

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT – YEAR A – 26 FEBRUARY 2023

Genesis 2: 7 – 9, 3, 1 – 7; Psalm 51: 3 – 6, 12 – 14, 17; Romans 5: 12 – 19; Matthew 4: 1 – 11

Theme: Lent is a time to confront sin and temptation.

Reflection:

The exploration of mystery of sin in the human heart exposes us to the problem of evil. Sin reveals the darkness of the human heart. But the good news is that the human being was given the breath of God from the very beginning. **“The Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Genesis 2:7).**

This is a clear indicator that the human being is not destined to be conquered by sin although temptation is an essential part of being human. The Word of God on the First Sunday of Lent suggests that we have the capacity to overcome temptations. Jesus in the wilderness overcame temptations as famous hymn, **Praise to the Holiest in the height** by *St John Henry Newman* puts it, ‘**a second Adam to the fight/ and to the rescue came**’.

Lent is a time to confront sin and temptation with great confidence in Christ Jesus, the New Adam. St Paul’s Letter to the Romans says, **“For if many died through one man’s trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many.”**

Family Reflection Question:

1. How do you deal with sin and temptation in your own life and in the life of your family?
2. Have you ever had a spiritual experience of the power of grace overcoming your temptation to sin?
3. What is your most persistent sin that disturbs the life of your family and how are you going to overcome it?

MONDAY – FIRST WEEK OF LENT – 27 FEBRUARY 2023

Leviticus 19: 1 – 2, 11 – 18; Psalm 19: 8 – 10, 15; Matt 16: 13 – 19

Theme: Lent is a time to revive our universal call to holiness.

Reflection:

When we say that the human being belongs to God, we mean that he also longs to be with God. Or in the famous words of St Augustine, “Our hearts are restless until they rest in God.” The human being also finds true meaning in his life when God is at the centre. This is what it means to live a holy life, it is about putting God at the centre of your life. The Lord God when He was establishing the covenant relationship between Himself and His people. He set aside holiness as a prerequisite of belonging to the family of God. **“Say to the congregation of Israel, You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy.”**

Every Baptised Christian is called to a life of holiness, because our Christian lives are meant to sanctify the whole world. This is one of the highest demands of Christian discipleship, living and witnessing the Gospel of love. We are Christians, which means we are to be other Christs in the world, therefore Christianity is not a mere religion, but it is a way of life.

Hence, in the opening section of *Pope Benedict XVI*, Encyclical Letter, *Deus Caritas Est*, **On Christian Love**, makes it very clear that, **“Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which give life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”**

Jesus is the reason for our holiness.

Family Reflection Question:

1. *What do you understand by the holiness of life?*
2. *How can we be holy as members of our families?*
3. *How can we make Jesus central to our lives of holiness?*

TUESDAY – FIRST WEEK OF LENT – 28 FEBRUARY 2023

Isaiah 55: 10 – 11; Psalm 34: 4 – 7, 16 – 19; Matthew 6: 7 – 15

Theme: Lent a time to learn how to pray effectively

Reflection:

“Prayer is essential, not a luxury that benefits just a few. It should be a common practice for everyone. Everyone of us needs miracles in our lives, for own healing and to deepen our relationship with God.” – Jean Maalouf on his book, The Healing Power of Prayer.

The Book of Isaiah (55:10 – 11) speaks about effective prayer as the rain and snow that makes the earth produce fruit. Jesus speaks about prayer as not needing eloquence but simplicity of heart. He gave us the model of prayer, **“Our Father”**. This prayer begins by naming our relationship with God, He is not **“My Father”** but **“Our Father.”** We all belong to Him. But His identity is further revealed as the prayer continues, **“Our Father who art in heaven.”** We have a duty to make holy the name of our **“heavenly Father”**. We make his name holy when we are holy bringing his kingdom to this world by doing his will here and now.

Only after giving proper honour and glory to God, can we now look to ask the Lord directly for our daily bread. The daily bread that nourishes the body, the daily bread that feeds the soul, and the daily bread that grows the human maturity of our emotional intelligence. The soul food which is our daily bread prepares us for the most challenging human quality of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Family Reflection Question:

1. *How is your spiritual life as a Christian who lives on prayer?*
2. *What can you do to make your prayer effective and healing?*
3. *What is the role of the family in cultivating a culture of prayer in the members of the family?*

WEDNESDAY – FIRST WEEK OF LENT – 1 MARCH 2023

Jonah 3: 1 – 10; Psalm 51: 3–4, 12 – 13, 18 – 19; Luke 11: 29 – 32

Theme: Lent a time of penance and repentance.

Reflection:

Penance and repentance are very important words during the Lenten season. They remind us that our Christian journey is about ongoing conversion. In the book of the Prophet Jonah a story is told about the conversion of Nineveh, **“an exceedingly great city, three days’ journey in breadth”** that was so inspired by the preaching of Jonah that **“the people of Nineveh believed God, they proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them” (Jonah 3:3- 6)**. This is the sign of Jonah that is demanded by the proclamation of the kingdom of God that is preached by Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus Christ proclaims Himself as someone greater than Jonah and even greater than the Wisdom of Solomon that had seduced the beautiful Queen of the South to come and visit Israel.

Jesus Christ is the reason for our conversion and coming to know Him leads us to conversion not by force but by choice. This conversion is a radical change of heart. Lent gives us an opportunity to prioritise our values by embarking on the desert journey of self-introspection. This adventure of conversion changes not only our lives but inspire us to influence generations to come. If we want to change the world, we have to start by changing ourselves. The adventure of our own personal conversion is the call to change the world moment by moment.

Family Reflection Question:

1. How has your conversion influenced your values and changed your outlook on life?
2. Who has had the most influence on your Christian conversion?
3. Do you even think that the call to conversion is directed to you?

THURSDAY – FIRST WEEK OF LENT – 2 MARCH 2023

Esther 14: 1, 3 –4, 11, 13 – 14; Psalm 138: 1-3, 7-8 Matthew 7: 7-12

Theme: Lent a time to pray with faith in God.

Reflection:

The Catechism of the Catholic Church on defining Christian Prayers quotes St Therese of Lisieux in his Autobiography, *The Story of A Soul*, **“For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned towards heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy.”**

The explanation goes on to speak about Prayer as God’s gift by quoting St John Damascene on his treatise on Faith, **“Prayer is the raising of one’s mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God.”**

The Prayer of Queen Esther in the first reading, is the model of how men and women of faith ought to pray. It is a prayer based on humility and the firm hope that the Lord will respond favourable to His children. Jesus encourages this kind of prayer, **“For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds and to him who knocks it will be opened.”** The challenge of our prayer is the silence of God. Sometimes it would seem that God is not listening to us and our prayers are falling on ‘deaf ears’. This leads to doubt as our world crumbles all around us. The earthquake in Turkey and Syria has left us wondering about the impact of our prayer. The floods that have devastated the northern part of our country has shocked us into asking questions about the effects of prayer. In our own area we are going through a draught that is threatening to leave us in a deeper crisis of water. Our faith though does not depend on our will being done by God but on God’s will being done ‘on earth as it is in heaven’.

Family Reflection Question:

1. Do you believe in the power of Prayer?
2. Have you experienced Prayer at work in your life?
3. How has your faith being tested by the silence of God?

FRIDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT – 3 MARCH 2023

Ezekiel 18: 21 – 28; Psalm 130: 1 – 8; Matthew 5: 20-26

Theme: Lent a time to experience the tender Mercy of God.

Reflection:

The Devotion of Divine Mercy is the reminder of the true nature of God. The tendency to forget that God is Mercy is one of the biggest blunders of the spiritual life. Lent has to turn us towards what Pope John XXIII called the ‘*medicine of mercy*’ over the ‘*severity*’. In the Pontificate of Pope Francis, Mercy has been central to his message. He once said to Cardinal Kasper that Mercy is the name of God.

The Word of God reminds of the Mercy of God in the readings today. The Lord forgets the mistakes of a wicked person who ends up righteous. But the Lord holds accountable the righteous person who loses his grip on reality and ends up in the quagmire of iniquity. The book of the prophet Ezekiel is very clear that life is to be found in keeping the commandments of the Lord. The former life of the past with its sins is no longer of consequence. The mercy of the Lord wipes the slate clean. The Psalmist knows very well that, **“If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?”**

The Mercy of God is the Justice of God. Let us learn to judge each other with mercy for that we will bring reconciliation in our lives. Jesus in the gospel of the day calls for integral worship, **“So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5:23).**

Family Reflection Question:

1. Have experience the Mercy of God in your life?
2. Have been merciful to someone in need of your mercy?
3. How can you share the mercy of God with others?

