



Lenten
Reflections
2018

Dear Sisters, Associates and Friends,

Greetings. As I sit down to write to you, one story comes to mind which remains in my mind. I served as school supervisor for 14 primary schools which I visited in the morning, meeting with women's cooperatives in the afternoon in the parish which I covered every month. The shortest distance was three miles and the longest was 35 miles, and I did it all on a bicycle.

I left the house by 7 a.m. to get to the first shift of the school. Advent and Lenten preparation programs took place after the school activities, too. One day after school, I was walking with my bicycle across the school field where the students were, when suddenly a little girl about two years old, and wearing nothing, took hold of my hand and pulled me toward her house. She could barely speak, but she managed to say, "mee, mee" meaning rice, rice.

Her message was clear even with her broken language. This was the poorest village in the parish. Most of the women were gone to the forest to cut trees, which provided the only daily income for their families. After a debate with myself, I approached the house. I found the girl's grandmother in the yard, and her grandfather sick in bed. The grandmother was embarrassed by her granddaughter's request. She sent someone to the market which was three miles away to buy some rice and she prepared a simple meal. I asked if we all could share the meal together.

In the beginning, they were hesitant. As we shared this meager meal, I realized it was the tastiest rice I had ever eaten. I often wondered how this small girl could have realized that I was hungry that day. As we know, only hungry people can really know what the feeling of true hunger is like.

In this Lenten Season, it is hoped that the following reflections will enhance our spirituality and enrich our prayer lives. I am amazed by our sisters' enthusiastic response in providing these reflections and I am honored to thank Sisters Miriam Nohemí Arizpe Paredes, Dolores Jean Bray, Patricia Mary Crane, Patricia A. Dieringer, M. Bruno (Beiro), Margaret Mary Lavonis, Madeleine Marie (Clayton) and M. Veronique (Wiedower) for their contributions. I am very grateful to them.

May this Lenten season enlighten us with God's transforming love so we feel the presence of the resurrected Jesus in our lives and in the lives of those whom we encounter.

In Holy Cross,
Sister Angela Golapi Palma
Leadership Team Member



ASH WEDNESDAY

February 14, 2018

Matthew 6

How many Ash Wednesdays have we celebrated in our lifetimes? How many Lenten seasons have we participated in? It is that time of year when we again think of how we are living our Christian lives and how we could better prepare to celebrate the great feast of the resurrection of Jesus Christ with peace and joy.

What should we add to our busy schedules to ensure a closeness to God and help us celebrate the coming feast more worthily? Matthew 6 has some suggestions: Give alms, pray and fast, and do not showcase these actions.

If you are like me, you waver along the way, and wonder if you have fallen short of the resolutions you made on Ash Wednesday. This year we might put gratitude into the equation. Maybe we could try choosing gratitude each day, each hour, not only for the good, but for the challenging and hurtful experiences in our lives.

Let us be grateful that we can choose to give alms to those whose needs are greater than our own. Let us pray in gratitude for those whose lives are so painful that we feel unable to help in any other way. We can be grateful that we can choose to fast from gossip, criticism, judgment and “fake news.” Author Melody Beattie reminds us that gratitude “turns what we have into enough and more”—this Lenten season and throughout our lives.

—*Sister Dolores Jean Bray*

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

February 18, 2018

Mark 1:9–15

“The curve of falling water demands something of us we had not perceived.” —Excerpt from *Godwit* by Sister Eva Mary (Hooker)

Mark’s Gospel is a short version of Jesus’ whole life and ministry. It begins with Jesus’ baptism. Then the Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness where he experiences temptation for 40 days. Afterwards, Jesus goes to Galilee and, proclaiming that the kingdom of God is near, he exhorts people to repent and believe in the good news.

It is Jesus’ baptism that calls my attention. The purpose of Jesus’ baptism is to attest to Jesus’ identity as the Son of God, the beloved. The significant event is marked with a vision of the heavens torn apart, the Spirit descending as a dove, and a voice from heaven saying, “You are my Son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

The event reveals to us who Jesus is; that Jesus has an intimate relationship with God and the Spirit; and that Jesus has the desire, willingness and openness to experience God with all his senses. Jesus’ baptism is contemplation. Not only in the form of spiritual vision but also as an awakening to his real identity. It is a response to God’s call. Through our baptism, we too must be open to experiencing God with all our senses. We must be willing to respond to God’s call and be ready to be led by the Spirit, wherever the Spirit takes us.

God creates by speaking, calling and naming, and gives us identity through our baptism. Today’s Gospel is an invitation to contemplate. Can I see God in all that surrounds me—in my work, my family, my community, my neighborhood? Am I aware of God’s presence with all my senses? Can I hear God’s voice? If so, where do I hear it and what is it telling me? Where is God’s Spirit leading me?

—Sister Miriam Nohemi Arizpe Paredes

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

February 25, 2018

Mark 9:2–10

Jesus chooses three of his disciples, Peter, James and John—what a special joy to be chosen by Jesus—to walk with him up the mountain. Then, surprising them, Jesus appears in dazzling white with Elijah and Moses. Is this reference of brilliant white a description of heaven for us?

Peter appears to be excited to be there, but also frightened. Being the practical person that he is, he offers to build shelters for the three of them. It seems that Peter and his friends do not understand the purpose of this experience, so God envelops them in a cloud and speaks to them directly, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him.”

Then they are alone with Jesus, who continues to teach them. When leaving, Jesus instructs them not to tell anyone about their experience until the Son of Man has risen from the dead. We wonder what this means to the disciples. Could they hear what God was saying to them about his Son, really hear?

We know from Genesis that men and women are created in the image and likeness of God. Theologian Father Karl Rahner, SJ, shared about the human in the divine, and vice versa. The designation “Son of Man,” says John Piper, pastor and founder of desiringGod.org, indicates that Jesus is indeed a human being, but also an exalted figure of heaven, as referenced in Daniel 7:13–14.

If we do believe that Jesus has risen from the dead, then as the Apostles’ Creed indicates, we also can rise to be with God in God’s presence, which we call heaven.

How do we honor the presence of the human and divine (Christ) in ourselves and others?

—*Sister Patricia Mary Crane*

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

March 4, 2018

Exodus 20:1–17; 1 Corinthians 1:22–25; John 2:13–25

The readings for today are all about who God is. The first reading is very clear: “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt.” For this reason, God gave us commandments that are a guide for life. Imagine a world where no one lied, appropriated items that did not belong to them, including another person’s spouse, or killed others, whether quickly, through violence, or slowly, by not paying a decent salary. That would be a world worth living in, though it definitely is not ours.

The second reading brings us Christ crucified. A crucified God? What does that mean? It means strength and wisdom for the sons and daughters of God, strength and wisdom to create the world imagined in the first reading—slowly, moment by moment.

It is the third reading that creates conflict for us. We are very happy in our controlled Church, our Church that knows definitively what is right and what is wrong. The authorities of Israel during Jesus’ time felt the same way. They didn’t understand that what they did manipulated the lives of the people to their own benefit. They just saw the laws and sacrifices as the way things were always done. It was what God demanded they do.

Maybe we need to look at how we regard religion: Does it give us joy or make us more sensitive to the problems of others? Perhaps we need to look closer at the figure of God we hold in our hearts. Does this image arouse our desire to be closer to God, or do we entertain false images? Do we need to throw out the image of a punishing God and accept the reality of a God who loves us?

—*Sister Patricia A. Dieringer*

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

March 11, 2018

John 3:14–21

The Gospel speaks about Jesus being lifted up for love. God so loved the world that he gave Jesus who continually gives his life and light to us. We listen to the Scriptures and hear multiple examples of God's life with us, of God giving himself to us, and someday this life that we now live, will be a new life, eternal life, for us.

Jesus gifts himself totally to us. Love, a total giving of self for another, has inspired many people over the ages and continues through the lives of people around us—a parent spending the day with the family, a doctor, social worker or religious giving life in another culture. This type of love is so great—it does not count the cost, but is driven for the life of another.

Jesus was sent with love and for love for all. Reflecting on this, we bow our heads and are transformed to know that Jesus is with us in all the places and in all the people we meet, in the light filled places and in the darkness.

This is the fourth week of Lent and a time to reflect on our own lives of love and light as a member of a consecrated family. We think of this love and consider a response, finding Jesus in everyone we live and associate with, or see on the street, or teach in the classroom. This love is the light that will help us and reveal to us all that we have already been gifted; goodness not owed to us, but “loved” to us.

Do I know that I love others with God's love?

Am I able to give to others what has been given to me freely from a loving God?

—*Sister M. Bruno (Beiro)*

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

March 18, 2018

John 12:24–26

The Jews in the time of Jesus were mostly agrarian people. Many of them were farmers, so Jesus usually spoke in terms that related to their lives. One of his teachings was that “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.” Jesus is telling us that we must die to ourselves to be his followers.

He goes on to say that “anyone who loves her life will lose it, and whoever hates her life in this world will preserve it for eternal life. . . . Whoever serves me must follow me and where I am, there also will my servant be.”

Jesus calls us to service. Like the grain of wheat, Christians are called to die to themselves and to bear much fruit. It requires that we obey the greatest commandment to love God and our neighbor as we love ourselves. The ultimate expression of Christ’s love was his crucifixion. His death and rising was the fulfillment of the covenant made with the chosen people, and with us.

Love is what Christians are all about. A good practice is to ask ourselves before we go to bed: “Was there a little more love in the world today because of me?”

As Lent ends and we prepare for Holy Week and the Triduum, we might reflect on how we have or have not died to ourselves and brought love into the world during Lent.

How do we live the Paschal mystery, the suffering, death and rising, in our lives?

—*Sister Margaret Mary Lavonis*

PALM SUNDAY

March 25, 2018

Philippians 2; Isaiah 50

As we enter into Holy Week, the liturgy calls to our minds the image of Christ “taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness, and found human in appearance” (Philippians 2).

Since he did not “regard equality with God something to be grasped” or clung to, he fully entered the human condition with all its pains and joys. Throughout his life Jesus embraced his humanness as he struggled to be in right relationship with God, others and creation. It was in his relationship with his Abba that he knew himself to be God’s beloved. Rooted in this, Jesus was able to “empty himself” and learned to “speak to the weary a word that will rouse them” (Isaiah 50).

It was his faithfulness to this journey throughout his life which led him to the journey into Jerusalem, where he would “empty himself” completely for us through his passion and death. Through faith, we know that his death was not the end of the journey, but that God in love and faithfulness raised him up.

We, too, are on this same journey. Throughout our lives we so often struggle with truly believing and accepting that we are loved. When we see our own humanity in Jesus, we learn to embrace our own humanness, our own identity— not as little “gods,” but as those beloved by God. It is then that we have the freedom to reach out to our weary, hurting world in ways that will rouse it to life and hope.

How do I empty myself for others?

How do I feel when I empty myself for others?

—*Sister Madeleine Marie (Clayton)*

EASTER SUNDAY

April 1, 2018

Easter is so great, so full of meaning and grace that it overflows into a Triduum of celebration and grateful praise. Three days can barely contain the rejoicing that fills the hearts of God's people. We are invited to join in the annual reliving of the Paschal Mystery of Christ's life, death and resurrection, as the Church enters more deeply into the experience of God's transforming and abundant love that transcends time and space.

This is a sacred journey through the gardens of salvation history: Eden, where the original blessing of God's creating love met the reality of evil; the Garden of Olives, where vocation was tested and surrender in trust was chosen; the Garden Tomb, where mourning and darkness met dawn's light and the joyful realization that love conquers death; and the many diverse and unique gardens of the world, where we, apostles of today, embrace people of good will. We have witnessed all that Jesus said and did, and so are called to witness with the women sent out that first Easter morning, "Jesus is risen and goes before us! Jesus is risen and walks with us!"

Easter also confirms that life is always experienced as paschal. The cross and resurrection are inevitably intertwined. Today's global reality overflows with violence and suffering. Earth herself struggles: earthquakes, hurricanes and volcanic eruptions; fires, floods and drought. We witness life threatened on all sides. We grieve the death of loved ones and loved dreams, AND we are challenged to be prophets and apostles of life. We are called to be angelic heralds: Why seek the Living One among the dead? Hear the Beloved call your name. Go! Live the good news of God's transforming love."

So, let us run with the women and announce, "Christ lives!" Old and young, may we run with Peter and John to bolster the fragile faith of all those we encounter. May we whisper a promise of healing to broken hearts, shout love's triumph to those eager for encouragement, and fill the world with outrageous hope. All will be well! Christ is risen, ALLELUIA!

—*Sister M. Veronique (Wiedower)*

*You who dwell in the shelter of the Most High,
who abide in the shade of the Almighty,
Say to the Lord, “My refuge and fortress,
my God in whom I trust.*

—Psalm 91:1–2



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