move us outward and involve us in acts of liberation freeing others from poverty, injustice, oppression and suffering in today's world.



Prayer:

God of Liberation, grant us the grace we need during this Lenten journey to fast from selfish preoccupations and the clamoring of our endless imagined needs. Open our hearts and ears that we may hear what Your Spirit is asking of us. Guide the direction of our response to the cries before us so that we may listen more deeply and stand with those who rights and dignity are denied.

Fasting:

- Today fast from the urge to give into cultural pressures that tell you what you "must" have in order to be beautiful, successful, or powerful. Resist the messages that create false needs and waste both material and ecological resources.

Almsgiving:

- Learn about the Millennium Development Goals and the global effort that is underway to eradicate poverty. Inform and educate others in the promotion and protection of human dignity.

Web site:

United Nations Millennium Goals

Address:

www.undp.org/mdg/

Saturday, February 20, 2010

Scripture:

If you do away with the yoke of oppression,
with the pointing finger and malicious talk,
and if you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,
then your light will rise in the darkness,
and your night will become like the noonday.
The Lord will guide you always;
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land
and will strengthen your frame.
You will be like a well-watered garden,
like a spring whose waters never fail.

Is. 58:9-11

Quote:

Working for the common good requires us to promote the flourishing of all human life and all of God's creation. In a special way, the common good requires solidarity with the poor who are often without the resources to face many problems, including the potential impacts of climate change. Our obligations to the one human family stretch across space and time. They tie us to the poor in our midst and across the globe, as well as to future generations. The commandment to love our neighbor invites us to consider the poor and marginalized of other nations as true brothers and sisters who share with us the one table of life intended by God for the enjoyment of all.

USCCB, *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good*, #25

Reflection:

How easy it is to point the finger of blame towards others while avoiding responsibility ourselves. We know that whenever one finger is pointed outward toward others, four fingers are pointing back at ourselves. To be light we must be willing to be a catalyst for good ourselves and illumine the darkness around us with our own practical actions of light. Reflect on how your call to be a beacon of light in this world can impact not just those around you but ripple out to future generations as well.



Prayer:

Lord, we call for Your guidance in bringing light to the darkness. Stir us to actions that spread light and enkindle hope. May the witness of those who have been beacons of hope in our lives inspire and encourage our own efforts to be a witness of Your light. Bless all those who even in the face of persecution never fail to be light for others.

Fasting:

- Fast from finger-pointing and the temptation to blame others. Take responsibility for your words and actions and in this way let your light shine.

Almsgiving:

- Learn about those who literally work in the dark: miners. The "Unearth Justice Campaign" website presents a variety of resources about the harm caused by extractive (or mining) industries (like diamonds and gold). Learn what you can do.

Website:

Unearth Justice Campaign

Address:

www.cafod.org.uk/unearthjustice

First Sunday of Lent: February 21, 2010

Scripture:

When the Egyptians maltreated and oppressed us, imploring hard labor upon us, we cried to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and he heard our cry and saw our affliction, our toil and our oppression. He brought us out of Egypt with his strong hand and outstretched arm, with terrifying power, with signs and wonders; and bringing us into this country, he gave us this land flowing with milk and honey. Deut. 26:6-10

Quote:

Technological innovation and entrepreneurship can help make possible options that can lead us to a more environmentally benign energy path. Changes in lifestyle based on traditional moral virtues can ease the way to a sustainable and equitable world economy in which sacrifice will no longer be an unpopular concept. For many of us, a life less focused on material gain may remind us that we are more than what we have. Rejecting the false promises of excessive or conspicuous consumption can even allow more time for family, friends, and civic responsibilities. A renewed sense of sacrifice and restraint could make an essential contribution to addressing global climate change.

USCCB, Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good, 2001, #18

Reflection:

What would happen today if we really got what we deserved? As a nation, we have often been seen as the oppressor imposing our will on weaker more vulnerable nations through our foreign policy and trade agreements, while failing to lift the burdens of people in real need: we usually act in our own self-interest. As citizens we need to hold ourselves and our government accountable for the ways this fails to measure up to God's plan for the full flourishing of all people.



Prayer:

Awaken in us the desire for a change in lifestyle and a reform of damaging consumption patterns. Show us the way to overcome "structures of sin," and the pull of our own wants by harnessing our desire to form sustainable communities. Help us see and understand the connection between our own affluence and the poverty of others.

Fasting:

- Fast from the impossible expectations you place on others to live up to your ideals of behavior, love, generosity. Accept others just as they are and free up wasted, misdirected energy.

Almsgiving:

- Learn about numerous ways to live more simply and overcome the negative effects of consumerism.

Website:

CAFOD Climate Justice Campaign

Address:

<http://www.cafod.org.uk/climatejustice>

Monday, February 22, 2010

Feast of The Chair of St. Peter

Scripture:

So I exhort the presbyters among you, as a fellow presbyter and witness to the sufferings of Christ and one who has a share in the glory to be revealed. Tend the flock of God in your midst, (overseeing) not by constraint but willingly, as God would have it, not for shameful profit but eagerly. Do not lord it over those assigned to you, but be examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd is revealed, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

1 Peter 5:1-4

Quote:

As individuals and as a nation we are called to make a fundamental “option for the poor”. The obligation to evaluate social and economic activity from the viewpoint of the poor and the powerless arises from the radical command to love one’s neighbor as one’s self. Those who are marginalized and whose rights are denied have privileged claims if society is to provide justice for all. This obligation is deeply rooted in Christian belief.

USCCB, *Economic Justice for All*, #87

Reflection:

We live in a culture that wants to avoid, ignore, or numb the pain of suffering. The impulse to turn away from suffering is a real one, and a very human one. To enter into the suffering of another person not only demands something of us physically and emotionally, but will very likely change us from the inside out in ways beyond our control or imagining. Today the Gospel calls us to enter into the suffering of our neighbors by facing their need and acknowledging their suffering as an act of love. The call is not one that can be ignored, for we are told that our very salvation depends upon our response. Where do we need to refocus our vision in order to see our neighbor more clearly?



Prayer:

As we focus on the reality of poverty in our community and world, help us do our part to understand the structures and causes that create and sustain the evil of poverty. Let us call on our elected officials to place this first among their priorities so that together we can take responsibility for creating a world where all can thrive and flourish.

Fasting:

- Today, fast from avoidance. We all have those places, people, or responsibilities that we avoid for a variety of reasons. Examine the reason and the impulse of avoidance and strive to face it head on.

Almsgiving:

- Learn about poverty and explore the Catholic Campaign for Human Development Toolkit for Young Advocates. Use it yourself and pass it on to the young people in your life.

Web site:

Ending Poverty in Community

Address:

www.usccb.org/cchd/epic/www/index.html

Tuesday, February 23, 2010

Scripture:

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud
and flourish,
so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,
so is my word that goes out from my mouth:
It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

Is.55:10-11

Quote:

The Bible, from the first page on, teaches us that the whole of creation is for humanity, that it is men and women's responsibility to develop it by intelligent effort and by means of their labor to perfect it, so to speak, for their use. If the world is made to furnish each individual with the means of livelihood and the instruments for growth and progress, all people have therefore the right to find in the world what is necessary for them.

Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, #22

Reflection:

From the very first pages of the Bible, we read how God speaks through creation. All life is to be seen and treated as sacred. We are called to be active stewards and caretakers of this remarkable earth. Through our efforts and the advances of human ingenuity, we can use or misuse the resources before us in countless ways. Scientific discoveries continue to reveal the amazing designs of life and the interconnection of all living creatures. But we have also unleashed the capacity to destroy and devastate the earth. We must strive to live on this earth in such a way that our actions and innovations speak of reverence, and the resources we harness must provide benefit and life to all.



Prayer:

God of Life, Your creative Word echoes through all of creation. Open a space within us so that we may hear You speaking through the groaning of creation. Deepen our appreciation for the great diversity of all creation. Guide our human efforts to be good stewards. Inspire our use of human ingenuity and technology so that we may sustain, preserve, and protect the great resources You have placed in our care.

Fasting:

- Fast from foods today that are filled with preservatives and chemicals. Read the labels today. Seek out food choices that are organic, natural, and chemical free.

Almsgiving:

- Find and support farmers in your local area who embrace sustainable farming methods. The Local Harvest web site helps you identify and locate organic sources in your area.

Web site:

Local Harvest

Address:

www.localharvest.org/

Wednesday, February 24, 2010

Scripture:

Just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation . . . At the judgment the men of Nineveh will arise with this generation and condemn it, because at the preaching of Jonah they repented, and there is something greater than Jonah here.

Luke 11: 30,32

Quote:

A world divided into blocs, in which instead of solidarity imperialism and exploitation hold sway, can only be a world structured in sin. Those structures of sin are rooted in sins committed by individual persons, who introduced these structures and reinforced them again and again. One can blame selfishness, shortsightedness, mistaken political decisions, and imprudent economic decisions; at the root of the evils that afflict the world there is — in one way or another — sin.

Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, #36

Reflection:

Do you ask God to give you signs and indications that “prove” that God is listening to you? In today’s reading, Jonah didn’t ask for a sign, he was one. God places people in our lives who offer messages that we need to hear even if we are unwilling at times to listen. Sometimes all it takes is a word of encouragement to turn our day around. Jonah used the power of his words to turn the hearts of the people back to God. What a power words can have. How will you use your words today?



Prayer:

Living Word, make us more aware of the power of our speech and the content of our words. Help us to speak the truth with love and to use our words with care. Make us quick with words of praise and gratitude and restrain our tongues when it comes to gossip and criticism.

Fasting:

- Today, fast from using words for criticism, complaint, or negative comments. Concentrate on using words that encourage the heart, words that compliment, uplift, and encourage others. Notice the impact of the positive power of words.

Almsgiving:

- Words of hope can be found in the statement released Dec. 30, 2009 entitled, “Delegation Trip Report”. Jewish, Christian and Muslim religious leaders are working together for peace with justice for Israelis, Palestinians and all peoples in the Middle East. Read and reflect on the document.

Web site:

United States Catholic Conference of Bishops

Address:

<http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/interreligious.shtml>

Thursday, February 25, 2010

Scripture:

Queen Esther, seized with mortal anguish, likewise had recourse to the Lord...Then she prayed to the Lord, the God of Israel, saying: "My Lord, our King, you alone are God. Help me, who am alone and have no help but you, for I am taking my life in my hand. . . Put in my mouth persuasive words in the presence of the lion, and turn his heart to hatred for our enemy, so that he and those who are in league with him may perish.

Esther C:12, 14-15, 24

Quote:

For the human being, created to God's image, received a mandate to care for the earth and all it contains, and to govern the world with justice and holiness; a mandate to relate to the totality of things to God Who was to be acknowledged as the Lord and Creator of all. Thus, by the subjection of all things to human beings, the name of God would be wonderful in all the earth. This mandate concerns the whole of everyday activity as well. For while providing the substance of life for themselves and their families, men and women are performing their activities in a way which appropriately benefits society. They can justly consider that by their labor they are unfolding the Creator's work, consulting the advantages of their brothers and sisters, and are contributing by their personal industry to the realization history of the divine plan.

Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, #34

Reflection:

In the face of great forces of oppression and injustice in today's world, we, like Esther, need to call upon God's help in pursuing the course that restores human dignity and justice. Our everyday activities are the place where we can practically and realistically make a difference. In the ordinary course of our daily lives, God is calling *us* to enact justice, to heal broken relationships, to respect life, to tend wounds, and to live faithfully. How is the work we do bringing to life God's plan more fully?



Prayer:

With the courage of Esther, help us to place our ordinary activities at your service in creating a world where the kingdom vision is made visible. We place our own needs before You in trust and confidence. You alone are God who can do all things through us if we have faith. Increase our faith and guide our lives so that we may bring your justice and truth to life.

Fasting:

- Today, fast from cynicism and pessimism. Let your actions be signs of hope for others recalling that being a Christian calls for steadfast hope and trust.

Almsgiving:

- Learn about the life and work of one modern-day queen, Queen Noor of Jordan, who has used her role for the good of others. Check out her website and consider reading her book, Leap of Faith.

Website:

Queen Noor of Jordan

Address:

<http://www.kinghusseinfoundation.org>

Friday, February 26, 2010

Scripture:

But if a wicked man, turning from the wickedness he has committed, does what is right and just, he shall preserve his life; since he has turned away from all the sins which he committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die.

Ez. 18:27-28

Quote:

Human society is sorely ill. The cause is not so much the depletion of natural resources, nor their monopolistic control by a privileged few; it is rather the weakening of brotherly and sisterly ties between individuals and nations.

Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, #66

In the face of the present-day situation of the world, marked as it is by the grave sin of injustice, we recognize both our responsibility and our inability to overcome it by our own strength. Such a situation urges us to listen with a humble and open heart to the word of God, as God shows us new paths towards action in the cause of justice in the world.

Reflection:

It is true that there are a great many illnesses plaguing our society today, particularly the HIV/AIDS pandemic. But there are also other illnesses such as consumerism, racism, greed, and corruption which serve to weaken the bonds between members of society and the wider human family. The cure God offers us in the face of such illness is to listen with humility and an open heart to the Word of God. The teachings of scripture show us a new path that can free us from such ills. Where do we need to begin as a society to turn away from social sin?



Prayer:

God Who Makes Us One, we recognize the grave sin of injustice which divides your human family. We long to be healed of the social ills that plague our world. Help us to take the time to understand the issues before us and grant us the resolve to forge new paths to justice as we join with our brothers and sisters who long for new life.

Fasting:

- Today, fast from ignorance about AIDS. Take time to learn more about the magnitude and effects of this global pandemic. Take hope from the efforts identified below and engage with local efforts to respond.

Almsgiving:

- One of the great ills of today's world is the pandemic of AIDS. Today there are an estimated 12 million children who have been orphaned by AIDS. Learn about the beautiful work started by Fr. Angelo D'Agostino, SJ, MD (who passed away on Nov. 20, 2006) addressing the needs of these orphans and what you can do to help.

Web site:

Nyumbani Home

Address:

www.nyumbani.org/

Saturday, February 27, 2010

Scripture:

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you.
Mt. 5:43-44

Quote:

Love of God and love of neighbor are now truly united: God incarnate draws us all to God's self. We can thus understand how *agape* also became a term for the Eucharist: there God's own *agape* comes to us bodily, in order to continue God's work in us and through us. Only by keeping in mind this Christological and sacramental basis can we correctly understand Jesus' teaching on love. The transition which he makes from the Law and the Prophets to the twofold commandment of love of God and of neighbor, and his grounding the whole life of faith on this central precept, is not simply a matter of morality—something that could exist apart from and alongside faith in Christ and its sacramental re-actualization.

Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, #14

Reflection:

What is the first step in the making of an enemy? Where does it begin? Perhaps if we spent as much time researching and analyzing this as we did consumer tastes, we would be living in a completely different world. There is a saying that goes, "The enemy of my enemy is my friend;" where one stands can determine one's perspective. Today's passage is one of the most challenging passages in all of scripture. We are called to actually love our enemies and to pray for them. This is surely the greatest penance there is: to will what is best for those who persecute us, to love in the face of hate. Where can we begin to dismantle our own hearts as a step in dismantling the hate between enemies?



Prayer:

We pray for the reconciliation between enemies. We pray for those who work through diplomatic channels to mediate the conflicts that divide and destroy peoples. May the power of love bring an end to hate. God of Peace, guide us in actively working to dismantle the violence within us and around us.

Fasting:

- Today, fast from using phrases or language that engage violent metaphors - like "I was just killing time" or "I wanted to kill him/her." Be attentive to the many ways that violence phrases pepper our ordinary speech.

Almsgiving:

- Learn about gospel-based lay communities of peace and nonviolence like the Agape Community located in Brockton, MA.

Web site:

Agape Community Christian Nonviolence

Address:

www.agapecommunity.org/