



Friday after Ash Wednesday

Is not this the fast I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?

—Isaiah 58:6

MANY PEOPLE THINK that we religious make a big sacrifice by not having a family, and that is true. But that sacrifice and the other sacrifices we make free and empower us to serve and help others. In my case, it frees and empowers me to work with the children in the neighborhoods of Guadalupe, Mexico, children like Bryant who live in houses with dirt floors, makeshift walls and roofs, and no hot water. And that is why I became a sister, to teach and work with poor children so that they could have a better life.

Lent is the season of making sacrifices, yet we do not make sacrifices simply for their own sake. We make sacrifices precisely so that we can be freed and empowered to love God more by helping our brothers and sisters. In this regard, Lent is really the season of doing things

for others. During these forty days, we must ask ourselves if we are truly doing all we can to help those in need. Reaching out to the poor and suffering will require great sacrifices of us, but they are worth it, for those are the sacrifices God so desires.

Michelle Toepp, C.S.C.



Saturday after Ash Wednesday

“Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” Jesus answered, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

—Luke 5:30–32

I CONFRONT MY own stereotypes of others every day. My ministry among the marginalized in downtown Portland opens me to the authentic stories of suffering people. I let go of my prejudice that the homeless are lazy when I hear the story of Joe who suffers from stifling

depression because his father sexually abused him. The label of drunkard falls away when Betty confesses to me she turned to alcohol and drugs when she witnessed her father kill her mother. The tag of mental illness is ripped off when I befriend Paul, who teaches me how to be honest in prayer.

Jesus called tax collectors and sinners around him because they were marginalized from their communities. He turned the tables on who was labeled “sinner”—a category where I find myself when my ignorance hides behind prejudice and discrimination. People on the margins peel away our stereotypes and false identities so that we cling to God with raw love. Their vulnerability teaches us a new acceptance of all who long for hope.

Ronald Patrick Raab, C.S.C.



Sunday, Week One

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

—Matthew 4:1

WITHIN THE SPRAWLING parish of El Señor de la Esperanza in Lima, Peru there is an area that, as it grew, took on the name *la Boca del Diablo* (the Devil's Mouth). Stories are told of strangers who entered this violent and menacing place never to return. The first parish chapel built there was burned to the ground by those hostile to the holy intrusion. The second chapel stands on that same spot. As if to imitate the bold move to build again, and perhaps relieved that someone had faced the devil, the residents began to refer to their neighborhood as *la Mano de Dios* (the Hand of God), and so it is called today.

We all have devils in our lives we must face with courage and faith, armed with the assurance that the mouth of the devil is no match for the hand of our God. And the most challenging

devil is the one whose temptations fascinate us most.

The same Spirit who led Jesus into the desert invites us, if we are inclined to be so bold, to follow where we might not normally want to go, where we will find ourselves face-to-face with our own fascination with pleasure, wealth, and power. And our sojourn into that wilderness can be as purposeful as Jesus' forty days to face the devil. But we do not go to the wilderness to stay there, to keep the temptations at bay. Rather, we let ourselves be led into the wilderness by the Spirit in order to know our devils better so that we can then return to where they are, but this time less captivated by them. To overcome the temptations that fascinate so many in our world is a prophetic witness we so desperately need.

Don Feters, C.S.C.



Monday, Week One

“Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink?” . . .

“Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

—Matthew 25:37–40

IF JESUS WERE here in the flesh, if he were hungry, naked, or distressed, it would be so easy—even pleasurable—to rush to attend to him. Who of us would refuse Jesus? But at my ministry with the homeless at André House, I see people who are dirty, cranky, not always appreciative, and quite often high on alcohol or drugs. Why is it so hard to reach out to these people day after day? I believe it’s because we do not take this directive from Jesus seriously enough. For us to reach out continually to the homeless, the poor, and the needy, we have to refrain from thinking, “That’s just Gloria or Willy looking for another handout.” If we instead think, “Look, it’s Jesus, and he’s in

need,” then we wouldn’t think twice, no matter how often it was asked of us. Of all the passages that refer to Jesus, this is one meant to be taken literally. It’s that simple: When we serve our sisters and brothers in need, we are really serving Jesus. And how can we refuse Jesus?

Bill Wack, C.S.C.



Tuesday, Week One

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout . . . so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth.

—Isaiah 55:10–11

THE HEAVY DOWNPOUR came right on God’s cue. We were in the fifth reading of the Easter Vigil at St. Brendan Parish in Kitete, Tanzania: “As the rain and snow come down from heaven” With our corrugated roof and no ceiling, the rain was deafening. The reader

raised his voice to the maximum, but only a few in the front could barely hear him. Yet even as the people strained to hear, smiles of joy came across their faces. The farms were well prepared by this time, only waiting for this blessed rain to water them so the wheat could be sown and new life bloom again.

That downpour and the growth it would sprout were a perfect image of what God had done for us that Lent. God had showered us with the blessings of his word, and we were entering Easter blooming anew with his life. And that is the hope for all of us every Lent. We hope through our Lenten practices, especially the daily reading of scripture, that the Lord will pour his word upon us. We do so trusting that God's word always accomplishes its purpose: our salvation.

David Eliaona, C.S.C.



Wednesday, Week One

*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and
put a new and right spirit within me.*

—Psalm 51:10–11

OCCASIONALLY, I SUGGEST that students in my residence hall give up beer for Lent. There are no laughs or chuckles, perhaps a few looks of horror. Candy or desserts are fine, but cutting out beer is a drastic step for a college sophomore. Perhaps they're right. Lent is a new beginning, not an ultimate resolution to our struggles. Prodigals who have wandered far from God may require a lightning bolt epiphany, but mostly, spiritual progress is like exercise. Going from couch potato to marathoner takes time, and we need to be patient and persevere through our off days. By graduation many of the students who arrived four years earlier like lost sheep in new pastures have undergone a transformation. Those changes are effected unevenly and sometimes painfully. They are usually gradual in pace. There is not one of us who can't do just a little more and walk a few

steps farther with the Lord each day. Like zealous gardeners dutifully working on their patch each day, we continue cultivating and tending our hearts, motivated by small sprouts of success to bring our lives to fullest bloom.

James B. King, C.S.C.



Thursday, Week One

“Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.”

—Matthew 7:7–8

DO WE REALLY believe that God answers our prayers? After all, Jesus says to ask and it will be given to us, to search and we will find. If we get the feeling at times that God does not hear us, perhaps it is because we limit our prayer to petition and neglect prayer of praise, thanksgiving, and repentance. We might feel like the

first-grader who told her mom, “I don’t believe there is a God!” After some gentle probing, the mom discovered that her daughter prayed for grandma to get better, yet she died. Then she prayed for a puppy for her birthday, but no little dog came. And so the girl concluded there was no God.

There are definitely times when I feel that way, asking, “Where are you God?” But other times, especially when I am praying for the Spirit’s guidance and offering God praise and thanksgiving, the answer just pops up, often in the most unexpected way. Our God is a God of surprises, and so while the answer to our prayers is often what we least expect, it is always what we need.

Jean Goulet, C.S.C.



Friday, Week One

“When you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.”

—Matthew 5:23–24

I AMAZE MYSELF sometimes, but not in a good way. When wronged, I am often tempted to hold on to the hurt and wallow in self-pity. I’m certainly not proud of it. It makes this teaching of Jesus very uncomfortable to hear, let alone put into practice. I always expect Jesus to say that if I have something against my brother or sister, then I must go and apologize. That’s natural; that’s acceptable. I am able to apologize.

Jesus, however, is saying something quite different. He is saying that if someone has something against *me*, then I must go and be the reconciler. I must let go of the temptation

to close in on myself and instead go out to the other and seek reconciliation first. That goes against the grain of how we normally live out our relationships, yet Jesus calls all of us who come to him to have hearts that love and forgive. And so if we are to approach him with the gift of ourselves, we first must approach our brothers and sisters with the gift of ourselves in humility and love.

Thomas A. Dziekan, C.S.C.



Saturday, Week One

“I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven.”

—Matthew 5:44–45

I LIVE IN Canada, a country where I have no fear of persecution. I’m not aware of any “real enemies.” Yet in community life and in ministry, there are individuals who tax my patience or are a challenge for me. Sometimes

it's people who love to control or manipulate. Other times, it's those who are overly demanding or never seem satisfied. Still other times it's simply people who do not seem to understand me. Our Holy Cross Constitutions describe this reality well when they speak of how faults and shortcomings will make us each a trial to others from time to time.

Every Lent we are presented anew with this gospel challenge to act as Jesus would act: to love and to pray for these individuals. Some days, that can seem as daunting as loving enemies or persecutors. From my many Lenten journeys I have come to recognize the wisdom of Jesus' call to change and do my best to be reconciled. I also give thanks for those who see me as a challenge and are able to follow his admonition to love and to pray for me. For it is only when we all live as children of our Father in heaven that we become true sisters and brothers to one another.

John Vickers, C.S.C.



Sunday, Week Two

Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white.

—Mathew 17:1–2

IT IS A special moment when someone comes to our door asking to join Holy Cross. As director of formation for our men's community in Mexico, I interview these young adults. Having great respect for the relationship with God that brought them to us, I also hint there is more to come. One of them, who came knocking years ago, recently presented his request to make final vows. It was inspiring to read his petition describing the action of God that has transformed his heart and soul. In a way, he is the same person. In a way, he is a person profoundly transformed. Like the athlete who finds his game only after years of disciplined training, like the diamond that reflects the

light only after being cut by the jeweler, he has become a man of God for others.

And yet his growth, like the growth of all of us, remains incomplete, for our transformation into Christ is never finished. There is always more to come. That is why the Church gives us another Lent. It is not that our Lenten practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving themselves transform us, but that they open our hearts and minds anew to the grace of conversion. With this openness and an eye toward grace, all the moments that make up our daily lives—from the joyful to the sorrowful, from the amazing to the routine—can become gifts of the divine jeweler, transforming us into more brilliant reflections of his love. It is then that the glory of the transfiguration will be seen in the glimmering transformation of our lives into his.

Tom Zurcher, C.S.C.



Monday, Week Two

“Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”

—Luke 6:38

MY FIRST MISSION was as a catechist in a tribal village in Bangladesh. I used to go there during the week to teach and then on Sundays to lead prayer. The village was seven miles from the convent on a dirt road through the forest. Other than walking, the only means of travel was cycling. When the sun was hot or it rained, I was tempted not to go, but the thought of depriving the students of learning or the people of getting together to pray pushed me to make the hard trip. On every visit their joyous welcome overwhelmed me and made me forget my pain. The villagers’ faith and trust in Divine Providence touched my core. Even in their poverty, they were happy and generous. Their love nourished me to become a better person

and deepen my faith. I was truly given more than what I gave.

In today's broken world, we are challenged by Jesus to accept and share our giftedness. It might be hard; our selfishness and personal interest may stand in our way. But when we open our hearts and share our treasures, we experience God's love in abundance.

Pushpa Gomes, C.S.C.



Tuesday, Week Three

*Make me to know your ways, O Lord;
teach me your paths. Lead me in your
truth, and teach me, for you are the God
of my salvation.*

—Psalm 25:4–5

A FEW YEARS ago, I was at the reunion of one of the classes I had taught at our Holy Cross secondary school in Taunton, Massachusetts. During the social hour, a former student came over to express his gratitude to me for teaching him the four cardinal virtues. He promptly named them as prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. He said it had been his goal to live these virtues ever since my class. I was astounded. Taunton was one of my earliest assignments, and this was his fiftieth reunion!

All of us who instruct and mentor young people, whether as teachers, parents, coaches, grandparents, or godparents, are privileged with a great opportunity to influence them as their minds and hearts develop and they determine what ideals will guide their lives. At our best,

we are pathways of grace as God seeks to show them his ways and lead them in his truth. And yet, if we are to teach them God's ways, we must first ask God to teach us. For it is only in following the path of the Lord in our lives that we ourselves and all those we guide can come to discover God as the God of our salvation.

Renatus Foldenauer, C.S.C.