

A LENTEN JOURNEY

Come back to me with all your heart. Joel: 2:12

SEEKING THE WAY FORWARD

In life's journey, as in every journey, what really matters is not to lose sight of the goal. We should ask ourselves: on the journey of life, do I seek the way forward? *Return to me*, says the Lord. *To me*. The Lord is the goal of our journey in this world. The direction must lead to him – **Pope Francis Homily** March 2019

AS WE APPROACH ASH WEDNESDAY

Lent is, I think, the answer of the human soul to the challenge and invitation of God's love. Lent is the call to turn my face from the clamour of a thousand distractions, to the Beauty in which I have my being. Lent is a return, to the heart of all that matters most, the single Matter of Christ apart from whom nothing matters at all.

A few nights ago, I went to a compline evening service. In deep shadow, amidst plain-chanted hymns to end the day, I looked to the altar where candles burned round a simple cross. Behind the altar loomed a larger than life picture of a sorrowing Christ, cross on his shoulder, clothed in brown, down on one knee as he bore the weight of the world's sin and grief. Kneeling there in the candlelit darkness, with the hymns almost whispered in a tender, gentle awe, I was aware of Christ's givenness. Of the love poured without stint or measure. Of the grace that is with me now, regardless of what I offer. I did not need to give, because all Love was already given to me. All that was needed was my joy in the fact.

Lent is, I think, the nourishment of joy. It's the honing of sight, the hushing of mind, so that Love can make his presence potently known. I've watched the day close with the knowledge that tomorrow a great quieting and centering of soul and self begins. Tomorrow I will hear these words: *Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return. Turn away from sin and be faithful to Christ.* Christ, in whom dust is formed back into living love.

Sarah Clarkson *Lenten Splendor*

BELOVED

*And as he was coming up out of the water,
he saw the heavens torn apart
and the Spirit, like a dove, descending on him.
And a voice came from heaven, "You are my
Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on you."*

When Jesus went into the desert, he went with the baptismal waters of the Jordan still clinging to him, and with the name *Beloved* ringing in his ears. How else to enter into the forty-day place that lay ahead of him? How else to cross into the wilderness where he would have no food, no community, nothing that was familiar to him – and, to top it off, would have to wrestle with the devil? How else, but to go into that landscape with the knowledge of his own name: *Beloved*.

In this first week of Lent, we would do well to have that name echoing in our own ears – to enter into this season with the knowledge that we, too, are the beloved of God.

As we cross with Christ into the landscape of Lent and into the mystery that lies ahead of us, may we know at least this about ourselves: that our name, too, is *Beloved*.

Jan Richardson *The Painted Prayerbook*

BELOVED IS WHERE WE BEGIN

If you would enter
into the wilderness,
do not begin
without a blessing.

Do not leave
without hearing
who you are:
Beloved,
named by the One
who has travelled this path
before you.

Do not go
without letting it echo
in your ears,
and if you find
it is hard
to let it into your heart,
do not despair.
That is what
this journey is for.

I cannot promise
this blessing will free you
from danger,
from fear,
from hunger
or thirst,
from the scorching
of sun
or the fall
of the night.

But I can tell you
that on this path
there will be help.

I can tell you
that on this way
there will be rest.

I can tell you
that you will know
the strange graces
that come to our aid
only on a road
such as this,
that fly to meet us
bearing comfort
and strength,
that come alongside us
for no other cause
than to lean themselves
toward our ear
and with their
curious insistence
whisper our name:

*Beloved.
Beloved.
Beloved.*

Jan Richardson
*Circle of Grace: A Book of
Blessings for the Seasons*

PREPARING FOR THE JOURNEY

God sent his Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that through him the world might be saved. John 3: 17

MEDITATION

Lent is the time of year when the Church tells us to take a deep breath and begin to taste the gifts of life once more, the parts of life that bring the inner monk in each of us alive.

Lent gives us the space we need to refresh our hearts and quiet our souls in expectation of beginning again to live life well.

We're meant to become conscious of our blessings, to savour the goodness of the God who is with us always, who carries us beyond ourselves, who is our strength and our support through all the seeds and undergrowth of life.

The Rule of Benedict, that 1500-year-old guide-rail upon which the entire Order of St. Benedict has been based, offers perhaps Lent's clearest definition. Benedict does not talk about "giving up" things just in the name of giving them up. On the contrary, Benedict teaches us to add things to our lives that are missing but deeply needed if our inner lives are to grow and guide us through all the twists and turns of life.

We need the kind of good reading that nourishes our contemplation of God's presence here and now. It faces us with the realities of life and, the Rule says, will carry us through whatever dark days await us in life.

We need to take the kind of time that allows us to sink into an awareness of the Presence of God even now, even here, that will give us new courage for the mysteries of life.

We need the quiet it takes to contemplate the important things of life, to refuse to allow excess in anything to drown us, to become aware again of the beauty of life everywhere so that no interruptions, no darkness along life's uneven paths, can defeat us.

Lent raises the fullness of the beautiful in us at the thought of the resurrection of God in our hearts.

Then our inner monk will lead us into the centre of a renewed sense of life's gifts as well as its challenges. Then we will have the inner insight and outer courage it takes to trust that every day of our lives is meant to be a good one.

Sister Joan Chittister *Feeding your inner Monk*

Reflections compiled by Anne O'Connor Lent 2024

PRAYER

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.
Nor do I really know myself,
and the fact that I think I am following your will
does not mean that I am actually doing so.

But I believe that the desire to please you
does in fact please you.
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know that, if I do this, you will lead me
by the right road, though I may know nothing about it.

Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem
to be lost and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear, for you are ever with me,
and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

Thomas Merton *Thoughts in Solitude*

SURRENDERING TO GOD'S LOVE

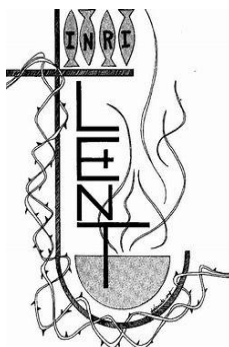
To return to God means to return to God with all that I am
and all that I have. I cannot return to God with just half of
my being.

It is going to be a very long road. Every time I pray, I feel
the struggle. It is the struggle of letting God be the God of
my whole being. It is the struggle to trust that true
freedom lies hidden in total surrender to God's love.

Following Jesus is the way to enter into the struggle and
find true freedom. The way is the way of the cross, and
true freedom is the freedom found in the victory over
death. Jesus' total obedience to his Father led him to the
cross, and through the cross to a life no longer subject to
the competitive games of this world. Jesus held on to
nothing; there was nothing was left for him to cling to.

Only when I surrender myself completely to God's love
can I expect to be free from endless distractions, ready to
hear the voice of love, and able to recognize my own
unique call.

Henri Nouwen



In our pilgrimage through Lent, the path keeps inviting us to practice discernment, to enter into the sorting and sifting that lie at the heart of this word and this season. I pray for courage to make wise choices that draw me deeper into the divine.

Jan Richardson *The Painted Prayerbook*

HOLY WEEK

I exult for joy in the Lord, my soul rejoices in my God. Isaiah 61:10

PRAYER

Bless me Lord in this Holy Week, and give me the grace to know your loving presence more intimately.

O Lord, this holy season of Lent is passing quickly. I entered into it with fear, but also with great expectations. I hoped for a great breakthrough, a powerful conversion, a real change of heart; I wanted Easter to be a day so full of light that not even a trace of darkness would be left in my soul ...

I pray that this last week, in which you invite me to enter more fully into the mystery of your Passion, will bring me a greater desire to follow you on the way that you create for me and to accept the cross that you give to me.

Be with me tomorrow and in the days to come, and let me experience your gentle presence. Amen.

Henri Nouwen *A Cry for Mercy*

A JOURNEY INTO WHOLENESS WITH GOD

The cross is the measure of Christ's love for us. This love has the power to heal and save. The cross is an act of love, both on the part of the Father who sent his only son to save us, and on Jesus' part, who lays down his life in love. Jesus disregards the shame of the cross and goes through suffering, not around it. Likewise, God sends us on the path towards wholeness not by eliminating obstacles, but by making use of them.

The focus of Christian healing is an invitation to go on a journey into wholeness with God. A key part of healing is the ability to recognise and forgive our own shadow side. The full journey towards wholeness includes the negative experiences (the cross) that we usually reject.

The resurrection is the ultimate healing of our humanity. It restores humanity to its fullness.

Annie O'Connor *Healing Through the Life, Death and Resurrection of Christ*

REFLECTION FOR MONDAY OF HOLY WEEK

Today is one of those days that remind me how much the path through Lent resembles the path through Advent.

Waiting, preparation, anticipation; the invitation to live both in the now and the not yet; the call to recognize God in the present even as we yearn for a time when God will appear in fullness and bring healing to all creation: these themes that draw us into the season of Christ's birth draw us also into this season in which we enter into the story of his death and resurrection.

For now, we wait. With hope. With longing. With a patience that is not passive but that enables us to perceive where God may be calling us to act for the healing of the world.

Jan Richardson *The Painted Prayerbook*

POEM

You dreamed like all mothers do.
Until he began to speak aloud,
Your boy,
calling for justice in the market place,
Demanding integrity and fair play
in the courts and halls of business.
Declaring the Realm of God
Imminent,
Manifest . . .

Jesus leapt into the swelling crowds
like an axe into wood,
Uncompromising and unrelenting
in his passionate call
for peace and justice.

Jesus, your boy,
causing havoc in public,
critiquing and condemning
the status quo,
breaking rule after rule . . .

And with every speech,
with every act of defiance,
with every call to liberation,
with every amazing deed,
Your dreams of peace and liberation,
Your dreams of a secure old age,
Your dreams of grandchildren —
Evaporated.

Edwina Gateley, from *Soul Sisters:
Women in Scripture Speak to Women
Today*

BLESSING FOR HOLY MONDAY

May the path that Christ walks
to bring justice upon the earth,
to bring light to those who sit in darkness,
to bring out those who live in bondage,
to bring new things to all creation:
may this path run through our life.
May we be the road Christ takes.

Jan Richardson *The Painted Prayerbook*



HOLY WEEK: THE EASTER TRIDIUM

Contemplation is nothing else but a secret, peaceful and loving infusion of God, which, if admitted, will set the soul on fire with the Spirit of love – St John of the Cross

To be guests at the table of the one who washes our feet and disappears into bread and wine is surely to be guests on this earth of a God who calls us into the real story he is creating. We shall only know this in a real way if we learn to tread lightly on the earth and realize our communion with the dispossessed.

Fr Tom Cullinan

Jesus calls us to continue his mission of revealing the perfect love of God in this world. He calls us to total self-giving... He wants our love to be as full, as radical, as complete as his own. He wants us ... to touch the places in each other that most need washing.

Henri Nouwen *The Road to Daybreak*

WE WAIT

Several years ago, I did a series of charcoal drawings for Peter Storey's book *Listening at Golgotha*, in which he reflects on Jesus' Seven Last Words from the cross. Peter is a retired bishop and active leader of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, and his experiences of working for justice and reconciliation in his home country profoundly shape his understanding of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.

In Peter's reflection on Jesus' third word, "Woman, here is your son.... Here is your mother," he observes that in giving his mother and his beloved friend John to one another, Jesus "created a community that was to become family to the widow, the orphan, the outcast, and the stranger."

Peter writes of our call to such a community as a "sacred trust," and he asks, "If we accept, can anybody suffer hunger, homelessness, or need? Would there be any lonely old people? Could there be a single unwanted child? If Jesus has made everyone kin to me, would that not make every war in history a civil war and every casualty a death in my family?"

We call the crucifixion of Jesus the passion, and so it is, for us as well as for him. Each time we stretch out our arms in love to one another, every time we open our hearts, we find the shadow of the cross, but also a glimpse of the open tomb. Jesus' final word from the cross, "Into your hands I commend my spirit," reminds us that every relationship will, at some point, contain a good-bye.

Yet we who know the rest of the story, we who have glimpsed the other side of Good Friday, know that Jesus' last word from the cross is not the final word. There are more words to come, crucial words that Christ will yet add to our vocabulary, our story, our community.

For now, we wait. Together.

Jan Richardson *The Painted Prayerbook*

PRAYER

Watch now, dear Lord,
with those who wake
or watch
or weep tonight;
and give your angels charge
over those who sleep.

Tend your wounded ones,
O Christ;
rest your weary ones,
bless your dying ones,
soothe your suffering ones,
shield your joyous ones
and all for your love's sake.
Amen.

St Augustine

EASTER POEM

Behold the man,
Who in frailty walks,
Towards his cross shaped throne.
Arms outstretched,
Love enfleshed,
To welcome sinners home.

Behold the man,
Whose healing hands,
Were once nailed to cursed tree,
Hope restoring,
Grace declaring,
To set the shackled free.

Behold the man,
Whose beaten body,
Was laid in garden grave,
Death defeated
Hell retreating,
Humanity to save.

Behold the man,
Whose silent corpse,
Was raised to reign as King.
Love embracing,
Joy empowering,
For him the saints will sing.

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