

Morning Offering

PRAYER

I offer all the prayers, works, joys and problems of this day to the Father, through the Son, my Lord and Brother, in Union with the Holy Spirit. I unite myself in spirit and prayer with all the Eucharists that will be celebrated today throughout the world. May the People of God witness the Good News of Christ in all places, at all times, today and forever. Amen.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, *
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

PSALM(S) APPOINTED FOR THE DAY

BIBLE READING(S)

MEDITATION

PRAYER

To the beginning of this day you have brought me, O Lord Father Almighty. Preserve me now by Your power so that throughout this whole day I may not fall into any sin; rather that all my words, thoughts, and acts become part of your Holy, providential plan. This I ask of You through my Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son, who lives and reigns with You in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen.

Introduction

Many years ago, in a brilliant song, Miss Nancy Wilson, live in concert, was told to leave all the talking to those more qualified—she, of course, is a great singer song stylist. She made that request known in her rendition of the song, *Don't Talk, Just Sing*.

The English language may be one of the most complicated languages to speak or read and understand according to some—I really don't know for it is the one with which I have been familiar all my life. Still we have words upon words and they are being coined daily. Words are being introduced to replace perfectly good words already in existence. We use the richer syllable-wise word “conversate” to mean simply “talk.” Synonyms abound and we can distinguish them only by the smallest of nuances sometimes. I am reminded by my critics that language is evolving; I prefer to say that it is eroding.

I have been behind the curve having only recently discovered the two Bible translations approved by the last General Convention, i.e., the *Common English Bible* and *The Message: the Bible in Contemporary Language*. These Bibles purportedly give us the sacred writings in true translations, but in words and idioms we know and understand in this day and age.

Seems everything is geared toward our making the ancient sacred words more accessible to more and more individuals. I wonder sometimes, though, if the old way of the priest providing the interpretations may not have been the better way. Yet, even with all the newly nuanced translations of the Bible, we still need commentaries. Eugene Peterson, the author/editor of *The Message: the Bible in Contemporary Language*, still exhorts us to use a study Bible for true understanding.

Everywhere one looks, there are meditations and reflections being offered for our edification. The CREDO people once again published Advent Meditations for those of us who have attended a CREDO conference. It seems, and yet, the more words are written about various subjects, the more further amplification is required.

It appears, then, that the passage we have used this year as our booklet title and as the umbrella under which our writings are couched is in order. “We could say more but could never say enough” (Ecclesiasticus 43:27a, *New Revised Standard Version Bible*). Again this year we will pen 40 meditations for your use in Lent. They will not be enough nor will they answer your questions; in fact, they may raise others.

If we have not said it all—and we have not—join us as you reflect on what we have said here. More can and should be said.

Richard +
a servant of God

Lent 2014

Ash Wednesday - March 5, 2014

Psalm 103:1-5 “Let my whole being bless the Lord! Let everything inside me bless his holy name! Let my whole being bless the Lord and never forget all his good deeds: how God forgives all your sins, heals all your sickness, saves your life from the pit, crowns you with faithful love and compassion, and satisfies you with plenty of good things so that your youth is made fresh like an eagle’s.”

I’ve always preached that Lent is that period of time when we reflect on the grace God has shed on us individually, and then we figure out what our response to that grace ought to be. Simple equation, right?

I wasn’t the first child in my family to attend college, but I was the first to graduate. We were poor, I realize that in retrospect; however, I never thought about that reality. In fact, I never thought of my family as being poor at all for in so many ways we were very rich indeed.

All the children were afforded the opportunity to attend college. There were four of us. We lived in a nuclear family, i.e., under our roof were father, mother, and children. Dad always worked two jobs all the time to provide for our needs, and mama stayed at home and took care of the house and us. Only downside for me personally was that my father never saw me play high school football.

I was introduced to my friend Jesus by my parents, and I participated in corporate worship throughout my childhood into adulthood. I married up like so many men I know, and I have been employed secularly and sacredly throughout my life. I have been graced with my own family. My wife is more than I could ever have hoped for. With her, I have been made complete, whole.

There have been times in my life when I missed the mark, when I did not love my neighbors as myself, when I did not love God with all my heart, mind, soul, and strength. When I have sinned, God has forgiven me. He continues to do so in this day.

Bless the Lord. I do so with everything that is inside of me. I do so with my whole being.

Throughout these 40 days, I will be in contemplation about how good our God is and has been to me. I will respond appropriately. That’s the plan I will work out as my lenten discipline. I pray others will join me.

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 103 or 103:8-14; Joel 2:1-2,12-17 or Isaiah 58:1-12; 2 Corinthians 5:20b—6:10; Matthew 6:1-6,16-21

Thursday after Ash Wednesday - March 6, 2014

Luke 9:20 “He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Peter answered, ‘The Messiah of God.’”

What would I say if Christ asked me this same question today? My initial response without hesitation was “The Messiah of God, The Savior, and The Lord of my Life.” These are all true and deep felt responses, but on a more personal level there was much more I would say.

The air that lifts the butterfly’s wings
The cuddly warmth the bed cover brings
The hug from a child
So tender and mild
The morning sun so crisp and bright
The beacon on a cold winter’s night
The tears of hurt that flows
From pains that no one knows
Wiped clear with time
Because of hope sublime
Watching the flowers bloom
Dancing to a catchy little tune
A safe place to land
Someone holding my hand
Watching time passing by
The soaring bird in the sky
The dinner table with steaming food
The piano setting a mood
All things good and wonderful
Life, laughter, and love so beautiful

Who do you say He is?

Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings with your most gracious favor, and further us with your continual help; that in all our works begun continued, and ended in you, we may glorify your holy Name, and finally, by your mercy, obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 1; Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Luke 9:18-25

Friday after Ash Wednesday - March 7, 2014

Matthew 9:12-13 “But when he heard this, he said, ‘Those who are well have not need of a physician, but those who are sick do. Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.’”

Benjamin Franklin said “The only thing certain in life is death and taxes.” I think another certainty is change. Major changes in our lives occur unexpectedly, both good and bad. That is the case in my life.

I was raised in what could be called a typical Christian family. I was baptized as an infant. My parents attended church more or less on a regular basis and my brother and I attended Sunday school. When older I went to catechism class and was confirmed. I finished high school, entered the military, got married, had a child, got discharged, got a job, had a child, got promoted, started a business, was active in church. An average life.

Fast forward to early 1980’s. I am in my early 40’s. Rapid changes occur, none of them good. Without going into detail they include drug addiction, rehab, divorce, a daughter with severe behavioral problems, and a business closure. I don’t remember if I asked God for help. I think not. Looking back, the help was there. I had changes again-good ones. I got a job, met someone, got married, got a very good job. Things were good. I was not going to church very often. Sundays in the warm weather are for golf and in the winter messing around the house.

Fast forward to 2003. Major changes. My wife is diagnosed with cancer and given six months. Our lives included doctors and chemo and radiation, progress and set backs. I know I am going to lose her and I am concerned about her belief in Jesus Christ as her savior. We talk about this, our minister comes over to the house and we take communion. I am convinced my wife believes and will be in heaven after she passes. Something happens to me too. I changed. I felt close to God and to Jesus. I remain close to God and I pray for him to keep me close.

Awhile after my wife’s passing I experience more changes. I retired, moved back to Wisconsin, eventually meeting a wonderful lady and got married. Things are good.

This is a brief history of one ordinary man’s life and the changes that occurred. If this were a football game I have run 80 yards and am in the red zone. I look back with disappointment at some things I have done and with pride at others things. I know that I am glad that Jesus came to call the sinners and when I have run the final 20 yards again change will occur and it will be good.

Support us, O Lord, with your gracious favor through the fast we have begun; that as we observe it by bodily self-denial, so we may fulfill it with inner sincerity of heart; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalms 51:1-10; Isaiah 58:1-9a; Matthew 9:10-17

Saturday after Ash Wednesday - March 8, 2014

Luke 5:32 "I have not come to call the respectable people to repent, but outcasts."

Jesus was, often, questioned regarding the company that he kept. He was with the tax collector, the fishermen, the ordinary people and the mysterious Mary Magdalena. Who were these people who dare to question Our Lord. They were "the" people of the community and the Synagogue. Why were they concerned about Jesus' friends or acquaintances? Sometimes our ego tricks us into thinking that we are the chosen or, at least, we should be the chosen. Perhaps, they wanted to be included in Jesus' entourage. Or, they wanted to be in a position to influence Jesus' mission. Maybe, they, simply, wanted to derail the influence of Jesus for their own political needs.

There is a story floating on Facebook about a new pastor who dresses as a homeless man and goes into his new church. The congregation is not happy to see him and avoid engaging him at all levels, including making simple eye contact. The ragged homeless man upset everyone when he stepped into the pulpit. He introduced himself as the new pastor and their fawning began. The new pastor had seen the hidden dark side of his congregants. The message of this church was only the "pretty people" were accepted in their midst. My husband and I visited churches one summer. We went to one Episcopal church, where no one spoke to us or even offered us a bulletin. We understood the coded message - we were not welcome nor should we ever consider returning. For them, we were "outcasts" and not welcome to be with the "respected people."

Humans tend to live their lives on a continuum. We move from perceived respectability to perceived outcast status. We are most dangerous when we smugly sit in our created respectable zone. It is at this time when some question how Jesus works; His inclusion of the perceived outcasts; and who is given His grace. Without God's grace, which allows the entire spectrum of humans and their behaviors to be included in the heavenly kingdom, being respectable is not enough.

Once a co-worker became upset with me because I had not been able to do what she asked of me. She did not accept my reason for my failure. She smiled at me and said, "I'll pray for you." This personally-declared, saved Christian walked away and flashed a smug smile over her shoulder. That act of hers told me that I was not of her caliber. I was an outcast. What she did not know is that her Jesus would never have treated me as she had. What she did not understand was that all other outcasts and I, perceived and real, would be welcomed into God's kingdom.

Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully look upon our infirmities, and in all our dangers and necessities stretch forth your right hand to help and defend us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 86:1-11; Isaiah 58:9b-14; Luke 5:27-32

Monday in the First Week of Lent - March 10, 2014

Leviticus 19:17-18 “You should not nurse hatred against your brother. You should not seek revenge or cherish anger toward your brother. You should love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.”

In January of 2011 Act 10 was introduced to the Wisconsin Congress. Democratic senators left the state so a vote could not take place.

I let myself get all wrapped up in the political debate. A tiny seed of hate had been planted and I fed it and helped it grow. I couldn't understand how the side who didn't agree with me could be so blind. If I heard a conversation in a store, I had to let my opinion be known. Sometimes a heated argument broke out. I was so angry inside. I even hated those people. Why?

This went on even after the recall election. I was changing inside. I didn't like what I was becoming. I had to stop. I disengaged myself from the conversation. I had to put the events in their proper place. Politics could not rule my life. Everyone has his own point of view.

Instead I will love my neighbors.

Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully increase in us your gifts of holy discipline, in almsgiving, prayer, and fasting; that our lives may be directed to the fulfilling of your most gracious will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 19:7-14; Leviticus 19:1-2,11-18; Matthew 25:31-46

Tuesday in the First Week of Lent - March 11, 2014

Matthew 6:7-8 “When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

Keep it simple! He knows what you need.

The above scripture is the prelude to the Lord’s Prayer, a simple to the point prayer, a gift to us from Jesus. For many of us, the Lord’s Prayer is the first prayer we learned as children and the prayer we recite before drifting off to sleep. By it being a fiber of our being and so much a part of us from childhood, we can become desensitized to the words and meaning.

This became evident to me at the point that the church came up with the Rite II Service and there was a slightly different version included. St. James resisted the Rite II Service for several years so I didn’t become familiar with that version by rote as many others had.

I was part of the leadership team at a Youth Convention in Madison which was opened with the Rite II Service. While I had to refer to the prayer book for the Lord’s Prayer, the teenage girls in the pew in front of me were scoping out boys behind them with their compact mirrors. They were, however, reciting the Lord’s Prayer without skipping a beat! Since that time, I have become familiar with the other version of the Lord’s Prayer and can also recite it by rote.

It is wonderful to have something such as the Lord’s Prayer to fall back on in times of trouble or confusion, but it is important to listen to the words, to absorb them into our lives and know and understand their meaning. I appreciate alternating the versions of the Lord’s Pray during different seasons of the church year, as it makes me more conscious of what I’m saying.

When I take time to sit quietly in the Lord’s presence and pray for others and myself, I find that the Lord’s Prayer is the best way to start or end the session.

Grant to your people, Lord, grace to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and with pure hearts and minds to follow you, the only true God; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Psalms 34:15-22; Isaiah 55:6-11; Matthew 6:7-15

Wednesday in the First Week of Lent - March 12, 2014

Psalm 51:14-16 “Rescue me from the guilt of murder, Oh God, the God who delivers me! Then my tongue will shout for joy because of your deliverance. Oh Lord give me the words! Then my mouth will praise you.”

This psalm of David was written when Nathan, the prophet, confronted David after his affair with Bathsheba and he had murdered Uriah, her husband. King David laments his sins. He feels separated from God and prays to be rescued. He asks for the right words to praise him so he will again be joyful. It is ironic that David, the great psalmist, asks God for the right words.

God doesn't care what words we use, or if we use any words. As relationships mature words often become unnecessary. Picture an elderly couple sitting on a park bench together quietly, silently, simply being together. When we are with someone we love just their being present brings us joy.

In *Spirituality for Ministry*, Urban T. Holmes writes, “Prayer is the movement of God to humanity and humanity to God, the act of meeting.” There are so many ways to be with God. In *The Book of Common Prayer* the principal kinds of prayer are listed as adoration, praise, thanksgiving, penitence, oblation, intercession, and petition. Page 857 explains them in more detail. We have worship as a community and private prayer. Many find God while walking or running or skiing or washing the dishes. Mary Oliver stated “The sun is the best preacher that ever was.” On icy winter days how easy it is to find God in the warm sun warming your skin. Amazing things happen when we are silent and pay attention.

C. S. Lewis wrote: “ I pray because I can't help myself. I pray because I'm helpless. I pray because the need flows out of me all the time, waking and sleeping. It doesn't change God, it changes me.” Prayer strengthens our relationship with God, be it silent or aloud or be it with words or simply being in his presence. It changes us. This Wednesday in Lent let us be aware of his presence around us, within us and within others. We don't need beautiful poetic words. Let's stop during our day to take a deep breath and feel his presence. For can't a deep breath be another form of “Amen?”

Bless us, O God, in this holy season, in which our hearts seek your help and healing; and so purify us by your discipline that we may grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 51:11-18; Jonah 3:1-10; Luke 11:29-32

Thursday in the First Week of Lent - March 13, 2014

Matthew 7:7-9 “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you; for everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks, it will be opened.”

These lines sound so simple and straight forward on the surface. I’m convinced God meant it that way as He wants to be available to all people, everywhere, regardless of class or intelligence. Why then do we mortals on this earth make it so complicated? Like they say, “If you don’t ask, you don’t get.”

Each year when shopping for the family Christmas tree, I have no problem at all asking for money off of a firmly priced tree. I usually get it, too (to the embarrassment of my wife). When I need something more substantial from God it is not always so easy to ask. As I often go to Him with my “laundry list” of requests, I sometimes feel guilty asking for more and more help and favors. I know He listens and cares when He knows what’s troubling me but I must speak to Him and ask. As I seek answers to life’s challenges, I can wander from one source to another including what I may perceive as my own intelligence. What I need to do is seek God first.

As I wander through God’s creation, do I knock on His door or do I just peek in a window to see if anyone’s home? I know that if I do knock He will open to me, so what is it that holds me back? I have no definite answer for this page, only ongoing questions, but I do know deep down He will be there for me. I guess it’s about my trust and faith which during my life has at times been challenged and shattered.

This Lent, with prayer support and determination, I will be trying to implement: asking, seeking, and knocking on His door.

Strengthen us, O Lord, by your grace, that in your might we may overcome all spiritual enemies, and with pure hearts serve you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalms 138; Esther (Apocrypha) 14:1-6,12-14; Matthew 7:7-12

Friday in the First Week of Lent - March 14, 2014

Psalm 130:5 "I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope."

Whenever things are going badly in the everyday things of life, I pray to God. If someone I know is dealing with cancer or fighting some other physical trial, I pray. That the plumbing doesn't freeze, the roof doesn't leak, that my car holds together for another year or two, that my check will cover everything for the month; for all these things I pray. I always believe that somehow the Lord will help me through. In all the trials and losses of my life, God has always been there watching out for me and helping me through.

When I complain to my sister about what's going on, I always say "things will work out, with God's help." She teases me and says, "Aren't you a little 'Mary Sunshine?'" Not really! I can be a pretty "Gloomy Gus," too. I prefer to believe that God loves us and has a plan for us. I believe that if we 'try to be the best we can be' nothing can happen to us that we won't be able to deal with.

Without hard times, how would we recognize the good times? Without sadness, how would we know joy?

Without God in our lives, how can we have hope?

During this Lenten season, I hope to be the best that I can be; but I know if I should fail that God will still love me if I keep trying.

Lord Christ, our eternal Redeemer, grant us such fellowship in your sufferings, that, filled with your Holy Spirit, we may subdue the flesh to the spirit, and the spirit to you, and at the last attain to the glory of your resurrection; who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 130; Ezekiel 18:21-28; Matthew 5:20-26

Saturday in the First Week of Lent - March 15, 2014

Matthew 5:45b “for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.”

I hear the naysayers in Kahlil Gibran’s Prophet in response to giving say these words, “I would gladly give, but only to the deserving.”

I am reminded of a recent execution wherein the state used two new drugs to accomplish the deed of putting the felon to death. The dying man was heard to gasp on several occasions before he finally succumbed.

Some of us may be appalled by this action that created pain for the dying man; others will have no sympathy for the man in the face of the things that he had done to bring about this execution.

That famous canticle says it all, to wit: God’s ways are not our ways, nor ours his. His ways are higher than ours. It follows then that God is of such a nature that he would make the sun rise on the evil as well as on the good. It follows that he would not be discriminant in sending the rain to water crops for all and the like. Everyone receives these beneficial elements of nature.

These kinds of truths may be among the most problematic of all for us to assimilate and to embrace. On the one hand, we are taught how we should live our lives, loving God and loving our neighbor. We have been given saints to emulate along with the life of our Lord.

We are told, however, that at the final day, the wheat and the tares will be separated by God’s angel. What does that say about our subsisting with the unrighteous in the world? I think of that group of primates of the church that refused to take communion because our presiding bishop was present for that mass.

“I should like to have supper at your house tonight” Jesus said to the tax collector. Everyone in that day knew that tax collectors were counted among the most notorious of sinners. How much more unrighteous could one be? Yet our Lord dined with this man and his family.

Let us not forget as we reflect on these kinds of quandaries, that scripture tells us that all we like sheep have gone astray, i.e., you and me. Sometimes, it boils down to who is the righteous and who is the unrighteous? Don’t we roll in and out of those categories? If that be true, then aren’t we glad that God gives his sun and his rain to all persons alike?

O God, by your Word you marvelously carry out the work of reconciliation: Grant that in our Lenten fast we may be devoted to you with all our hearts, and united with one another in prayer and holy love; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 119:1-8; Deuteronomy 26:16-19; Matthew 5:43-48

Monday in the Second Week of Lent - March 17, 2014

Luke 6:37 “Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.”

Judgment, condemnation and forgiveness are the three things I have struggled with the most on my journey as a Christian. I suspect we all have struggled with these at one time or another. I grew up in a family where judgment and condemnation were expressed about everyone and everything. It was expressed towards me from how I did my hair to how I spoke or pronounced a nearby city’s name (which I, ironically, now live in). I genuinely felt as if there was nothing I could say or do right. This created in me the constant feeling that I was doing something wrong in absolutely everything I did or said. Sadly, this also instilled in me the natural instinct to judge and condemn others. It became a vicious circle of my judging others to distract myself from looking at my constant insecurities that were created by someone else’s judgments.

This affected my relationship with God on a deep and painful level. I wanted to be a good Christian, and strived to do so, but because I thought He was judging me and condemning me, it was very hard to accept His forgiveness. I thought that nothing I could do would ever be enough. I could not pray enough, or volunteer enough. This led to my taking on far more than I should and in areas where my gifts were not strong. And as a vicious cycle will do, it led to more self-judgment and self-condemnation.

Jesus said to love your neighbor as you love yourself. I did exactly that, but it was not working out very well. I was treating others the exact same way I treated myself, by judging and condemning and assuming they were wrong in everything they did. After years of prayer and therapy I discovered that how I loved myself was not healthy and certainly was not what He had intended. I discovered that I needed to learn to love myself the way my Lord loved me, or I would be doomed to a life of discontentment and turmoil.

Interestingly, the key to unlock my door of constant self judgment and condemnation was forgiveness. I have had to learn to be kind and gracious to myself. I learned to look at what Jesus’ message was, how He lived His life and how God continually forgave the flawed and struggling Israelites. Once I was able to start accepting that God was not mean or hateful, but was loving and kind, I was able to start practicing this behavior towards myself. Once I was able to be this way towards myself it became easy to see others through loving and caring eyes. Now when I catch myself judging someone else I try to put myself in their shoes. I go to my forgiving Father and humbly repent. I stop and try to remember that I do not know this person’s life, deepest thoughts or hurts. I do not know what they may be going through. I try to treat them with kindness, grace and tenderness. And now I can try to love them as I love myself, as God loves me.

I still have those certain people that are a challenge for me, but I thank God that His grace, His love and His forgiveness is so much bigger than mine will ever be. I also thank God that I have His example to follow and that there is always hope for a world and a time where humans choose forgiveness before judgment and condemnation.

Let your Spirit, O Lord, come into the midst of us to wash us with the pure water of repentance, and prepare us to be always a living sacrifice to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 79:1-9; Daniel 9:3-10; Luke 6:27-38

Tuesday in the Second Week of Lent - March 18, 2014

Psalm 50:23 “Those who bring thanksgiving as their sacrifice honor me; to those who go the right way I will show the salvation of God.”

I pray regularly. I say my daily prayers early in the morning soon after I wake up. During my day I might say some mini prayers, thanking God or asking for help amongst other things. My daily prayers pretty much follow a form that I was taught as a teenager. I begin with a salutation, “Almighty Father,” followed by a thank you for blessings, followed by petitions, and ending with “in the name of Christ I pray, amen.” My daily prayers are very similar in content, but I am sincere and I concentrate on what I am praying.

My prayers seem to contain many more petitions (asking for help or needs) than thank you for blessings received. I notice that the Prayers of the People found in our Sunday bulletin are almost completely petitions for God to act on our behalf –not a single thank you for blessings received. Of course Jesus said in the book of John, “if you ask anything of the father in my name, he will give it to you” so I know that God wants us to go to him with our needs. I just know that I need to be more thankful more often for blessings received.

What are those blessings and gifts? I always give thanks for those things such as food and clothing, healing of the sick, our church, my wife and family, friends, etc. What about the little things that I take for granted or that seem to slip pass me in going about my daily life? I need to sit or lie quietly once in a while and let my mind wander as I think about the blessings God has given me in this world. Things such as what the first warm day in spring feels like. Or the smell of a baby after his or her bath. The hummingbird that buzzes a foot in front of my face and seems to be staring directly into my eyes. The sunset that reflects off the water of a placid lake or the brilliant red and blue sky at sunrise. The dog that cocks its head and looks at me inquisitively. So many blessings!

In this Lenten season I also want to think about the greatest blessing of all: God’s plan for our salvation and Jesus’s fulfillment of that plan.

O God, you willed to redeem us from all iniquity by your Son: Deliver us when we are tempted to regard sin without abhorrence, and let the virtue of his passion come between us and our mortal enemy; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 50:7-15, 22-24; Isaiah 1:2-4,16-20; Matthew 23:1-12

Wednesday in the Second Week of Lent - March 19, 2014

Matthew 20:26 “. . . If one of you wants to be great, he must be the servant of the rest.”

As a child, I had a very difficult time with being a servant. My people were brought here to be servants. Servants against our will. Servants who had no voice. Servants that were seen as less than chattel. My maternal grandmother, Granny, worked in a private home as the laundress. In other words she took care of washing and ironing the family's clothes and linens. My grandmother took great pride in her work. She had learned her trade at the knees of her mother. Her mother had taken in washing to keep her family in food and shelter. My mother's first job, as a teenager, was cooking and cleaning in a private home; a home where, the grandparents had been slave owners. My maternal history was filled with servants. Granny voiced many times that she didn't want me to work in a private home. She knew the dark side of this work environment and it wasn't just about being a servant.

I had been reared by Mama, my paternal grandmother. My parents were teenagers at my birth - children having a child. Mama had been sent to the Atlanta Baptist Seminary, now known as Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia. I was not taught the language of servanthood or the fears of that status - of being a minority in the Deep South. I did not fit the profile of the house servant. That was what scared Granny. Where she was from, talking in an educated fashion was perceived as “uppity” talk. One could be killed for that educated talk, unlaced with “Yes Suhs and Yes M'ams.”

The south is known for its hospitality, but my world was segregated. When I moved to Texas, I learned the Mexican culture of grace and gentleness, of humility and respect. I learned to honor others, as Jesus honored his disciples and the people he met. My first awareness of my respect of servanthood was at a wedding where I was the Altar Guild member on duty. The bride was at the door of the church. I looked down at her train and it was not in place. I dropped to my knees at the feet of this bride, who did not look like me, and straightened her train and smiled up at her in reassurance that she was ready. I had arrived. I was, now, a servant of Jesus.

I have come a long way from my years in Georgia and Texas. When I worked on my degree in Educational Leadership, I had to develop my personal educational philosophy. I was at the end of the manager-style of leadership and was bridging the new era of the administrator as being an Instructional Leader. As a teacher, I knew the focus was on the student. I spent my years in the counseling field, where you learn that the focus is on the client. My focus as an administrator was on the needs of the students and the parents. I had evolved. I chose servanthood leadership as my personal and educational philosophy. Being a servant to God's people is an honorable way of life. Jesus was a servant and is a servant to us and for us. Who am I - to be more than Jesus - to be above being a servant. Shame on me and the history that taught me that servanthood was beneath me. God, please forgive me. I want to be honorable enough to be your servant. Amen.

O God, you so loved the world that you gave your only-begotten Son to reconcile earth with heaven: Grant that we, loving you above all things, may love our friends in you, and our enemies for your sake; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalms 31:9-16; Jeremiah 18:1-11,18-20; Matthew 20:17-28

Thursday in the Second Week of Lent - March 20, 2014

Jeremiah 17:7 “Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and rests his confidence upon him.”

We all have challenges in our lives. If we didn't, life would be so dull. Would we even know what happiness is?

Usually when faced with life's challenges, I take a deep breath and ask God for guidance. I give my problem to God. Doing this always calms me down and eventually I start to think of solutions. It isn't immediate, sometimes it can take weeks. God has always come through for me. His answers are yes, no or wait.

Recently I became really sick. I could not do anything for myself. My husband even had to dress me so I could go to the doctor. I prayed for it to pass. One week went by and not much improvement, a second week and a little more improvement. That Sunday I was able to go to church. St James parish family was so supportive. Many of you had experienced the same illness. I received a lot of encouragement and some suggestions on how to cope.

God came through for me. I have to be patient and wait. The illness will pass in time. God's answer for me is – wait.

O Lord, strong and mighty, Lord of hosts and King of glory: Cleanse our hearts from sin, keep our hands pure, and turn our minds from what is passing away; so that at the last we may stand in your holy place and receive your blessing; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 1; Jeremiah 17:5-10; Luke 16:19-31

Friday in the Second Week of Lent - March 21, 2014

Matthew 21:42-43 “Jesus said to them, ‘Have you never read in the scriptures: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing and it is amazing in our eyes?’ Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produced the fruits of the kingdom.’”

This is a parable of the landowner who sent his slaves on two different occasions to collect the produce from his leased land. The tenants conspired both times to beat and kill the slaves so they could have the harvest. This is representative of the prophets (the slaves) who were sent through the years to the chief priest and elders (tenants) to bring them from their erring ways back to God. God had chosen the Hebrews to be His chosen people, but they had become very rigid and self centered in their beliefs and practices, and God was trying to bring them back.

When the landowner sent his only son to collect the produce. The tenants knew if they killed him they would inherit the land and could continue as they had been. But the crucifying of Jesus, the son, was not the end. It was the beginning of God’s grace freely given to everyone.

We now are heirs of that crucified sacrifice and have the presence of God, through the Holy Spirit, to continually seek guidance and return to Him when we stray. This carries with it a great responsibility to act and live out our faith that others might see it and be drawn to it.

I give thanks to God for His direction in my life and always challenging me to step out in faith. My children and their children are rooted in faith, and it was the greatest joy to be present at my future granddaughter-in-law’s baptism. Many years ago I was called to a special ministry. In that ministry I had the privilege of working with and sharing my faith with many youth at St. James and the Milwaukee Diocese. I now feel that God is calling me to ministry at St. James, and to be open to wherever He leads me.

When you are with friends, relatives or acquaintances are they aware of your faith? Can they see the presence of Christ in your life? What is God calling **you** to do?

Grant, O Lord, that as your Son Jesus Christ prayed for his enemies on the cross, so we may have grace to forgive those who wrongfully or scornfully use us, that we ourselves may be able to receive your forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 105:16-22; Genesis 37:3-4,12-28; Matthew 21:33-43

Saturday in the Second Week of Lent - March 22, 2014

Psalm 103:8-9 “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always accuse, nor will he keep his anger forever.”

As I read through today’s readings it dawned on me that I had written a reflection on The Prodigal Son before. Looking back to the 2012 meditation booklet I found what I had written. I wrote about sibling rivalry. The brother of the prodigal son certainly resented the attention and the forgiveness the father showered upon his brother. I am wondering if God, or Father Richard, really wants me to do some additional reflection on this parable. Today two themes appeal to me, forgiveness and God’s steadfast love. Over these last two years sibling rivalry has lost its importance.

Several years ago after going through a difficult time I was a bundle of resentment. One day Father Russ offered me a book on forgiveness. My eyes must have flashed with anger. I think he may have backed up a step and said, “Maybe you aren’t quite ready.” At that time I could not even imagine ever being ready. Time and Faith are beautiful healers. With prayer, study and reflection I have come to forgive the person who hurt me. I began to feel sorry for him. Later I realized I was certainly not blameless and then I had to also forgive myself.

There are cultures in the world where forgiveness is not a virtue. The Middle East is one of them. In our culture we are more often called to have tolerance for others. As Christians we are called to do more. Jesus commanded us to love our enemies. This is what sets Christianity apart. It always comes back to love. We are called to wish the best for that person. We cannot hold grudges, or wish for their comeuppance. We have to walk in their shoes.

Human relationships will always have situations where our expectations are not met. There can be disappointment that can lead to resentment. A retired counselor recently said to me that this is what therapy is all about, failed expectations and resentment.

I wonder if our relationship with God can be similar. Do we expect God to answer our prayers and resent him when we don’t get what we want? Maybe we should pray for strength or vision or faith to help us cope with whatever life brings? The psalm reading today mentions his steadfast love three times. We are all like the Prodigal son. We sin and are forgiven without hesitation because he loves us.

Today I need to pray for a pure heart. I pray I won’t compare or judge others. I pray that when I look into another’s eyes I will seek to understand them. I pray for God’s love to shine through me. I pray if someone is unkind I can forgive them.

Grant, most merciful Lord, to your faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins, and serve you with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 103:1-4(5-8)9-12; Micah 7:14-15,18-20; Luke 15:11-32

Monday in the Third Week of Lent - March 24, 2014

Luke 4:27 “And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha; and none of them was cleansed but only Naaman, the Syrian.”

This quote immediately drew me to one of my favorite books - *The Way of the Wolf* by Martin Bell. One of the chapters is titled “Where are the Nine?” It is a story about Jesus cleansing 10 lepers, but only one returned to give thanks. Jesus asks, “Were there not ten lepers cleansed? But where are the nine?”

One didn't understand and so he was frightened. A second was offended, because he felt he should have done something to deserve it. I must admit I sometimes fall into this category. Do I really deserve God's healing and grace? The third realized he probably didn't want to be healed because he would lose his identity of who he was. The fourth forgot to return to give thanks because he was so overcome with joy. He just forgot. At times this may have happened to me also. The fifth leper was so tired of begging for little needs that he just couldn't say thank you anymore. The sixth leper was now allowed to return home to join her family. She had been freed by Jesus so she just wanted to rush home. The seventh just didn't believe that Jesus had anything to do with his healing. The eighth leper didn't return to give thanks because he did believe Jesus healed him so he just ran to publish the news. The ninth leper showed himself to the priest and said, “ah” and “so,” and disappeared from sight. It is impossible to say exactly why the ninth leper did not return to give thanks. So where are the nine? Jesus knows where they are.

I take great comfort in this. He knows who I am, and he knows where I am. Lent is a time for me to search for myself and look at my actions of this last year. Of all the times I approached Jesus and He healed, cleansed, and forgave me. How many times did I return to give thanks? By the grace of God, I will use this Lenten season to come up with answers to those questions and to monitor myself to always give Him thanks.

Look upon the heart-felt desires of your humble servants, Almighty God, and stretch forth the right hand of your majesty to be our defense against all our enemies; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 42:1-7 2; Kings 5:1-15b; Luke 4:23-30

Tuesday in the Third Week of Lent - March 25, 2014

Psalm 25:4 "Make me know your ways, O Lord; teach me your path."

Being raised a Catholic and schooled by nuns, I learned my catechism. I learned all the rules. Once I got out of public high school and into the working world, I fell into the ways of the world around me. What I saw as wrong in the beginning, in time seemed right. I had stopped going to church, I stopped for nearly thirty years.

The death of my husband led me to St. James church. I met a few people and in the course of our time together, got to know them and like them. So, I came to mass one Sunday and haven't left since. I was even received into the Episcopal Church. This religion, this church, and its people were a good fit for me. It gave me a second family and a deeper understanding of religion in my life.

My brother, a practicing Catholic, asked me why I like my church. I told him that I liked the warmth of the people and the Sunday service, but I really like the little prayer groups that meet at the church during the week. I also like the occasional bible study groups that I've attended. This makes me feel closer to my faith. Meeting the people in this little church, I see the friendships, the way they work together and the humor and pain and love they share. Instead of just reading the ways of the Lord, I see people who practice it everyday and it warms my spirit.

This is one of my favorite times of the year. With Lent, come soup suppers and prayer with friends at church. I treasure these evenings of friendship and prayer. I thank God for the community of St. James.

O Lord, we beseech you mercifully to hear us; and grant that we, to whom you have given a fervent desire to pray, may, by your mighty aid, be defended and comforted in all dangers and adversities; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 25:3-10; Song of the Three Young Men 2-4,11-20a*; Matthew 18:21-35

* In some Bibles, Daniel 3:25-27,34-43

Wednesday in the Third Week of Lent - March 26, 2014

Deuteronomy 4:2 “You must neither add anything to what I command you nor take away anything from it, but keep the commandments of the Lord your God with which I am charging you.”

One of the important components in the old hi fi stereo system was the equalizer. Sometimes this was a separate component, and sometimes it was built into the integrated stereo amplifier or the preamplifier. The equalizer was used to boost or reduce frequency or sound in a stereo system. But in the middle between boosting and reducing was a midpoint that audiophiles referred to as “flat.” In that position, nothing was added or subtracted from the music. I like to think of it being the clean state of the music.

When some priests have instructed lectors [the people who read the lessons in Christian churches during primary services] in the fine art of reading, they sometimes make a point of telling the candidates to read in an unembellished state, without affectations and so forth. That would be similar to placing the equalizer in the flat position. Add nothing, take nothing away. That’s tantamount to letting the hearer place the emphasis where it best fits him or her.

The Lawgiver to the Israelites told the people to accept the laws as he was passing them on to them. In a sense, he was chiding them to do what so many find it difficult to do in this age, and that is to leave it alone; take it as it comes. Don’t question it. As the pope said, “It is what it is.”

One problem of the written and spoken word is that words can have different meanings dependent upon the context. We have a supreme court because laws, written plainly the lawmakers probably thought when they enacted them, are subject to interpretation.

The lawgiver in Deuteronomy wanted to avoid this kind of foolishness. So, he said, in effect, here are the laws applicable to you and to me. I am giving them to you unadorned. You should take them as they come.

Blessed are those that have accepted the word that has come from the mouth of the Lord, without addition or subtraction.

If you know someone who has one of those old stereo systems, ask to listen to it. Try out the music in various settings, i.e., boosted, reduced, and in its flat position. What do you think?

Give ear to our prayers, O Lord, and direct the way of your servants in safety under your protection, that, amid all the changes of our earthly pilgrimage, we may be guarded by your mighty aid; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 78:1-6; Deuteronomy 4:1-2,5-9; Matthew 5:17-19

Thursday in the Third Week of Lent - March 27, 2014

Jeremiah 7:27 “So you shall speak all these words to them, but they will not listen to you. You shall call to them, but they will not answer you.”

The librarian of the city library was gracious enough to permit me to conduct a book signing at the public library. I still stand amazed because my book is a work of religious meditations written during the Lenten season for Christian people.

I had a number of books from my publisher on hand so I could sell them, and of course, autograph them for those who wanted that little touch. This was my first time attending a book signing either as an author or as a member of the audience. I did not know what to expect. Certainly I was unaware that some in the audience might call upon me to serve as an apologist for the Faith.

There are some vocal atheists in my hometown, and a couple of them showed up for my signing. Now my intent was to sell books and to speak about the meditations I had written. But these gentlemen, asked questions that aptly applied to one serving as an apologist. As a result, I lost focus of my purpose.

They never asked about my meditations. They asked about historical matters of the faith. They inquired about religious theology. None of that was really pertinent to what I had written.

My book dealt with a passage of scripture in which Jesus calls us to be extraordinary people, to go above and beyond.

No matter how often I tried to get us back on track, I faced hostility and indifference. Nothing I said was acceptable to these men. Like those people that Jeremiah faced, they would not listen. They certainly did not believe in a God that operates in our lives, loves us, and redeems us constantly. They certainly did not believe that one Jesus came down from heaven for us and for our salvation.

An adage suggests that history repeats itself. Isaiah showed once more why he was so important a person as a prophet of God. Like the Israelites passing out of slavery in Egypt into freedom, these men would not listen.

Keep watch over your Church, O Lord, with your unfailing love; and, since it is grounded in human weakness and cannot maintain itself without your aid, protect it from all danger, and keep it in the way of salvation; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 95:6-11; Jeremiah 7:23-28; Luke 11:14-23

Friday in the Third Week of Lent - March 28, 2014

Hosea 14:8b “What we have made with our own hands we will never again call gods.”

Henry Ford made strides in manufacturing by implementing the assembly line in the production of automobiles. Since those early days, car manufacturers have produced cars that were sheer objects. Have you ever witnessed an automobile owner lovingly washing and waxing his car? Such love, such devotion. I know how much I put into my little MGB when I first purchased it. My wife loved the Camaro we owned and the speedy Eclipse sports car she owned.

My wife and I shared a hobby. We loved working in ceramics so very much that we even poured our own greenware using slip we purchased in bulk. I recall several pieces I fashioned with my own hands, and I have remained proud of the work I produced. Among my prized pieces were a bald eagle painted in oils, a set of mugs with various faces, and a gift I grudgingly gave to my mother.

One year, I fired some greenware and produced this marvelous tea set. On each piece, I drew a ring of gold around the opening or the rim of the individual pieces in the set. The final product was so lovely, so delicate that I found it most difficult to part with it. I finally did. That set, by the way, now resides in my nephew’s house.

We were on the leading edge of technology, particularly the so-called home computer. We purchased an Atari 800—not the game machine—and it was on this computer that I learned to program in Basic. One evening at our intergenerational Bible study, we sent the kids to the room where the computer was and permitted them to play on it. Someone came out later to tell us that someone had spilled a drink into the keyboard of the computer. My baby was dead.

In my old age, I have come to prize such possessions less than in the past. I see them so often these days as things we need for life, but they are not things that have any real bearing on who and what we are. They are objects and have no godly qualities or capabilities. I keep them in their place.

... and I hear that man proclaiming, “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is One.”

So who has time for idols?

Grant us, O Lord our Strength, a true love of your holy Name; so that, trusting in your grace, we may fear no earthly evil, nor fix our hearts on earthly goods, but may rejoice in your full salvation; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 81:8-14; Hosea 14:1-9; Mark 12:28-34

Saturday in the Third Week of Lent - March 29, 2014

Hosea 6:1 “Come let us return to the Lord; for it is he who has torn, and he will heal us; he has struck down, and he will bind us up.”

I spent the major part of my adult life without giving much thought to God. It was all about me: my pleasures, my wants, what’s in it for me? All this with little thought of how my actions affected others. I was associating with people who were living the wrong way, but none of us thought we were. We had a group mentality that this was the way to live. Outwardly, we looked liked we had it all. But in time, I came to realize that something was missing. I started to feel empty and alone. The world and all of its temptations had pulled me in. I started to realize how much I had hurt myself and others by my actions.

When I asked God for help and forgiveness, I could feel the burden I’d been carrying lifted from me. I realized that God’s love had always been in my life, but I had turned away from it. He was there patiently waiting for me to return to the right path and to really live my life. Everyday, I try to remain on that path of righteousness. We all owe every fiber of our being to God; a God who loves us, always. He will forgive the repentant soul and restore us, if only we seek him.

During this Lenten season, I will pray for the strength to stay to the path that leads to God.

O God, you know us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers, that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright: Grant us such strength and protection as may support us in all dangers, and carry us through all temptations; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 51:15-20; Hosea 6:1-6; Luke 18:9-14

Monday in the Fourth Week of Lent - March 31, 2014

Psalm 30:1-4 “I will extol thee, O Lord, for thou hast drawn me up, and hast not let my foes rejoice over me. O Lord my God, I cried to thee for help, and thou hast healed me. O Lord, thou hast brought up my soul from Sheol, restored me to life from among those gone down to the pit. Sing praises to the Lord, O you his saints, and give thanks to his Holy Name.”

Yes, I will give praise to the Lord, for he has indeed raised me from low points in my life. Prior job losses in my life had certainly dragged me down to some low pits. He has led me to pastures of peace and feelings of more self-worth than I had after the scary times of unemployment. Not only did God himself raise my spirits and self-worth, but also through His influence from my wife, family, and a wonderful, spiritual filled Christian community of friends.

I honestly don't know about the part that He didn't allow my foes to rejoice over me? I mean no disrespect toward my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, but I try to survive in this world full of enemies (those out to hurt me) by never underestimating them. My comfort is knowing that I do have Jesus in my corner, which is much better than just me alone to face my enemies. Through many of life's heartaches, hurts, and disappointments, I have certainly “cried out to Jesus,” and he was there for me. I know I am blessed to have been lifted out of the “pits of life,” while others with no relationship with Jesus remain in desolate pits of sorrow and self-pity. I still have setbacks of depression and anxiety and am under counseling and medication, but I can truly look back and see how God has gifted me with lots of good – coming out of many of life's setbacks. I will continue to “sing praises” to Jesus my savior, for any relationship with Him results in “gifts aplenty” from heaven.

O Lord our God, in your holy Sacraments you have given us a foretaste of the good things of your kingdom: Direct us, we pray, in the way that leads to eternal life, that we may come to appear before you in that place of light where you dwell for ever with your saints; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 30:1-6, 11-13; Isaiah 65:17-25; John 4:43-54

Tuesday in the Fourth Week of Lent - April 1, 2014

John 5:17 “But Jesus answered them, ‘My father is still working, and I also am working.’”

We are bombarded daily with news about civil wars, hunger, poverty, drug addiction, crime, dishonest politicians, gun violence and don't forget the dire predictions of the future of our planet from climate change. God is working?

Yes, I believe he is. It can sometimes be easy to miss if we don't look for him and keep our eyes and ears open. As a child I prayed before we ate, at bedtime, in school and nightly walking through the kitchen looking up at our lit up Blessed Virgin night light on the wall. I prayed most fervently while running home after dark from the next door neighbor's house. That scared me to death. Every Friday I went to confession and confessed to not praying after meals. Once-in-a-while I'd throw in another sin, like lying. My parents taught me to pray. We grew up remembering God's presence several times a day. I have carried on the teaching of the “God bless mom, God bless dad etc.” night prayer for the next two generations.

Prayer opens us up to God. It makes us aware of his presence. I see his working so clearly in our parish here at St. James. God is working on Saturdays at Harvest House. That is how those meals that can be a bit nerve-wracking in the early morning always come together just fine. We have been blessed with Richard, Anna and Cathy. Thank you Lord. We were blessed with senior, junior wardens and a vestry that helped to carry us through these last years. We now have a new senior warden who never would have imagined she would have the courage to take this on ten years ago. God bless her. We have a new junior warden who has come through EFM and when a mentor was needed she took that job on. Now she has taken on the challenge of being junior warden. Thanks be to God. Our vestry is filled with good, kind, gentle, faith-filled people. With God's help they can move mountains. Our treasurer frets and worries over our nickels and dimes for us. God is working. The choir members sing like they have miraculously added extra voices and help us praise God. Amen! The women's group has teas and luncheons and we are able to donate money to charity. Wow. We have parish members who come together to worship as a community. They bring smiles and joy and kindness into our lives. Some kind soul always makes the coffee. Altar guild always has the altar set up. The bulletins are printed. The list goes on.

We leave church on Sundays and we spread this joy, this Faith. Last summer I took my granddaughter for a walk down to the lake. We started to throw stones and I remembered a sermon Father Kevin had given about ripples. I explained to her how ripples spread out and touch other ripples. We have no idea how far they go. We make ripples by our words and actions. These ripples can affect those around us and we have no idea how far they can spread. Her eyes grew so big and she whispered, “Is this true?” Yes, it's true. Our actions matter. Like Jesus and like the Father, we need to keep working. I love the Book of James. It beautifully states, “Be a doer,” and “Faith without works is dead.” In Lent please join me in acts of kindness and in continuing our daily meditations and Bible readings. Send out those ripples. God is working.

O God, with you is the well of life, and in your light we see light: Quench our thirst with living water, and flood our darkened minds with heavenly light; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 46:1-8; Ezekiel 47:1-9,12; John 5:1-18

Wednesday in the Fourth Week of Lent - April 2, 2014

John 5:25 – “Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.”

I am a cradle Episcopalian who has been active in the church since I was in 5th grade. Growing up I sang in the choir, took care of the nursery and was active in the youth group. As an adult I continued taking leadership positions, working with the youth and participating in spiritual weekends. What I have discovered is that there is never a time when you can sit back and say I’ve done it all and learned everything I need to know. There are always new understandings of God’s presence in the Bible, in the church and in our lives.

As I read the above scripture, “the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.” The word “dead” stood out to me in that phrase. What does that mean? Could the word “dead” mean those who have not heard the word, or those who have turned away from God? If it means either of these scenarios, we have a great responsibility to rectify that situation.

Father Richard’s statement at the end of the Eucharist, “The liturgy has ended the service now begins. So go in peace to love and serve the Lord” should be our mantra. When we encounter friends, relatives or new acquaintances, can they see that we’re Christians? The way we live and express ourselves should be a witness to the presence of Christ in our lives. There is a joy in knowing Christ that should be visible to those around you.

When God sends new people into our midst, we need to be loving, caring and giving of ourselves and our faith so that we may be a great witness for Him.

Do those around you recognize you as a Christian?

O Lord our God, you sustained your ancient people in the wilderness with bread from heaven: Feed now your pilgrim flock with the food that endures to everlasting life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 145:8-19; Isaiah 49:8-15; John 5:19-29

Thursday in the Fourth Week of Lent - April 3, 2014

Exodus 32:7 “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely;’”

Centuries ago, that’s what God said to Moses. God was hot! His anger was welling up and he was thinking about consuming those people.

What must God be thinking about this generation?

Recently, the young singing star, Justin Bieber, went on a spree. What else could we call it? He was under the influence of alcohol. What is the legal age for drinking in Florida? He was apparently drag racing. He has a very expensive and powerful car, the kind that many of us in this world can only dream about owning. He and his comrades smoked dope on a plane in flight.

The Bieb, as he is known, is only in his late teenage years—I believe he is 19 years old. Who hasn’t done some silly things in his or her teen years? We only hope that they live through some of the antics they pull.

But what is so extraordinary in this case is that young Bieber was accompanied by his father when he committed some of these deeds.

The half sister of a woman stole the latter’s newborn baby and went traipsing off to Iowa. This obviously deranged woman was trying to convince persons she knew that she had been pregnant and delivered a baby. There was a serious manhunt for the child.

Selena Gomez just emerged from a two-week stint in rehab. Rehab has gotten to be a usual thing among some of the rich and famous in this world.

Civility has broken down in this country among and between those who hold differing points of view about politics, finances, work, and the like. All these things represent just the tip of the iceberg. “The world is in an uproar; danger zone is everywhere.”

Jihad, a word we did not know until in recent years. In the name of God some are committing genocide, refusing to let women and girls be educated, quelling humans’s right to govern themselves, controlling others via armed conflict, indiscriminately causing injury and death to others to press upon us their desires. I speak here of suicide bombers.

Will our God remember the plea of Moses for this current people and will he relent?

Almighty and most merciful God, drive from us all weakness of body, mind, and spirit; that, being restored to wholeness, we may with free hearts become what you intend us to be and accomplish what you want us to do; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 106:6-7, 19-23; Exodus 32:7-14; John 5:30-47

Friday in the Fourth Week of Lent - April 4, 2014

Psalm 34:18 “. . . he saves those who have lost all hope.”

I am fascinated with the concept of hope. Faith, Hope and Love is a mantra that I have seen in churches, books, and even jewelry. I have found hope lost by the homeless, poverty-ridden families, and those who think that they have lost their connection with Our Lord, Jesus Christ. What does hope do for us? It gives us purpose, direction, goals and a reason to get out of bed.

Can you even imagine what it is for days to be unimportant, to feel that no one cares about you or your welfare, to feel that you work in vain, that God has left you to fend for yourself? Some people have felt lost hope for many and varied reasons. One action or incident may be the last straw for one person and only a blip on life's radar for another.

I have seen lost hope in the faces of students. It occurs when they are not safe, at school and, even sometimes, at home. I have seen it in the faces of parents when they cannot provide for the needs of their children, when they feel disrespected by school personnel, and when their children are hungry and the refrigerator and pantry are bare. I have seen homeless people living under the bridges of highways and on the streets of cities. I have seen the eyes of people whose mental health is not being addressed. I have seen the sadness of people whose needed health care has not been approved by the insurance company. I have seen a mother go to the neighborhood market everyday to buy food because her refrigerator had no door. I have seen the embarrassment on students' faces when they reported that their parents could not come to the parents' meeting because both parents were incarcerated. I have seen the loneliness of students and faculty members who have not been allowed to be a part of the school or class community - to be ostracized. I have seen parishioners excluded from parish inner circles.

The reflections of these varied faces mirror hopelessness in their eyes. St. Theresa of Avila said, “Christ has no body now, but yours. No hands, no feet on earth, but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ looks compassion into the world. Yours are the feet with which Christ walks to do good. Yours are the hands with which Christ blesses the world.”

We are called upon to respond to the loss of hope in others. We must feed and clothe the poor. We must respect all of God's people. We must make sure that everyone's dignity is preserved. We must make sure that all health needs are provided for - both physical and mental. We must be inclusive. We must be Christ in the world. Our commission is to be the reflection of hope to those who have lost all hope.

O God, you have given us the Good News of your abounding love in your Son Jesus Christ: So fill our hearts with thankfulness that we may rejoice to proclaim the good tidings we have received; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 34:15-22; Wisdom 2:1a, 12-24; John 7:1-2, 10, 25-30

Saturday in the Fourth Week of Lent - April 5, 2014

Jeremiah 11:19a “But I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter.”

Unlike Jeremiah, I haven't been led like a gentle lamb to the slaughter, but I led myself into emotional slaughter by not turning to Jesus for daily guidance during a time of family heartbreak.

The heartbreak took place many years ago when my father was diagnosed with stomach cancer and underwent stomach replacement surgery. Of course I prayed for him often throughout the operation and recovery, and he recovered quite well. Still it was a tense time for the family, but the tension turned to trauma ten months later when my mother was diagnosed with incurable brain tumor. She had surgery on her seventy-fourth birthday and died nine months later. The family was in turmoil! Adding to almost two years of illness and death was my brother's anger. An anger that started shortly before father's operation and continued for years after father's death. My brother's unprovoked and unreasonable anger hurt his own family, my family, and father. I was angry, too! Could I have dealt with his anger and mine better than I did? Yes! I prayed for everyone in the family but usually left him out. When I did mention him, it was *about* him, not *for* him. I needed to obey Jesus' command to “love thy neighbor” even when that neighbor was an angry brother!

In John 7:38, Jesus says, “As the scripture says, ‘Whoever believes in me, streams of life-giving water will pour out from his heart.’” If I had started praying for my brother after his first outburst of anger, and continued to seek the Lord's guidance, Jesus' *life-giving water* would have poured out of my heart. In time my brother calmed down, and he became more congenial, but still something was wrong. That something was alcoholism. Evidently he had suffered from it in various degrees of intensity throughout most of his adult life. This past year it got to the point where he could no longer be cared for at home. After a few months of professional care, he was able to return home. I pray that he will continue to recover and that the Lord will bless him with peace of mind.

Mercifully hear our prayers, O Lord, and spare all those who confess their sins to you; that those whose consciences are accused by sin may by your merciful pardon be absolved; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalms 7:6-11; Jeremiah 11:18-20; John 7:37-52

Monday in the Fifth Week of Lent - April 7, 2014

John 8:12 “Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”

Light is a hot commodity in Wisconsin during the winter months. The days are so very short when we find ourselves switching on the lamp lights earlier and earlier each day. Many people travel to work in the dark only to return home in the dark, never glimpsing the warmth of the sun. Many people suffer from seasonal depression issues because of the lack of light. I often find myself in bed much earlier than usual because the darkness makes me sleepy. During this time of year many people take trips to tropical places in order to spend some time basking in the light of the sun.

I have a visual impairment that, amongst other symptoms, causes night blindness. This is not just a “night-time” thing. Even during the daylight hours or in rooms with lighting it is as if I were wearing a very dark pair of sunglasses. Imagine a very sunny day and you have just entered your home from the outside while wearing dark sunglasses. It is very hard to see anything and takes time for your eyes to adjust even after removing your protective eye wear. This is what it is like for me at all times. Try to make a bed, do dishes, or walk stairs with the darkest sunglasses you can find and you will experience just a brief moment in my daily walk. I have discovered that the brighter the lights are in my surroundings the better I can see. When I am riding in a car at night, I cannot see anything but lights. I find myself searching out the lights of houses, the street lights, the oncoming cars or even staring at the dash board. I feel very uncomfortable when we are driving on country roads where there is little traffic or homes. Being in the dark can be a very scary and lonely feeling, and I especially do not like the darkest months of winter.

I have often imagined that this is what life would feel like, spiritually, if Christ were not the light of the world. I picture that world as dark, hopeless, lonely and full of fears. We would not know where to step, or how to maneuver safely. Fortunately, we have His light to lead the way. It is interesting to me, that when my spiritual or daily life is like a dark country road, I find myself searching restlessly for His light. I switch on the lamps of God’s word and pray that it is a light to my path. I find that when I do not follow Him, things become more difficult to see. My hope is that whenever I end up in these dark places I will go to church, a spiritual tropical paradise, to bask in the light of the Son. I rejoice in the thought that in repentance, worship and service God removes the dark sunglasses so that I can see clearly once again. Oh the joy in knowing that one day I will be in His presence and there will be no more darkness to hinder my way.

Be gracious to your people, we entreat you, O Lord, that they, repenting day by day of the things that displease you, may be more and more filled with love of you and of your commandments; and, being supported by your grace in this life, may come to the full enjoyment of eternal life in your everlasting kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 23; Susanna* 1-9,15-29, 34-62 or verses 41-62; John 8:1-11 or John 8:12-20

* In some Bibles, Daniel 13

Tuesday in the Fifth Week of Lent - April 8, 2014

Numbers 21:4 “From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way.”

Is it human nature to be so impatient? Why can't we wait?

Take notice of how news is broadcast these days. The networks learn that the president is planning to make an important policy speech. All the networks are chomping at the bit to get the essence of the announcement so they can broadcast that before the actual speech is delivered. I sometimes wonder why we listen to anything except what the newscasters have dredged up.

The credit card for decades has been the instrument of “we just can't wait.” Who saves money to make purchases today? All one needs is a sufficient credit limit, and off he or she goes to make the purchase. Buy now, pay for it later, much much later, at an ever increasing rate of interest.

One of the most ironic of ironies is a program NPR calls *Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me*. Mystery is not a valued commodity anymore. We need to know what is inside the box.

Gone are the days when couples would plan their baby's room in colors of green or some other gender-neutral color. Now it is imperative that we know the sex of our babies before they are born. That way, we tell ourselves, we can more appropriately plan for the child being either a boy or a girl.

A new phenomenon is the so-called payday loan. Can't wait a couple of days to receive our paycheck, which will be deposited into our checking account automatically. No, no, we must have the funds now. These new high-interest loans make it possible for us to get a loan on what will come to us in days; however, we can get it now.

I just love the JG Wentworth commercials, to wit: “If you have got a settlement, but need cash now. Call J.G. Wentworth, 877-CASH NOW.” The trained operatic-like singers make this a wonderful exercise in getting it now.

Why don't we consider waiting on the Lord? He is faithful and just, and in time, just in time, in my experience, he will come through. When we need him. Just wait.

Almighty God, through the incarnate Word you have caused us to be born anew of an imperishable and eternal seed: Look with compassion upon those who are being prepared for Holy Baptism, and grant that they may be built as living stones into a spiritual temple acceptable to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 102:15-22; Numbers 21:4-9; John 8:21-30

Wednesday in the Fifth Week of Lent - April 9, 2014

John 3:31-32 “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

The world pulls at us everyday. It says to ‘get more stuff.’ Get a HD television, an iPod, a laptop, or a new car that practically drives itself. Then there are the reality TV shows with people who supposedly have it all: money, style, and fame. Lying is no longer lying, but a different version of the truth. People who steal from charities to line their own pockets. Big businesses that crush the little guy to gain more profits. It’s hard to see all that is happening in the world around us.

I think that we need to remind ourselves that God gave us life, because he loves us. He wants us to have a good and happy life. He gave us a soul and free will. He gave us people who love us and taught us right from wrong. We all have a ‘moral compass.’ Sometimes we ignore that little voice inside of us or we don’t even hear it, but that doesn’t mean that we’re lost forever. God knew our hearts before we were born. He sees us fall, but he does give us everything we truly need and one of those is his strength. If we are truly sorry and change our ways, God will forgive our sins and welcome us back to the fold.

One image of God that I love the most is that of the ‘Good Shepard.’ God loves us, he cares for us and when we go astray, he seeks us out to return to him. He protects us.

Soon, we will celebrate God’s greatest gift to us; The suffering and death of his only son, for our sins, and because of his resurrection, the freedom to enter into paradise. I can’t speak for everyone, but for myself, that’s the “stuff” I want to gain: a place in heaven with the God who made me and loves me.

Almighty God our heavenly Father, renew in us the gifts of your mercy; increase our faith, strengthen our hope, enlighten our understanding, widen our charity, and make us ready to serve you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm Canticle 2 or 13; Daniel 3:14-20,24-28; John 8:31-42

Thursday in the Fifth Week of Lent - April 10, 2014

Psalm 105:4 "Seek the Lord and his strength, seek his presence continually."

SURELY THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD IS IN THIS PLACE

She stood in the middle of the aisle of the small church - pews close on the right and close on the left. She had cancer and was headed down that lonely path of treatment. The priest came forward to anoint her and lay hands on her. As he approached, he invited members of this close-knit congregation to come forward to participate in this Sacrament by also placing their hands on her. And so we did. Hands upon hands upon hands upon Sylvia. A powerful spiritual moment etched forever in my memory.

Sylvia joined the heavenly choir of angels not long after, knowing how loved she had been by her parish family here on earth.

Her husband, John, was the church organist and choir director. How often had we lifted our voices and sang the words of a beloved song?

"Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place,
I can feel His almighty power and His grace,
I can hear the brush of angels wings; I see glory on each face,
Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place." Lanny Wolfe

As I close my eyes and sing these words, I can still HEAR the brush of angel wings and I can still **feel** Sylvia's presence as well as God's.

How great a cloud of witnesses encompasses us around.

O God, you have called us to be your children, and have promised that those who suffer with Christ will be heirs with him of your glory: Arm us with such trust in him that we may ask no rest from his demands and have no fear in his service; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 105:4-11; Genesis 17:1-8; John 8:51-59

Friday in the Fifth Week of Lent - April 11, 2014

John 10:31-34 “The Jewish leaders picked up rocks again to stone him to death. Jesus said to them, “I have shown you many good deeds from the Father. For which of these are you going to stone me?” The Jewish leaders replied, “We are not going to stone you for the good deed, but for blasphemy, because you, a man, are claiming to be God.” Jesus answered, “Is it not written in your law, ‘I thought, You are gods: all of you are sons of the Most High.’”

In 1995 I went to see a movie, *Dead Man Walking*. In it Susan Sarandon portrays Sister Helen Prejean, a Catholic nun who ministers to the convicted killer, Mathew Poncelet. He is on death row in Louisiana. Sean Penn brilliantly and believably plays the part of a man who has brutally murdered a young couple. The movie is based on a true story. It knocked my socks off.

In the movie I was looking for a shred of decency in Matthew. He denies his guilt repeatedly. He appears to be evil incarnate. Sister Helen persists and ministers to him until he finally confesses and is remorseful. He is then executed. It is a three hankie movie.

Jesus’ answer ‘I said you are gods; all of you are sons of the Most High,’ comes from Psalm 82:6. When the leaders want to stone Jesus for blasphemy he doesn’t deny their claim. He has called himself the Son of God. He raises the possibility that his opponents should be making the same claim. If they are living the life of God in the world isn’t God within them? He discredits their charge of blasphemy by quoting Hebrew scripture, the Law. Jesus has to sneak out of Jerusalem. His time has not yet come.

I love the belief of there being Divinity in all of us. It is at times difficult to see, but Sister Helen Prejean could see it in the worst of us. I can see it sometimes, in a newborn’s eyes or in the kindness of others. Jesus believed it was there. He sacrificed his life to show us. I was delighted in today’s reading that this idea goes back to the psalms. The prayer of St. Teresa of Avila so perfectly states:

Christ has no body now, but yours.
No hands, no feet on earth, but yours.
Yours are the eyes through which
Christ looks compassion into the world.
Yours are the feet
with which Christ walks to do good.
Yours are the hands
with which Christ blesses the world.”

O Lord, you relieve our necessity out of the abundance of your great riches: Grant that we may accept with joy the salvation you bestow, and manifest it to all the world by the quality of our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Psalm 18:1-7; Jeremiah 20:7-13; John 10:31-42

Saturday in the Fifth Week of Lent - April 12, 2014

Psalm 85:7 – Show us your steadfast love, O Lord, and grant us your salvation.

Many times in my past I've felt a strong presence of God in my life. The first time I remember was when I was in my teens, and being home alone one Sunday afternoon watching an evangelism program on TV. At the end of the program I followed their direction to pray to God and ask Him to fill me with His Holy Spirit. I don't know what I expected to happen, but a feeling of warmth, peace and love filled me. I had trouble believing what was happening to me at the time, but I remember it vividly to this day.

My dad was a very special person. He was diagnosed with liver cancer when he was in his 80's. I would spend weekends with my parents to help my mom take care of him. I don't remember when he was diagnosed, but I remember wanting him to live until at least Thanksgiving. One morning at the end of October I opened my book of prayers randomly and started praying for Dad. At the end of the prayer it somehow stated that it was okay to go. I reread it and said "no, not yet," but my heart said "yes, it's okay to go." Tears came to my eyes and my heart ached for what would happen. I went to work and an hour or so later I got a call from Mom to tell me that Dad had died. It was God's time to take him home, and I had to be glad for him.

I have been to many spiritual events and have experienced the over powering presence of the Holy Spirit guiding me and filling me. There are times when I don't pay attention or just walk away, but as I look back on my life and experiences, there have been more times than not that I have been open to His direction. The above are just two examples of the many times I listened.

Be open to His presence and He will show you His steadfast love, and grant you salvation.

O Lord, in your goodness you bestow abundant graces on your elect: Look with favor, we entreat you, upon those who in these Lenten days are being prepared for Holy Baptism, and grant them the help of your protection; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 85:1-7; Ezekiel 37:21-28; John 11:45-53

Monday in Holy Week - April 14, 2014

2 Corinthians 1:2-3 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God.”

Foolishness to the wise. “My daddy used to say that man is getting wiser but weaker.” We certainly have learned to exploit our world in so many ways. We have cracked the genome code. Not sure what that means to us, but I think it has to do with giving us, ultimately, a better and longer life, as we control illnesses, diseases, deformities, and the like.

We know that God has blessed his creatures with memory, reason, and skill, and who can be surprised that we have been able to make so many advances? Our lives have gotten more comfortable, in general. We do actually live longer. And, we have conquered many maladies that have affected the human race. There is, obviously, much more to be done, but it certainly looks promising.

Sin is still in the world, and it has manifested itself in ways that have brought misery to countless people. It has led to warfare among peoples of the world. Even though the world is freer of war than it has been in centuries, there is sufficient unrest to keep misery in the forefront.

Despite all our advances, we still get injured, sometimes resulting in permanent disfiguration and the like. We still have only a given life expectancy and then we die. All those kinds of things bring sadness and hurt to us the survivors. We try to make sense of tragedy. We ask, in so many cases, “Where is God? Why did he not intervene? Does he even care about what’s happening in the world?”

There is a saying that God indicated that he did not promise to keep us from the storm, rather he promised to be with us in the storm. The words of Paul are true and worthy to be assimilated by us all. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction.” That’s the truth on which all our hope is couched, that God indeed does console us in all our afflictions.

So, though we cannot “fix” everything, though we don’t always have all the answers, though some things are beyond our capabilities to repair or make right, we know there is a God who does more for us than we can imagine. And, doesn’t that give us the property we need to console others that may be in pain?

Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified: Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 51:1-18(19-20) or 69:1-23; Lamentations 1:1-2, 6-12; 2 Corinthians 1:1-7; Mark 11:12-25

Tuesday in Holy Week - April 15, 2014

Psalm 94:22 "... my God protects me."

Every since I was young, somehow I knew that God protected me. I did not have the same nuclear family that my friends had. My father was in the Army, in fact he was in the Korean Conflict. I never understood why it was not called a war. People were dying. My mother was in college in another state. I lived with my grandmother. I had to walk a very long way to school. I was to walk with some of the neighborhood students to school but they thought it was more fun to run ahead and leave me to walk alone. I was never afraid because I had learned in Sunday School that God protects us. I remembered a card that we were given in Sunday School. It was a picture of little children walking across a bridge with an angel walking behind them keeping them safe. As the others ran ahead, I imagined God's angel walking behind me. The innocence of a child understood the adage "be not afraid" and I wasn't.

As an adolescent, I was good at testing God's protection by my foolish, unsafe choices. I lived in the suburbs which meant that there were no buses into our neighborhood. The buses stopped a mile or more from my house. There were wooded lots along the way and houses set three to four car lengths back from the sidewalk. The houses had patios and screened porches on the back of the houses so there was no activity in the front of the homes. I would attend the high school football games with my friends. I lived the farthest out and would be the last person on the bus. When the bus line ended, I was to get off of the bus and get a taxi cab home. The adolescent mind, whose executive processing center is not functioning during the high school years, said to me keep the taxi money and walk home. God protects babies and fools. I was not a baby.

I was working at church early one evening. My husband was at a vestry meeting. I had taken our children with me as I worked in the Sunday School building preparing materials for the Sunday school teachers. I needed to go over to the church to copy some worksheets. My kids did not want to come with me they wanted to stay in the all purpose room to play. Many church people were around, I thought they would be safe. I locked the door and went over to the other building, resting assured that the kids were fine. From the work room, I overheard that a man had been found wandering around in the Sunday School building. Oh, my God, my children were in the that building. I rushed out screaming that my kids were in there. The parishioner reported that my kids were safe. It seems someone had unlocked the door to the building and the man walked into the building. The kids were unaware of the strangers intrusion and that he had been ushered out quickly and quietly. The building had been unlocked inadvertently. When we are unaware that we need to be protected, God has already taken care of us and kept us and our love ones safe. I am sure God's guardian angel was with my children.

. . . my God protects me and He protects you and yours, as well.

O God, by the passion of your blessed Son you made an instrument of shameful death to be for us the means of life: Grant us so to glory in the cross of Christ, that we may gladly suffer shame and loss for the sake of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 6, 12 or 94; Lamentations 1:17-22; 2 Corinthians 1:8-22; Mark 11:27-33

Wednesday in Holy Week - April 16, 2014

Psalm 55:1 – “Hear my prayer, O God; don’t turn away from my plea!”

We, like the psalmist, ask God to hear our prayers and to not turn away from our pleas. We ask Him to hear our prayers in many situations. Certainly we pray for his mercy and healing in our personal lives and, indeed, for the whole world. Everyday we see and hear of all kinds of evil and we ask, “Why doesn’t God put an end to all this? Doesn’t He see what is happening to innocent people? Doesn’t He care?” Are there answers to these questions? I believe there are and that *we* can make a difference. God isn’t turning a deaf ear, but we have to do our part. First of all, we need to allow God to work through us. We can do this by being true disciples of Jesus Christ. To do this, we *must* accept His teachings even if they are not what or how *we* think things should be, and we must guard against being misled by anything contrary to Christ’s teachings. We need to ask ourselves, “*What would Jesus do?*”

A large part of our discipleship involves making decisions. We are besieged with making decisions. We need to make personal and family decisions concerning relationships, religion, health, and the list could go on and on. We need to make decisions in our work place. Do we need more education or training? Should we seek a better job? Again, the list could go on and on. What about our church? Should we get more involved or less involved? Our local, state, and federal governments need our input. Which programs and laws are in line with God’s love for everyone and which ones are not? We need to turn to the New Testament for the answers and pray for the perseverance to follow through on the guidance we receive. Then we can overcome evil. In Romans 12:21, we read, “Do not let evil defeat you; but instead, conquer evil with good.”

Lord God, whose blessed Son our Savior gave his body to be whipped and his face to be spit upon: Give us grace to accept joyfully the sufferings of the present time, confident of the glory that shall be revealed; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 55 or 74; Lamentations 2:1-9; 2 Corinthians 1:23—2:11; Mark 12:1-11

Maundy Thursday - April 17, 2014

Mark 14:25 “Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

When I saw that the reading for today was none other than the one about our Holy Eucharist, I was a bit overwhelmed. What could I possibly say that hasn't already been said? How could I ever come up with the words to express what it means to our Christian faith? I have prayed and struggled with this particular scripture reflection for many weeks now. Although this particular scripture does not say “Do this in remembrance of me,” it is in the Luke version of the last supper. It is also in our collect for today and it is what has popped into my mind every time I have read the scripture in the last few weeks.

My dad passed away 19 years ago when he was only 44 years old. To say that his loss profoundly affected me would be an understatement. His loss was felt so deeply that there were times when I did not think I could live with the pain and sorrow that was left behind. In Mark 14:25 Jesus is telling his disciples that he is leaving very soon. I wonder if they really understood or if it sunk into their minds what he was saying. If my dad had been able to tell me that his body would reject his heart transplant and that he would be leaving soon, would it have made any difference in the feeling of loss, or would I have even taken it seriously? I am not sure of the answer to this, but it does make me contemplate the feelings of the disciples as they ate what would be their last supper with someone they loved. If my dad had said that this would be our last spaghetti dinner together and that he would not eat it again until he was in the kingdom of God, would I have hushed him and said “Don't talk like that?” Were these the feelings of Jesus' loved ones? I am not sure but if dad had said to eat spaghetti every week to remember him, I would have lovingly done so.

Most weeks you will find me kneeling in the same pew that my dad knelt in with my family. Quite often, I could swear that he is still next to me. I picture him patting my back or even giving me that scowl that said if I did not stop wiggling there would be a stern lecture coming my way. My dad's love for God was so beautiful that it strongly influenced my choice to love and worship God too. I think that that is ultimately what happened with the disciples. Their love was so beautiful that once shared it was passed on over and over again to bring us to this day where Christianity has grown so vastly.

When I kneel down at the altar railing and partake in a meal of bread and wine there is so much more there than if I were having a weekly spaghetti dinner in memory of my dad. We believe that His Spirit is with us. For me, it is not only a reminder of the Passion, but a reminder that I am a part of a body. I remember that we are to work together to be the whole body of Christ in this world, while he is in the kingdom of heaven. We are his body, doing his works and bringing his plans to fruition. I receive His presence and am reminded that I am one with all those across the world who are also a part of His body. I feel connected to Him and to all who have knelt both past and present and shared in this community, in this communion, and in this one body of God.

Almighty Father, whose dear Son, on the night before he suffered, instituted the Sacrament of his Body and Blood: Mercifully grant that we may receive it thankfully in remembrance of Jesus Christ our Lord, who in these holy mysteries gives us a pledge of eternal life; and who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 102 Or 142, 143; Lamentations 2:10-18; 1 Corinthians 10:14-17; 11:27-32; Mark 14:12-25

Good Friday - April 18, 2014

John 13:38 “Jesus answered, ‘Will you lay down your life for me? Very truly, I tell you, before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times.’”

We understand very well how this passage applies to and is reflective of Simon Peter. This same Peter claimed that he would fight valiantly for his master, but as scripture reports, Peter did exactly as the Lord Jesus had predicted he would do.

Writers of these meditations love to say that we deny the Lord; they even go so far, in some cases, to say that we crucified the Lord. Well, I don’t know about you, but I am no Roman. I am not responsible for his death and I have not denied him. Is that really true? Think about it.

Jesus tells us that we are to give a person our shirt if that person has taken our coat. He tells us that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. He goes further to say that the blessed on the last day will be those that fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the sick and prisoners. We bemoan the country providing healthcare for all her citizens, denouncing such practices in any number of ways, particularly as socialistic. We refuse to give a tithe of our income to God, or even to give proportionately. The abbreviated form SMH comes to mind when I hear those evangelistic Christians spout, “I love the Lord.” And yet, they do not love their neighbors as that same Jesus loves them.

In such cases, could we say that such people are denying the Lord? Do we hear the Lord responding, “I don’t know you?” Peter was guilty of denying his lord and master three times on that eventful Friday in Palestine. How many times over our lifetime have we denied the Lord? Peter was a good man. He was somewhat zealous. He certainly loved the Lord. Indeed associating with Jesus, he put himself in harm’s way, to wit: “You, too, were with him.”

Over a period of time I have come to reflect on one question. It bears on this whole notion of denial of our Lord Jesus Christ. That question is this: If being a follower of Jesus became against the law, would enough evidence exist against you to convict you in a court of law?

Jesus was faithful to the will of the Father all the way to the cross, even death on a cross. Is our faith strong enough that we will never deny him in our lives and as we interact with others in this world? Peter was strong in his belief in the man Jesus, leaving his job and his wife and family to travel around the countryside with Jesus. Yet, he denied him thrice.

Almighty God, we pray you graciously to behold this your family, for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed, and given into the hands of sinners, and to suffer death upon the cross; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 95* and 22 or 40:1-14(15-19), 54; Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-33; 1 Peter 1:10-20; John 13:36-38** or John 19:38-42***

* For the Invitatory ** Intended for use in the morning *** Intended for use in the evening

Holy Saturday - April 19, 2014

Psalm 88:7 “You have laid me in the depths of the Pit, in dark places, and in the abyss.”

On September 11, 2001, some terrorists commandeered several jet aircraft. Then two of them flew those commercial airplanes into two structures that had reached into the heavens. Those intentional crashes caused those buildings to collapse killing thousands and injuring countless others. The people of the United States of America stood dumbfounded and so many of us were simply numb. Alan Jackson asked a simple question in a song he composed in response to this tragedy: “Where were you when the world stopped turning?”

Rewinding some 21 centuries, there were two men walking home, having spent a few days in Jerusalem where they witnessed some horrific events. The man they and many others thought was the one that would lead the Jews into a new reality had been killed. The man they thought was the anointed one of God was crucified like a common criminal.

Many present at his execution taunted the man hanging on the cross, the man who answered affirmatively the high priest’s question that he was the messiah of God. They said to this man, “You saved others, save yourself.” Others told him to come down from the cross and they would believe him. All along, this man had told his disciples on several occasions what was going to happen to him in Jerusalem. He tried to reassure them that he would be raised from the dead, but they did not comprehend what he was saying to them.

Following an uncharacteristically short time to die, the man hanging between two criminals who obviously deserved the treatment they were receiving commended his spirit to God the Father. He died and some of his followers took his body and buried it, placing it in a new tomb where the dead man would lie forever. At least that was the prevailing thought about his death.

The men walking to Emmaus expressed the same gloom and doom and despair that had grappled so many of the man’s former disciples. Clearly a darkness had descended upon those who thought they had seen a great light shine into their lives. Many lost hope. We can hear them saying, “We thought he was the one.” Surely some thought the world had stopped turning. The song asking the pertinent question for that time is “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?”

O God, Creator of heaven and earth: Grant that, as the crucified body of your dear Son was laid in the tomb and rested on this holy Sabbath, so we may await with him the coming of the third day, and rise with him to newness of life; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 95* and 88 or 27; Lamentations 3:37-58; Hebrews 4:1-16**; Romans 8:1-11***

* For the Invitatory ** Intended for use in the morning *** Intended for use in the evening