



Surrender

LENTEN PROGRAM 2018

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21 FEBRUARY 2018

Wednesday of the first Week of Lent

JONAH 3:1–10

PSALM 50:3–4, 12–13, 18–19

LUKE 11:29–32

God saw their efforts to renounce their evil behaviour. And God relented. JONAH 3:10

The first week of Lent presents us with the strange yet intriguing account of Jonah preaching in Nineveh, after he reluctantly accepts this mission from God. He walks into a large, wealthy and powerful city, and, somewhere away from the city centre, he preaches God's apocalyptic message in simple language unaccompanied by powerful signs. It is very easy to imagine Jonah's half-hearted message falling on deaf ears, yet, incredibly, the people of Nineveh instead wholeheartedly change their ways. Whatever their past injustices, and all God's efforts to get Jonah and his message into the city, God is shown to see their humble and contrite hearts, and forgive them.

The Ninevites' unlikely response is a model for how we can respond to the Lenten call to repentance. There are four aspects of Nineveh's response to take account of.

Firstly, we need to be open to a clear-sighted critique of our actions, whether this be from a trusted friend or our conscience. Secondly, we need to recognise and accept that some of our attitudes and choices have been sinful and harmful, even though they may be things that we persist in to the present. Thirdly, we need to renounce our sinful ways of thinking and acting, and resolve to make amends. Finally, we need to carry out that amendment, expressing this through acts of reparation and self-discipline, including prayer, fasting and almsgiving, and seeking solace in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Show me, Lord, where I do wrong, and grow my heart this Lent. Amen.

Mr James Arblaster

22 FEBRUARY 2018

The Chair of St Peter the Apostle

1 PETER 5:1–4

PSALM 22

MATTHEW 16:13–19

Who do you say I am? MATTHEW 16:15

When Jesus asks this question of his disciples, "Who do you say I am?" he wanted them to say the answer out loud. Jesus was so much more than just another prophet, as wonderful and amazing as this is. He knew that his followers had grasped this, and he wanted them to own this truth by speaking it aloud. Peter steps forward as spokesperson for the group "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16).

Jesus was God's Messiah. He was God's true anointing King, who would replace the wicked rulers and their corruption and establish a new kind of kingdom.

Jesus wants us to answer this question ourselves. To speak it aloud ourselves. To own it ourselves.

Peter becomes the rock at the centre of this new community of Jesus' disciples—all those people who have or will give allegiance to Jesus as God's anointing King. Peter will still make mistakes and he has much to learn, but Jesus doesn't call the perfect. Falling down and being forgiven is all part of the process of this new community of faith, this new Kingdom of God. We only have to remember to get up one more time than we fall down.

Jesus, you are the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Help us to find time today to answer your question aloud—"Who do you say I am?" Amen.

Fr Richard Healey

the Temptation

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT







Christ in the Desert
Ivan Nikolaevich Kramskoi (1837–1887)
Kramskoi, Ivan Nikolaevich (1837–1887) Russian painter. "Christ in the Desert" c. 1872.
Oil on canvas, 180 x 210 cm. Inv. no. 651. Moscow, Tretyakov Gallery, Public Domain.

OPENING PRAYER

Leader: Let us pause and call to mind God's presence within and among us, today and always.

Brief pause.

All: In the wilderness of our lives, in the concerns that are ours, may we feel your closeness Father. Speak to us and grant us the grace to hear your Spirit of comfort and truth at work in us. We ask this through your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

PSALM 24:4–9

R. Your ways, O Lord, are love and truth to those who keep your covenant.

Lord, make me know your ways.

Lord, teach me your paths.

Make me walk in your truth, and teach me: for you are God my saviour. **R.**

Remember your mercy, Lord, and the love you have shown from of old. In your love remember me, because of your goodness, O Lord. **R.**

The Lord is good and upright. He shows the path to those who stray, he guides the humble in the right path; he teaches his way to the poor. **R.**

GOSPEL

MARK 1:12–15

The Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness and he remained there for forty days, and was tempted by Satan. He was with the wild beasts, and the angels looked after him.

After John had been arrested, Jesus went into Galilee. There he proclaimed the Good News from God. "The time has come" he said "and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Pause for silent reflection.

GOSPEL REFLECTION

The time has come

Fr Graham Schmitzer

“**T**he time has come”—Jesus’ first words as recorded by St Mark are addressed to you and me as we begin another Lent in our lives. The Gospel is not a storybook. It is a proclamation to those who desire to read it. It is, as Jesus says, “Good News” (Mark 1:15). We don’t hear a lot of good news these days. Open the daily paper; switch on the TV and you won’t be confronted with good news stories. The media prefers to dwell on crime and outrage. Jesus comes with *good* news. What good news? Would you be able to convincingly answer that question to a stranger? Were you brought up to believe that the Catholic Church offers *good* news?

Hopefully, by the end of this Lent, you will have discovered the Good News for yourself. This Lenten program is an attempt by the Diocese of Wollongong to help strengthen your faith. Lent is an old English word which simply means “lengthen.” In the Northern Hemisphere, winter is departing and the days are beginning to lengthen. As the days of our lives lengthen, we need to take stock. What provisions have I made for the future? “The Kingdom of God is close at hand” (Mark 1:16), Jesus reminds me. As I get older, the certainties in my life should be becoming clearer and firmer.

This was how Lent was presented to the Christians of the early centuries. Times were uncertain, but to enter the Church meant accepting some certainties. They were enough to help some face death. The Scripture reading for the Sundays of Lent were thus carefully chosen by the Church. These were the “icing” on the cake—the last of a long series of instructions which had been given over the course of perhaps a year. These final meditations were to be the ammunition needed to “take the plunge” at the Easter Vigil. The thoughts in this program are offered to

you in the hope that you will want to renew the vows of your Baptism on the night of 31 March 2018.

St Paul presented Baptism in terms of a marriage covenant. “I have married you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:2) he told his converts. So, when you and I stand at the altar on Holy Saturday night, we will not be standing alone. As is customary in any marriage ceremony, the bridegroom will already be there waiting—waiting to renew his vows to me. “You are my beloved” (Mark 9:7). He waits for our *surrender* to his love. We so often regard religion from the wrong angle—my attempt to reach God—when it is actually the other way around—God is trying to reach me.

So, when you and I stand at the altar on Holy Saturday night, we will not be standing alone. As is customary in any marriage ceremony, the bridegroom will already be there waiting—waiting to renew his vows to me.

In a sense, Lent begins with a bang. If ever we thought we were alone in our struggle in finding God, then the account of Jesus’ temptations in the desert is given to us for our comfort. We will never fully understand the mysteries of God’s incarnation. Actions speak louder than words. For generations, God had spoken to his people. When they would no longer listen and their sense of wonder had dulled, God came to earth in person. His life, death and rising would act out his divine message. God would become like us in all things but sin (Hebrews 4:15).

St Mark’s introduction to his Gospel is stark, as is the first artwork we are contemplating in this week’s program. It is by the Russian painter, Ivan Nikolaevich Kramskoi, and created about 1872. It hangs in Moscow. Kramskoi thought about this stark theme in *Christ in the Desert* for about ten years, making several sketches before

continued ▶

the final product. To a critic who asked, “This is not Christ; how do you know he looked like that?”, Kramoskoi replied that the actual, living Christ went unrecognised by most who saw him.

Kramoskoi has succeeded in giving us a picture of true humanity. The dust and rocks in the foreground are so realistic, you can imagine yourself sitting on a rock watching Jesus—watching a man entirely engrossed in thought. This is a man who has been fasting, and the experts tell us that real fasting clears the mind. There is a haunting dignity about his face—a face I think is similar to that on the Shroud of Turin. Christ’s figure seems to be slumped, as if bearing an unspeakable burden. His very body seems to bear the weight of humanity’s struggle with the Evil One.

There is a haunting dignity about his face—a face I think is similar to that on the Shroud of Turin. Christ’s figure seems to be slumped, as if bearing an unspeakable burden. His very body seems to bear the weight of humanity’s struggle with the Evil One.

Because we belong to Jesus, we bear this weight too. We must also engage with the “Dominions and Powers” (1 Peter 3:22) mentioned by St Peter in today’s second reading—of our personalities, the circumstances of our lives and the society in which we live. We are slowly—and sometimes begrudgingly—becoming aware of how easy it is to do violence to our planet. It is only a symbol of the violence we can cause to the balance of our lives. Too many of us fall prey to the addictions offered by society as “quick fixes” to the problems we face.

St Matthew and Luke would later spell out the temptations Jesus faced. The Evil One would offer him “quick fixes” too—do some fancy

tricks so that the multitudes would follow him. But the ultimate temptation would be trust in God. Luke tells us that because Satan is frustrated with Jesus’ stubbornness in the wilderness, he promises to return. He does so at the moment of the Crucifixion. He puts on the lips of the crowd what is so often in our hearts, “Come down from the cross!” (Mark 15:30). In other words, do what we want and we will believe in you. It is the ultimate temptation.

Every time we say the Our Father, we pray that God will not lead us into temptation—meaning, that we will never experience that accumulated weight of evil as Jesus did, and that our tasks in life will not be beyond us. Kramoskoi’s painting hints at an answer. The figure of Jesus opens the coldness of a chill dawn and the beauty of the rising sun. “At night there are tears, but joy comes with dawn” (Psalm 30:5, *Breviary version*).

Lent is basically a pilgrimage—a reflection of our lives. One of the basic lessons you learn if ever you embark on a real pilgrimage—like the one you walk to the shrine of St James in Compostela—is that you can only take with you what you can physically carry. You quickly realise that what you thought you needed to make you happy in life, you didn’t really need at all. May the conclusion of Lent find us completely at peace with God, a peace that comes from *surrendering* to him, knowing that Christ has walked the journey before us and returns to accompany us on our road to Emmaus where we shall recognise him in the “breaking of bread” (Luke 24:35). ■

SEE PAGE 12 FOR REFLECTION QUESTIONS

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

To Hell with God

By Sr Hilda Scott OSB

We now set out on our own road of *surrender* by meeting Surrender in the person of Jesus. We are told that it was the Spirit who drove him out into the wilderness. It all sounds very ominous, especially when we read the rest of the Gospel about temptations and wild beasts. Yet, St Anthony the Great—who likewise encountered the wilderness—calls the Spirit, “The friend of the heart” who “teaches us how to heal the wounds of the soul.” The poet, W.H. Auden, added, “In the desert of the heart, let the healing fountain start.”

This Friend of the Heart drove Jesus right into the very core of our human experience—the desert of doubt, hunger, thirst and loneliness where demons known and unknown roam about our consciousness endeavouring to convince us of the most awful of lies. Lies such as God not loving us; that our anguishes of whatever kind—self-inflicted or otherwise—are of no interest to him and he has left us to deal with life on our own because we are so bad, so sinful, so negligent and so clearly unworthy of his attention. This all amounts to a fairly succinct description of hell, and in some way, we can all therefore say we have known hell.

Yet, we need not stay there, and the clue to this can be found in the initial Lenten Gospel. Here, covering himself in us, Jesus began the work given to him by the Father, namely, the healing of our wounds. He starts by taking on the lies presented to him and tackles them Scripture. Victorious against the Devil, Jesus then leaves us with a wonderful truth—when we know hell, we can also meet him.

Anthony Bloom (1914–2003)—a medical doctor, monk and metropolitan bishop in the Russian Orthodox Church—reassured us that it is very possible for many people to meet God when in the grip of evil. He knew what it was to suffer, especially as a doctor during

World War II. This experience, he said, was infinitely precious to him. He discovered that God was not an outsider simply observing and beholding what happens to us from a distance, or “helping” us by weakly offering just two fingers to get us out of the mire. “To have a God who is prepared to go to the very depths of the ugliest recesses of our life, our person, our heart and our destiny, is a very remarkable thing,” he said. And that is who we have.

Perhaps you have heard of St Josephine Bakhita. She was ten when slave traders abducted her in Sudan. In her terror, she forgot her own name, so they called her *Bakhita* which means “fortunate one”. From one cruel owner to another, she was tortured, covered in tattoos and scars, had designs cut into her and then salt rubbed in the wounds. Death was infinitely preferable.

Then, in 1882, an Italian purchased her, took her to Italy and gave her to a kind colleague, Augusto Michieli. Accompanying Augusto’s daughter to the school run by the Canossian Sisters, Bakhita began to discover the source of Augusto’s kindness, and so her discovery of God took off in earnest. She became a Catholic, a free woman and a Canossian Sister. Of her past, she could say, “If I were to meet the slave traders ... even those who tortured me ... I would kneel and kiss their hands.” Because of them, she claimed, she had found the God who went to hell with her.

This is the God who invites us this Lent to *surrender* ourselves to him. ■

SEE PAGE 12 FOR REFLECTION QUESTIONS

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

GOSPEL REFLECTION

The time has come

1. What are your expectations for this Lent?
2. “The time has come” (Mark 1:15). How may Jesus be addressing this to you?
3. In what ways do you think you take more seriously the renewal of your vows this coming Holy Saturday?

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

To Hell with God

1. What part of this reflection speaks to you?
2. What difference does it make to you to read Antony’s description of the Spirit as “the friend of the heart”?
3. Have you known what Hell is like? How did you come up out of it? Did it change your perception of God?
4. What does it mean to you to read, “Here, covering himself in us, Jesus began the work given to him by the Father, namely, the healing of our wounds”?

PERSONAL REFLECTION FOR THE WEEK AHEAD

Take a good look at the picture Fr Graham has included here. Spend some time gazing into that face and you will find there every anguish you have ever known. Scan the scene of rocks and ask yourself when has life looked like that for you? Notice who is sitting right in the middle of it—Jesus, the one who came to heal you.

Why not make this picture a vehicle for conversation with Jesus. Perhaps there is something he really wants you to know.

CLOSING PRAYER AND INTERCESSIONS

All: My God, I am yours for time and eternity.
Teach me to cast myself entirely
into the arms of your loving providence
with a lively, unlimited confidence
in your compassionate, tender pity.

Grant, O most merciful Redeemer,
That whatever you ordain or permit
may be acceptable to me.
Take from my heart all painful anxiety;
let nothing sadden me but sin,
nothing delight me but the hope of
coming to the possession of you,
my God and my all, in your everlasting
kingdom. Amen.

*(Suscipe of Catherine McAuley, foundress of
the Sisters of Mercy, 1771–1841)*