

MONDAY
LOVE WITHOUT LIMIT

Encounter:

Readings: Leviticus 19:1-2, 11-18; Matthew 25:31-46

Scripture for the day:

“When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you?”
(Matthew 25:38)

Embrace:

Reflection: In times like these how do we “preach” the gospel...how do we point people to Jesus? I believe that Matthew 25 is truly relevant for us today. Matthew 25 calls us to care for those vulnerable in society. We are reminded that the “strong” have a responsibility towards the “weak”...feed the hungry and offer water to the thirsty.

I note that Christ puts no other limits on salvation here; there is no test of dogma, no demand for particular kinds of worship. Care for the stranger, in the eyes of Christ, is worship!

I note, too, that Christ puts no limits on who we should be serving. We are not asked to visit those imprisoned unjustly, but anyone imprisoned; to feed only those who are hungry through no fault of their own, but anyone who hungers; to welcome just those who have their papers in order, but any stranger in our land. We are asked to love without limits, so that we might grasp that God’s love for us is limitless.

In his essay “The Weight of Glory,” C. S. Lewis reminds us that next to the Eucharist itself, our neighbor is the holiest thing we encounter; there are no ordinary people, every person is ablaze with God. So where do we encounter God’s saving power? At every turn. How shall we be saved? By love and in loving.

Engage:

Where do you find difficulty in loving without limits? Is it with colleagues and friends, or is it harder with those whose lives you don’t know? Commit to stepping outside your limits once today and doing an undeserved loving act for someone.

Prayer: Your command, O Lord, is clear, your ordinances just. Open my heart that I might love as you love, without limits.

X R D S

TUESDAY
SHATTERED BONDS

Encounter:

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

Scripture for the day:

Just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down And do not return there till they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful . . . So shall my word be.
(Isaiah 55:10a, 11a)

Embrace:

Reflection: I long for the warmth of Africa. As I see the signs of spring around me, and the lengthening days, this new life all around speaking powerfully into our current situation. I am reminded of Isaiah...he reminds us that God's words are more than a simple exchange between the Creator and his creation, more even than something to quench our thirst for the divine. God sends down his Word with the expectation that a garden will spring up. These words soften our hearts, releasing them from the rocky soil that prevents them from sprouting to life. They feed us, enabling us to do the work God expects of us, work that will bring the kingdom closer to hand. We cannot do this work if we do not allow ourselves to be broken apart, allowing God's life giving words to penetrate. We must pray that what falls from heaven upon us will return to God, bearing great fruit.

Engage:

Meditation: Where in your life has God's Word softened your heart? Where has it fed you? Where has it provoked you to undertake something new? What were the fruits of this labor? What in your heart do you sense God's Word pushing open today?

Prayer: Break open our hearts, O God, that we might bear good fruit. Grant that what we return to you has achieved what you have willed for us.

**WEDNESDAY
CARVED ANEW**

Encounter:

Readings: Esther 9:12, 14-16, 23-25; Matthew 7:7-12

Scripture for the day:

When I called, you answered me; you built up strength within me. (Psalms 138:3)

Embrace:

Reflection: Give me courage, prayed Esther in her anguish. Build up strength within me, cries the psalmist.

The Psalms are a wonderful place of refuge during times of exile and wilderness, I encourage you to read them. They help us pray for courage, strength and wisdom. They help us understand the presence of God in our lives, especially during times of uncertainty. They remind us that God somehow repairs the damage done, when things are broken. Remember the story of Michelangelo's carving of David. The block of marble Michelangelo used had a huge gash in it from a previous sculptor's attempt to carve it; it was unclear if anything could be made from it. Michelangelo, however, could see the possibilities within this block of marble, risky as they were. He carved David at an angle within the block, using the gouge to set David's stance, rather than trying to fill it in, and unsure if it could stand on its own at the last. So, too, as I read the Psalms, I realize that God sees the possibilities in me and the circumstances I find myself in.

God did not repair the great gash my heart struggles had made in my life but instead he worked with it, carving carefully at odd angles until he risked setting me on my feet again. I would not be the same as I was before, but if I could bear with the Sculptor, I would at the last stand. This Lent I pray for such courage as Esther had, for the willingness to be set askew, to let God refashion my life around the wounds that sin and circumstances has left. To bear with the Sculptor while he makes of me a new creation.

Engage:

Meditation: Though we long to erase sin and its effect from our lives, we cannot always undo its effects. Where has God worked around sin's (or challenging circumstances not of your own making) gouges in your life to re-create you? Where do you most need God to reshape your life this Lent?

Prayer: Build up your strength within us, O God. Do not forsake the work of your hands, but refashion our lives that we might once again stand upright in your presence.

THURSDAY
REACHING OUT OF THE DEPTHS

Encounter:

Readings: Ezekial 18:21-28; Matthew 5:20-26

Scripture for the day:

Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD;
LORD, hear my voice!
(Psalm 130:1-2a)

Embrace:

Reflection: Whilst recovering from my hip surgery last year the first lines of Psalm 130 would run through my mind, “Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD, / . . . hear my voice!”

God taught me, during those dark days to reach out to him from the depths of my being. To learn how to orient myself within the heaving depths, where I cannot see the way forward nor be sure I have found solid ground on which to stand. Turn toward me, God says, and I will reach into the depths of your unease and pull you out. Trust me, for surely as dawn comes every day, I will redeem you. If we listen to the voice of God we will, during times of unease, also come to a new understanding that God also to use my struggles to draw my attention to others and how I should respond to the people around me. We are to listen for each other’s cries for mercy and for justice. We should not be afraid to reach out to those we have wronged and to those we have been wronged by, and trust that there is mercy in abundance, enough for us all. We must strive to pull each other out of the depths.

Engage:

Meditation: Where do you hear cries for mercy emerging from the depths? In your own life or in the lives of others? Who can you reach out to today?

Prayer: The dawn can seem far away, O Lord, and we struggle to see your light on the horizon. Draw us up from the depths and from the darkness into your mercy. Give us the strength to reach out for our sisters and brothers in need.

FRIDAY
TODAY

Encounter:

Readings: Deuteronomy 26:16-19 / Matthew 5:43-48

Scripture for the day:

“Today you are making this agreement with the Lord: He is to be your God and you are to walk in His ways.”

(Deuteronomy 26:17)

Embrace:

Reflection: I hear in the readings for today a call to move, to get out of my comfort zone (is God wanting to use this pandemic as an open door, calling us out of our comfort zone), not one day, but now...today.

This day God says, you are my people. This day, Moses says, you will walk in God's way. Today you will love those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute you.

I want to respond by saying, no wait...not today...I am not ready. This reading reminds us that TODAY is the moment to step away from sin, doubt, guilt, fear (the things I have become comfortable with)...and commit myself again to the Lord's path for my life. In the Matthew reading Jesus says this call is not to instant perfection but to get moving, to walk with purpose in the direction of God. To take not just one step but a second and a third.

Engage:

Meditation: What seems insurmountably difficult to undertake in your life at the moment? Are there well-worn habits you wish to change or long-standing conflicts you wish to resolve? Ask God what one small manageable step you can take today to move in that direction. What are the next small steps toward God and life you need to take?

Prayer: Dear God you have given us your son Jesus that we might know how to walk in your ways. Do not forsake us but help us on the way...today.

SATURDAY
GOD ALWAYS AND IN EVERYTHING

Encounter:

Readings: Jeremiah 18:18-20 and Matthew 20:17-28

Scripture for today:

“Whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave” (Matthew 20:26)

Embrace:

Reflection: Jesus is asking, in Matthew’s gospel, James and John, where they wish to stand. He is not offering seats of honour, but the chance to be servants. To give up their lives to save the lives of others. He wants them to life their perspective away from themselves and onto others, away from themselves and onto God. I went to the shop the other day to get some groceries but to my amazement the shelves were virtually empty and I really struggled to get food for my family. This was for me such a powerful micro picture of the macro world situation we live in – the “have’s” and the “have-not’s”. Me first...as long as I have enough. This way of behaving is not the gospel way.

St. Vincent Pallotti wrote:

“Not the goods of this world, but God.

Not riches, but God.

Not honours, but God.

Not distinction, but God.

Not dignities, but God.

Not advancement, but God.

God always and in everything.”

May the gospel give us perspective...God always and in everything.

Engage:

Meditation: What behaviours keeps you from desiring God *always* and in *everything*?

Prayer: Help us keep our eyes fixed on you, O Lord. Let us seek you in all things and at all times.