

# Reflections on Gospel Readings for Sundays and Feast Days

February 2020 Archive

## The Presentation of the Lord - Luke 2, 22-40

The Church, the family of God, must constantly live on the mystery of the Passover and offer the only begotten Son to the Father, as the Immaculate Lamb for the life of the world. That is why today's meeting with Jesus is already a preview of the liberation of His brothers. He is already prophesying about the Paschal Victory. The light that accompanies us today in the liturgy makes us look forward to the Resurrection Light and the full freedom of God's Children. Is this what we really want, dearest? Let us especially pray for all consecrated persons, as today is their feast day. Let us remember them in our prayers and support them with our love. They devoted themselves to God completely, may they persevere in good, bringing Christ's Love to the world. Jesus is alive. Amen.

*Fr. Michał Żarkowski CFMD*

## 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time - Matthew 5, 13-16

"You are the salt of the earth...You are the light of the world." How important is salt? In ancient Israel, salt was a part of the rituals of sacrifice. Before modern refrigeration, salt was a necessity when it came to preserving foods. 40 million tons are required each year to fill our needs. Homer called salt divine. Plato called it a "substance dear to the gods." Shakespeare mentioned salt 17 times in his plays. Perhaps Leonardo da Vinci wanted to send a subtle message about purity lost when he painted "The Last Supper." In that painting an overturned bowl of salt is conspicuously placed before Judas. In ancient Greece a far-flung trade involving the exchange of salt for slaves gave rise to the expression, "not worth his salt." Roman soldiers were given special salt rations known as "Salarium Argentum", the forerunner of the English word "salary." Thousands of Napoleon's troops died during his retreat from Moscow because their wounds would not heal – their bodies lacked salt. The human body contains about 250g / 4oz. of salt. Without enough of it, muscles won't contract, blood won't circulate, food won't digest, and the heart won't beat. Without a doubt, salt is essential for life. Salt is a BIG DEAL! And light? They didn't have electricity when Jesus preached his famous sermon, therefore, they could really only accomplish and do things during the day when the sun was up. We know how important light is. Have you ever tried to find your way through the woods in total darkness? "You are the salt of the earth...You are the light of the world." Jesus said that to this humble mob, and it's telling that the word "you" in this sentence is plural – it's not any one of them by themselves, but if they work together. The 20th century English Archbishop William Temple is quoted as saying, "The Church is the only organization on earth that exists for those who are not its members." And it's true – Salt can lose its flavour

and therefore usefulness when we forget about those outside our doors. Salt loses its leavening quality when we become focused on self, rather than loving God and neighbour. "You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lamp stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

*Fr Julian Kent CFMD*

### **6<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time - Matthew 5, 17-37**

Today's Gospel reading leaves us with no space for any compromises when it comes to be more loving, more forgiving, more Jesus-like. How many Gospel readings more do we need to read or hear finally to understand that there is no compromise ever possible for those who want to follow Christ? It is a radical choice of love. So radical, in fact, that it ensures no sin. Because only if you truly love, whatever you do, will not lead you to sin. Is this the day that you will decide to follow that radical Gospel of love and inclusiveness that we see in Christ? Or are you still juggling your commitment between worldly benefits and Him, at the cost of your life?

*Fr. Chris CFMD*

### **7<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time - Matthew 5, 38-48**

Love your enemies

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor[b] and hate your enemy.' 44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47 And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

We believe in the mercy of God. At least out of one side of our mouth. On the other side we doubt it.

And wait for some coming proof. Which comes, and before which we persist in doubt.

I read the following story of Rudolph Hoess to retreatants once. I am not sure of their reaction. But I sense troubled souls. Can this be true? A bit much, is it not?

It is indeed a bit much.

And so is His "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." The murder of the Son of God at our hands by our sins.

A bit much indeed.

Centuries later we still doubt. The proof of that is our mercy to others. For an experience of mercy leads most certainly to a passing it on. And so a merciful people. Pass it on.

Here is the story:

“Let us pray for the Nazis, because no conversion is impossible!”

Fr. Maximilian Kolbe said to his friend Fr. John Lipsky in Auschwitz. In the end, he was right.

In 1947, a few days before his execution, Rudolph Hoess, one of the cruelest mass murderers in the course of history, converted.

In the Nuremberg Trials, as well as in the Warsaw National Court, Hoess confessed to being responsible for everything that happened under his command at the Auschwitz concentration camp. Calm and matter of fact, he confirmed that three million people died under his leadership.

Already after he had been condemned to death, he heard the bells of a nearby Carmelite convent in his prison cell in Krakow. He remembered how he stood at the altar as an altar boy and how becoming a priest had been his dream. Then, the virtually unthinkable happened: Hoess wanted to talk to a priest. When there was no response to his wish, he repeated his plea in a written petition. In the end, Fr. Wladyslaw Lohn SJ was chosen to take on this delicate mission. The provincial of the southern Poland Jesuits, he was very well informed about the concentration camp Auschwitz which was situated there.

Before he went to Rudolph Hoess, he went to get spiritual support from the convent where St. Faustina had lived and received the revelations of Divine Mercy.

Fr. Lohn then spoke several hours with Hoess. At the end of the conversation, the former commander of Auschwitz made a profession of Catholic Faith and officially came back to the Church. Then Hoess received sacramental confession.

Years later, Fr. Lohn testified that he prepared this man, who had been condemned to death, for confession by speaking about Jesus heart.

On the following day, Fr. Lohn brought Holy Eucharist to the converted Hoess. On receiving Holy Communion, he knelt down in the middle of his cell and cried. He dismissed the priest with the words, “God has forgiven me, but the people will never forgive me!”

Anticipating his imminent death and reconciled with God, he wrote a touching and loving farewell letter from prison the next day, April 11, 1947, to his wife and his five children. In it he openly stated the motives for his behavior and admitted his faults, but he also describes his sincere and caring love for his family and describes his return to God: “It was a difficult struggle. Yet I found my faith again in the Lord my God.”

On April 12, four days before execution, Hoess wrote a statement publicly asking the Polish nation for forgiveness...

A bit much, isn't it? It is indeed a bit much.

*Fr. James Baker CFMD*

## Ash Wednesday - Matthew 6, 1-6. 16-18

Is it just me or did we just have Lent? Well actually, that was Advent which is given the name, mini-lent. The call to be ready in preparation for the second coming of Christ.

This is the time that the whole church goes on retreat for 6 weeks, about 6 weeks after the Christmas season. In fact, as we are recovering from the holidays and celebrations of Christmas retail packs away the decorations and gifts and replaces them with chocolate Easter eggs, nothing like pressure.

Let us focus on what Lent is about. As Christians it is the most fundamental belief, Jesus was raised from the dead and is Christ the Lord. The Lent period prepares us for Easter and this wonderful celebration, the Resurrection.

Three themes take us on the journey: the mystery of Jesus' death and resurrection; the implications of this for those who are preparing for baptism and a renewal of faith and conversion for those already baptised.

The season of Lent starts with Ash Wednesday. Ash comes from the palms used the previous year and are placed on the forehead saying, 'repent, and believe in the gospel'.

We then embark on a journey of purification for 40 days that mirrors Jesus' time in the desert of fasting and temptation in preparation before he was to embark on his ministry.

I have worked in the health service for many years and we aim to provide quality care to patients and careers. For me as chaplain that also includes care to staff. If we are looking at change we consider a template and use the acronym, SMART. This means specific, measurable, realistic and timely. I was thinking about this today and how it could be applied to our purification. Sometimes we makes decisions of what to give up for Lent. As a child it was things like chocolate and sugar in my tea and going to Mass everyday. As a child I would consider that as SMART and not too testing. Of course, sometimes I didn't go to Mass everyday but did not give myself a hard time about it.

Give space for prayer, pray for peace, for justice and for the homeless. Give even if it is a loaf of bread at the food bank for those who need our love and support.

I understand the purification part and also thought about how some sacrifices promotes my own wellbeing. Maybe this is an opportunity to try and lose some weight as ultimately it will contribute to positive health outcomes. Maybe this is a time to reflect on my work life balance. Ultimately, I want to get to know Jesus more, build my relationship with the Divine through prayer and meditation.

I say this during Lent, during the Easter Triduum and the day of Easter, 'he did this for me'. This is the unconditional love of God.

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.  
Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.  
Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, grant us peace.

*Fr. Tosh Lynch, Saint Mungo's Mission, Glasgow, Scotland*