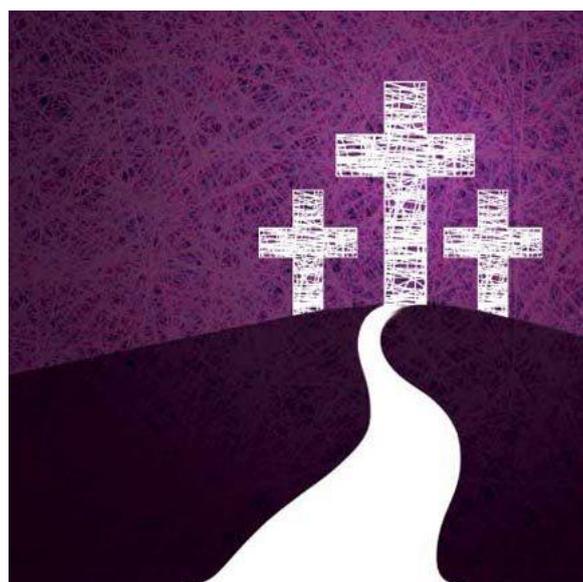


# **Our Lady of Lourdes Parish**

**Westville**

## **Lenten Programme 2020**

### **From Repentance to Renewal**



**WEEK FOUR**

## SUNDAY 22 MARCH

**Scripture:**                    *John 9:1-41*

### **Reflection**

*Spiritual blindness!* Today John narrates a beautiful story about the healing of the man born blind. It would appear that in addition to being physically blind, he was spiritually blind as well. Jesus heals him of his physical blindness as well as his spiritual blindness. As we read and reflect on this gospel account we move from our spiritual darkness (blindness) into the light of Jesus!

We are struck by the blind man's acceptance of Jesus "Lord I believe." It is almost as if Jesus is saying to us today "You are looking at him, he is speaking to you." With the blindness and darkness removed from the eyes of our hearts and minds we also proclaim "Lord I believe!"

The revelation of Jesus to the blind man can also translate to our growing personal relationship with Jesus. He reveals himself to us daily at Mass and we recognise him with the eyes of faith.

Even though the blind man was instantly healed it took him a while to realise the true identity of Jesus. He had referred to Jesus as "the man called Jesus" (vs. 11) then "he is a prophet" (vs. 17), then as "from God" (vs. 33) and finally he said, "Lord, I believe".

We can compare this with the Samaritan woman whom we encountered last Sunday. She began by identifying Jesus just as a "Jew" (4:9), then as "a prophet" (4:19) and finally she said, "could he be the Messiah" (4:29).

Little by little, both the blind man and the Samaritan woman received their spiritual sight. By the end of the gospel account, the one who healed him was no longer just 'the man called Jesus' but he was the Lord worthy of worship.

During this our Lenten journey, we are afforded an opportunity to look at our relationship with Jesus in a new light – with new sight. We are invited to an ever-deepening relationship with him so that we may be able to worship him in spirit and in truth!

### **Practical Suggestion**

Reflect on what the following represents: my spiritual journey from darkness to light, from blindness to sight?

### **Prayer**

Lord open my mind and heart that I may see your light so that I am filled with the hope you call me to. May I be filled with the richness of the blessings you offer to all your children. Amen

## MONDAY 23 MARCH

**Scripture:** *John 4: 43 - 54 "Go your son shall live"*

### Reflection

Today's scripture challenges us to ask ourselves, 'how easily do I become discouraged?' Jesus gave a testing challenge to the official who, had heard (just as we have) about 'the signs and wonders' that Jesus performed. He was sent home with no more than the instruction; "Go; your son will live."

Was he a little disappointed? Perhaps he expected something a little more 'spectacular.' Whatever he felt, his need for his child's healing was great so he accepted the instruction of Jesus and returned home.

Often we become despondent when our prayers and hopes appear not to be answered (in the ways we want). Today we learn to put our complete faith, hope and trust in Jesus, never to be discouraged. Jesus knows our every need. We need to take him at his word. Jesus always provides for us. We begin to understand the ways in which God works when we choose to listen to Jesus and do as he tells us to.

During Lent we make a special effort to 'repent' and to rid ourselves of the 'baggage' that holds us back from following the ways of Jesus. Then we can go out 'renewed' in the love of our faith and strengthened to share our discipleship.

### Practical Suggestion

Make a special effort today to take on a positive attitude regarding your faith. Place yourself in the hands of Jesus and trust in him.

### Prayer

Lord Jesus, help me to trust as the official did. Strengthen my little faith. Help me to seek good and not evil, that I may live in the awareness that you are with me always. Amen

## TUESDAY 24 MARCH

**Scripture:** *Ezekiel 47: 1 - 9, 12. John 5: 1 - 16*

### Reflection.

The deeper we get into a sinful way of life, the easier it becomes for us to sin without a conscience and so become less holy. It therefore makes sense, that the closer we follow Christ's teachings, the easier it should become for us to live a saintly life. However, to have a faith like this is not a walk in the park. Only a constant, never-ending adherence to a holy lifestyle, will help us achieve holiness. Furthermore, there is only one way to be holy, and that is God's way.

Now to encourage us to follow our consciences, scripture tells us of a man who is shown a stream of water, flowing from the temple and going eastward and he was lead along this flowing water. After every thousand cubits, he was made aware of how deep the water was and the further they went the deeper it became, until it was so deep, that no one could wade over to the other side. This exercise was intended to show us, that the further we go down the road the deeper we could get into trouble.

Can we see how this teaching can influence our lives? In John's gospel, we encounter similar advice. John tells us that when Jesus went to Jerusalem for a Jewish festival, he went to a pool where he encountered a man who had been crippled for thirty eight years. He was patiently waiting and hoping for the opportunity to be the first person into the pool when the water was disturbed. Jesus asks him, "Do you want to be well again?" Indirectly the man says yes, but he also explains, that before he can get into the water, someone always gets in before him. It is only the first person into the water who is healed. This serves to highlight the patient endurance of the man. He knows what he wants, and faithfully waits patiently in hope. Regardless of how long it takes, he will achieve his goal.

Jesus heals the man there and then, and sends him on his way. This incurred the wrath of the religious hierarchy because Jesus had healed the man on the Sabbath. How hard of heart they were! In their fury they wanted Jesus dead.

This happened despite that what Jesus had done, was out of His love and compassion. When hearts are hardened we lose our love and compassion.

Today we need to find ourselves at the well. We need the Lord's help. As we embrace his healing presence we commit ourselves to a change of lifestyle – a genuine metanoia. This change, transformation and renewal makes us as loving, merciful and compassionate as our Father is.

### **Practical Suggestion**

Today we examine our attitude towards God and an acceptance of his way, Through his Son Jesus he gives us a way to follow. Be open to accept God's way. It is tough going sometimes but it is the best way!

### **Prayer**

Dear Lord, grant me a happy and contented life; a life you will help me to live, in holiness of heart and spirit. Help me to accept your way unconditionally. Forgive my many failings and strengthen me in your way. Amen.

## **WEDNESDAY 25 MARCH**

### **Solemnity of the Annunciation of Our Lord.**

**Scripture**      *Luke 1: 26 - 38*

#### **Reflection**

The Word was made Flesh and dwelt among us! Each day we pray these extraordinary words; at 6.00am (the beginning of the day), 12.00pm (the middle of the day), and 6.00pm (the evening of the day).

Today we celebrate this, the greatest even in human history! God became man, he came amongst us in the fulfilment of the prophesy of Isaiah (7: 10 – 14). We are familiar with these words and the meaning of the name Emmanuel: *God is with us!*

Through Mary's 'yes', our God is with us! The great God of the universe, the Creator of heaven and earth, chose to come among us, born of a maiden from Nazareth. Do we even realise the gravity of this truth we celebrate today?

God's choice is to be with us, very ordinary humans, involved in the everyday stuff of life, experiencing hardships, struggles, difficulties, and confronting the challenges of life. Today he says "I am with you always" (cf. Matthew 28:20). When all is said and done, this is where our God chooses to be; here in the trenches of life. He did not choose something grand and opulent, no blue-light brigades, no fancy clothing and magnificent feasts, no grand titles and thrones of power and control.

In a world turned mad by reality tv, greed, a lust for power and control, God chooses to be in the simple and humble, the very ordinary stuff of life. He chose Mary who would have been considered a very ordinary young woman preparing to begin her life as the wife of a carpenter, Joseph. Mary and Joseph were, however rich in faith, hope and trust. They taught the boy Jesus the faith they so dearly held on to, a way of life that valued each person regardless of status, position or wealth.

Through the Annunciation God lays down his way for us, his people. Lent reminds of the most valuable and important things in life. In this season of fasting and self-denial, we reconnect with our real self, stripped of the trappings and trimmings of life and focused on what really counts: faith, humility, sincerity, kindness and gentleness, hope and trust.

#### **Practical Suggestion**

Ask yourself today: Who am I? Who or what I have I become?

We have wrapped ourselves with so many layers of life that we lose sight of who the real person is beneath the layers of wrapping. Lent invites us to unwrap

ourselves from all these, and to wrap ourselves in faith – like the white garment of our Baptism which we will renew at Easter – or will we?

## Prayer

Pray the Angelus today and every day:

The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary, *And she conceived of the Holy Spirit.* Hail Mary ... Behold the handmaid of the Lord. *Be it done unto me according to Your Word.* Hail Mary... And the Word was made flesh, *And dwelt among us.* Hail Mary... Pray for us, O holy Mother of God. *That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.*

**Let us pray:** Pour forth, we beseech you O Lord, your Grace into our hearts; that we to whom the incarnation of Christ your Son was made known by the message of an angel, may by his passion and cross be brought to the glory of His Resurrection through the same Christ, our Lord. Amen.

## THURSDAY 26 MARCH

### Scripture

*John 5: 31 - 47*

### Reflection

These words of Jesus today, recorded by John, have a great deal to say. Jesus is responding to the persecution by the Pharisees, who see Him as making Himself, a mere human (in their eyes), equal with God.

Jesus tells them, and us, that He has been made ‘the source of LIFE;’ that He is the ‘supreme judge’, and that His judgement is ‘fair and just’. He praises John the Baptist for being a ‘shining lamp’ and testifying to the truth. But then He accuses them (and us?) of studying the scriptures and refusing to see the LIGHT they pointed to – the Light that He is!

He talks of the approval we seek from each other, but we all know that those words of praise are not always sincere. There was an era, not so long ago, when people growing up were told not to expect or rely on praise from others because it would lead to pride! But praise, genuine praise, is a good thing and it is through that that we come to accept and use the gifts that God has given us. The important thing to remember is that when we are lauded or applauded for our efforts, that we give the praise back to God, from whom ‘all good gifts come’!

So, there are questions to ask ourselves today: Do we see Jesus as the source of life; as the supreme judge – do we read the Word of God, and understand that Jesus is the LIVING WORD? These are all things we should have accepted after saying, “We believe.” Our time for repentance and renewal is running out – make the most of what you have left!

## **Practical suggestion**

Reflect seriously on the questions posed. Examine your conscience and your life, and if there is need for repentance, prepare to go to Confession before Easter.

## **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, give me the gift of humility – that I may see myself as You see me, and where there is need to change, give me the grace to do it. Amen.

## **FRIDAY 27 MARCH**

**Scripture:** *John 7: 1 - 2, 10, 25 - 30*

## **Reflection**

Jesus is in Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles where the Jews celebrated the fragile shelters they had used in the desert for forty years. It is for this reason that Peter had, at the Transfiguration (a few days earlier), wanted to build three tents in commemoration of this.

The Rabbis taught that the Messiah would appear suddenly out of nowhere. Despite Scripture being fulfilled in that the Christ Child was born in Bethlehem, most Jews did not know that and assumed He was born and bred in Nazareth. So He did not fit into the idea they had of the Promised One nor did they recognise the prophecies of Isaiah coming true.

Jesus cries out to them (He had to speak loudly – no microphones) and diverts attention from Himself to the One who sent Him. He tells them that He is not just about geography and acknowledges their thoughts about His earthly origin but He pleads with them that He truly comes from God and this is much more important than anything else. He has full knowledge of God. At this, the leaders want to arrest Him, to silence Him.

We too become so familiar with the facts and stories and miracles of Jesus that we fail to see past these and recognise Him as GOD the Son, the Redeemer, the Saviour and that His primary mission was to save us from the horrible consequences of our sinfulness.

## **Practical Suggestion**

On Sunday we celebrated Laetare Sunday when, in the midst of our Lenten efforts, we paused to rejoice in the reality of what He is going to do for us at Easter. We are moving from Repentance to Renewal and are shortly to be renewed.

## **Prayer**

Father, I open my heart to the Holy Spirit who reveals who Jesus really is and what He is about to do for me. Amen.

## SATURDAY 28 MARCH

**Scripture:** *John 7: 40 - 53*

### **Reflection**

Today we read about Nicodemus, a wealthy Pharisee and a respected member of the Sanhedrin. This was a judicial council made up of leading citizens including the chief priests, elders, and scribes and presided over by the high priest. We first meet Nicodemus in the Gospel of John 3:1-15 when he comes to speak to Jesus in secret at night for fear that his fellow Pharisees would hear about his meeting and have him barred from entering the synagogue again. Nicodemus must have had heard Jesus preaching at various times and this had led him to embark on his own journey of faith. Today we see him speaking out in defence of Jesus whom the Sanhedrin were keen to have arrested. Nicodemus was ridiculed by his peers for taking a stand for Jesus.

We also experience ridicule when we stand up for our faith. As a result we often prefer to say nothing and fade into the background when people start criticizing the Catholic Church and its members. We quickly wash off our ashes from Ash Wednesday so that we aren't put into a position where we have to explain what the "smudge" on our forehead is all about. We are provided with so many opportunities to speak-up and testify to the faith and hope we have as Catholics. Lent is the ideal season to be brave and to share our faith with others.

The last time we read about Nicodemus is in John 19: 38-40 when Joseph of Arimathea asked for the body of Jesus. Nicodemus brought along a large quantity of expensive spices and the two men prepared Jesus' body for burial. We see evidence of Nicodemus' wonderful journey of faith, braving ridicule and the chance of expulsion from the synagogue, culminating in him performing the most beautiful act of service in anointing the body of his Lord and Saviour before laying Him to rest.

### **Practical Suggestion**

Seek out an opportunity to share with someone what the season of Lent means to you and how you are journeying from Repentance to Renewal.

### **Prayer**

Father, help me to be brave and to take a stand for Jesus even when I'm ridiculed for my faith. Give me the words to speak so I can boldly share the hope I have because of Jesus' Resurrection at Easter. Amen

**These Daily Reflections for Lent 2020 are written by Fr. Wandile Cagwe, Deacon Mark Wardell, Lawrence Surgeson, Fr. Desmond Nair, Irene Helsdon, George Cominos, and Veronica Donnelly. Please acknowledge the authors when copying and distributing. We wish you a fruitful and blessed Lenten Journey from Repentance to Renewal.**