

Lent Week Two

REPENT

The beauty of Lent is that, in recognising our shortcomings, we are not left without hope. Gráinne Treanor reminds us that the season of repentance is also one of compassion and hope.



SUNDAY 13 MARCH

2ND SUNDAY OF LENT

Permanence and change

Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18; Philippians 3:17 – 4:1; Luke 9:28-36

A sense of the history of our faith – and with it, permanence and change – permeates today's readings. Abram looked to the heavens and saw the stars, symbolising his descendants. We can imagine the awe he probably experienced while gazing at skies that fill us with awe even today. And in the Gospel, we see from the disciples' reverence towards Moses and Elijah that the faith sealed in the covenant has indeed lasted the ages.

There has been change, too, and some people – perhaps, to some extent, all – have lost their way. Yet even in change there is permanence in Paul's recognition of the error of placing too much importance on earthly things.

Lord, help us this Lent to take time to be present with you, in wonder and awe, connecting with our place in the long history of our faith. May we continue to experience the heavenly amid our earthly concerns. Amen.

MONDAY 14 MARCH

Compassion overflows

Daniel 9:4-10 Luke 6:36-38

In Sunday's second reading, Paul referred to things that are "shameful" and in today's first reading, Daniel refers to "the look of shame" of those who have sinned. Despite God's faithfulness to the covenant, people have done wrong, acted wickedly, betrayed the commandments and ignored the prophets.

Shame can at times be so overwhelming that we don't see the point in changing our ways, turning around, starting anew. The psalmist, who recognises that shame, nevertheless has faith enough to ask the Lord to treat us with compassion rather than according to our sins. And that sense of compassion is overflowing in the Gospel, where Jesus asks us to be compassionate as God is compassionate, to refrain from judging and condemning, and to grant pardon.

Lord, time and again we experience your forgiveness and compassion. May your faithfulness to us move us to try again, keeping your message of compassion alive in our times. Amen.

TUESDAY 15 MARCH

The call is relevant today

Isaiah 1:10, 16-20; Matthew 23:1-2

There is no mistaking in Isaiah's words what we need to do to keep the command of the Lord: cease to do evil, learn to do good, search for justice, help the oppressed, be just to the orphan, plead for the widow. These are part of our faith tradition and the call is as relevant today as it was millennia ago.

The psalmist alerts us to the contradiction of making offerings and reciting commandments while acting in a way that does not reflect them. In the Gospel, Matthew presents Jesus as distinguishing between what the scribes and Pharisees preach and what they do, because they do not practise what they preach. They attract attention with their piety, yet place burdens on others without lifting a finger to move them.

Lord, may we turn humbly to your word, so that we do not lose sight, in our outward display of faith, of your command to be compassionate. Amen.

WEDNESDAY 16 MARCH

True greatness

Jeremiah 18:18-20; Matthew 20:17-28

There is a contrast between superficial greatness and deep humility in this week's readings. Jeremiah's adversaries are plotting and Jeremiah speaks of how he pleaded before the Lord on their behalf, asking a question many of us find difficult to consider: should evil be returned for good? It seems Jeremiah had the humility and inner strength to remain faithful to the Lord's command for compassion and mercy, despite the ways of his adversaries.

In the Gospel, we also see the contrast between outward displays of authority and true humility. In response to a mother's concern about the place of her sons in God's kingdom, Jesus makes it clear that those who follow him must serve rather than be served. Therein lies true greatness.

Lord, may you give us inner strength to serve you in our service to others, even when this means returning evil with good. May we share with others the hope that reconciliation brings. Amen.

THURSDAY 17 MARCH

ST PATRICK

Trust in God

1 Peter 4:7-11; Luke 5:1-11

There are elements of the life of St Patrick, whose feast falls on this day, that ring true in today's readings.

In the first reading, and echoed in the psalm, we hear the Lord speak of a blessing on the person who trusts in the Lord. That person is compared to a tree by the water – it stays green even when the heat comes, because it has spread its roots into the stream. It does not worry about drought, nor cease to bear fruit.

In the Gospel, we hear of the hardship Lazarus endured during his life, in stark contrast to the life of the rich man at whose gate he sat.

Patrick endured hardship during his mission to Ireland. He was rejected, isolated and probably often in danger. Yet he trusted in God and did God's work.

Lord, may our trust in you nourish our commitment to fulfil the mission you intend for us. Amen.

FRIDAY 18 MARCH

Superficial and real greatness

Genesis 37:3-4. 12-13. 17-28; Matthew 21:33-43. 45-46

In today's readings, we again see the contrast between superficial and real greatness. In the first reading, Joseph is rejected by his jealous brothers, who even considered killing him. Their compromise – selling him for twenty silver pieces rather than shedding his blood – may have spared his life but was nevertheless harsh. Yet greatness would come to Joseph.

There is much harshness in the Gospel too. The tenants in the parable kill the servants the landowner has sent to collect his produce. They even kill his son whom he was certain they would spare. Like the power demonstrated by Joseph's brothers, however, their power is not lasting, and they will be replaced by tenants who deliver the produce at season's end. The stone rejected by the builders becomes the cornerstone and the kingdom of God will be given to those who produce fruit.

Lord, may we not be distracted by the glitter of temporary greatness, but rejoice in doing your will. Amen.

"Reconciliation always brings a springtime to the soul."

Br Roger Schütz, Founder of Taizé

SATURDAY 19 MARCH

ST JOSEPH, HUSBAND OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Hope for the future

2 Samuel 7:4-5. 12-14. 16; Romans 4:13. 16-18. 22; Matthew 1:16. 18-21. 24

This second week of Lent opened with a strong sense of hope for the future of God's relationship with humanity. The week closes with a similar sense of hope and promise. In the reading from the book of Samuel, we see further references to offspring and to the establishment of a kingdom. In his letter to the Romans, Paul reminds us of God's promise to Abraham, the father of many nations.

There is also a strong sense of God's call to individuals to play their part in fulfilling God's will. In the Gospel, it is the turn of Joseph, whose feast we celebrate today. Instead of rejecting Mary when she is found to be with child, he takes on a more difficult role that ultimately becomes critical in the history of our faith.

Lord, may we not be afraid to take on the role you desire for us, spreading your message through the decisions we make in our lives. Amen.

DISCUSSION POINT

Sometimes the allure of temporary greatness drowns out the call to live out our Christian mission of reconciliation, compassion and service to others.

Can I carve out time this Lent to listen to the word of Jesus and identify my true calling in the history of God's relationship with humanity?

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