

MONDAY 7 MARCH

Who is our neighbour?

**Leviticus 19:1-2. 11-18;
Matthew 25:31-46**

As we start this first full week of Lent, are we able to ask ourselves what we are doing for the least of God's people? Whom do we identify as the "least" in our current society? In today's reading we are reminded of the trappings of being a hypocrite. The parable talks of those who claim to serve the Lord, but do not recognise God in those who are in need. We are challenged this week to go that little bit further in the way we love our neighbour. It may be easy to think of our neighbour as our friends, those simply living nearby, or possibly only those from our same nation. Jesus explains that our neighbour in need stretches even further. Whom do we notice who may truly need clothing, who may need to be fed, who may be sick, and in need of company? They may even be people with whom we find it hard to like or associate. Here is where Jesus calls us to see the true nature of the Lord.

Compassionate Father, help us to see you in all those who need our support and may we continue to do your work, wherever it is needed. Amen.

TUESDAY 8 MARCH

Pray deeply

**Isaiah 55:10-11;
Matthew 6:7-15**

How do you feel about the word of God nourishing all it touches just like the rains on the earth? Jesus calls us to pray deeply, with faith in the outcome. He asks us to have trust that the Lord knows what we need already and will respond to our heartfelt intentions. He asks us to use plain words to the Father: words that are nourishing, simple and of course heartfelt. It is here we are given our greatest prayer, the Our Father. Yet this prayer is not only about the deep connection to the Father using humble words. Jesus focuses on the message of forgiveness: how, in forgiving others, we are ultimately led to our own redemption and our own forgiveness. Who do you need to forgive today?

Loving Lord, we thank you for forgiving our sins and ask you to give us the peace that comes from being able to forgive others and ourselves. Amen.

WEDNESDAY 9 MARCH

It is never too late

Jonah 3:1-10; Luke 11:29-32

We live in an age of evidence, constantly on the lookout for signs and data. Last year during the pandemic we heard stories of those who rejected the knowledge of experts – in particular, those who tried to warn us about potential dangers. How do we feel about those messengers now? The hopeful message, which surfaces from today's potentially gloomy exterior, is one about the gift of repentance and how that leads to our redemption. In truth, we are in no need of signs because Jesus acts as the only evidence we need. We are, instead, in need of faith. It is never too late for one to change their path, to turn a life around with faith in the Lord. The sign of Jonah that Jesus talks about is the sign of faith, trust – and a true shift in our paradigm – which ultimately leads to everlasting life.

Jesus Christ, we ask you to guide us with love towards a place of repentance. Allow us to trust your signs as that which lead us to the Father. Amen.

"The problem is not feeding the poor, or clothing the naked or visiting the sick, but rather recognising that the poor, the naked, the sick, prisoners and the homeless have the dignity to sit at our table, to feel 'at home' among us, to feel part of a family. This is the sign that the kingdom of heaven is in our midst."

Pope Francis

THURSDAY 10 MARCH

How much do you ask of God?

Esther 4:17; Matthew 7:7-12

Matthew's reading today is one of such joyful news, though it is a message we might find quite difficult to rationalise practically. How much do you ask of God, with pure trust in the outcome? Sometimes the chaos of the world can get in the way of our path to the Lord. Jesus may be suggesting here that the biggest block for us all is possibly our perception. Ultimately, the faith we need is, more often than not, impacted by our own relationship with trust. If we don't believe the Father will give us good gifts, or that we deserve them, can they ever materialise? What potential could we reach if we had the ability to lead a life free from the sin acting as a barrier between us and God? It's a simple idea, but clearly not easy. This message is just as relevant to those listening to Jesus two thousand years ago as it is for us today. Jesus reassures us that his Father in heaven wants us to live a life of abundance: that when we are in need he will be there for us. What sin acts as a barrier for you, preventing you from receiving the good gifts of the Lord?

Dear Lord, Please help us to surrender our sins to you, so that we, like your Son, feel worthy of your love. Help us to seek, to ask, to knock and to receive your loving embrace with trust. Amen.

FRIDAY 11 MARCH

Go further

**Ezekiel 18:21-28;
Matthew 5:20-26**

There is so much to think about in today's readings, including the idea of death – both physical and spiritual. Ezekiel suggests that those who have turned their back on sin gain everything, a beautiful image of the success of reconciliation. Jesus challenges us to go further: that even a quarrel or a sustained disagreement brings about a type of murder or death. How much of a righteous life can we lead with a personal vendetta hanging over us? As is often the way in his teaching, Jesus is asking us to be free from hatred and anger in our heart as well as in our daily practices and actions. After all, what good is praising the Lord our God in church weekly, all the while holding a grudge? Can you think of someone you need to reconcile with this Lenten period? It is in this practice of settling matters quickly that you free yourself from judgement and open your heart to the gift of everlasting life.

Dear Jesus, show us the way to being free from judgement in our heart and in our actions. Sustain us in our practice of forgiveness, so that we may be ever closer to you and the Father. Amen.

SATURDAY 12 MARCH

Go deeper

**Deuteronomy 26:16-19;
Matthew 5:43-48**

In today's world it can be easy to see division everywhere. Social media, for example, has given rise to clashes between people on opposing sides of the debate, often talking about large topics all too complex to be thrashed out on a digital platform. The political divide, even within our faith, appears to be getting wider and wider. Jesus challenges us to use this as a trigger point, a call to action if you like. In life it can be very simple to love the ones you like, but Jesus asks us to go deeper in order to reflect the love of the Father. He tells us that it is the love of one's enemies that is the work of God. Jesus' command is simple yet direct: "Be perfect therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." How easy is it for you to love those you disagree with, or those you perhaps don't get on with at work? How would you feel about taking the time now to pray for your so-called enemies?

Heavenly Father, you show us the way to be free from division and reach deeper in our love. Guide us on this path to loving those we disagree with, letting your light and love do what we struggle to. Amen.

DISCUSSION POINT

Jesus calls for our hearts to expand and shows us how, in a series of practical ways. Think about those you may need to forgive. How hard or easy is that for you? What impact would it have on your life if you could put aside differences with those you disagree with? How much do you help those in society who are truly in need? What challenges do you need to overcome, in order to do more of God's work?

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