

Lenten Reflections

Lent 2022



“The truth however is that we are all in the same boat and called to work together so that there will be no more walls that separate us, no longer others, but only a single “We,” encompassing all of humanity.”

For the World Day of Migrants and Refugees on September 26, 2021, Pope Francis titled his message “Towards an ever wider We.” He invited each of us to counter the false claims of nationalism and individualism that keep the human family separate. This call to an ever wider We offers a profound and inviting challenge to each of us this Lent.

For the next six weeks, we invite you to join the Jesuit Refugee Service as we reflect on this call through the Gospels for each Sunday of Lent. May these reflections help us break through the walls that separate us so that we can become one humanity embraced by Christ.



First Sunday of Lent, March 6, 2022

Luke 4.1-13

4 And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness **2** for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. **3** The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.” **4** And Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone.’” **5** And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, **6** and said to him, “To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. **7** If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” **8** And Jesus answered him, “It is written,

“You shall worship the Lord your God,
and him only shall you serve.”

9 And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, **10** for it is written,

“He will command his angels concerning you,
to guard you,’

11 and

“On their hands they will bear you up,
lest you strike your foot against a stone.”

12 And Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’” **13** And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

It's not about me.

The Sundays of Lent begin with Jesus' temptation in the desert after 40 days of fasting and prayer. In Luke's narrative, the evil spirit believes that everyone will sell her or his soul for a price.

The three temptations grow in their appeal to self-centeredness. Turning stones into bread would make Jesus feel full. Worshiping the devil would give him power over all the kingdoms of the earth.

The third temptation may seem to be anticlimactic: Jump off the Temple roof, and the angels will save you. Yet the pride of being the most important can be more seductive than material things or power. Jesus refuses to make himself the center of the world.

Building the ever wider *We* requires that we see our sisters and brothers as equals. It's not only about my wants, my influence, my ego. It is recognizing that our salvation is through one another. Our call to build kinship and solidarity—especially with those on the margins—sets us free.

The end of the story presents a cautious reminder: the devil will come back to tempt Jesus, and tempt us as well. The allure of making ourselves the center of the world is always there.

This Lent, Lord, make it not only about me. Help me to embrace all my brothers and sisters.





Second Sunday of Lent, March 13, 2022

Luke 9.28-36

The Transfiguration

28 Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. 29 And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. 30 And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, 31 who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure,[a] which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. 32 Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. 33 And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah”—not knowing what he said. 34 As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. 35 And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, my Chosen One;[b] listen to him!” 36 And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.

Come down the mountain.

The Transfiguration is always the Gospel for the second Sunday of Lent. Only in Luke's version do Moses and Elijah speak with Jesus about what he would accomplish in Jerusalem: his passion, death, and resurrection.

But from the Gospels, we know Peter doesn't want to hear about suffering and death. Jesus tells Peter, "Get behind me, Satan!" when he tells Jesus to avoid the hard reality of what Jerusalem means (Matthew 16.23). So it is not surprising that Peter would want to make three tents and stay on the mountain, focusing on Christ in his glory. As the Gospel gently tells us, he didn't know what he was saying.

We have all been blessed with moments of clarity: an instant of pure love, a sunset beyond description, an experience of God speaking to us. It is right to stay in the moment as long as we can. But the moment is not for itself; its grace is meant to be put into practice.

So it is with the ever wider *We*. It is a wonderful idea, and the idea is not enough. We must follow Jesus down the mountain, into the real world of people on the margins, and do what he did: reach out, welcome, reconnect the human family.

This Lent, Lord, show yourself to me and help me put my love into practice.





Third Sunday of Lent, March 20, 2022

Luke 13.1-9

Repent or Perish

13 There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. **2** And he answered them, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? **3** No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. **4** Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? **5** No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree

6 And he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. **7** And he said to the vinedresser, ‘Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?’ **8** And he answered him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. **9** Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’”

End the blame game.

It's sometimes called *the blame game*. We believe or even hope that bad things happen to bad people.

Jesus will have none of that. The Galilean victims of Pilate's violence did not deserve to die, nor did the eighteen people who died under a collapsed tower.

Yet our leaders, our cultures and our own hearts are good at the blame game with forcibly displaced people and others on the margins.

- He must have done something to have to flee his homeland.
- She knew the Mediterranean is dangerous; why did she try to cross it?
- Did they think it would be easy to cross a border with a child?

For people on the margins, life is difficult. They know violence and accidents happen any time; they understand travel is perilous. So when the moment arrives to choose life, a choice with urgency and risk, they make it. Who among us would not do the same for ourselves and our families?

Today, Jesus' call to repent makes it clear that the time to change our lives is now. It is now because we never know when the tower might fall, the unexpected might happen to us.

What do we need to change? Do I have that urgency? Do I feel the urgency to make the human family wider?

*This Lent, Lord, help me end the blame game.
Help me repent and open my arms.*



(Photo: Darrin Zammit Lupi)



Fourth Sunday of Lent, March 27, 2022

Luke 15.11-32

The Parable of the Prodigal Son

11 And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. 12 And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. 13 Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. 14 And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to [a] one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. 16 And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

17 "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants."' 20 And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. 21 And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' [b] 22 But the father said to his servants, [c] 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. 23 And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. 24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

25 "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. 27 And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' 28 But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, 29 but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' 31 And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"

Walk through the door!

The parable of the prodigal son presents two attractive characters. We can relate to the younger son, the repentant child in all of us. We aspire to be the father, willing to forgive without being asked.

But it's the parable of two sons, and the elder is the character we most resemble, the one we least want to embrace.

He's not a bad person. He works hard, he obeys, and he hopes for a large inheritance. But his brother's return and the feast of the fatted calf triggers a rage that has been sitting there a long time. In conventional morality and in the economic world, he is justified. Yet he insults his father, just as his brother did.

The elder son is us. We have wounds not quite healed; pull off the bandage, and the pain returns. We have ghosts living in our minds rent-free, taking up space we could use to love and be loved.

The parable leaves the elder son and us at the front door: will we go in and enjoy the feast with everyone?

Lent is a time to ask God's help to let go of the hurt and resentment that we all feel, the parts of our history that keep us in mental shackles and less able to enjoy what God offers to us among the ever wider We. The feast is for all!

This Lent, Lord, heal the broken parts of my life so that I can walk through the door to the feast.



Fifth Sunday of Lent, April 3, 2022



John 8.1-11

8 but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. **2** Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. **3** The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst **4** they said to him, “Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. **5** Now in the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?” **6** This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. **7** And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.” **8** And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. **9** But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. **10** Jesus stood up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” **11** She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.”]]

Pay close attention.

There's an obvious question to ask about this story from a contemporary viewpoint: why is only the woman accused of adultery? Why doesn't the man face stoning as well?

We don't know why or what Jesus wrote on the ground. Possibly it gave him time to find the right response. Maybe he was doodling, waiting for the crowd to quiet down; perhaps it showed his disgust for a trap that used and abused a woman.

Unfortunately, things do not always change for the better. Women continue to be abused and victimized by sexual and gender-based violence. Among forcibly displaced people, women and girls are more likely to be trafficked, to be sexually exploited, and to be left with fewer opportunities for education and income.

As we try to build the ever wider *We*, some situations call for greater compassion. It can be easy to welcome a child for whom we can imagine a new future. It may be easy to welcome someone like us, whose story resonates with ours. The poor, the traumatized, the one who is different: does her inclusion take more effort, even more love? Lent calls us to greater attention.

We all need time to think, we all doodle, and we all recognize the call for justice and compassion.

This Lent, Lord, help me find the right words and actions to care for those most in need.





Sixth/Palm Sunday, April 10, 2022

Luke 19.28-40

The Triumphal Entry

28 And when he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. 29 When he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples, 30 saying, “Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here. 31 If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ you shall say this: ‘The Lord has need of it.’” 32 So those who were sent went away and found it just as he had told them. 33 And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, “Why are you untying the colt?” 34 And they said, “The Lord has need of it.” 35 And they brought it to Jesus, and throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. 36 And as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road. 37 As he was drawing near—already on the way down the Mount of Olives—the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, 38 saying, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” 39 And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples.” 40 He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.”

Shout with loud voices.

Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem is the focus of the blessing of palms and olive branches and the procession that begins the Palm Sunday Mass. Only a few moments later in the liturgy, the readings will lead us into Jesus' passion and death. The triumph turns to sorrow and desolation, only to be transformed by the grace of Easter Sunday.

Knowing what is to come, we sometimes move too fast to the passion, and we can forget the truth of this scene. Though only for a brief moment, the people got it right: Jesus is the Messiah! God should be praised with a loud voice for the mighty works Jesus has done! When the Pharisees asked Jesus to rebuke the crowd, he notes that even the stones would sing out.

As we enter into Holy Week, we should not forget this experience. Let us not be afraid to raise our voices loud and together, like the people did along the road as Jesus entered Jerusalem.

Building the ever wider *We* requires praying together, shouting together, working to build kinship among us all as if it is our most important task...which it is!

We are blessed to know how Jesus' story ends. We know his message is true. Let us loudly say so!

*Help us, Lord, raise our voices to build the human family
that you love and care for.*



(Photo: Paul Jeffrey/Misean Cara)