

Old Catholic Apostolic Church

Lent 2020, A Series of Daily Readings

Ash Wednesday , February 26th

A Prayer At The Beginning of Lent

Praying and praising, immersed in the Saviour's love, Servant Christ help us to follow you deep into the waters of baptism

Help us to follow you out into the desert, where we are stripped of all that would distract. May we emerge better fitted to follow you into your task of healing the world and reconciling people to their creator God.

Joel 2 v 1-2, and 13 b ,The Voice

Eternal One: Blow the trumpet in Zion; signal the alarm from My holy mountain! It is almost here. Let all who live in the land tremble because the day of the Eternal One is coming. Judgment will come on a black and fearful day; a thick cloud of darkness will loom over everything. A great and mighty army advances like dawn spreading across the mountains. Never has the world seen anything like it before, nor will future generations ever see anything like it again.

Return to the Eternal, your True God. You already know He is gracious and compassionate. He does not anger easily and maintains faithful love. He is willing to relent and not harm you.

A Prayer for Ash Wednesday by Kelly Givens

Lord, Holy One, have mercy on us. We confess our sins to you. We have fallen short of your glory and without your mercy and grace, we would be dust. We repent now. Lord, as we enter into this Lenten season, be near to us. Help us, by your Holy Spirit, to feel right conviction and repentance for our sin. Help us, by your Spirit, to have the strength to overcome the enemy.

Thank you, Lord, that Easter is coming! Death has no sting, no victory, because of Jesus! Glory and honour and praise to His name! Thank you for rescuing us. Help us keep both the weight and the joy of this season in our hearts and we move through the next several weeks. Help us bear the good fruit of your Spirit.

Thank you that the ashes on our forehead do not symbolize our ultimate reality. From dust we might have been formed, but our bodies, our spirits, ourselves, await beautiful redemption and the restoration of all things. Help us long and look forward to that day, and let it come quickly, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Thursday February 27th

There is a dichotomy about Jesus . I was taught at an early age that he was fully human and yet fully God. Paul, writing to the Philippians described what he believed – in Philippians 2 v 6, 7 we read as

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part of a hymn :- (Jesus) who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant.

I have long wondered what this meant in the everyday. Was omniscience something that came at baptism for instance when the dove descended? Was it more gradual? We don't know. How much was he aware when he went into the desert of what would happen in the next few years?

We don't know our future. We don't know where God will lead us, but we can pray these words by Caryl Micklem :-

Heavenly Father, we have decided for your kingdom and have dared to take your cup.
But we confess we do not understand the fearsome consequences of obedience.
When we are brought to the test , steady our nerve and hold us in your faith.
That we may sail through heavy seas and ride the frightening storm.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Friday February 28th

If you have ever been alone in a desert at night you will know how still everything is and how small it makes you feel . No street lights, no people passing. Just you alone under the stars . No one to talk to. Nothing to look at except the stars.

From Psalm 8 :-

You have set your glory in the heavens.
Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.
When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?
In our dark nights , the times when things seem to overwhelm, we too can speak to God:

Speak, Lord, in the stillness all our longing see. Hush our hearts to listen in expectancy. The words you speak Lord, are life indeed. Living Bread of heaven, all our spirits feed. (adapted from a hymn by E.M.Crawford.).

Saturday 29th February

It is clear from the gospels that Jesus had a close relationship with his heavenly father :-

John 10 v 27-30 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one."

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During his time in the desert Jesus had many hours alone, alone and yet with his heavenly Father. It was of course at the time when he was preparing for his earthly ministry. Perhaps he prayed a prayer like this one :-

Here I am, Lord

Lord, I am here to thank you for my life. For calling me to be an instrument of accompaniment. An instrument to make a difference wherever I am. Lord, open my ears so I can listen in silence and, thus, be able to hear the needs of my sisters and brothers. Lord give me the strength to never give up, even if darkness appears. Perhaps it's only me to start, but you are with me. Lord give me the wisdom to continue being an instrument that listens, gives hope, and accompanies. Thank you, Lord, because through service, you fill me with joy. Lord, I am ready to go to the peripheries. Be my partner, my guide, my everything. Amen. (By Consuelo E. Sandoval, Pastoral Migratoria)

Sunday 1st March

It is usual to see Lent as a time of 'less'. Less sugar, less chocolate and more.

But what could you do more of? More time perhaps in such things as considering what God wants of you. More time in silence rather than in empty noise. More time in worship, but also in good neighbourliness. Whatever it is, your particular task this Lent, I do pray you are blessed by it.

Fast from judging others; feast on the Christ indwelling them.

Fast from emphasis on differences; feast on the unity of all life.

Fast from apparent darkness; feast on the reality of light.

Fast from thoughts of illness; feast on the healing power of God.

Fast from words that pollute; feast on phrases that purify.

Fast from discontent; feast on gratitude.

Fast from anger; feast on patience.

Fast from pessimism; feast on optimism.

Fast from worry; feast on divine order.

Fast from complaining; feast on appreciation.

Fast from negatives; feast on affirmatives.

Fast from unrelenting pressures; feast on unceasing prayer.

Fast from hostility; feast on non-resistance.

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Fast from bitterness; feast on forgiveness.

Fast from self-concern; feast on compassion for others.

Fast from personal anxiety; feast on eternal truth.

Fast from discouragement; feast on hope.

Fast from facts that depress; feast on truths that uplift.

Isaiah 58 v 6 -10

'Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke ,to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?

Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter –when you see the naked, to clothe them and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear, then your righteousness[a] will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.

Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: here am I.

Lord remake us according to your will. Amen.

Monday 2nd March

Lent is often seen as a journey to bring us closer to God . In our pursuit our route must be upward bringing us closer to heaven where sits our Saviour . See Colossians 3 v 1-4:-

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

It is only when we are able to rise above our earthly realities that we can rise like this. Philippians 3 v 20 tells us that our citizenship must be in heaven. Yet we have probably met those who are 'So heavenly minded they are no earthly use.'

It is a matter of balance. We still have to go to work, to study , to look after a home, children, the sick, animals or whatever is our responsibility, but on the other hand we need to get close to God. Try treating it in a practical way. What can I do to help me to get closer to God this Lent? Are there Lenten groups meeting? Special services? Is there a friend with whom you can spend regular time in prayer and praise? It will be different for different people, but do make some effort that goes beyond eating less chocolate.

We all have things we must do. Perhaps this short prayer will help:-

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Lord thou knowest how busy I must be today. If I forget thee, do not thou forget me, Amen

(Lord Astley, before the battle of Edgehill)

Tuesday 3rd March

There are a number of paintings of Christ in the desert or wilderness. Often they are in 'cold' colours, as in Ivan Kromsky's 1872 work. Some of these works have a few cacti or other desert foliage. One I have seen has a camel train in the distance - a reminder that ordinary life was continuing not so far away. All show a lone figure. Was he alone? The gospel writers mention that angels ministered to him. Also there was his heavenly father. Lots of time for long conversations, for prayer.

Michael Counsel talks about the traditional Christian disciplines of prayer and worship and how these affect our daily living. He goes on to say that they are rarely taught these days as people fear being 'thought too pharisaical.' That however does not mean they are not necessary.

Mark's gospel begins by announcing the Good News about Jesus the Messiah. Only a few lines later we are told that, immediately after his baptism :- At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him. (Mark 1 v 12-14). This time alone on the earth , even with the intervention of Satan, was seen as important – three gospels include it. It was a necessary preparation for ministry. If we try to minister without time spent alone with God we will fail. If we never acknowledge and go on to resist temptation, we will fail.

Hold us safely O God in our lonely and dark days and nights so that, stripped of inessentials , we are able to go forth ready to serve.

Wednesday 4th March

In the book 'Sacred Reading' (2018) Douglas Leonard includes this short prayer :-

'Lord, I am not worthy that you should come to me and speak to me through your Spirit and your Word.'

We are all aware of the wrong things in our lives, the things which serve to separate us from God. That however doesn't mean God does not want to have and to continue to have a relationship with us.

Romans 3 v 23 'All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.' Or , in the Old Testament and Psalm 8 . The psalmist talks of the wonder of God's creation and asks ' Who are we that you should care for us?' On the other hand there is the song by Harriett Buell that we used to sing . It has the chorus :-

I'm a child of a king .I'm a child of a king.

With Jesus my saviour I'm the child of a king.

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Of ourselves we aren't worthy. But, because of Christ our Saviour God sees us and loves us.

A prayer of George MacDonald :- Lord teach us to understand that your Son died to save us, not from suffering, but from ourselves ; not from injustice , far less from justice , but from being unjust. He died that we might live – but live as he lives, by dying as he died who died to himself.

Thursday 5th March

John 17 v 5 And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

It is clear from words such as these the Jesus knew what he had given up when he came down to earth. As it says in Philippians 2 v 6-8:-

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!

A conscious and deliberate choice. An innocent saviour.

Lord God, you love innocence and only through you can it be restored. Draw to yourself the hearts of your faithful people , so that, inspired and infilled by your Spirit, they may be firm in their faith and better able to be active in your service. We ask these things in the name of Christ, our innocent Saviour.

Mothering Sunday 22nd March

Long ago I taught Mothercraft classes to pregnant moms, and later this became 'Parentcraft' as fathers began to come too. I didn't choose the task, but was allocated it. The classes were announced and people kept coming back week by week, so I can't have been so bad. However at that point in my life, although I was a qualified midwife, I had never had a baby. It was all theory.

Early on, almost immediately after his time in the desert , Jesus visited the synagogue in his adopted home town of Nazareth. There he read from the scroll of Isaiah 'The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is upon me, for the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted and to proclaim that captives will be released and prisoners will be freed.' (Isaiah 61 v 1). You could say he was a little like me at that point. God had appointed him to a task , but as yet it was all theory. His ministry hadn't really begun. But he knew that it was the Lord who gives sight to the blind, who raises up the lowly, the Lord who loves justice and who will thwart wickedness.

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God in heaven , at the time of his baptism you appointed Jesus Christ and filled him with your Spirit. Send your Spirit to us right now so that we can follow the example of Christ our brother. Through baptism we are all your children, make us worthy ministers of your word in the world. Amen.

Good Friday, April 10th