

**Archdiocese of Durban**



**Lenten Reflections 2022**

**Come back to me  
with all your heart**



**WEEK THREE**

## SUNDAY 20 MARCH

**Scripture:** *Luke 13: 6 - 9*

### **Reflection**

What good is a fruit tree that doesn't produce any fruit? It serves no useful function and should be chopped down.

In this parable of the barren fig tree, Jesus questions the usefulness of a disciple who fails to produce the fruit of faith. The owner of the vineyard (God) tells the gardener (Jesus) to chop it down. The gardener implores the owner to give him time to dig around it and manure it in the hope that it will produce fruit next year. If it doesn't then it will be chopped down.

What sort of 'fig tree' (disciple) are you? Do you produce the fruit of faith in abundance, in half-measure, scarcely, or none at all? Just the fact that you are reading this reflection is an indication that you are living the faith as a disciple.

Each of us has the capacity and potential to produce fruit in abundance but we are often focused on so many other things that our measure is greatly reduced. This sacred season is an opportunity to allow the Lord to care for us and give us all the help we need to produce fruit in abundance.

Lent is a time of spiritual fervour, a time to do more, and to experience the abundance of God's grace to strengthen us in our faith, to live as faithful followers, and to produce the fruit of compassion, care, kindness, love, charity, patience, tolerance and active participation in the life of the Church through Christian Stewardship.

There is a general consensus that after two years of Covid there appears to be less enthusiasm in regard to matters of faith. Few volunteer to do anything in the parish, and to do anything more than attend Mass once during the week. Getting parishioners to volunteer for ministries that are restarting appears to be a real challenge in many parishes. Have we become reluctant and minimalistic followers of Jesus?

This time of renewal should find us joyful and enthusiastic about contribution towards and actively participating in the life, work, mission, ministry and worship of the Church. Jesus gives us everything we need to do this. He gave everything, he gave his life!

### **Practical Suggestion**

How much of yourself are you willing to give in the service of others? What ministry or area in the life of your parish are you involved with or participating in?

### **Prayer:**

Thank you Lord Jesus for this time you give to me to grow my faith and to produce fruit in abundance by serving others. Amen.

## MONDAY 21 MARCH

**Scripture:** *Luke 4: 24 - 30*

### Reflection

It is easy to fall into the trap of believing that Christians have an exclusive claim to God and his love. It was this arrogant attitude that led to Israel's downfall and their rejection of Jesus.

Religious intolerance has been the cause of many wars, acts of terrorism, division in families and hatred among people.

Just the mention by Jesus of Elijah who was sent to a widow in a Sidonian town, and the healing of the Syrian commander Naaman by the prophet Elisha, enrages the people gathered in the synagogue in Nazareth. Widows were outcasts in society and often reduced to begging to eake out a living. Sidon was not in Israel but in Lebanon. Naaman was a foreigner who came from Syria. Yet both these children of God encountered him through his prophets. God reaches out in love to all his children!

Jesus was rejected in his own town, by his own people. Yet when the disciples set out to preach and teach after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, it was many outside Israel who welcomed his message and embraced the Gospel.

God sent his Son to his people and they rejected him and crucified him. God sends his priests to us in our parishes today. How do we welcome them and embrace their message? Or should that be; Do we welcome them and embrace their message?

Besides being intolerant of those who don't share in our Catholic faith, we can also be intolerant towards those whom God sends to us. Lent is a call to us to open our eyes, our minds and our hearts; to see that we are all God's children, that he works in the lives of all whom he created, regardless of race, gender, nationality, ethnicity, religious beliefs, or all our many other differences. Pope Francis wrote his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* which means "all brothers and sisters," and taken from the Admonitions of Saint Francis of Assisi, to remind us that we are all God's children, brothers, and sisters in the great family of God. In our parish communities we call our priests 'Father' because they lead our family of faith. Let us not reject those whom God sends to us as did the people of Nazareth.

### Practical Suggestion

Pray for your priest today, thanking God for his ministry, dedication and service.

### Prayer:

Father, help me to see your presence in everybody and to embrace the family of mankind, even those who are different and especially those who are regected by society. Amen.

## TUESDAY 22 MARCH

**Scripture:** **Matthew 18: 21 – 35**

*“Lord, how often must I forgive my brother if he wrongs me?”*

### **Reflection:**

Peter had been brought up with a law that said ‘an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’ – which was a progressive step from what used to take place between the people of the tribes of Israel! So, in suggesting to Jesus that ‘seven times’ should be more than sufficient, he probably expected to get a ‘gold star’!

Instead Jesus says, “Don’t even count!” and then tells the story of the king and the servant with the ‘huge debt’, that he was never going to be able to repay. The king, ‘moved with pity’ cancels the entire debt! Does Jesus mean that if we beg hard enough that God will forgive, no matter what sin, and with no strings attached? No! He says that there is a limit to God’s mercy – mercy received must equal mercy given! When we experience the incredibly generous forgiveness of God – as we do, over and over again, there is only one return we must make – go and do the same!

### **Practical suggestion:**

Reflect on the number of times you have asked for ‘forgiveness’ in the words of the ‘Our Father’: ‘Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us’. We are asking God to forgive us in the same way that we forgive. Do you forgive from the heart – over and over?

### **Prayer:**

Father God, we count on Your willingness to forgive our sins no matter how many times we ask. Fill our hearts with Your love and compassion so that we may truly forgive those who have wronged us. Amen.

## WEDNESDAY 23 MARCH

**Scripture** **Matthew 5: 17-19**

### **Reflection**

The coming of Jesus was certainly not to get rid of what God had said through His prophets and through the Law of Moses. Jesus came to give a better understanding of what is contained in the five books of the Old Testament: the Jewish Pentateuch.

Over a period of one thousand three hundred years and through man’s self-interest, the religious leaders of the people had added many by-laws and many of their own interpretations - to the extent that it had actually taken people away from serving God. They had been brought up to observe rules and in the hope

that this would please God. Their actions and thoughts were not driven by love, just adherence to laws and the performance of many rituals. They were overburdened. They needed to be freed.

Jesus came to give a first-hand perspective of what it means to love God through obeying His law. He now includes the love of neighbour.

Adultery is no longer confined to its narrow definition where the adulteress is stoned to death. In the teaching of Jesus a man offends God when he looks lustfully at a woman. It is no longer acceptable not only to covet your neighbour, but one now has to go out of one's way to help that neighbour. No longer is that neighbour a friend or acquaintance or someone from your own culture; he or she is now everyone whom you encounter. Your enemy is not to be hated and plotted against, even more, according to Jesus, he or she must benefit from your time, talents, treasure and love.

The Jewish Elders were most unhappy about the Saviour's far-reaching teaching because it showed that they were not as holy as they made themselves out to be, and this behaviour, according to Jesus, did not find favour with God. Their interpretation was narrow and self-serving: it was actually too easy because it missed the point. Indeed our Lord, in fulfilling the law, has cast its scope very widely, and makes us more acutely aware of how much we sin.

### **Practical Suggestion**

The "new" version of the law is summed up in love of God and neighbour. How much of your time, talents and treasure do you devote to both?

### **Prayer**

Holy Spirit, search me and help me to identify those areas where I am not obeying God's laws as defined by Jesus. Help me to ask for forgiveness. Our sinfulness is now much greater than we thought. That is why He died for us. Amen

## **THURSDAY 24 MARCH**

**Scripture:** *Luke 11 : 14 - 23*

### **Reflection**

Jesus knew what the people who witnessed the healing of the mute were thinking. We often use the phrase "I know exactly what you're thinking," usually after we are aware of a change in a person's facial expression in response to something we've just said or done. In reality it is very difficult to know what someone is thinking, but God knows our every thought.

Most thoughts pass through our mind without us paying much attention to them, while others take root. It is from those thoughts that our behaviour stems. We pray at Mass "I confess to Almighty God and to you my brothers and sisters, that I have greatly sinned, in my thoughts and in my words ..."

It's hard enough to control what we say and what we do, but knowing that God is aware of our every thought means we should make the effort to be more mindful of what we are thinking. Positive thoughts will often lead to noble activities, while evil thoughts can result in sinful actions.

In 2 Corinthians 10:5 we are told to take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. That's a tall order when science speculates that we have a new thought every 2 seconds which equates to 30 thoughts every minute! But God doesn't expect us to do the impossible. He has sent us the Holy Spirit who will guide so that we keep our *thoughts* continually fixed on all that is authentic and real, honourable and admirable, beautiful and respectful, pure and holy, merciful and kind. (Philippians 4:8)

While so much that we focus on during Lent is action-driven, it would be a good opportunity to be more aware of the thoughts which are going through our mind. It's so easy to get caught up thinking about negative situations and everything that could go wrong. God gave us the ability and capacity to think so we could be inspired by wonderful, exciting, magnificent thoughts!

### **Practical Suggestion**

Try to be more aware of the thoughts you are focusing on during the day. Slip an elastic band onto your wrist and whenever you catch yourself thinking about something negative give yourself a ping with the elastic band. Then immediately turn that thought around into something positive.

Sometimes it's quite a challenge, but we can always ask the Holy Spirit to help us to change that thought into something beautiful for God.

### **Prayer**

Father, thank you for giving me the ability to think and reason. Thank you for my imagination and my creativity which stem from my thoughts. Help me to keep by thoughts pure and positive. Amen.

## **FRIDAY 25 MARCH**

### **Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord**

**Scripture:** *Psalm 39 (40):7 - 11 & Luke 1:26 - 38*

### **Reflection**

*"Here I am, Lord! I come to do your will. You do not ask for sacrifice and offerings, but an open ear."* Today we recall with great joy that most extraordinary moment in the dramatic history of our salvation! The Annunciation of the Lord falls exactly nine months before Christmas Day, the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. These words of the psalm are so appropriate to the Annunciation of the Lord. The Psalmist embraced the will of God just as Mary did. She said, *"I am the handmaid of the Lord...let what you have said be done to me."* God took the

initiative and reached out to fallen human nature through a young Hebrew girl and she said “Yes” to the will for God.

The ‘Yes’ of Mary changed the world! There is something truly great that preceded Mary’s fiat. Mary listened to God’s messenger the angel Gabriel. In the same breath, the Psalmist says, “*You do not ask for sacrifice and offerings, but an open ear.*” God wants us to listen to him even before we offer sacrifices and gifts. Even before we choose to abstain and fast during Lent, God wants an open ear from us in the imitation of Mary. We must first listen to what God has to say to us. We are to cultivate a listening ear so that we can say yes to his will. Sometimes we suffer from selective hearing, we only listen to what we like and ignore what seems to be difficult. Luke (2:19) also tells us that Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart. After listening to God, we are called to a deep reflection on his words.

Mary gave herself totally to God and without reservation. She accepted the will of God even though she didn’t fully know what was in store for her. All she knew was that God would always be by her side. Mary’s faith and trust made a huge difference. She becomes a model of total trust and faith in God. God asked a lot from her; he asked for her life, reputation and herself. She didn’t hold anything back. In turn, God gave her every grace and blessing. Dear beloved, the source of our real joy comes from listening to God and doing his will. The demand may be enormous but we trust in the Holy Spirit to give us the grace to give way to the will of God - just as Mary did.

### Practical Suggestion

Do you ever give yourself time to listen to God? Sometimes we think that prayer only consists of us enumerating our needs to God. Today’s Gospel reminds us that we should always listen to the things that God tells us, even though they may be difficult. The more we pray, the greater is our capacity to listen to God.

### Prayer

Heavenly Father, you offer us abundant grace, mercy, and forgiveness through your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Help me to live a grace-filled life as Mary did, by believing in your promises and by giving you my unqualified ‘yes’ to your will and plan for my life. Amen.

## SATURDAY 26 MARCH

**Scripture:**     *Hosea 5: 15 – 6: 6*

### Reflection

Today’s readings play down the value of outward actions and emphasise the importance of love and a sincere change of heart. These demand so much more of us than mere actions. Whilst we may not be feeling it mid-way into Lent, the

sacrifices of Lent are the easy part. We should look inwardly and ask, “do our sacrifices flow from a sincere change of heart?” (*metanoia*) Are we sincere, committed and consistent in our response to God’s call through the prophet Joel to “Come back to me with all your heart”?

The first line of today’s reading (Hos 6:1) “*Come let us return to Yahweh*” seems, on the face of the reading, to be a positive response to God’s call. However, in this instance, Hosea is putting insincere words of repentance into the mouths of the people of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. These people, after being warned by God of dire punishment in chapter 5, decide to make a confession of repentance hoping to satisfy God and guarantee His Blessing in the future. BUT – they have no love or loyalty to God and no desire to know Him. These people of the Northern Kingdom professed to follow the faith in Yahweh of their ancestors but allowed the pagan worship and rituals of their neighbouring states to assimilate into their religion. Hosea describes the insincerity of his people in 6:4b, “*For your love is like the morning mist, like the dew that quickly disappears.*”

Are we also guilty of proclaiming our Faith in God on Ash Wednesday only for it to falter and fail as a result of the “more important” things we have to do? Many of us profess to be Catholic Christians but lead a divided life of Church on Sunday and work during the week. Our faith is left at the Church door!

God is a loving, forgiving God who looks to us for “Faithful Love... not sacrifice.” Let us repent and go to God with ALL OUR HEART.

### **Practical Suggestion**

Reflect on how your faith may take a back-seat at times, replaced by your life activities. Resolve in your heart to be more sincere, committed, and consistent in demonstrating your faithful love to God, our Father.

### **Prayer**

Father, forgive me for my insincerity, lack of commitment and inconsistency in showing my love for you. Send your Holy Spirit to guide me to be prudent in what I think, say, decide and do, and provide me with the self-control I need to remain consistent in my love for you, and the courage to do what I know is right even in the face of pressure from this secular world. Amen.



These Daily Reflections for Lent 2022 are written by Fr. Desmond Nair, Irene Helsdon, George Cominos, Veronica Donnelly Fr. Wandile Cagwe, and Mike Montocchio. Please acknowledge the authors when copying and distributing. We wish you a fruitful and blessed Lenten Season as you respond to God’s call to come back to him with all your heart.