



Bringing Home the Word

First Sunday of Lent | February 18, 2018

The Beauty of the New Covenant

By Mary Katharine Deeley

When our youngest daughter was three, we traveled to Hawaii to see her grandparents. It wasn't her first trip, but it was the first she would remember.

One day her grandfather took us to the pineapple fields. We got out of the car and started into a field. Suddenly, she stopped to stare at the sky. She was looking at the largest and most vibrant rainbow I had ever seen, its end planted firmly in the very field in which we stood.

"What is that?" she asked in a hushed voice. "It's a rainbow," I said. She'd seen

pictures of them, and we had drawn them with crayons, but nothing prepared her for the grandeur of this one, which arced up and away into the clouds. Everything else paled in comparison.

I can understand why the writer of the Noah story looks at the rainbow as a sign of both God's gracious covenant and peace. The sheer beauty of the reality reflects the glory of the Lord of creation.

But today, on this first Sunday of Lent, our real attention goes to the beauty of the new covenant unfolding with the preaching of Jesus. The call to repent is the call to change our lives in response to the love of God, whose kingdom is one of peace and joy.

The opportunity to change is the gift Christ gave us in his passion and resurrection. It's a sign of God's wondrous love.

When we understand that with all our hearts, we also will stare with awe and ask, "What is that?" +

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Sunday Readings

Genesis 9:8-15

[God said,] "I set my bow in the clouds to serve as a sign of the covenant between me and the earth."

1 Peter 3:18-22

Put to death in the flesh, he was brought to life in the Spirit.

Mark 1:12-15

The Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert, and he remained... for forty days.

A Word From Pope Francis

In the face of tragedies which take the lives of so many migrants and refugees... expressions of empathy and compassion cannot help but spontaneously well up. "Where is your brother?" (Gen. 4:9)... This is not a question directed to others; it is a question directed to me, to you, to each of us.

—Migration and Peace forum, February 21, 2017



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- What important lessons have I learned from a challenge in my life? Maybe I can share that lesson with a friend or family member.



Our Path to Joy

By Bishop Robert F. Morneau

Jesus taught by word and deed. In his Sermon on the Mount we are given words that point to the path of happiness. Blessed are the poor in spirit, the peacemakers, those who hunger and thirst for justice, the merciful. The beatitudes sketch out in exquisite detail the Christian map for happiness.

In the Gospel of John we are given a humble, simple, hospitable deed of washing feet. After he is finished, Jesus—knowing that the disciples lacked full understanding—urges them into action: “Blessed are you if you do it” [washing of feet and Jesus’ other teachings] (13:17b).

We have here a highly pragmatic path to happiness. In doing the loving thing and reaching out to others in service, we participate in the inner life of Jesus. By doing what Jesus did, we enter into a blessed way of life.

Conventional wisdom finds this absurd. The cultural messages we are given would have us believe that happiness lies in “doing it my way.” We are often told, “You only go around once, so grab as much as you can get,” and, “The one who dies with the most toys wins.” Biblical wisdom proclaims that blessedness lies in surrendering to God’s

will, in self-forgetfulness as we serve others, in washing another’s feet.

How do we do this? We wash one another’s feet by stopping to help a stranded motorist or holding the hand of a dying person. We wash one another’s feet when we attempt to change unjust systems, when we strive to end world hunger, when social justice and the gospel become our priority. The happiness and blessedness that Jesus proposes is not living well, feeling good, or staying in our comfort zones. It is risky business, this gospel living.

Missing the Point

It is consoling to see that the disciples often struggled to understand what Jesus was about. Peter saw suffering as inappropriate to Jesus’ life. James and John would have God send down fire upon an inhospitable Samaritan town. Thomas didn’t believe reports that Jesus had risen. We should not be surprised if we, too, find it difficult to equate blessedness with a life of service. Every day we should pray for two things: the knowledge to understand Jesus’ teaching, and the courage to put it into action.

If we are to become disciples, it’s insufficient to simply give a portion of our time, talent, and treasure to God.

The cost of discipleship involves the giving of self. Since we are made in the likeness of a self-giving God, our vocation is to strive in grace to image the God who made us.

One simple, concrete expression of this self-giving love that leads to blessedness is the washing of feet. It is a symbol of a large reality, God’s kingdom: being totally for others, whatever their needs. In serving one another, we serve the Lord and become like Jesus.

Bountiful Byproducts

Those who serve as Jesus did experience an indescribable joy because through that service—be it the washing of feet, the giving of a cup of cold water, a word of affection—we are bonded to Christ and the community. In that bonding lies happiness, and from it flows two byproducts: joy and peace.

Concluding Prayer: Lord, sometimes we just don’t get it. Help us to understand that by caring for others we further your kingdom. Do not let us pursue a false blessedness through a life of self-seeking. Rather, draw us into your life and ministry. Therein we will do your will and know your peace. +

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WEEKDAY READINGS

February 19-24

Mon. Lenten Weekday:
Lv 19:1–2, 11–18 / Mt 25:31–46


Tue. Lenten Weekday:
Is 55:10–11 / Mt 6:7–15

Wed. Lenten Weekday:
Jon 3:1–10 / Lk 11:29–32

Thu. Chair of St. Peter the Apostle:
1 Pt 5:1–4 / Mt 16:13–19

Fri. Lenten Weekday:
Ez 18:21–28 / Mt 5:20–26

Sat. Lenten Weekday:
Dt 26:16–19 / Mt 5:43–48



Lord, strengthen my resolve to be faithful to your covenant of love and be more compassionate and generous toward all people.

From Mindful Meditations for Every Day of Lent and Easter,
Rev. Warren J. Savage
and Mary Ann McSweeney