



Lenten Reflections

Ash Wednesday February 25, 2009

Readings: [Jl 2:12-18](#), [Ps 51:3-4, 5-6ab, 12-13, 14 and 17](#), [2 Cor 5:20-6:2](#),
and [Mt 6:1-6, 16-18](#)

As I write this reflection for the beginning of Lent I've just returned from a funeral for a long-time member of my parish. Bob had a long, rich life; he and his wife were married for 60 years, they had several children, many, many grandchildren, and even a few great-grandchildren. Last fall they danced at one of their granddaughters' wedding. Several hundred people attended the funeral including many fellow parishioners who have journeyed with him, through the years, in observing fast and abstinence regulations, giving alms, and especially in prayer.

Over the years as parishioners and friends we've shared his family's joy in births, first communions and confirmations; weddings and anniversaries. It is fitting that so many of his fellow parishioners shared in his family's sorrow, uplifting them, upholding them in prayer. We visited, chatted, and prayed together the evening before; we sang and gave praise at Mass, and walked together that long walk behind the casket from the front of church to the waiting coach. How many times have we heard people remark, "I don't know how I could have gotten through that experience without the prayers and support of so many neighbors and friends?"

We are community, we are social believers, united under a triune God that calls us to love one another, because God loves us first; God is love. As we begin our Lenten practice of fasting, almsgiving, and prayer may we renew our commitment to extend ourselves out of compassion and reflect the love of Christ to our neighbors. May we search life's roadsides and ditches, for the fallen, the weary, the sorrowful, the lonely, the poor, and not pass them by on the other side, but stop to help, to heal, and carry the other to an inn of hope. May we in our service find, in the people we serve, the eyes of Christ returning our gaze.

Rev. Mr. Richard Sage
Executive Director
Catholic Charities
Diocese of LaCrosse
rsage@cclse.org



Lenten Reflections

Thursday after Ash Wednesday February 26, 2009

Readings: [Dt 30:15-20](#), [Ps 1:1-2, 3, 4 and 6](#), and [Lk 9:22-25](#)

On this the second day of Lent 2009, we are reminded of the journey that Lent permits each of us to travel, that of prayer, almsgiving and fasting. In today's readings we are reminded that the Lord will bring us back and make us prosperous, of our need to choose life and love the Lord and heed God's voice and hold fast to Him.

As I reflect on these words I can't help but relate to the fact that each day this is the message that we bring to the people we serve at Catholic Charities. It is a message of hope, it is a reassurance that the Lord does in fact watch over us and invites us to daily take up our cross and follow Him. The readings also admonish us to not take anything for the journey; a reminder of the unconditional nature of our discipleship.

Our clients know these messages well. It is often the hopeful message that sustains them during difficult times and how humbling and honored we are to travel their journeys with them. Not only do they often have a radical dependence on God, they inspire us to turn to God ourselves on their behalf.

May our prayer be one in solidarity with the poor we serve that God grant both of us the promise of hope this Lenten season.

Karen Johnston
Director
Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Green Bay
kjohnston@gbdioc.org



Lenten Reflections

Friday after Ash Wednesday February 27, 2009

Readings: [Is 58:1-9a](#), [Ps 51:3-4, 5-6ab, 18-19](#), and [Mt 9:14-15](#)

Today's readings remind us that Lent is not merely a time of penance when we give something up, but rather in sacrifice and fasting we reflect on the call of Christ, refocusing ourselves and opening ourselves to a change of heart and mind.

Isaiah describes what fasting should be: "releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; Setting free the oppressed, breaking every yoke; Sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless; Clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own." In fasting we remember that we have brothers and sisters who are in real need: the poor, the hungry, those held down by injustices. In fasting, we allow ourselves to be in solidarity with the oppressed- and in this solidarity and sacrifice we humble ourselves.

The responsorial psalm gives us this prayer: "My sacrifice, God, is a broken spirit; God, do not spurn a broken, humbled heart."

This Lent, let us not forget to always humbly call on God for help, to open our hearts to the poor, to our own who are oppressed. The Lord tells us we fast because the bridegroom is not with us; may we continue to hope and bring about the reign of the Lord each day and in the lives of all those we meet, especially the least among us.

Catarina Torres
Catholic Charities of Dallas
Missions/Social Concerns Coordinator
ctorres@central.catholiccharitiesdallas.org



Lenten Reflections

First Sunday in Lent March 1, 2009

Readings: [Gn 9:8-15](#), [Ps 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9](#), [1 Pt 3:18-22](#), and [Mk 1:12-15](#)

*When the clouds again gather over the earth, and the bow appears in the clouds,
I will recall the covenant I have made between me and you and all living beings...*
(Genesis 9: 14-15a)

Our readings for the First Sunday of Lent focus appropriately on “new beginnings.” In Genesis we hear of the “new day” that has dawned after the devastating waters of the Great Flood have finally receded. God establishes a covenant with Noah and his surviving family, and his future descendants, and indeed with every living creature. Simply stated, that covenant is a promise of enduring relationship between heaven and earth, God and humanity. God chooses the rainbow as the visible sign and reminder of this covenantal relationship. This does not mean that there will not be stormy days ahead, but rather that even when dark storm clouds rise, God will always recall, and remind us, that we are bound to one another by this covenant.

In these increasingly dark and gloomy days of recession and economic uncertainty, our agencies’ resources are strained to the limit as never before. We are being asked to meet more needs with less at our disposal, and those seeking assistance now include more middle class folks that are unsettlingly similar to the staff who endeavor to serve them. Amidst such challenges one might be tempted to despair that our best days are behind us. The forty days of torrential rain, like the forty days Jesus spent in the desert, figuratively translate into “what feels like an interminable and unending time of testing.” It is precisely in such moments that we need to cling to the promise that God will not abandon us, that our story is God’s story, that we are bound together with all living things in an enduring relationship with the God who is Life and Love. Jesus emerged from the desert only to hear the troubling news of the arrest of John the Baptist. Yet He confidently proclaimed, “THIS is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand!” When we recall the covenant God has made, it creates hope within us – God’s goodness will prevail!

Edward J. Lis
Director, Mission Integration
Catholic Human Services
Archdiocese of Philadelphia
elis@CHS-ADPHILA.ORG



Lenten Reflections

Monday of the First Week in Lent March 2, 2009

Readings: [Lv 19:1-2, 11-18](#), [Ps 19:8, 9, 10, 15](#), and [Mt 25:31-46](#)

Lent calls us to silence ourselves and reflect upon our Creator. It is a time to meditate on the principals and the justness of our God. Today's readings reflect on God's perfect, refreshing nature. As stated in Psalm reading, "The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart. The command of the LORD is clear, enlightening the eye."

In my work with the agency, I encounter many who society would detest. Parents who choose to physically abuse their children to relieve their own stress, children who crave love and attention so much they will violate others to meet their own needs, and parents who find comfort for their afflictions in substances which cloud their judgment and alter their mood.

These passages remind me of the nature of God. He wants all to be loved and respected, no matter what the offense. He can enlighten our eyes as His servants to demonstrate His love and compassion for humankind. It is only truly through Him that we can carry His message of love to others.

As we remember this season, let us pray the Psalm, "Let the words of my mouth meet with your favor, keep the thoughts of my heart before you LORD, my rock and my redeemer." In this way, we pray that our service aids others to inherit the kingdom God has promised.

Tricia Wallin
Foster Care Program Manager
Catholic Charities of Kansas City-St. Joseph, Inc.
twallin@ccharities.com



Lenten Reflections

Tuesday of the First Week in Lent March 3, 2009

Readings: [Is 55:10-11](#), [Ps 34:4-5, 6-7, 16-17, 18-19](#), and [Mt 6:7-15](#)

Throughout salvation history, people have searched for meaningful ways to invoke the Divine. Today, in Isaiah and the Psalms, we read that the Lord's ear is inclined to those who seek His will and who do justice. This understanding serves as a prelude to Jesus' prayer in the Gospel of Matthew.

Since Jesus offered this prayer, the primary tasks of religious life have taken on a new significance. His prayer is the harbinger of a great social awakening which draws His followers into a vocation of Charity. Based on the principles of community, reciprocity and equality, the Lord's Prayer assumes the solidarity of humankind and recognizes the social and economic basis of all moral and religious life.

While churches have employed the prayer for ecclesial purposes, it holds not a hint of Canon Law. Though the prayer is profoundly personal, its deepest significance is revealed only when we become dedicated to the vaster purposes of the *Kingdom*. The words are not the property of those whose religious aim is to pass through the world unscathed, leaving Evil unchallenged. Their dominating theme is a moral and social transformation that imitates Heaven on Earth. Given to us by Jesus, the source of Charity, this invocation is the strength of people called to assist all people who are poor and vulnerable. As we offer this prayer, may it call us into partnership with the Lord and with all people of good will in seeking the reign of justice and abundant life!

Wm. R. (Bill) Jones
Diocesan Director
Catholic Charities, Diocese of Covington (Kentucky)
bjones@covingtoncharities.org



Lenten Reflections

Wednesday of the First Week in Lent March 4, 2009

Readings: [Jon 3:1-10](#), [Ps 51:3-4, 12-13, 18-19](#), and [Lk 11:29-32](#)

These readings of weal and woe hit me hard today. First, Jonah's call for an entire city to repent, basically calling an entire civilization to fast and wear sackcloth and sit in the ashes. Then the psalmist's cry for mercy and forgiveness, with true sacrifice being a broken and contrite heart. Finally Luke's chapter of Jesus's teachings: "Give us each day our daily bread".... "Ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." They definitely are timely given the economic crisis, the state of our agencies and the harsh realities faced by our clients.

Since becoming an executive director with responsibilities for fund raising and managing the budget, I have learned to pray "give us this day our daily bread" with a certain pragmatic earnestness. And the prophetic calls for repentance, forgiveness, and sacrifice challenge me. It is easier for me to say, "Woe are you -- other people" who neglect the poor while living the high life, who pass laws that cut services to the widows and orphans, and needy. It is harder for me to look at myself and acknowledge when I have turned my back on those in need right in front of me, whether it be a colleague, a staff person, a client, or a stranger. Part of the seeking is for a contrite heart. Part of the asking is for a compassionate heart. Then I can knock and the door will be opened.

Gracious God, grant us hearts that are humbled by your overwhelming love, that we in turn can have big hearts for those in need. Thank you for opening your door to us; give us the grace to always open our doors to your poor. Amen.

Greg Kepferle
Chief Executive Officer
Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County
gkepferle@ccsj.org



Lenten Reflections

Thursday of the First Week in Lent March 5, 2009

Readings: [Est C:12, 14-16, 23-25](#), [Ps 138:1-2ab, 2cde-3, 7c-8](#), and [Mt 7:7-12](#)

Nobody likes to be judged by someone else's assumptions or misunderstandings. I know that the fruit of such judgments are terribly annoying to me, because they are not based on reality, but they can absolutely impact how people respond to me and how I respond to people.

The opening verses of today's Gospel talks about these types of judgment and highlights our tendency to respond by "proving" to others that we are worthy of their admiration. We throw our pearls of time and treasure before the swine of public opinion. What a waste!

We already have what we need—the gifts God has given us and our relationship with God are the true realities. By fully living with and sharing those gifts in cooperation with God, the true fruits of a good life, well-lived, will make the amorphous rewards of society appear to be what they are—smoke in the wind. The most important of the fruits of a life lived in a collaborative relationship with God is that we are a part of the Kingdom here on earth, and for eternity.

Sr. Mary Lou Stubbs
Diocesan Director
Catholic Charities of Arkansas
mstubbs@dolr.org



Lenten Reflections

Friday of the First Week in Lent March 6, 2009

Readings: [Ez 18:21-28](#), [Ps 130:1-2, 3-4, 5-7a, 7bc-8](#), and [Mt 5:20-26](#)

Today's readings remind me of just how human we really are and how difficult it is to walk the path of Jesus on a daily basis even for those of us serving our faith at Catholic Charities. "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter into the Kingdom of heaven." We think that we are following His ways but are we really?

We may externally (just like the scribes and Pharisees) do all the right things, like going to mass on Sunday, work with the poor and vulnerable, and give money to our favorite charity, and yet harbor resentment to a family member or someone at work because of the way we were treated. I believe the Lord is talking to us in these readings and telling us that the best path to heaven is through forgiveness. As I say the Our Father daily, I am constantly reminded with these words, "please forgive me for my sins as I forgive those who have sinned against me". Yikes! That can be really hard to do when someone has hurt you or taken advantage of you especially those closest to you.

I realize much of the hurt I felt in my life was largely due to misunderstandings and miscommunications and the inability to communicate and resolve these differences in a timely and positive manner. This can only lead to a heart filled with anger, resentment, and/or holding on to grudges. But if we can forgive ourselves first for our trespasses (we are human after all) knowing that Jesus forgives us, then we should have the courage to forgive others. It would be so sad if we are looking at Jesus in our final hours and he said oops sorry you didn't forgive your sister and brother so off you go! So today, let's pray to God that he will help us to forgive all those who have injured us in any way and free us from resentment and bitterness. Only then will we be able to freely serve the Lord and do His work.

I love the Lenten Season as it provides us with the time of self examination and what we can do to improve our relationship with God and with our family, friends, and co-workers. It is a time to forgive and be forgiven. It is a time of sacrifice and a time to celebrate life.

Lisa Sakamoto
Vice President Finance
Catholic Charities Hawaii
lisa.sakamoto@catholiccharitieshawaii.org



Lenten Reflections

Second Sunday in Lent March 8, 2009

Readings: [Gn 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18](#), [Ps 116:10, 15, 16-17, 18-19](#), [Rom 8:31b-34](#), and [Mk 9:2-10](#).

I have never had the honor to see Jesus in majesty alongside of Moses and Elijah as Peter, James and John do in this Gospel, but when I take the time to, I recognize God's presence in my life all of the time. I find it easy to see God in the wonder of nature, the sacraments especially as we gather to celebrate, the strength I see in people when times are tough, and the connection it is possible to make with another with whom I have seemingly little in common. I hope that you have ways that God makes his loving presence known to you.

I am struck by how this Gospel is coupled with the testing of Abraham. What awe-inspiring trust in God he displays! He shows that he is willing to sacrifice Isaac – his only son and the fulfillment of his God-given vocation as the father of many nations. It is no wonder that the two of these readings come together. Cultivating the ability to recognize God's presence is an essential step to developing trust in answering God's call. A God who is active in our lives is easier to trust.

At times, having this trust is tough – right now is no exception. We are or are walking with the most vulnerable people in our society. The economic crisis, which the most vulnerable has the least control over, is impacting poor and vulnerable people disproportionately.

It is times like these when it is even more important that we are intentional about finding God in our midst. In our current reality, can we be open to recognizing God present – acting through the growing solidarity in our communities, the call for a change in our society, and hope and compassion born of suffering?

For when we recognize God's presence, we can trust as Abraham did.

Rachel Lustig
Director, Parish Social Ministry
Catholic Charities USA
rlustig@catholiccharitiesusa.org



Lenten Reflections

Monday of the Second Week in Lent March 9, 2009

Readings: [Dn 9:4b-10](#), [Ps 79:8, 9, 11 and 13](#), and [Lk 6:36-38](#)

Some days, it is a challenge to find the common thread running through the Scripture readings. Not so for today. It is readily apparent that today's lesson is all about mercy and forgiveness.

In Daniel, the author laments the sinfulness of his people before concluding: "But yours, O Lord, our God, are compassion and forgiveness!" And in Psalm 79, we hear the following petition to God: "Do not hold past iniquities against us; may your compassion come quickly..." Finally, in the Gospel of Luke, the tables are turned somewhat as Jesus instructs us to forgive: "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you shall not be condemned. Forgive and you shall be forgiven."

Especially in today's tough economic times, people can easily fall into the trap of bitterness and condemnation – the politicians are only looking out for themselves, the illegal immigrants are taking our jobs, the greedy bankers sold us down the river – instead of focusing on positive actions that might be taken. Even in our work with Catholic Charities, we can be tempted to judge our clients, assigning blame where, instead, a measure of understanding is needed.

Lord, as we face the difficult journey to economic recovery, remind us that we are called to be compassionate and forgiving, and that your gifts are intended to be shared generously with those in need.

George Garchar
Associate Director of Social Action
Diocese of Youngstown
ccho@cboss.com



Lenten Reflections

Tuesday of the Second Week in Lent March 10, 2009

Readings: [Is 1:10, 16-20](#), [Ps 50:8-9, 16bc-17, 21 and 23](#), and [Mt 23:1-12](#)

These passages contain strong language including the exhortation to listen, when, if anything, a part of me wants to skim over these verses to something less discomfoting. So, first of all, I need to ask the Lord to help me to listen. I hear Him admonishing me for the very human propensity toward hypocrisy: being phony; portraying an image of myself that is better than the true condition of my heart; trying to appease God by complying with His rules when my heart wants to do otherwise. Stated positively, these verses bid us to be persons of integrity: to be genuine; persons in whom there is no deceit or pretense.

In addition, these passages impress upon me the need for balance in my Christian walk – balance between inner piety and outer manifestations of my faith. Growing up, I was taught Is.1:18, but only as it pertained to my inner life. Looking at this verse in its context, we see that the exhortation is not only to having a clean heart, but also to demonstrating God's love through compassion, clemency, good deeds, fair dealings, and hospitality toward the less fortunate. Later, I discovered James 1:27: "Religion that is pure and undefiled...is this: to care for orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained by the world."

Lord, help me be a person of integrity and to live a balanced Christian life; to be equally attentive to my inner life and the outward manifestation of your love.

Paul Mocerri
Program Manager
Quality Assurance Specialist
Treatment Foster Care
Commonwealth Catholic Charities
Norton, VA
Paul.Mocerri@cccovfa.org



Lenten Reflections

Wednesday of the Second Week in Lent March 11, 2009

Readings: [Jer 18:18-20](#), [Ps 31:5-6, 14, 15-16](#), and [Mt 20:17-28](#)

James and John are nicknamed "*sons of thunder*". However, the thunder is silenced as their mother speaks for her two tongue-tied sons and asks Jesus the favor of letting them take the places of honor at his right and left in his kingdom. Jesus, however, tells them that these reservations are made not by him but by his heavenly Father.

Having gotten their attention, Jesus proceeds to give them a basic lesson in leadership which is not a matter of position, power, or prestige. Jesus says clearly that the key to successful Christian leadership is a matter of service. He will dramatically demonstrate by deed not by word what he means by service when at the Last Supper he washes the feet of his apostles. There is not much glory in such a menial task. There is no glory but only suffering when Jesus concludes and climaxes his service by giving his own life as a ransom for the many.

When we wash the feet of those we serve in our charity organizations, we make the Eucharist. As we work to reduce poverty in America, we "go in peace to love and serve the Lord." We are the presence of "Jesus in his human, humble disguise" as Mother Teresa said. How blessed it is to serve the poor realizing we are poor ourselves.

Rev. Michael Kiernan
Diocesan Director
Catholic Charities of Sacramento
mkiernan@diocese-sacramento.org



Lenten Reflections

Thursday of the Second Week in Lent March 12, 2009

Readings: [Jer 17:5-10](#), [Ps 1:1-2, 3, 4 and 6](#), and [Lk 16:19-31](#)

In our society today there is so much talk about poverty or around those who are poor. Each day I see staff and volunteers spending time working and speaking WITH the poor, understanding the issues they face and engaging them in building a better community. When we engage with others we build up what the greatest commandment calls for: love of neighbor. Unfortunately in today's passage from the Gospel of Luke, we see the rich man avoiding Lazarus which is an affront to the call to neighborliness! This parable cautions us that it may be important to share food and shelter with others but it is most essential to live with a deep and pervasive attitude of neighborliness toward the vulnerable and marginalized on our society.

Some may assume that the rich man's duty would have been fulfilled if he had merely provided money or bread. Yet we know through this parable that true charity is more than flinging a coin to a beggar, it is not superficial but true engagement and care. "Fundamental neighborliness" is the barometer of the soul, an indication of the attitude of one's heart that is prized in God's sight.

We at Catholic Charities all over the country are so involved in the lives of the clients we serve each day, we are truly living out fundamental neighborliness with those we serve.

Fr. Ragan Schriver
Executive Director
Catholic Charities of Eastern Tennessee
frragan@yahoo.com



Lenten Reflections

Friday the Second Week in Lent March 13, 2009

Readings: [Gn 37:3-4, 12-13a, 17b-28a](#) ; [Ps 105:16-17, 18-19, 20-21](#), and [Mt 21:33-43, 45-46](#)

In the book of Genesis we read about the story of Joseph and how he received preferential love from the father. This caused intense jealousy among his brothers who as a result sold Joseph into slavery. In Matthew's gospel we learn about a man who owned a vineyard and sent his beloved son to collect the fruits of that vineyard. Out of selfish ambition the workers killed him. In both cases man's greed gives him a blind eye and his heart hardens to the needs of others. Both immediate outcomes in these scriptures are negative, but despite human reactions and choices, God draws good from wrong intentions.

During Lent we are preparing ourselves to celebrate the glorious grace that God bestowed upon us and to spend time contemplating on what actions we can take to follow the mandate set for us. That mandate is to love our neighbor and meet them at the point of their need.

Here at Catholic Charities we are doing all we can to meet the needs of men, women, and children who are living in hopelessness and poverty. Each of us should have a heart of joy, no matter what our task or who sees us doing it, because we are spreading the light of God's grace and love to those who need to see it in action in order to believe that they are loved.

Emily McCue
Accounts Payable
Catholic Charities of Kansas City, MO
emccue@ccharities.com



Lenten Reflections

Third Sunday in Lent March 15, 2009

Readings: [Ex 20:1-17 or 20:1-3, 7-8, 12-17](#), [Ps 19:8, 9, 10, 11](#), [1 Cor 1:22-25](#), and [Jn 2:13-25](#)

We all know the first of the Ten Commandments, “you shall have no other gods besides me.” In our day and age, this may seem to be a relatively simple commandment to keep as very few of us worships the god of the sun or the moon or the goddess of the stars. However, in the year 2009 as we face a world-wide financial crisis of unprecedented proportions, I can’t help but wonder if we are seeing the results of far too many of us ignoring this important commandment.

Corporate greed, the gross misuse of political power, the elevation of fame and fortune are just a few examples of the worship of gods other than the God of love. When the worship of money or power or fame becomes more important than the worship of the one true God by more than just a corrupt few, we see the widespread results – hunger, loneliness, despair, and poverty of every kind.

In contrast, I know that when I place God at the center of my motivation as a husband, a father, a citizen of my world, and as a director of Catholic Charities that all will be well. When I practice the law above all laws – the law of love, I rarely go astray.

During this time of Lent, let us all put aside any other gods than the God of love and pray that all the world will join us in heeding this command.

David Siler
Executive Director, Catholic Charities
Archdiocese of Indianapolis
dsiler@archindy.org



Lenten Reflections

Monday of the Third Week in Lent March 16, 2009

Readings: [2 Kgs 5:1-15ab](#), [Ps 42:2, 3; 43:3, 4](#), and [Lk 4:24-30](#)

There is a great traditional bluegrass gospel tune based on today's Old Testament reading from 2 Kings, telling the story Naaman, the commander of the Aramean army who suffered with leprosy. In the words of the song "He dipped himself in the River of Jordan, and the cool waters made him whole."

The first thing that struck me about today's readings is the "connectedness" between the Old Testament reading and Luke's gospel. Just as Naaman was anointed in the Jordan, Jesus too, is ultimately "dipped" in the Jordan and anointed with the Holy Spirit, fortifying him for his 40-day journey through the desert all the while being tempted by the devil with promise of temporal riches.

I think that Catholic Charities agencies are also anointed, just as Jesus and Naaman, before him. In a similar way, I believe that we are anointed with the same Spirit; the same fire. If Jesus played out this scenario today, what would he be tempted with? A job? A path to citizenship? An affordable mortgage? The promise that the next generation will do better than this one?

For so many families during these desperate times, the concerns have been made real. I fear that many would opt for selling their soul for assurance from anyone or anything that held the false promise of hope in this life. As more and more Americans struggle, lose ground and ultimately become perceived as the lepers or the unclean of this time, I am reminded of why I chose to be a Catholic Charities director.

For me, today's readings are **not** about who has been "dipped" or "made whole"these readings are about recognizing who has been anointed.

John Young
Executive Director
Catholic Charities Diocese of Yakima
jyoung@ccyakima.org



Lenten Reflections

Tuesday of the Third Week in Lent March 17, 2009

Readings: [Dn 3:25, 34-43](#), [Ps 25:4-5ab, 6 and 7bc, 8-9](#), and [Mt 18:21-35](#)

Psalm 25 contains one of my favorite verses, “Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior (5).” I love this verse because it truly illustrates to me the character of King David, author of this passage. David was a man seeking after God’s heart. And although David was not perfect, what is so beautiful about David is how you can hear throughout the Psalms him calling out to God. He desires for the Lord’s ways to be his own ways, for his path to be the Lord’s path, and his truth to be the truth in Christ.

This is something that should cause all of us to stop and reflect. Are we seeking after God’s heart? My Catholic Charities family, I know how very busy and stressful these times are for us. We are being asked to do more with less and are seeing so much pain with the families we serve. However, our first call is to God by spending time with Him in fellowship, prayer, and study. When we seek His heart, all else falls into place.

Lent calls us to focus on the incredible gift God has given us. And when we focus on being men and women after God’s heart, all who we meet and serve will sense it. This is when we truly become a beacon of hope in our communities.

Heather Reynolds
President/CEO
Catholic Charities, Diocese of Fort Worth, Inc.
hreynolds@ccdofw.org



Lenten Reflections

Wednesday of the Third Week in Lent March 18, 2009

Readings: [Dt 4:1, 5-9](#), [Ps 147:12-13, 15-16, 19-20](#), and [Mt 5:17-19](#)

What interpretation of statutes and decrees can make a nation great, wise and intelligent? What is this law given to Israel through Moses? Today's passage from Deuteronomy lists the Ten Commandments. These are the great laws of Moses. Yet, when we study the Ten Commandments we see a series of do's and don'ts. Do not steal, do not murder, do honor your parents, do keep the Lord's day. Over the years these laws were interpreted as a complicated system of religious practices that included ritual cleansings and payments for purifications, temple tax and rules about what to eat and not eat. Practice of the law seemed to become narrow and exclusive.

Chapter 6 goes on to summarize the law into the great Commandment which Jesus later repeats as the way to holiness: "You shall love the LORD, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength." (Deut. 6:5) The chapters of Deuteronomy go on to guide the people to care for the orphan, the widow and the migrant strangers among them for they were once a people who wandered the earth.

Jesus came to fulfill the law, and to help us see that fulfillment of the law is a work of the heart, a work of seeking the spirit of the law. Thus we find the courage to fulfill the law: "Love your neighbor as yourself" for herein is the mandate to care for our global neighbors and our earth with hospitality, respect and dignity.

Today, we have the potential to become a great nation, wise and intelligent. This is the ongoing project of every government in the world. This is the passion of those who do social ministry, who embrace a "fundamental option for the poor" as a way of life. This is the compassion that helps us greet each day with enthusiasm singing "Praise the Lord, Jerusalem.

Sister Lucy Meissen, CPPS
Office of Liturgical Education
Diocese of Las Cruces
lucymeissen@dioceseoflascruces.org



Lenten Reflections

Solemnity of Saint Joseph March 19, 2009

Readings: [2 Sm 7:4-5a, 12-14a, 16](#), [Ps 89:2-3, 4-5, 27 and 29](#), [Rom 4:13, 16-18, 22](#),
and [Mt 1:16, 18-21, 24a](#)

Today is a day to feast on God's faithfulness! The readings highlight the faithfulness of God throughout the ages. We hear about the promise God made to Abraham and to his descendants; God's faithfulness to that promise animates the lives of David and Joseph, and finds its culmination in the birth of Jesus, the Son of David. Today, that promise is our inheritance, too!

In what way can we repay God's faithfulness? By being faithful, of course! Our faith in God gives us strength to be faithful followers and righteous children of Abraham. We witness our faith in that promise when we live it out: acting in compassion to welcome the stranger, care for the poor, speak for the voiceless, and build communities of compassion.

Today we also celebrate the feast of St. Joseph. Centuries ago, the faithful of Sicily threw a huge party on St. Joseph's Day to thank God for much-needed rain in a time of drought. All were invited to a feast, and rich and poor alike broke bread together. This tradition continues in many communities and parishes today, when all are welcome to celebrate at St. Joseph's Table and feast on God's faithfulness. Buon Appetito!

Kathryn Anderson
Associate Director for Parish Social Ministry
Catholic Charities Houma-Thibodaux
kanderson@hdiocese.org



Lenten Reflections

Friday of the Third Week in Lent March 20, 2009

Readings: [Hos 14:2-10](#), [Ps 81:6c-8a, 8bc-9, 10-11ab, 14 and 17](#), and [Mk 12:28-34](#)

My mother died in December of 2007. She spent most of the last month of her life in a hospital before being transferred to our local hospice care center. Most of the hospital staff who cared for mom were skilled and compassionate people who did their best to help both mom and our family through a very difficult time. However, there were times when I wanted to shout: “Is this the type of treatment and care you would want for your own mother or sister if she were the one lying in this bed?” Make no mistake, the problem is not just with how people are sometimes cared for at hospitals and nursing homes. I am sure we have all heard similar stories about how people have been treated when approaching social service agencies and government offices for support and care.

In today’s Gospel Jesus reminds us that our goal and purpose in life is to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength and to love your neighbor as yourself.” As members of Catholic Charities organizations it is especially important that we keep these words close to our hearts. . . Living out our love for God in how we treat each other and the people we serve is what makes us great.

In a recent survey one of our clients wrote, “I like Catholic Charities because God’s people are there.” When people come to Catholic Charities for help they expect that they will find God’s people working there and will be treated accordingly. As long as we see ourselves and the people we serve as God’s people, we can be assured that we will continue to be refreshed and sustained by God’s love and grace and that we will receive the strength we need to continue to do God’s work in the world.

Louis Cocchiarella
Executive Director
Catholic Charities, Diocese of Toledo
lcocchiarella@toledodiocese.org



Lenten Reflections

Fourth Sunday in Lent March 22, 2009

Readings: [2 Chr 36:14-16, 19-23](#), [Ps 137:1-2, 3, 4-5, 6](#), [Eph 2:4-10](#), and [Jn 3:14-21](#)

This week's gospel includes John 3:16 and this citation, "John 3:16" has been the most recognizable of all citations of the bible. You can not go to, or watch on TV, a large public/sporting event without seeing "John 3:16" on a poster or a t-shirt. Many will remember a guy with rainbow hair in the perfect camera shot with John 3:16. (I know I joined others wondering how does he always get such great tickets?).

Now mind you, the *citation* was recognizable, but the verse itself often was not known. The difference between recognizing something and knowing it is important for us as people of faith. Ignoring the difference leaves things pretty superficial. We are deep in this season of Lent and we are called to do more than simply recognize the love of God described in the gospel. We are called to really know it, and we know it best when we risk of ourselves and witness this love of God to others.

CCUSA's *Campaign to Reduce Poverty* is increasingly recognizable, even to those not directly involved with CCUSA on a daily basis. But let's ask ourselves how we have really made it known? How have I risked witnessing to the reality of God's love in my own practice of faith this season with the inseparable call to free God's people from poverty? The reality might be recognized. We need to make it known. John 3:16 can help.

Michael Griffin
Parish Social Ministry Section
Pax Christi Catholic Community
Eden Prairie, MN
mgriffin@paxchristi.com



Lenten Reflections

Monday of the Fourth Week in Lent March 23, 2009

Readings: [Is 65:17-21](#), [Ps 30:2 and 4, 5-6, 11-12a and 13b](#), and [Jn 4:43-54](#)

Today more than ever it seems people are losing hope. We know all too well that during these tumultuous economic times, it is our clients - those facing home foreclosure, or who wonder where their next meal will come from, or how they will clothe their children - who may feel particularly hopeless. In today's Gospel, Jesus says, "*Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will not believe.*" John 4:48.

Could it be that at Catholic Charities, we have the awesome opportunity to help those less fortunate begin to believe once again? The things we do each and every day to help those less fortunate could be just what they need to begin to believe in a better tomorrow. It is up to us to send that message of hope, or in the words of John's Gospel, for us to be the visible, wondrous sign of God's love.

Celeste Matheson
Director of Communications
Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Peoria
cmatheson@ccdop.org



Lenten Reflections

Tuesday of the Fourth Week in Lent March 24, 2009

Readings: [Ez 47:1-9, 12](#), [Ps 46:2-3, 5-6, 8-9](#), and [Jn 5:1-16](#)

Today's reading from Psalms conveys such determined assurance in the face of disaster. "So we will not be afraid, even as the earth is shaken and the mountains fall into the ocean depths: even if the seas roar and rage, and the hills are shaken by violence... Come and see what the Lord has done. See what amazing things he has done on earth."

Today, it seems everyone's earth is shaken. The economic crisis and foreclosures have hit every community. There are job losses across the country. Local governments are bracing for cutbacks in programs to help the poor. And there are those whose earth has literally shaken - those in the Midwest hit by tornadoes, those on the gulf coast ravaged by hurricanes and those in areas devastated by fires. Some lives have changed drastically and families have found themselves with nothing and some have been living in a shaky world of poverty all their lives. So many people are living in fear.

It would seem, though, that scarier than living through a disaster or scarier than getting up every day wondering if my family will have a place to live, would be doing it without any hope for the future. And, while our agencies may not be able to provide a program to address a specific need or we may not have the funds to do all that we want to do, we can open a door to hope. We can all learn to hope, and as we become hope-full we also become fear-less.

Then see what amazing things we can all do with Him.

Joan Fowler Brown
Chairperson, Spirituality Committee
Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington
Joan.Fowler-Brown@CatholicCharitiesDC.org



Lenten Reflections

Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord March 25, 2009

Readings: [Is 7:10-14; 8:10](#), [Ps 40:7-8a, 8b-9, 10, 11](#), [Heb 10:4-10](#), and [Lk 1:26-38](#)

Today, the church celebrates the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord. The readings in Isaiah invite our attention to the annunciation story as foretold many years before its occurrence. Isaiah's narrative presents a sign from the Lord himself; "the virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel, which means "God is with us!" The psalmist acknowledges God's desire for our faithfulness and reminds us to be obedient to God's will, "Here I am Lord; I come to do your will."

Luke's gospel details the annunciation: Gabriel greets Mary, tells her she is full of grace and that she will bear a son and that he will reign over the house of Jacob and that his kingdom will have no end. She accepts without question the answer Gabriel gives her when she asks how this is possible since she knows no man. When Gabriel explains it will be through the power of the Holy Spirit she unhesitatingly accepts her role in the salvation story, "may it be done to me according to your word." We have in today's readings the executive summary of God's plan to enter into our world and be with us in our midst. The readings remind us that, like the psalmist, we are all called to do God's will.

Doing God's will is the central focus of Catholic Charities. It is presumptuous to suggest that God's work could not be accomplished without our help, but for reasons only known to God, he wants us involved. He wants us to help bring about the kingdom of God. The vision statement of Catholic Charities includes, "that we believing in the presence of God in our midst, we proclaim the sanctity of human life and the dignity of the person by sharing in the mission of Jesus given to the Church." By doing the work of Catholic Charities, we demonstrate acknowledgement of Isaiah's prophesy, the willingness of the psalmist, and acceptance of our role in the salvation story.

Howard B. Kravitz, OPA, MA, LPC
Managing Director, Catholic Counseling & Consultation Center
Catholic Charities, Archdiocese of San Antonio, Inc.
hkravitz@ccaosa.org



Lenten Reflections

Thursday of the Fourth Week in Lent March 26, 2009

Readings: [Ex 32:7-14](#), [Ps 106:19-20, 21-22, 23](#), and [Jn 5:31-47](#)

As a theory, negotiating with God seems blasphemous. As a part of religious experience, it is fairly common. We pretend we don't. But we do—all the time and almost always in private. We try in small matters: “If you help me find my keys, I'll say an extra prayer,” and in life and death matters: “If you save my child....”

Today, the Book of Exodus describes a very public negotiation. Moses skillfully negotiates with God. The charge God brings against his people—depraved idolatry—is true and it is very serious: worshiping the molten calf violates the First Commandment: “I the Lord your God am one – you shall not have other gods.” Yet, Moses convinces God, and the Israelites are spared.

In this vein, Lent might be considered the annual public negotiation of the Christian community with God. Here's the deal: if we pray, fast and give alms, then we expect You to change us and draw us more profoundly into the great mysteries of our redemption: the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Today's scriptural reading about Moses' negotiation with God provides a fruitful direction for our own self-examination. What are the false Gods we worship (obsess over)? How do we let them distract us from the worship of the true God and the genuine living out of our faith? We might want to direct our own Lenten prayer, fasting and almsgiving toward eradicating these false idols.

Msgr. Kevin Sullivan
Executive Director
Catholic Charities of New York
Msgr.kevin.sullivan@archny.org



Lenten Reflections

Friday of the Fourth Week in Lent March 27, 2009

Readings: [Wis 2:1a, 12-22](#), [Ps 34:17-18, 19-20, 21 and 23](#), and [Jn 7:1-2, 10, 25-30](#)

The first reading in Wisdom, Chapter 2, has to do with the fact that Jesus was resented because of his goodness and righteousness that challenged the wickedness and intentions of those around him. He was despised because he reminded others of their sins. The religious authorities were out to test him. 'If he truly is the son of God then he will be delivered from his torture and execution. Let him prove what he says.'

In John, Chapter 7, though Jesus knew he was in danger, he traveled to Judea to partake in the holy days. While there, he openly spoke in the temple preaching his message. This openness and courage was founded on his knowledge that God had sent him and that he was doing the Father's will. This conviction of doing that which is right is the basis of true moral courage. This is what sets saints and great leaders above and apart ... the ability to do right in the face of persecution and personal loss.

Have you ever stood up for what you knew was right even when you knew you would suffer for it? Have you known someone who was willing to be persecuted, ridiculed, or otherwise abused for doing what they knew to be right? In your capacity of working for Catholic Charities you often stand up for the vulnerable, protect the weak, and honor the dignity of all persons – have you felt ridicule for doing such, perhaps even from your own family and friends?

As we continue our Lenten journey, may we draw comfort from the Psalm who writes:
Many are the troubles of the just man, but out of them all the Lord delivers him.

Lynn Youngblood
Program Manager
Concepts for Effective Services II
Catholic Charities of Kansas City-St. Joseph
lyoungblood@ccharities.com



Lenten Reflections

Fifth Sunday in Lent March 29, 2009

Readings: [Jer 31:31-34](#), [Ps 51:3-4, 12-13, 14-15](#), [Heb 5:7-9](#), and [Jn 12:20-33](#)

Remember how nervous we were when reciting before our classmates in school? We wanted to give the correct answer so we would not be exposed and look foolish. We did not want **that kind** of experience.

Jesus talks about being “lifted up” in today’s Gospel. Jesus was publicly exposed and died a shameful death. Crucifixion was to humiliate the victim. The Psalmist said, “All who see me, mock me; they curl their lips and sneer; they shake their heads at me.”

Jesus is also lifted up by being glorified by the Father. The “hour” of Jesus is both the time of his Passion and his Glorification.

Jesus sowed in tears. He wept over Jerusalem, at the death of his friend, Lazarus, in the Garden of Gethsemane. But, Jesus sang where he reaped. He is the grain of wheat that falls into the ground, watered with his blood and tears. He is the fruit of the resurrection, the harvest of God’s field, the song of his Father’s glory. “Those who are sowing in tears will sing when they reap.”

As Jesus was lifted up to give glory to the Father, so can we bear witness to God by our lives – in prayer, the sacraments – life in religious vows, as a priest, as a worker in Catholic Charities . . . we bind the wounds of those who seek our healing.

We are called to sow in tears like Jesus and sing when we reap. We share his death and resurrection and in the Eucharist we become “lifted up.” We share with Jesus in drawing all people to God’s love.

Most Reverend Michael P. Driscoll, MSW, DD
Bishop of Idaho
Episcopal Liaison, CCUSA
mdriscoll@rcdb.org



Lenten Reflections

Monday of the Fifth Week in Lent March 30, 2009

Readings: [Dn 13:1-9, 15-17, 19-30, 33-62 or 13:41c-62](#), [Ps 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6](#), and [Jn 8:1-11](#)

Evil wins by a forfeit. Good does not show up.

We are all familiar with the expression that “evil will win when good people do nothing.” Evil or wrongdoing does not have to actually do anything to have an effect on the world around us. When we fail to do the good we could do, then evil has progressed and good has regressed.

In today’s scripture we hear that the Holy Spirit moved the heart of a young man named Daniel. Daniel had to say something; Daniel had to do something. He could not simply sit back and allow Susanna to be victimized by the lustful, evil-hearted old men who were accusing her falsely.

In the Gospel reading for today, Jesus embodied a compassionate, non-judging spirit that we are called to live daily. Unlike Susanna, the adulterous woman had committed sin; she was not innocent. Still, Jesus challenged her accusers to look at themselves before passing judgment on her.

Those of us engaged in the ministry of social service must, like Daniel, speak the truth to power. At times we may be the one voice that turns the tide of ill will and rash judgment. There are days we must say, “yes, this person has caused some of his/her problem, but who has not? Let her/him begin again with our help and our support.”

- * Is the Spirit moving me to speak a word of challenge?
- * Is there a sin in my life that must be addressed before I speak to another?
- * Have I judged someone unjustly and need forgiveness myself?

Fr. Henry Mancuso
Secretary of Pastoral Services
Diocese of Lake Charles
Mancusoh1@cs.com



Lenten Reflections

Tuesday of the Fifth Week in Lent March 31, 2009

Readings: [Nm 21:4-9](#), [Ps 102:2-3, 16-18, 19-21](#), and [Jn 8:21-30](#)

“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life”.

As I reflect on today’s reading from the Gospel of John, I am struck by Jesus’ response to the scribes and Pharisees. As they brought the woman before Jesus to be condemned, they try to force Jesus to pronounce judgment, which would ultimately result in her death. Instead, Jesus proclaims life for her, “Neither do I condemn you. Go, (and) from now on do not sin any more.” Jesus assures us that he doesn’t give up on us, but will provide the light to lead us out of the darkness.

How blessed we are, to be instruments of bringing Jesus’ light to those in despair. Our mission is to proclaim life for those we touch through our work. Lent is an opportunity for us to shine the Light of the World into the darkness of the lives of those who have lost hope by preserving their dignity and encouraging them to leave behind the dark condition of their lives and to receive the blessings that God has prepared for them.

Tina Andrade
Director, Catholic Identity and Mission
Catholic Charities Hawai‘i
tina@catholiccharitieshawaii.org



Lenten Reflections

Wednesday of the Fifth Week in Lent April 1, 2009

Readings: [Dn 3:14-20, 91-92, 95](#), [Daniel 3:52, 53, 54, 55, 56](#), and [Jn 8:31-42](#)

In the readings from Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (Jews who oversee the province of Babylon on behalf of King Nebuchadnezzar) are threatened by the king with certain death in the “fiery furnace” for refusing to worship the statue the king has made. What amazes me is that it doesn’t matter to them whether God saves them from this fate or elects not to – their faith enables them to face this most horrible dilemma with incredible confidence and with hearts glorifying and blessing God.

The nature of faith, so dramatically depicted in Daniel, is deeply amplified in the gospel reading from John. If we make the Lord’s Word our home, we will learn the truth and the “truth shall make you free”. In embracing the Word, we have been liberated to experience the joy of faith - a faith that enables me to know that I am loved by God, made in God’s image and fulfilled through loving the Lord and loving my neighbor.

Lent provides us all with the healing opportunity to reflect on things in our life that diminishes our true freedom. In what way is that wonderful humanity that we have been gifted with constricted by unnecessary distractions and insecurities? How can I embrace the freedom that Jesus offers and arrive at Easter sounding an Alleluia that is truly centered in the depths of my soul?

Robert Siebel
Chief Executive Officer
Catholic Charities of Brooklyn
RSIEBEL@ccbq.org



Lenten Reflections

Thursday of the Fifth Week in Lent April 2, 2009

Readings: [Gn 17:3-9](#), [Ps 105:4-5, 6-7, 8-9](#), and [Jn 8:51-59](#)

As I read the Scriptures for this day, I was struck by the recurring theme of Covenant. I reflected not only on God's Covenant with Abraham, but also God's Covenant with me. Psalm 105 reminds us to seek the Lord, and his strength: "seek His face evermore. Remember the marvelous works he has done; his wonders..."

I have the privilege of journeying with friends, as they prepare to enter the Church. I watch, as they humbly absorb the instructions of a Godly priest. I see the longing in their eyes each Sunday, as they study the procession of those preparing to receive the Eucharist. I understand their desire to fully comprehend the significance, of this life changing mystery; for in the Eucharist we receive God, Himself. My friends are preparing to seal their Covenant with God. In being a witness to their conversions, I have the desire to renew my Covenant with God: in part, to seek the Lord and His strength, to remember His marvelous works and wonders.

A good friend calls her job with Catholic Charities "beautiful drudgery." She reminds me that, yes, you work face to face with poverty, homelessness, hunger, fear, sadness, etc., but when you work, with the eyes of God, you remember the face has a name and it is beautiful. For me, I need to reflect on my Covenant with God more often, to seek His face and strength and delight in His marvelous works and wonders that are present and before me each day.

Nancy Hickman
Coordinator
Pregnancy & Adoption Services
Catholic Charities, Diocese of Camden, Inc.
nancy.hickman@camdendiocese.org



Lenten Reflections

Friday of the Fifth Week in Lent April 3, 2009

Readings: [Jer 20:10-13](#), [Ps 18:2-3a, 3bc-4, 5-6, 7](#), and [Jn 10:31-42](#)

This particular season of Lent finds us in a time of economic turmoil. Craving hope, we turn our prayers to God. We want to feel that he is close and knows our suffering. We want to believe that he offers us refuge, a stronghold, a champion. We want to see that He rescues the life of the poor from the power of the wicked... that He saves those who struggle from the clutch of despair.

But for many, the comfort of God seems so distant and intangible. As in John, we doubt and condemn. As those who would stone Jesus for calling himself God on this earth, we are slow to recognize that God walks with us still on very this same earth. We ask, how do we know God is here? What is our proof? Jesus said that through his works, all can see that the Father is in him and he is in the Father. With every one of his works, he shows us that God's mighty power, tender compassion, and healing transformation are being poured upon us.

Jesus also said that what he has done, we can do too, because God is within us as well. We at Catholic Charities have the honor of carrying out so much of God's good work. With every bag of healthy food, every hand that wipes away a tear, every penny that keeps a family from being evicted from their home, we share the God that is within us with those who so badly need to see and believe. Our works, just as Jesus' works, give proof that God is here. Jesus' works were the basis of belief. Our works are the basis of belief, and belief is the basis of hope.

By merely doing our jobs, we show our brothers and sisters that their cries have reached God's ears. Through us he rescues his people from the power of the wicked and hope is restored to empty hearts. Rocks are dropped from slack fists and the souls of the empty are filled with the certainty that Emmanuel, God is with us.

Lori Fox, LCSW
Director of Counseling Services
Catholic Social Services, Diocese of Charlotte
LLFox@CharlotteDiocese.org



Lenten Reflections

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion April 5, 2009

Readings: [Is 50:4-7](#), [Ps 22:8-9, 17-18, 19-20, 23-24](#), [Phil 2:6-11](#), and [Mk 14:1—15:47 or 15:1-39](#)

Today's first reading provides comfort to those of us who see the reality of the recession reflected in our clients' faces on a daily basis. We are promised a "well-trained tongue", so that we may "know how to speak to the weary a word that will rouse them."

Perhaps our most welcome words are ones of hospitality, encouragement and fortitude to individuals who find themselves unemployed, homeless or unable to feed their families. Their injuries are as painful as the beatings and spitting described in the Isaiah passage, and we are the healing hands of Christ to lay on their wounds.

So, while we make the referral, fill out the voucher or hand over the bag of groceries, our real gift is the assurance that there is no shame or disgrace in accepting help to make ends meet in a broken economy. As the Catholic Charities USA Campaign to Reduce Poverty in America states, "Poverty is a fundamental violation of human dignity and also a form of violence against the God who is present in every human person."

Let us "set our faces like flint" to defend the rights of the poor and vulnerable in our acts of service and advocacy, "knowing that we will not be put to shame."

Brigit Hurley
Parish Social Ministry Coordinator
Rochester, NY
bhurley@cfcrochester.org



Lenten Reflections

A Reflection on Holy Week

Prayer of course comes with our nature.
It's a given.
But our nature being in the pickle it's in,
And having been,
And still is, in the process of being restored in God's elegant plan,
We need to recognize there's more to it than that,

We do our best, with the energy at hand under the circumstances,
To celebrate the Sacred Triduum,
The three inexpressibly holy Week
That returns in the yearly cycle of the liturgy.

But do we remember that sacramental time during our struggle to pray?

Do we realize that our prayer is the inner presence of the Great Week,
And especially of the Great Vigil,
The Mother of Vigils?

Our faith, our life is sacramental.

Yes, it is intimate and spiritual and transcendent.
But it is sacramentally transcendent,
And we do not leave behind the sacramental world
When we pray each in our own hearts.
Our prayer arises from the depths of our sacramental initiation
From that night and the candle and the sacred waters
From which we rise daily, moment by moment.

The Great Vigil is the unpacking of the mystery of Redemption,
The application of its sublime grace to the waiting heart.
Whoever was responsible for it has formed it into the Great Story,
The texts, the song, the water and the bells,
The history and the immediacy of who and why
God lived and lives our mortal and immortal life.

That dark and glorious light
Embraces our prayer,
Penetrates and carries it and clothes it with the glory of that Night of Nights.

We don't have to worry about how to pray successfully.
We do our best, however the Spirit gifts us,
And we try to remember the fount, from which the prayer is pouring,
The Great and immeasurable bounty our sacramental God.

*Catholic Charities Health & Human Services
Archdiocese of Cleveland*



Lenten Reflections

Monday of Holy Week April 6, 2009

Readings: [Is 42:1-7](#), [Ps 27:1, 2, 3, 13-14](#), and [Jn 12:1-11](#)

As I read today's scriptures, I was drawn to the familiar verse in John's Gospel, "Amen, amen. I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit."

During this Lenten season, this verse spoke to me about conversion. I am a Secular Franciscan, and our rule defines conversion as a radical interior change. The rule goes on to state that our human frailty makes it necessary that this conversion be carried out daily.

In a sense, we are called to die each day so that we can produce much fruit. Conversion means leaving behind an old way of living and acting in order to embrace new life in Christ. Conversion is a proactive process requiring us to take action.

What better time than Lent to get into the habit of daily conversion. We can begin to die to our selfish wants and focus on the needs of others, most especially the poor. CCUSA's policy paper "Poverty in America – A Threat to the Common Good" reminds us "our relationship with God is not in right order, and the injustice of poverty and extreme inequality cries out for change". This is conversion; this is what we are called to each and every day!

Andy Zampini
Parish Social Ministry
Catholic Charities
Diocese of Wilmington
azampini@ccwilm.org



Lenten Reflections

Tuesday of Holy Week April 7, 2009

Readings: [Is 49:1-6](#), [Ps 71:1-2, 3-4a, 5ab-6ab, 15 and 17](#), and [Jn 13:21-33, 36-38](#)

As I stood outside the medical examiner's office the refrain "from death into life", kept running through my mind. Ronnie, a Catholic Charities' driver for our Meals on Wheels program, died in a car accident earlier that day as he finished his meals route. As the detective stood before me with Ronnie's clothing in a clear plastic bag I couldn't help but think of Jesus being stripped of his garments before his death only to find the garments of his burial also cast aside at the moment of His resurrection. So many images, so many connections!

Our readings today connect the Ronnies of our world to the Risen Christ once again. "Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and dry them with the towel around his waist." Ronnie, like countless Catholic Charities employees lived a life of service, bringing a much needed food to vulnerable seniors. Ronnie's was not a "morsel" of betrayal but a meal of sustenance, and a witness to hope, love and dignity. He used the delivery of the meal as a way to make contact, share a joke, and let those whom we are called to serve know that they are not alone.

But it is the reading from Isaiah today that shouts out to me as I think of the life and death of Ronnie. "You are my servant...through whom I show my glory...It is too little...for you to be my servant...I will make you a light to the nations".

God of New Life, I thank you for the witness of so many, past and present, who, like Ronnie, live quiet lives of prophetic witness through their service to others. May they, and those who are served, know that it is through suffering and service, and even death itself that we journey with you into life.

Anthony Mullen
Chief Community Services Officer
Catholic Charities of Rockville Center
mullen.anthony@catholiccharities.cc



Lenten Reflections

Wednesday of Holy Week April 8, 2009

Readings: [Is 50:4-9a](#), [Ps 69:8-10, 21-22, 31 and 33-34](#), and [Mt 26:14-25](#)

So often people like us, that is, people who would read (or write) a Lenten reflection, know who the sinners are. We know and we name them, if not out loud, then in our minds. We know what 'living right' is and they aren't doing it!

In today's gospel reading, we can name one of those people. His name is Judas and he is bad! Jesus knew it, or did he? He knew that his disciples weren't perfect; of course Judas was the most extreme example of that. Judas wanted money and he wanted power and he seized on an event in his life to do that. Yes, he needed to hand over someone he had spent lots of time with and someone that had at one time inspired him, but when wealth and power were on the table...well anything goes. Jesus knew it and all of the gospel writers tell us that Judas was bad!

If he was so bad then why did Jesus ask Judas to follow him? I don't know but I have a theory. I believe that Jesus saw the good and the brokenness and honored that. If that weren't true then why didn't Jesus get rid of him before the last supper? In the gospel of John we hear Jesus speak words of love and friendship to his disciples, and he said those words to Judas too. He washed all of the disciples' feet and gave them Eucharist, and that means Judas too. I believe that Jesus knew that there was something lovable about Judas. He must have seen even more than the gospel writers could see.

So often people like us think we know who the sinners are. I'll bet we are wrong! I'll bet that if we had the mind and heart of Christ, we would see the good first and rejoice in that! So often people in our world look at people on the margins, those most vulnerable ones, and they judge, but we know that is not the case in the mind and heart of Christ.

It's Lent. As we pray, let's remember to pray for the mind and heart of Christ, and we might come to realize that there is a part of Judas in each of us too.

Kathleen M. Langer
Director of Social Concerns
Catholic Charities of the Diocese of St. Cloud
klanger@gw.stcdio.org



Lenten Reflections

Holy Thursday April 9, 2009

Readings: [Ex 12:1-8, 11-14](#), [Ps 116:12-13, 15-16bc, 17-18](#), [1 Cor 11:23-26](#), and [Jn 13:1-15](#).

(Jesus) fully aware that the Father had put everything into his power...rose from supper and took off his outer garments. He took a towel and tied it around his waist...and began to wash the disciples' feet and dry them with the towel around his waist. (John 13:3-5)

In a deliberate attempt at “trans signification,” John inserts the washing of the feet at the very place of the institution of the Eucharist in the synoptic gospels. The “Gospel of Signs” conveys to us the profound and sacramental connection between the Eucharist and a life of service. First by example, then by word, Jesus teaches us that to be his followers we must live the Eucharist through a life of selflessness, simplicity and humble service. Jesus turns our world upside down and our lives inside out.

Whether we are direct service staff, managers or directors, we are called to “remove our outer garments” of power, position and authority, gird ourselves with the humility of a servant and care for the most lowly and vulnerable amongst us. When we divest ourselves of the exterior trappings of power, we will be given the power of the Spirit that Jesus promised us not only to provide help and create hope, but also to transform lives by our gentleness and integrity as followers of Jesus.

While the reading from Exodus celebrates the liberation from servitude, today’s gospel passage speaks of the liberation of our deeper selves through servant hood. As we begin the celebration of the Paschal Mystery, the three days of preparation will lead us from humble service and the laying down of our lives for others to the transformation into the Risen Christ of our selves and of the people we serve.

Briston J. Fernandes
Executive Director
Catholic Charities North Dakota
bfernandes@catholiccharitiesnd.org

Lenten Reflections

Good Friday April 10, 2009

Readings: [Is 52:13-53:12](#), [Ps 31:2, 6, 12-13, 15-16, 17, 25](#), [Heb 4:14-16; 5:7-9](#),
and [Jn 18:1-19:42](#)

Jesus is crucified. The brutality, the unspeakable horror of this crucifixion stuns us into silence. Who can speak? What can we say? But God is saying something, something almost beyond belief. Despite the ugly inhumanity, despite the hatred and rejection we see, God is speaking. As we look at the cross today, God says to us, "No matter what you do to me, no matter how terrible it might be, I still love you." Nothing, but nothing, can destroy God's love, not even the cross. In fact in and through Christ on the cross God speaks that love in a very powerful way under the worst of circumstances.

We see and deal with so much suffering in our world and in our work that we are tempted to take a 'fight or flight' attitude. But in the cross God teaches us not to run, not to reject but to stay committed, to stay present and to work hard to love as best we can, even when circumstances encourage us to turn away. In the cross, God says to us as nothing else does or can "I love you." In our lives and in our work, the cross calls us to love even in the most difficult moments.

Fr. Dick Bresnahan
Retired pastor and member of the Peoria Diocesan Catholic Charities Board.
rfbpaul@qconline.com