



Bringing Home the Word

Fifth Sunday of Lent | March 18, 2018

Jesus' Light in Our Darkness

By Mary Katharine Deeley

I've lived in the Midwest most of my life. In the last few years, I've found myself appreciating why some of my senior friends enjoy spending time in warmer climates during the winter months. As I've gotten older, the range of temperatures that feel comfortable to me has grown increasingly narrow—and while I'm not yet ready to pull up stakes, the thought of it crosses my mind more frequently.

But as the Graeme Miles folk song "Dark December" reminds us, we shouldn't dislike winter. We celebrate the birth of Jesus—the light in our darkness—in the winter. In a four-season climate like that of the Midwest, we're particularly attuned to dark and light, death and life. We sense the days growing shorter and longer; we see leaves fall and plants sleep, only to reawaken when the weather turns warm. We know what lamps to light so we can see in those dark times and what clothes to wear until the warming sun brings the world to life once more.

The prophets knew God was stirring in the world, and they knew God's promise of light and salvation. For Jeremiah, light and life came in the promise of a new covenant—a new relationship with the Lord.

The Greeks of John's Gospel sensed that Jesus was the key to the light they longed for, and so they wanted to see him. John also says that to truly live, we must be like grain and die to ourselves.

Light into darkness, death into life—maybe the experience of winter helps us understand that just a little more. +

A Word From Pope Francis

If God could weep, then I too can weep, in the knowledge that he understands me. The tears of Jesus serve as an antidote to my indifference before the suffering of my brothers and sisters. His tears teach me to make my own the pain of others.

—Prayer Vigil to "Dry the Tears,"
May 5, 2016



Sunday Readings

Jeremiah 31:31–34

I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts.

Hebrews 5:7–9

[Christ Jesus]...became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.

John 12:20–33

[Jesus said,] "Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there also will my servant be. The Father will honor whoever serves me."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How can I more deeply receive Jesus' self-giving love for me?
- How should I imitate Jesus' self-giving love in my relationships?



God Comforts His People

By Donald Senior, CP

“Blessed are they who mourn,
for they will be comforted.”

—Matthew 5:4

Only those who have not lived long enough do not know what it means to mourn. The death of a parent or spouse. The end of a marriage or friendship. The loss of a job. All of these cut into our hearts and make us weep.

Jesus’ words in this beatitude touch on this painful, profound human experience. The Scriptures are not abstract or the result of a first-century theological seminar. The words and passions of the Bible resonate with the down-to-earth weeping of genuine human beings.

The Bible knows all about loss and mourning: the grief of Abraham at the death of Sarah; the profound sadness of Moses as he gazed at the Promised Land he would never enter; Rachel weeping for her lost children; the tears of Jesus as he laments over his beloved city of Jerusalem and its impending fate.

The Greek word *penthountes*—to weep or mourn—is used in the passage of Isaiah 61:1–3, a text that interpreters of Matthew’s Gospel believe had a strong influence on the formulation of the beatitudes:

Penthountes, a Greek word meaning “to weep or mourn,” may have influenced the formulation of the beatitudes.

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; He has sent me to bring good news to the afflicted, to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, release to the prisoners...to comfort all who mourn.”

In this text, those who mourn are those who are “afflicted,” “brokenhearted,” “captives,” “prisoners.” This is the grief of those who feel they have lost everything: their hope, freedom, and reason for living.

Lingering Images

It is hard to hear about mourning and not think about the recent losses and violent deaths that have occurred in our own country and around the world. Images of people weeping over the violently broken bodies of loved ones are burned into our hearts. So, too, are the dazed and haggard faces of refugees created by war—people without hope, in desperate need of food and shelter, wailing in anguish.

In calling those who mourn “blessed,” Jesus does not suggest that there is anything pleasant or beneficial in mourning. People mourn because of tragedy and suffering. Some suffering is the result of sin, such as violence inflicted on the innocent or abject poverty imposed on people without means. There is nothing blessed about that. No, the only reason people who mourn are blessed is because God hears their cries and will comfort them.

Our Responsive God

A fundamental belief of our Christian faith appears in the second half of this beatitude. No cry of the poor and suffering will go unanswered. Early in the biblical saga, God made that clear when he said to Moses, “I have heard the cries of my people and have come to rescue them.” Jesus’ prophetic words echo that same sentiment. God is not indifferent to human suffering and will comfort those who mourn. This is the intent of the reign of God for which Jesus has come.

Now Jesus’ words give direction to our lives. It is understandable that we lament the sufferings we witness or experience. Jesus, too, lamented the sufferings of his people and cried out in anguish at the prospect of his own death on the cross.

At the same time, we take heart in knowing that God still holds all those who suffer in the palm of his hand. Comforting those who mourn and alleviating their suffering are divine, noble works that we are called to as Jesus’ followers. +



Lord, your love is written on my heart. May your love inspire and empower me to love people from all walks of life.

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

March 19–24, 2018

Mon. St. Joseph: 2 Sm 7:4–5a, 12–14a, 16 / Rom 4:13, 16–18, 22 / Mt 1:16, 18–21, 24a or Lk 2:41–51a


Tue. Lenten Weekday: Nm 21:4–9 / Jn 8:21–30

Wed. Lenten Weekday: Dn 3:14–20, 91–92, 95 / Jn 8:31–42

Thu. Lenten Weekday: Gn 17:3–9 / Jn 8:51–59

Fri. Lenten Weekday: Jer 20:10–13 / Jn 10:31–42

Sat. Lenten Weekday: Ez 37:21–28 / Jn 11:45–56

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