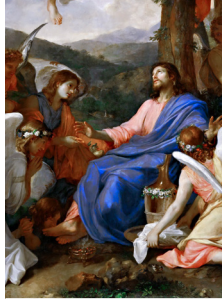


# *Comfort*

L E N T E N   P R O G R A M   2 0 2 1







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*The Temptation.*  
FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT



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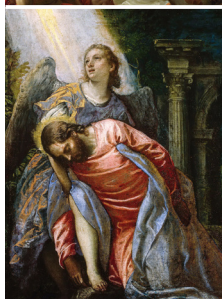
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## 17 FEBRUARY 2021

Ash Wednesday

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JOEL 2:12–18

PSALM 50(51):3–6, 12–14, 17

2 CORINTHIANS 5:20–6:2

MATTHEW 6:1–6, 16–18

### **Come back to me with all your heart.** JL 2:12

Look again at the cover portrait of Jesus and the angel, especially the posture Jesus' body—his face and his left arm. He is reposing upon the angel; exhausted, being comforted. What an appropriate theme for this year's Lenten reflections.

With COVID–19 and other dramatic events in the world and the Church that seem never ending, we can easily wonder whether the Lord has taken a break from us, or even given up on us? Is he trying to tell us something? Maybe he is. Isolation, loss, dislocation, fear, anxiety, profound questioning, are just some of the feelings expressed by many people. While we know that God never leaves us—especially when we need him most—we can still sometimes wonder. I think this is part of Jesus' human demeanor that the artist is communicating. He believes, he knows the final outcome of his agony, passion and death, yet he still wonders and seeks answers—just like us really. But sometimes, just like him, all we can do is set our face like flint and move trustingly forward seeking the Lord, wherever he is, even sometimes when he and his will seem hidden from us.

St Teresa of Calcutta said that “we are called, not to do great things, but to do little things with great love”. Wherever you are at the moment, keep trusting in God, as Jesus did, and seek him. Fasting and almsgiving are excellent things, but without prayerful faith and joyful trust, they will not yield much fruit. We are called to be saints. Saints are people who seek God and love much—who make a difference by their lives of quiet, but constant, fidelity. In the weeks ahead, seek the Lord and rest in your Heavenly Father as Jesus did. Persevere, pray, be nourished with the sacraments of Confession and the Eucharist. Seek the Lord and you will find him, and simply rest in him.

*Mary, my mother, help me to love Jesus as you did and to be faithful to God's will even when it is hard, and so to become a saint! Amen.*

FR CHRISTOPHER G SARKIS

## 4 MARCH 2021

Thursday of the 2<sup>nd</sup> week of Lent

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JEREMIAH 17:5–10

PSALM 1:1–4, 6

LUKE 16:19–31

### **They will not be convinced even if someone should rise from the dead.** LK 16:31

Jesus' words reflect a truism for the life of faith: that miracles mostly reinforce the faith of believers, but rarely convert the hearts of unbelievers. Jesus performed many miracles and ultimately raised himself from the dead—the most wonderful of miracles—and yet only a minority of people in first century Palestine became Christians. The cosmos took a profound new direction, for death is no longer the last word in life, yet most people continued living their regular lives, oblivious to all this. It is perhaps similar even now—we eat our Easter eggs, go to Church a few times and enjoy a long weekend, but do we really allow the truth of the Resurrection to transform our lives?

The past year has been marked by many difficulties that at times have challenged our faith. The Resurrection, however, reminds us that Jesus is Lord of all, even if we don't understand why he allows all these difficulties to happen. In his own life, Jesus allowed himself to be slandered, betrayed, arrested, tortured and brutally killed. This was very real, and yet it is not the whole of reality. The other side of the story is that by his suffering, Jesus conquered sin, death and all evil.

May this Easter be different. May our knowledge and faith that Jesus truly suffered, died and rose again for us sink into the very depths of our being and direct our lives until we, too, reach heavenly joy with Lazarus, Abraham and all the saints.

Lord Jesus, thank you for dying and rising for my salvation and the salvation of all people. Help me to renew my trust that you have the victory over all the difficulties I face, and that by your grace, you will lead me to eternal life with you. Amen.

SR ANASTASIA REEVES OP

## 9 MARCH 2021

Tuesday of the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of Lent

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DANIEL 3:25, 34–43

PSALM 24(25):4–6, 7A–9

MATTHEW 18:21–35

### **“Lord, how often must I forgive my brother if he wrongs me?”** MT 18:21

Today’s Gospel reminds me of a beautiful story of forgiveness. It is a story of a 70-year-old South African lady whose husband and son were brutally tortured and murdered in front of her. On the day of the trial, the judge asked the lady what justice should be done to the man who committed these crimes. The lady faced the murderer and said, “I want three things: first of all, I want to be taken to the place where my husband’s body was burned so that I can gather up the dust and give his remains a decent burial” She pauses, and then continues. “My husband and son were my only family. I want, secondly, therefore, for this man to become my son. I would like for him to come twice a month to the ghetto and spend a day with me so I can pour out on him whatever love I still have remaining in me.”

“Finally,” she says, “I would like this man to know I offer him my forgiveness because I have been forgiven. Jesus Christ died to forgive. The wish of my husband was to forgive. So, I would kindly ask someone to come to my side and lead me across the courtroom so I can take him in my arms, embrace him and let him know he is truly forgiven.”

The challenge for us today is to forgive “not seven, I tell you, but seventy-seven times,” says Jesus. We are called to forgive from the heart, not simply with just our words, or as a duty, but rather from the heart.

Who in my life do I need to forgive—from the heart?

*Jesus, give me the grace to forgive from deep within my heart. Thank you, Jesus, that you are a God of love, a God of mercy and a God of compassion. Amen.*

SR THERESE MILLS MGL

## 1 APRIL 2021

Holy Thursday

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EXODUS 12:1–8, 11–14

PSALM 115(116):12–13, 15–18

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23–26

JOHN 13:1–15

### **Unless I wash you.** JN 13:8

I remember a woman, Ella Curtis from Wollongong. She lost her adult daughter, Liz, and I offered her the appropriate sympathy in the middle of her terrible grief. “It isn’t about me and how I feel,” she said, “It’s about Liz’s four siblings who have lost their sister.” If we look across the broad spectrum of humanity, we see time and again instances of people, like Ella, who will say, “It isn’t about me, it’s about ...”

Today we read about a God seated with his friends, who in the middle of the unbearable personal suffering of betrayal, dread, fear and vulnerability, washed feet and sent a message: “It isn’t about me, it’s about you.” He made it so very clear in his exchange with Peter. Every reflexologist knows that feet are the map of the body, press some part of the foot and it will connect with another part of the body. For Jesus to wash feet is to connect with the whole person. We all know that washing feet in the time of Jesus was the job of a servant, and Jesus did it, despite being told not to, because, “It isn’t about me, it’s about you.”

There is an invitation here for us to do likewise—to wash feet, to walk through life with the attitude of Jesus. It’s about the person who says something stupid and needs you to treat them with dignity. It’s about the person who doesn’t look so good and needs you to treat them as the most beautiful person in the world. What a difference it would make to this hurting world, to our homes and workplaces right now, if a significant number of us went out into our daily life and washed feet because, “It isn’t about me, it’s about you.”

And still there is more. We never have to worry about whether or not we will lose by putting someone else first, about whether or not we will have our feet washed, because in the life of God, there is a continual refrain whispered to your heart: “It isn’t about me, it’s about you.” It’s your feet upon which he is totally focused.

*It isn’t about me Father, it’s about you. Amen.*

MOTHER HILDA SCOTT osb





# *The Temptation.*

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT



# The Temptation

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

## OPENING PRAYER

Host: 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.

## FIRST READING



GENESIS 9:8–15

God spoke to Noah and his sons, "See, I establish my Covenant with you, and with your descendants after you; also with every living creature to be found with you, birds, cattle and every wild beast with you: everything that came out of the ark, everything that lives on the earth. I establish my Covenant with you: no thing of flesh shall be swept away again by the waters of the flood. There shall be no flood to destroy the earth again."

God said, "Here is the sign of the Covenant I make between myself and you and every living creature with you for all generations: I set my bow in the clouds and it shall be a sign of the Covenant between me and the earth. When I gather the clouds over the earth and the bow appears in the clouds, I will recall the Covenant between myself and you and every living creature of every kind. And so the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all things of flesh."

*The word of the Lord.*

## RESPONSORIAL PSALM



PSALM 24:4–9

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

O LORD, make me know your ways.  
Teach me your paths.  
Guide me in your truth, and teach me;  
for you are the God of my salvation. **R.**

Remember your compassion, O LORD,  
and your merciful love,  
for they are from of old.

In your merciful love remember me,  
because of your goodness, O LORD. **R.**

Good and upright is the LORD;  
he shows the way to sinners.

He guides the humble in right judgment;  
to the humble he teaches his way. **R.**

## SECOND READING



1 PETER 3:18–22

Christ himself, innocent though he was, died once for sins, died for the guilty, to lead us to God. In the body he was put to death, in the spirit he was raised to life, and, in the spirit, he went to preach to the spirits in prison. Now it was long ago, when Noah was still building that ark which saved only a small group of eight people "by water", and when God was still waiting patiently, that these spirits refused to believe. That water is a type of the baptism which saves you now, and which is not the washing off of physical dirt but a pledge made to God from a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has entered heaven and is at God's right hand, now that he has made the angels and Dominations and Powers his subjects.

*The word of the Lord.*

## 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.*



### Christ in the Desert, Served by Angels

**Charles Le Brun (1619–1690)**

*Christ in the Desert, Served by Angels* (c. 1653). Canvas, 390 × 254 cm. Louvre, Paris. Public Domain.

Every year on the first Sunday of Lent, the Gospel we hear is that of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. St Mark sums up his account in three short verses. Following his Baptism, Jesus is "driven" into the wilderness, Mark tells us. We often hear of people "driven"—by ambition, lust, desperation. But what "drives" Jesus is the Holy Spirit. Jesus is thrown into the world we are thrown into. In the time God gives us after our Baptism (40 days, 40 months, 40 years), we have to struggle with two realities: we have been named sons and daughters of God, but we are also part of a sinful humanity! Like Jesus, we too will struggle both with angels and with wild beasts.

In his 40-day experience in the desert, Jesus acts

out in person Israel's experiences in the 40 years it took to reach the Promised Land following her rescue from Egypt. Jesus' temptations did not end with the 40 days, just as Israel's temptations did not end with the 40 years. St Luke makes it quite clear that Satan was frustrated by Jesus' rejection of him, and he promises to return. He returns finally at Calvary and puts on the lips of the crowd what often is in our hearts: "Come down from the cross." In other words, "Do what we want and we will believe in you." It is probably the ultimate temptation.

Matthew and Luke tell us Jesus underwent three temptations; temptations basic to any human. There was, first of all, the temptation to materialism—to deny the spiritual dimension of our lives. Secondly, there was the temptation to power—it had made Israel forget she was God's chosen people. She had wanted to be a nation like other nations and, indeed, to dominate the rest. Thirdly, there was the doubt which had made Israel lose trust in the goodness of God.

Our temptations are not over once we have been rescued at Baptism. Satan never sleeps. Like Jesus, we will be constantly tossed into the wilderness of struggle and grace, of success and failure. We need this Lenten retreat to discover afresh God's goodness, that his love for us remains even in, and above all, the adversity around us. "Lead us not into temptation," we pray each day in the *Our Father*—the temptation to think that he has abandoned us. It is not without good reason that faith is symbolised by an anchor.

In his monumental *Jesus of Nazareth*, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XVI, underlines the significance of Jesus' "retreat" in the desert before the onslaught of the devil. It is a time of interior recollection during which Jesus wrestles with the odds—his own will or his Father's will? It will be repeated in the agony in the garden. It would seem, then, that this was an ongoing struggle throughout his public life. Here in the desert, "It is a descent into the perils besetting mankind, for there is no other way to lift up fallen humanity. Jesus was to enter into the drama of human existence, for that belongs to the core of his mission; he has to penetrate it completely down to its uttermost depths in order to find the lost sheep, to bear it on his shoulders, and to bring

it home" (*The Illustrated Edition*, pp 51–52).

The letter to the Hebrews eloquently describes Jesus' mission in identifying himself with sinful humanity. "It was fitting that God.... should, in bringing many sons to glory, make perfect through suffering the leader of their salvation. Since all the children share the same human nature, he too shared equally in it, so that by his death he could set aside him who held the power of death, namely the devil, and set free all those who had been held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death. It was essential that he should in this way be made completely like his brothers so that he could become a compassionate and trustworthy high priest for their relationship with God, able to expiate the sins of the people. In the suffering he himself passed through while being put to the test enables him to help others when they are being put to the test" (Heb 2:10, 14–18).

In the persons of Adam and Eve, mankind is tempted to deny God. They are driven from the Garden to "till the soil from which (they) had been taken" (Gn 3:23). "Accursed be the soil because of you! Painfully you will get your food from it as long as you live. It will yield you brambles and thistles, as you eat the produce of the land" (Gn 3:17–18).

I can see now what Charles Le Brun is trying to say in his unusual *Christ in the Desert, Served by the Angels*. Desert? By reversing the disobedience of Adam and Eve, Christ has taken mankind back to the beginning. He is the new Adam, Son of the new Eve. The desert, the very opposite image of a garden, has now become the setting for man's reconciliation with God. The wild beasts, symbols of evil, have become man's friends—"He was with the wild animals" (Mk 1:13)—as predicted by the prophet Isaiah. "The wolf lives with the lamb, the panther lies down with the kid, calf and lion cub feed together" (Is 11:6). And Le Brun would have had before him the promise of Psalm 91: "To you has he commanded his angels, to keep you in all your ways." There has been a return to paradise.

Born in 1619, the son of a sculptor, Le Brun's talent was noted in early age. He studied the frescoes at Fontainebleau, The royal hunting lodge outside Paris, and the paintings of the royal collections. His first important commission came

from Cardinal Richelieu for three paintings for what is now the Palais–Royal. Wishing to perfect his education, he went to Rome in 1642 to study Raphael. Back in France, he was entrusted in 1661 with his largest project, the decoration of the Palace of Versailles. This would occupy him for the rest of his life. By 1664, he had become the Painter to the King. Christ in the Desert now hangs in the Louvre. It was originally commissioned by the Carmelite Order.

MGR GRAHAM SCHMITZER

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Mgr Graham describes the three temptations that Jesus' faces from Satan: materialism, power, and doubt. In what ways do we face these temptations today?
- In the *Our Father* we pray, "Lead us not into temptation." What are some strategies for avoiding temptation?
- In our modern world of busyness and chaos, what are some ways that we can retreat into "the garden"—to be ministered to by God?

### BREAKING OPEN THE WORD

with Sr Susanna Edmunds OP

Not too long ago, I heard about a young man who lost his sister before he was born, his mother at the age of eight, and his older brother and mentor at the age of 12. By the age of 21, his father, too, had passed away and he was living "underground," hunted by a government that had already arrested and killed several of his friends.

Although today's first reading promises that "there shall be no flood to destroy the earth again" (Gn 9:11), it seems like tragedy still comes in waves.

Why would the book of Genesis attribute to God the widescale destruction of the flood, only to then teach that he gives us the rainbow as a sign of his covenant protection? And how can the liturgy pair this reading about the flood with the proclamation



that God's ways are love and truth (cf. Ps 25:10)? Does God really care about my little concerns, or am I just another piece on a cosmic chessboard?

This time last year, Christian musicians (including Wollongong's own Bishop Brian!) united to sing a blessing over Australia. Similar movements occurred in over two dozen countries across six continents. The song chosen, written by Kari Jobe and others, repeats 35 times: "He is for you." This powerful proclamation resonates both with the truth about who God is, and the truth that the human heart most needs to hear.

To love is to will the good of the other. So, the God whose very nature is love (1 Jn 4:16) can have no desires for us, no stance towards us, other than for our happiness—a happiness that "no thief can steal and no moth destroy" (Mt 6:19), both in this life and for all eternity.

But while on this earth, we are never able to see all sides of the story—after all, we can't even see at one time more than three sides of a cube! And we must look to the second reading to discover the second half of the flood story.

"Christ himself, innocent though he was, died once for sins" (1 Pet 3:18)—the sins of all women and men, the cumulative consequences of humanity's rejection of God. When Jesus descended into the place of the dead on Holy Saturday, those who refused to be saved by a wooden ark were offered salvation through a wooden cross. Those who were too caught up in life's pleasures to listen to the words of Noah heard the Word of God himself who, "Went to preach to the spirits in prison" (1 Pet 3:19). And, as with all those who die, we pray that "through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has entered heaven and is at God's right hand" (1 Pet 3:22), they now share his glory and sing his praise—a joy that knows no end.

St Catherine of Siena wrote, "You must believe in truth that whatever God gives or permits is for your salvation" (*Letter*, T354). And, just as the best rainbows are seen during sun-showers, so too are we best able to give glory to God when we let him lead us through suffering with trust in his providence and love.

It was after Jesus had endured the temptation in the wilderness that he was ready to proclaim the Good News that "the kingdom of God is close at

hand" (Mk 1:15). It was because of his experience of God's truth and love even in the face of tragedy that the young man I mentioned, Pope St John Paul II, could proclaim to the whole world, "Don not be afraid!"—and have the whole world believe him.

Let us make acts of faith that whatever God sends our way today will be for our salvation, our eternal happiness.

SR SUSANNA EDMUNDS OP

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What does the phrase, "[God] is for you," mean to you?
- St Catherine of Siena tells us that: "Whatever God gives or permits is for your salvation." Why do you think this might be difficult to believe?
- What would it look like to, "Let [God] lead us through suffering with trust in his providence and love?"

### 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)