

A warm, golden-toned photograph of a hand lighting candles on a cake. The hand is in the foreground, reaching towards a row of lit candles. The background is softly blurred, showing more candles and a warm, bokeh light effect. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

Opening our hearts & minds

LENT 2017

WEEKLY REFLECTIONS FOR YEAR A

A Lenten Litany

When loved ones experience pain and suffering.

Remind us that your love is with us.

When illness, aging or chronic pain diminish our joy.

Remind us that your love is with us.

When doubts arise and confusion fills our minds.

Remind us that your love is with us.

When others fail us or refuse to forgive us for our failings.

Remind us that your love is with us.

When we stumble and stray from the path of goodness.

Remind us that your love is with us.

When death separates us from those we love dearly.

Remind us that your love is with us.

When financial problems threaten our security.

Remind us that your love is with us.

When things do not go the way we planned.

Remind us that your love is with us.

When depression or loneliness return again and again.

Remind us that your love is with us.

When broken relationships seem unmendable.

Remind us that your love is with us.

When our faith strengthens and gives us courage.

Remind us that your love is with us.

When the precious gift of life is recognised and appreciated.

Remind us that your love is with us.

When unexpected kindness and caring comes our way.

Remind us that your love is with us.

When optimism stirs in our heart and springtime returns.

Remind us that your love is with us.

When the peace of Christ calms our anxiety and softens our sadness.

Remind us that your love is with us.

When we realize that our loving presence can make a difference.

Remind us that your love is with us.

When the joy of Easter quietly permeates our heart.

Remind us that your love is with us.



LENT 2017

OPENING OUR HEARTS AND MINDS

These reflections are offered for individual and group use.
Each reflection has the Sunday gospel as its focus and is structured as follows:

1 BE STILL



A way of being invited into a sacred space for reflection is to light a candle. It may be appropriate to have a cross or another symbol to assist with this. A suggested song to commence is *Stay with Me*, the sentiment of which is drawn from Matthew's passion reading. A simple gathering prayer is offered and then the gospel.

2 THE GOSPEL



Ponder

The Sunday Lenten gospel readings provide many riches for contemplation and conversation. The approach offered here is to read the gospel, note key phrases and words that speak to the reader and then read the gospel in a contemplative manner a second time. (Given the length of some Lenten gospels, it may be appropriate to pause at key moments in the reading to allow for reflection.) After this second reading other thoughts may rise in the heart of the reader or there may be a stronger connection with the initial reaction. If time permits, a third reading of the gospel may be appropriate. If working with a group this could then be followed by a conversation about the ideas and thoughts raised in the minds of the readers.

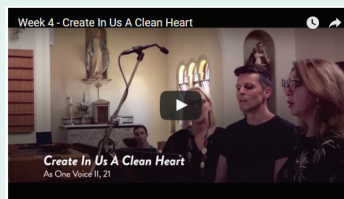
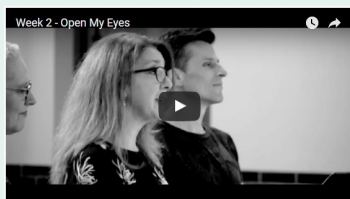
Reflect

A short reflection is offered about an aspect of the gospel which may assist the reader in their focus for the relevant week of lent.

3 RESPOND



A suggested song could provide a way of drawing together some of the thoughts arising from the focus on the gospel and then a short prayer is provided as a starting point. The hymns and songs referred to come with their corresponding references and some have also been recorded. These videos will be uploaded each week and can be viewed/listened to on the Archbishop's Office for Evangelisation website: www.cam.org.au/evangelisation.





BE STILL

Light a candle as a reminder of God's presence. You may wish to have a visual reminder of wilderness with a collection of greenery as a prayer focus.



Sing

Stay with me, remain here with me
Watch and pray, watch and pray.
(CWB II 317; GA 325)

Gathering Prayer

God of mercy and compassion,
As we enter this time of Lent,
Grant that our hearts and minds may
become more attentive to your presence
in our lives. Amen.

THE GOSPEL

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew:

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, after which he was very hungry, and the tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to turn into loaves.' But he replied, 'Scripture says:

*Man does not live on bread alone
but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'*

Then the devil took him to the holy city and made him stand on the parapet of the Temple. 'If you are the Son of God,' he said, 'throw yourself down; for scripture says:

*He will put you in his angel's charge,
and they will support you on their hands
in case you hurt your foot against a stone.'*

Jesus said to him, Scripture also says: 'You must not put the Lord your God to the test.'

Next, taking him to a very high mountain, the devil showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. 'I will give you all these,' he said, 'if you fall at my feet and worship me.'

Then Jesus replied, 'Be off, Satan! For Scripture says: You must worship the Lord your God, and serve him alone.'

Then the devil left him and the angels appeared and looked after him. •

MT 4:1-11



Ponder

What words or phrases struck you from this passage?

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Re-read the Gospel. From the above, which is the one word or phrase that stays with you? Share your thoughts.

Reflect

Walking through markets such as the market in the Old City in Jerusalem or the Grand Bazaar in Istanbul, it is not unusual to see charms or talismans. A black eye is usually set in the midst of a blue background and these charms come in a range of forms – as earrings, bracelets, door charms and so on. These blue talismans are believed to offer protection against the 'evil eye' or the evil spirit.

This practice stems from very early times. Our ancestors had a rich sense of a spirit world. For them the world was full of spirits – both good and bad – and there was a sense that the spirits delved in and out of the human world. It helped to make meaning out of good and bad experiences. It was thought that the wilderness was the home to the spirits and in this passage from Matthew we read about Jesus battling against a bad spirit in the wilderness. Jesus goes into battle with a scripture-quoting bad spirit by also quoting scripture. On three occasions Jesus repelled any temptation to work against the will of God, his Father. His three rebuttals are drawn from the Book of Deuteronomy:

- Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God (8:3)
- You must not put the Lord your God to the test (6:16)
- You must worship the Lord your God, and serve him alone (6:13).

Jesus was indeed the Beloved Son, with whom God was well-pleased.

Perhaps this passage is encouraging us to reflect on times in our lives when we have turned away, or been tempted to turn away, from God. And perhaps the Lenten practices of fasting, almsgiving and prayer can help us with this.

- What do I need to let go of so that I am more able to turn towards God during this Lenten period?

RESPOND



Sing

Be with me Lord when I am in trouble,
be with me Lord I pray (GA 53)
or read Psalm 91.

Pray

Lord, during this holy retreat time of Lent, help us to focus more closely on you and listen attentively to the whisperings of your spirit in our lives. Amen.

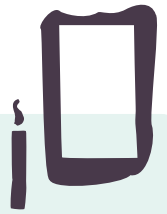




BE STILL

Light a candle as a reminder of God's presence.

You may wish to have an icon showing the divinity of Jesus as a prayer focus.



Sing

Stay with me, remain here with me
Watch and pray, watch and pray.
(CWB II 317; GA 325)

Gathering Prayer

God of mercy and compassion,
As we enter this second week of Lent,
Grant that we are able to see more clearly
your presence in our lives.
Amen.

THE GOSPEL

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew:

Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain where they could be alone. There in their presence he was transfigured; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became as white as light. Suddenly Moses and Elijah appeared to them; they were talking with him. Then Peter spoke to Jesus. 'Lord,' he said, 'it is wonderful for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.' He was still speaking when suddenly a bright cloud covered them with shadow, and from the cloud there came a voice which said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; he enjoys my favour. Listen to him.' When they heard this, the disciples fell on their faces, overcome with fear. But Jesus came up and touched them. 'Stand up,' he said, 'do not be afraid.' And when they raised their eyes they saw no one but only Jesus.

As they came down from the mountain Jesus gave them this order. 'Tell no one about the vision until the Son of Man has risen from the dead.' •



MT 17:1-9

Ponder

What words or phrases struck you from this passage?

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Re-read the Gospel. From the above, which is the one word or phrase that stays with you? Share your thoughts.

Reflect

Important things happen on mountains! Matthew's Jesus is tempted, teaches, prays, heals, is transfigured and directs the disciples to a mountain in Galilee where they have a resurrection experience. Aside from mountains being part of the lived reality of the Israelites, our ancestors believed that God lived in the heavens. To be on a mountain top was a sign of being close to God. We read in the bible that on occasions when key biblical people are on a mountain they hear the voice of God.

This week we read that Jesus gathers his close friends, Peter, James and John, and leads them up a mountain where they are joined by Moses and Elijah – two luminous figures from the Jewish tradition. This passage is preceded by Jesus' foretelling of his suffering, death and resurrection. The momentum is building in Matthew's gospel as the consequences for Jesus' ministry are starting to be realised. Something new about Jesus is revealed to Peter, James and John on the mountain top.

- Do you have a 'mountain top' – a place where you hear more clearly the voice of God?
- Who would be on your mountain top with you?
- What do you think was going on in the hearts of Peter, James and John when they received this revelation about Jesus?
- Have you had the experience of suddenly seeing someone in a totally different light? Share your thoughts.

Perhaps, in wanting to build three tents, Peter is expressing a desire to stay in the moment and to hold on to his experience. Have there been times when you have found it hard to move on or let go of something or someone?

- What can we do to transform ourselves in order to orient towards God during this holy pause of Lent?

RESPOND



Sing

Open my eyes
(AOV I, 166; CWB II, 582)

Pray

God of mercy, strengthen us in our desire to continue on the Lenten journey with Jesus by living more prayerfully, simply and generously. Amen.





BE STILL

Light a candle as a reminder of God's presence.
You may wish to have a bowl of water as a prayer focus.



Sing

Stay with me, remain here with me
Watch and pray, watch and pray.
(CWB II 317; GA 325)

Gathering Prayer

God of mercy and compassion,
As we enter this third week of Lent,
Grant that we are able to more deeply
understand what it is you ask of us
in our lives. Amen.



THE GOSPEL

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John:

Jesus came to a Samaritan town called Sychar, near the land that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there and Jesus, tired by the journey, sat straight down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink.' His disciples had gone into town to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, 'What? You are a Jew and you ask me, a Samaritan, for a drink?' Jews, in fact do not associate with Samaritans. Jesus replied: 'If you only knew what God is offering and who it is that is saying to you: Give me a drink, you would have been the one to ask, and he would have given you living water.' 'You have no bucket, sir,' she answered, 'and the well is deep: how could you get this living water? Are you a greater man than our father Jacob who gave us this well and drank from it himself with his sons and his cattle?'

Jesus replied, 'Whoever drinks this water will get thirsty again; but anyone who drinks the water that I shall give will never be thirsty again: the water that I shall give will turn into a spring inside him, welling up to eternal life.' •

JN 4:5-42 (SHORTENED VERSION)

Ponder

What words or phrases struck you from this passage?

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Re-read the Gospel. From the above, which is the one word or phrase that stays with you? Share your thoughts.

Reflect

Our lives are filled with stories. In 2009, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a writer and storyteller, gave a Ted talk: 'The danger of the single story'*. Ms Adichie grew up on

a university campus in eastern Nigeria and in the talk (which has been viewed over 11 million times), she explains how the repeating of the single story about a person or race can lead to stereotyping and a risk of misunderstanding. The stereotype can show a people as one thing, over and over again and while it is not untrue, it is incomplete.

She tells the story about a time from her childhood when a houseboy – as was customary for middle class families in Nigeria – came to live with her family. Her mother told her that this boy was poor and she would give food and clothes to the boy's family. Then, they visited his family. At the visit, the boy's mother showed them a basket that one of her other sons had made. This shifted the story about this family from being one about being poor to one that included the family's capacity for creativity and generativity.

Perhaps shattering the idea of the 'single story' is something that Jesus did throughout his ministry. His encounters with the unexpected – like the Samaritan woman in this week's gospel – demonstrate that Jesus can read the complexity of people's stories and he took them into his heart.

Perhaps we see the Samaritan woman approaching Jesus with her 'single story' about Jewish men. But Jesus was connected with her and her story. Jesus' understanding of the Samaritan woman's world and her place in it called forth a profound response. Jesus accompanied the Samaritan woman on a journey of faith.

- Do I need to open my heart and mind beyond a 'single story' about someone or something at the moment?
- What is it that I am being offered by God?
- What do I want to ask of Jesus at this moment in my life?
- What is welling up from deep within you that you can bring to prayer this week?

*WATCH VIDEO: https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story

RESPOND

Sing

Bless the Lord, my soul, and bless God's holy name.
Bless the Lord, my soul, who leads me into life.
(AOV II, 142) © 1985, Ateliers et Presses de Taizé



Pray

Use Sunday's Gospel Acclamation for prayer this week:
Lord, you are truly the Saviour of the world;
give me living water that I may never thirst again.





BE STILL

Light a candle as a reminder of God's presence. You may wish to have a paste of water mixed with ash as a prayer focus.



Sing

Stay with me, remain here with me
Watch and pray, watch and pray.
(CWB II 317; GA 325)

Gathering Prayer

God of mercy and compassion,
As we enter this fourth week of Lent,
Grant that through our efforts to live
more simply, generously and prayerfully,
we will be able to see more clearly your
purpose for our lives. Amen.

THE GOSPEL

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John:

As Jesus went along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, for him to have been born blind?' 'Neither he nor his parents sinned,' Jesus answered 'he was born blind so that the works of God might be displayed in him.'

'As long as the day lasts I must carry out the work of the one who sent me; the night will soon be here when no one can work. As long as I am in the world I am the light of the world.'

Having said this, he spat on the ground, made a paste with the spittle, put this over the eyes of the blind man and said to him, 'Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam' (a name that means 'sent'). So the blind man went off and washed himself, and came away with his sight restored.

His neighbours and people who had earlier seen him begging said, 'Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?' Some said, 'Yes, it is the same one.' Others said, 'No, he only looks like him.' The man himself said, 'I am the man.' So they said to him, 'Then how do your eyes come to be open?' 'The man called Jesus', he answered, 'made a paste, daubed my eyes with it and said to me, "Go and wash at Siloam", so I went, and when I washed I could see.' They asked 'Where is he?' 'I don't know' he answered.

They brought the man who had been blind to the Pharisees. It had been a Sabbath day when Jesus made the paste and opened the man's eyes, so when the Pharisees asked him how he had come to see, he said, 'He put paste on my eyes, and I washed, and I can see.' Then some Pharisees said, 'This man cannot be from God: he does not keep the Sabbath'. Others said, 'How could a sinner produce signs like this?' And there was disagreement among them. So they spoke to the blind man again. 'What have you to say about him yourself, now that he has opened your eyes?' 'He is a prophet,' replied the man.

However, the Jews would not believe that the man had been blind and had gained his sight, without first sending for his parents and asking them, 'Is this man really your son who you say was born blind? If so how is it that he is now able to see?' His parents answered, 'We know he is our son and we know he was born blind, but we don't know how it is that he can see now, or who opened his eyes. He is old enough: let him speak for himself.' His parents spoke like this out of fear of the Jews,

who had already agreed to expel from the synagogue anyone who should acknowledge Jesus as the Christ. This was why his parents said, 'He is old enough: ask him.'

So the Jews again sent for the man and said to him, Give glory to God! For our part, we know that this man is a sinner.' The man answered, 'I don't know if he is a sinner; I only know that I was blind and now I can see.' They said to him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?' He replied, 'I have told you once and you wouldn't listen. Why do you want to hear it all again? Do you want to become his disciples too?' At this they hurled abuse at him: 'You can be his disciple', they said, 'we are disciples of Moses: we know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this man, we don't where he comes from.' The man replied, 'Now here is an astonishing thing! He has opened my eyes and you don't know where he comes from! We know that God doesn't listen to sinners, but God does listen to men who are devout and do his will. Ever since the world began it is unheard of for anyone to open the eyes of a man who was born blind; if this man were not from God, he couldn't do a thing'.

'Are you trying to teach us,' they replied, 'and you a sinner through and through, since you were born!' And they drove him away.

Jesus heard they had driven him away, and when he found him he said to him, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' 'Sir,' the man said to him, 'tell me who he is so that I may believe in him.' Jesus said, 'You are looking at him; he is speaking to you.' The man said, 'Lord, I believe' and worshipped him.

Jesus said: 'It is for judgement that I have come into this world, so that those without sight may see and those with sight turn blind.' Hearing this, some Pharisees who were present said to him, 'We are not blind, surely?' Jesus replied: 'Blind? If you were, you would not be guilty, but since you say, "We see", your guilt remains.' •

JN 9:1-41



continued overleaf >

THE GOSPEL (CONTINUED)

Ponder

What words or phrases struck you from this passage?

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Re-read the Gospel. From the above, which is the one word or phrase that stays with you? Share your thoughts.

Reflect

Many people in the working world would have had the experience of a teambuilding game involving the use of blindfolds. A person is selected to wear a blindfold and then has to rely on a sighted person to undertake a range of movements and activities. It can be a strangely disconcerting experience being in the dark ...

- Take a moment to think about what it feels like to be 'in the dark'.

This week we are invited to reflect on physical and metaphorical blindness. Perhaps the journey of the blind man in his understanding about Jesus mirrors the ebb and flow of our own lives in relationship with God and Jesus. Firstly, the blind man responds by naming Jesus and describing the physical act which enabled him to regain his sight. Then, under further questioning by the Pharisees

and under great threat, he acknowledges Jesus as a prophet. A final personal encounter with Jesus calls forth the response of belief in Jesus, the Son of Man.

All the while the non-believers provide a malevolent backdrop to the story of belief.

- Matthew Henry (1662-1714) was an English clergyman and writer. He is credited with coining the phrase: '*None so blind as those that will not see*'. Have there been times in my life when I have been unable to see?
- What has prompted the true opening of my mind and heart?
- What do I see that is of God in my life at the moment?
- How should I live my life as a disciple?

Acknowledging Jesus as the Christ brought a great risk to the blind man – and to his family.

- Are there any risks associated with believing in the contemporary world?

RESPOND



Sing

Create in us a clean heart
(AOV II, 21)

Pray

'I am the light of the world, says the Lord;
Whoever follows me will have the light of life.'





BE STILL

Light a candle as a reminder of God's presence.

Sing

Stay with me, remain here with me
Watch and pray, watch and pray.
(CWB II 317; GA 325)

Gathering Prayer

God of mercy and compassion,
In this, the final week of Lent,
enable us to let go of anything that is
preventing us from living life to the full.
Amen.



THE GOSPEL



A reading from the holy Gospel according to John:

There was a man named Lazarus who lived in the village of Bethany with two sisters, Mary and Martha, and he was ill. It was the same Mary, the sister of the sick man Lazarus, who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair.

The sisters Martha and Mary sent this message to Jesus, 'Lord, the man you love is ill.' On receiving the message, Jesus said, 'This sickness will not end in death but in God's glory, and through it the Son of God will be glorified.' Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, yet when he heard that Lazarus was ill he stayed where he was for two more days before saying to the disciples, 'Let us go to Judaea'.

The disciples said, 'Rabbi, it is not long since the Jews wanted to stone you; are you going back again?' Jesus replied:

'Are there not twelve hours in the day?
A man can walk in the day-time without stumbling
Because he has the light of this world to see by;
But if he walks at night he stumbles
Because there is no light to guide him.'

He said that and then added, 'Our friend Lazarus is resting, I am going to wake him.' The disciples said to him 'Lord, if he is able to rest he is sure to get better.' The phrase Jesus used referred to the death of Lazarus, but they thought that by 'rest' he meant 'sleep', so Jesus put it plainly, 'Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there because now you will believe. But let us go to him.' Then Thomas – known as the Twin – said to the other disciples, 'Let us go too, and die with him.'

On arriving, Jesus found that Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days already. Bethany is only about two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to sympathise with them over their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus had come she went to meet him. Mary remained sitting in the house. Martha said to Jesus, 'If you had been here, my brother would not have died, but I know that, even now, whatever you ask of God, he will grant you.'

'Your brother,' Jesus said to her, 'will rise again.' Martha said, 'I know he will rise again at the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said:

'I am the resurrection and the life. If anyone believes in me, even though he dies, he will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' 'Yes Lord', she said, 'I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who has come into this world.'

When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in a low voice, 'The Master is here and wants to see you.' Hearing this, Mary got up quickly and went to him. Jesus had not yet come into the village; he was still at the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who were in the house sympathizing with Mary saw her get up so quickly and go out, they followed her, thinking that she was going to the tomb to weep there.

Mary went to Jesus, and as soon as she saw him she threw herself at his feet, saying, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' At the sight of her tears, and those of the Jews who followed her, Jesus said in great distress, with a sigh that came straight from the heart, 'Where have you put him?' Still sighing, Jesus reached the tomb: it was a cave with a stone to close the opening. Jesus said, 'Take the stone away.' Martha said to him, 'Lord, by now he will smell; this is the fourth day.' Jesus replied, 'Have I not told you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?' So they took away the stone. Then Jesus lifted up his eyes and said:

'Father, I thank you for hearing my prayer.
I knew indeed that you always hear me.
But I speak for the sake of all these who stand round me,
so that they may believe it was you who sent me.'

When he had said this, he cried in a loud voice, 'Lazarus, here! Come out!' The dead man came out, his feet and hands bound with bands of stuff and a cloth round his face. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, let him go free.' Many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary and had seen what he did believed in him. •

JN 11:1-45

continued overleaf >

THE GOSPEL (CONTINUED)

Ponder

What words or phrases struck you from this passage?

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Re-read the Gospel. From the above, which is the one word or phrase that stays with you? Share your thoughts.

Reflect

The story of Lazarus is a story about love, loss and the triumph of love. No-one continues in life without profound experiences of death and loss. When we are in the midst of death and loss, the idea that anything of value will emerge – love or the resurrection of life and hope – seems remote and almost impossible. But death and loss is never the final word in the story.

Recently there was a story about a successful young Thai guitarist whose mother became seriously ill. In order to pay for her mother's treatment the guitarist, Irin Prechanvinit, sold her most precious possessions. She thought that she would be able to keep at least one of her guitars to play, but in the end she had to sell that as well.

Her story was heard by a man who, through illness, was no longer able to play his own precious vintage guitar. His mother had given the guitar to him and he offered the guitar to the young woman on the day before her mother died. Perhaps this is a contemporary story about love, loss and the triumph of love in the midst of it all.

- Looking back over your life – can you think of a time when love triumphed over death or loss?
- Do you look back and wonder about the unfolding of some events in your life?
- What is it that I want to bring to God at the moment?
- Is there anything in my heart that I need to release to enable me to live life more fully as a person inspired by God's presence?



RESPOND

Sing

God of Compassion



Pray

Reflect on Jesus' words during this week:

Then Jesus lifted up his eyes and said:

'Father, I thank you for hearing my prayer.

I knew indeed that you always hear me.

But I speak for the sake of all these who stand round me,

so that they may believe it was you who sent me.' (Jn 11:42-43)

LENT AND A NEW HEART

ANTHONY KELLY CSsR

The following article is provided for further reflection. For similar articles and other liturgical resources, visit The Summit Online (www.cam.org.au/summit).

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In this time of Lent, the words of one of the great prophets from over 2600 years ago still resonate. Ezekiel is here speaking in the name of God to Israel in its experience of exile, defeat, guilt and failure:

A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put it within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 16:26).

There is a promise of a great gift. God will bring about a kind of “heart transplant”, by replacing what is dead and stony amongst us with a new vitality.

However, “the heart of stone” in the personal and communal life of faith is not an uncommon experience. It cries out for something more, something different but remains beyond our capacities to change. That can happen only as a gift of the Holy Spirit.

As we wait and pray, it is worth reflecting on what makes for the heart of stone. Who amongst us would not admit to feeling the dead weight of the heart of stone at least in times of disappointments, frustration, failure and rejection, to say nothing of the constant distraction and pressure of modern life. The dead weight of the heart of stone can be so real that we might well wonder when we will ever feel alive again...

The stony heart feels a certain coldness toward God and others. It doesn't want to be disturbed either by the promptings of the Spirit, or the claims of our neighbour. That means staying locked up in ourselves, almost fearful of showing any warmth toward God or welcome to others in friendship and collaboration. The cold heart is undistracted and unconcerned in regard to what matters to others—and even to itself. It is dead to what might be, or even to what once was.

Of course the cold heart is thoroughly bored. Nothing new can happen, nothing is worth caring about. There is no room for passion. In this so-called “comfort zone”, we don't want to be disturbed in any way. There is no room for surprises. We have seen it all before...

The heart of stone is heavy and depressed. In any communication, it is the source only of further discouragement. It adds nothing to the joy of life or the zest of living. It can only increase the scandal of joyless faith. It may speak in stilted terms of loving God above all things but in fact does not appear to love anyone.

And yet the God of love promises to pluck out this heart of stone and replace it with “a heart of flesh”. If this gift is God's doing; our part is patient, humble prayer for all. Where the heart of stone was turned inward, the heart of flesh is open to all—to the infinities of God's love and mercy along with the agonies and sufferings of our world and the struggles of the people we know.

This heart of flesh begins to feel both the wonder of God and the plight of our humanity. In its feeling for God it gives thanks and finds joy in everything. In compassion for humanity it expresses in prayer solidarity with all in the heart of Christ.

Lent is the time to allow God to pluck out the stony heart of selfishness and to receive a new heart—lively and light in the presence of God, strong in solidarity with all God's people, and delighting in the joy of all creation. •

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Opening our hearts & minds

LENT 2017

WEEKLY REFLECTIONS FOR YEAR A



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