

READING AND PRAYERS FOR April 6th, Lent 5

Collect

Most merciful God,
you prepare a new way in the wilderness
and your grace waters the desert of our lives.
May the power of Christ's victorious cross
transform the hearts of those who turn to you
that we may proclaim your love for all people.
We ask this through him who is perfect love,
your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Isaiah 43:16-21: *This reading enforces the notion that God's saving actions are repeated time and again. As God once saved His people from slavery by separating the water of the Red Sea, so God will act again. Instead of leading them across the waters, they will be led from exile in Babylon across the desert back to the Promised Land (the animals listed in the reading are desert dwellers). We have this reading in Lent because God has acted this way again, saving us from exile to sin and death, leading us to the Promised Land of the Kingdom of God through our baptism into the cross and resurrection of God's Son, Jesus.*

Thus says the Lord,
who makes a way in the sea,
a path in the mighty waters,
who brings out chariot and horse,
army and warrior;
they lie down, they cannot rise,
they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:
Do not remember the former things,
or consider the things of old.
I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert.
The wild animals will honour me,
the jackals and the ostriches;
for I give water in the wilderness,
rivers in the desert,
to give drink to my chosen people,

the people whom I formed for myself
so that they might declare my praise.

Philippians 3:8-14: *Paul wrote that trying to obey God through the Law is a “loss” for followers of Christ. True righteousness for Christians comes from worshipping Christ, not in our trying to be “godly.” Paul wanted complete union with Christ, even experiencing his death and sharing in his resurrection. Like all of us, Paul stated that he has not achieved his spiritual goals, but that he “presses on” because of the “heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.”*

I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. ¹⁰I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, ¹¹if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. ¹²Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴I press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

John 12:1-8: *Jesus raised Lazarus from death, so Lazarus’s sisters, Mary and Martha, threw a lavish dinner in Jesus’ honour to thank him. Mary anointed Jesus’ feet with a costly oil which outraged Judas, who said that they should have sold the oil and entrusted him, a thief, with the money so could give it to the poor (ya, right!). People were (and are) anointed with oil when they are sick and before death. Jesus implied that Mary had done something which Mary and others would only fully realize after he had been crucified.*

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus’ feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, ‘Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?’ (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) Jesus said, ‘Leave her alone.

She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.'

In order to understand this passage better, we need to take a look at what had happened just prior to Jesus showing up at Lazarus's house. About a week or so prior to this event, Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. Lazarus was the brother of Mary and Martha. Now the Jews of the area had heard about this miraculous event, and as you can imagine, it caused quite the stir among them. But by raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus was really putting the final nail in his own coffin instead. Jesus would take Lazarus's place in that tomb. And your place too.

The Jewish leaders of the area called an emergency meeting. They discussed the latest in a series of events that had caused such an upset in the religious community. And at the centre of it all was Jesus. This pesky, bothersome man from Nazareth, who had been going around the area creating all sorts of havoc. They asked themselves how much longer they could let this man upset their religious applecart. He was going around healing individuals, casting out demons, feeding hordes of people and performing countless miracles. And now this! This time he'd gone too far. It's said that he raised someone from the dead! These religious leaders agreed that they had to put a stop to this. They said that before they knew it, all of their people would be following Jesus instead of them, and then the Romans would notice the turmoil. Once the Romans got involved, they would all be in trouble. The Romans would blame any problems with the people on them. They needed to get rid of Jesus and fast! They agree to have him killed.

Then, we read, Mary went and got a pint of very expensive perfume, poured it onto Jesus' feet and then wiped his feet with her hair. Mary, the sister of Lazarus, expresses her gratitude to Jesus for the restoration of her brother's life. She offered this very expensive and lavish gift without any consideration of its cost. Just as Jesus would offer his life for yours without considering the cost. But we immediately heard from someone who does count the cost of all this extravagance. We heard from Judas, the one who will later betray Jesus.

As we approach the end of this Lenten season and journey into Holy Week next week after Palm Sunday, let us do so with a profound sense of thankfulness for what Jesus did for us on the cross. Let us look to Mary for the model of thanksgiving and faithfulness. Let us get up the courage to walk alongside Jesus remembering that he is the One that offers us the true gift of everlasting life. May our profound sense of thankfulness always be at the core of our relationship with Jesus.

I ask this in the precious and saving name of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Concluding Prayers

Draw your church more deeply into the reality of Christ's sufferings, O God, so that every one whom you have called in him may show forth the power of his resurrection.

Renew the spirit of hope in every human society and nation. Give wisdom to Charles, our king, and to those who govern in our land. Invigorate us, that we may strain forward to the future you promise.

Show your mercy to those who are held back by infidelity to your plans, and free them to receive your word of life.

Rescue from fear those who are deprived of their human needs or their human rights. Give them their share of the dignity you confer on all your children.

Grant to your church a heart open to your word, that we may embrace your promise, heed your commands, and declare your praise.

Loving God, bountiful in compassion,
your Son, Christ Jesus, in his dying and rising
has made us his own people
and we press on toward the goal of faithfulness
knowing we often fall short.
Forgive our every failing,
and in this Lenten spring time of grace
help us to forget what lies behind
and instead strain forward to what lies ahead,
especially to your heavenly call to eternal life.
We ask this through your Son,
our Lord Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, forever and ever.

For our Parish.

O GOD the Holy Ghost, Sanctifier of the faithful:
Sanctify this parish by thine abiding presence
especially at this time when some feel they cannot gather together.

Enlighten the minds of thy people more and more
with the light of the everlasting Gospel.
Bring erring souls to the knowledge of God our Saviour;
and those who are walking in the way of life,
keep steadfast unto the end.

Give patience to the sick and afflicted,
and renew them in body and soul.

Guard from forgetfulness of thee those who are strong and prosperous.
Increase in us thy manifold gifts of grace,

and make us all to be fruitful in good works;
O blessed Spirit, whom with the Father and the Son together
we worship and glorify, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

THE peace of God,
which passeth all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds
in the knowledge and love of God,
and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord:
And the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost,
be amongst you and remain with you always. *Amen*