

THE JOURNEY HOME

DAILY REFLECTIONS
FOR LENT
YEAR A

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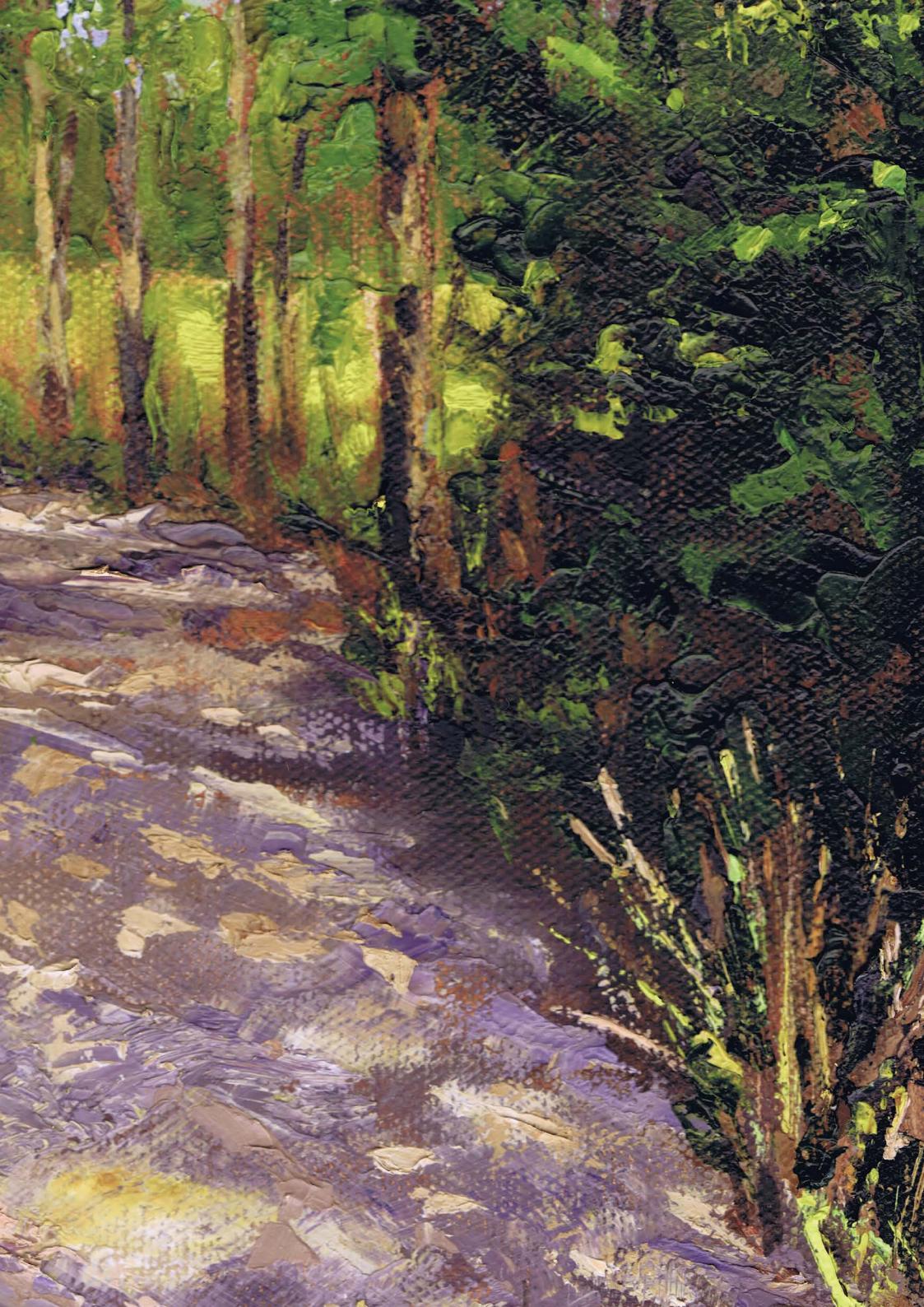
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THE JOURNEY HOME





Ash Wednesday

Joel 2:12-18 | Psalm 50:3-6, 12-14, 17 | 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2 |

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

BE RECONCILED TO GOD

Take a moment to quieten your mind and heart and ask the Holy Spirit to join you in this time of prayer.

Speak, Lord, your servant is listening:
give me ears to hear your voice,
give me a will to obey your word,
and lips to proclaim it to the world.
Amen.

So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:20-21)

God doesn't need to be reconciled to us. We need to be reconciled to God. St Paul doesn't beg God to be reconciled to us but says to us: "be reconciled to God".

God doesn't turn from us; we turn from God. We want to dethrone and replace God, whom we see not only as a competitor but as an enemy. That's at the heart of the Fall, the story of which is told in Genesis 3. According to the serpent, God is an oppressor who keeps the human being down. To realise our true potential, the serpent claims, we need to break free, and then we can finally be

God. That's the lie of evil, which turns the creature into God and God into a creature. That's the original sin, underlying all other sin – the drive to divinise ourselves.

To be reconciled to God means that we stop trying to dethrone and replace him, and accept that God alone is God and that we are God's creatures, dependent on him in every way. To accept that truth is not oppression but liberation for the human being; and it's that liberation which is the goal of the prayer, fasting and almsgiving of which Ash Wednesday and the whole Lenten journey speak.

FOR REFLECTION

What might seek to dethrone God in your life?

During this Lenten season, how can you grow in your dependence on God?

CONCLUDING PRAYER

Give me, Creator God, the true freedom
that comes to those who rejoice to be your creature,
called to create with you,
bringing light out of darkness.

Amen.

Thursday after Ash Wednesday

Deuteronomy 30:15–20 | Psalm 1:1–4, 6 | Luke 9:22–25

THE CALL TO LISTEN AND TO CHOOSE

Take a moment to quieten your mind and heart and ask the Holy Spirit to join you in this time of prayer.

Speak, Lord, your servant is listening:
give me ears to hear your voice,
give me a will to obey your word,
and lips to proclaim it to the world.
Amen.

I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. (Deuteronomy 30:19–20)

The call to listen and to choose is at the heart of Lent. The Book of Deuteronomy speaks of obedience, which means a deep listening to a voice other than our own, since if we hear only our own voice we are imprisoned in a hall of mirrors which becomes a tomb.

But if we listen to the voice of God, we find not death but life.

This life comes in strange ways, because the deep listening of obedience involves death of a kind – death to the world in which the only voice we hear is our own. Jesus speaks of his

resurrection, but it will come only after a journey through the violence of the Cross.

Obedience also requires that we not only listen to the voice of Jesus but also, like him, choose to act on what we hear. The Father calls us, as he called Jesus. But he leaves the choice to us, as he did to Jesus, because God is a great respecter of human freedom, since freedom is the greatest gift he has given us. He doesn't force us to do anything.

That's why the Book of Deuteronomy says: "Choose life"! Once we do choose the life that comes from listening, then we are taking the path of liberating obedience which is at the heart of biblical religion and the heart, therefore, of Lent.

FOR REFLECTION

Recall a time when you have listened to and acted upon the voice of Jesus, and it has given you freedom and a more abundant life.

What is your understanding and experience of 'liberating obedience'?

CONCLUDING PRAYER

Lead us, Lord God,
into the deep listening of these Lenten days,
and teach us the way of obedience
that we may choose life.

Amen.

Friday after Ash Wednesday

Isaiah 58:1-9 | Psalm 50:3-6, 18-19 | Matthew 9:14-15

RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AND OTHERS

Take a moment to quieten your mind and heart and ask the Holy Spirit to join you in this time of prayer.

Speak, Lord, your servant is listening:
give me ears to hear your voice,
give me a will to obey your word,
and lips to proclaim it to the world.
Amen.

Is not this the fast that 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? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly... (Isaiah 58:6-8)

The religion of ancient Israel is called, at times, ethical monotheism. The way we relate to God is strictly related to the way we relate to other human beings. You can't honour God if you dishonour other human beings. In other words, you can't separate the vertical (how we relate to God) from the horizontal (how we relate to other people). That's why the prophet Isaiah rails against those who claim to honour God and do all that worship requires,

but treat others, especially the poor and vulnerable, as if they matter not at all.

If you want right relationship with God, you have to have right relationship with other people, especially the poor and vulnerable. The prophet also says that if you turn away from this false religion and enter the world of right relationship, then “your light shall break forth like the dawn and your healing shall spring up quickly” (Isaiah 58:8).

Once we enter the world of right relationship, there is the joy of the wedding feast. But until then – and therefore through these days of Lent – we fast in order to feast once we come to the moment of Easter.

FOR REFLECTION

In what ways might you be separating your spiritual life from your social responsibilities?

How can your Lenten fasting help you to have ‘right relationship with others, especially the poor and vulnerable’?

CONCLUDING PRAYER

Through these Lenten days, Lord God,
lead us to you and to each other,
that we may learn the way of right relationship,
and come to the feast of Easter.

Amen.

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

Isaiah 58:9-14 | Psalm 85:1-6 | Luke 5:27-32

THE JOURNEY OF REPENTANCE

Take a moment to quieten your mind and heart and ask the Holy Spirit to join you in this time of prayer.

Speak, Lord, your servant is listening:
give me ears to hear your voice,
give me a will to obey your word,
and lips to proclaim it to the world.
Amen.

Then Levi gave a great banquet for him in his house; and there was a large crowd of tax collectors and others sitting at the table with them. The Pharisees and their scribes were complaining to his disciples, saying, “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 5:29-32)

In this time of Lent, we recognise the truth that we are sinners, not yet among the righteous who have entered the world of right relationship and come to the feast which it promises. We are on the way; we are works in progress. But if we see ourselves as already righteous, the finished product, there will be no progress. We will be stuck forever in the world of illusion, and there will be no feast.

Jesus calls the tax-collector Levi not because he is righteous or worthy, not because of what he is but because of what he might become, which Jesus sees clearly. In answering the call, Levi begins a journey out of the world of wrong relationship into the world of right relationship. That will be a long and difficult journey for him, but it will lead Levi home to Paradise.

We, too, are called on this journey of repentance – acknowledging that we are sinners but following the Lord out of the world of sin, which will climax on Calvary, into the world of grace, which will come with the Resurrection. Repentance allows the infinite mercy of God to do its work in us. When that happens, as the prophet Isaiah says, “you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water whose waters never fail” (Isaiah 58:11).

FOR REFLECTION

Where in your life are you tempted to see yourself as ‘already righteous,’ and how might that be hindering your spiritual growth? How can you allow God’s mercy to ‘water’ the dry places in your heart?

CONCLUDING PRAYER

Trusting in your mercy, Lord,
we acknowledge that we have sinned
and ask that we be healed of sin’s wounds
and be counted among the righteous.
Amen.

First Sunday of Lent

Genesis 2:7-9, 3:1-7 | Psalm 50:3-6, 12-14,17 | Romans 5:12-19 |

Matthew 4:1-11

THROUGH THE DESERT, HOME TO THE GARDEN

Small group host: As we begin today's small group reflection and discussion of the First Sunday of Lent, let us take a moment to invite God into our small community. We take a deep breath and pause to be still.

OPENING PRAYER

Speak, Lord, your servants are listening:
give us ears to hear your voice,
give us a will to obey your word
and lips to proclaim it to the world.
Amen.

GOSPEL

Small group member reads the Gospel

A reading from the Gospel of Matthew:
Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” But he answered, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone,

but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.””

Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written,

‘He will command his angels concerning you,’

and ‘On their hands they will bear you up,

so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.””

Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.””

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God,

and serve only him.””

Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Pause for 3 minutes for a time of individual reflection

SUNDAY REFLECTION

Small group member reads the Sunday reflection

But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” (Genesis 3:4-5)

The First Sunday of Lent has us initially in the garden and then in the desert. The interplay between garden and desert is at the heart of the Bible. The garden is the land of life, the desert the land of death. The garden is our true home, from which we have exiled ourselves and to which we must return. The desert is not our natural habitat, but it is where we are living, and it is the land we must leave behind if we are to return home to the garden. Satan's temptations of Jesus are seductions intended to make sure that Jesus stays in the desert, in the land of death, forever. If Jesus were to say yes to Satan, he would be signing his own death warrant and condemning himself to the desert forever. By saying no to Satan, he ensures that he will return to Paradise, bringing with him many others who, like him, say no to the seductions of Satan.

The voice of Satan is heard on the lips of the serpent in the story of the Fall. The serpent makes two claims about God, both of which are lies. The first is that God himself is a liar. God has said that if you touch the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, you will die. But then the serpent says, “You will not die” (Genesis 3:4). So God is a liar. Yet the creation story has left no doubt that God’s word is trustworthy and creative, not deceptive and destructive: “God said, ‘Let there be light’, and there was light” (Genesis 1:3).

The second lie is that God is not only a liar but an oppressor. The serpent claims that God is keeping the human being down because he wants no rival. But in fact, the serpent claims, if you break free, “you too will be God” (Genesis 3:4). Yet the creation story has made it clear that God is no oppressor. He has created the human being not to be a slave but to be a co-creator, a

partner with God in the ongoing work of creation (Genesis 2:15-19).

The human being has to choose between the lies of the serpent and the truth of God. In the story of the Fall, the human being chooses the lies, and Adam and Eve therefore expel themselves from the garden and head out into the desert, where they will face repeated temptations from Satan. Yet God doesn't abandon the human being out in the desert.

St Paul speaks of God's grace, the unearned gift of perfect love; and it's that grace which accompanies Adam and Eve, as it does us, as we make our way through the desert home to the garden. The choice we make to follow Jesus back to the garden is never just the result of our own willpower. It is the fruit of God's grace, the God who wants to work with us as we make our way out of slavery into freedom, out of the desert back to the garden, out of death into life.

Pause for 3 minutes for a time of individual reflection

FOR REFLECTION

What in today's scripture spoke most to your heart?

Why are the 'lies of the serpent' so alluring to us?

What can we learn from the way Jesus rejects the temptations he faces in the desert?

Take a moment to reflect on what you have heard and seen today. How might God be speaking to you through today's small group experience?

THE NEXT STEP

After completing this year's Lenten journey through daily reflections, the next step is yours to take. One step could be to visit the Archdiocesan Ministries website: archdiocesanministries.org.au

The Adult Formation section of the website will provide you with information about other programs and resources.

Some of these are listed in the following pages.



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