



LENTEN REFLECTIONS



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SEASON OF LENT

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me" (Ps 50:12).

ONE MINUTE MEDITATIONS FOR LENT



THE DESERT WILL BLOOM

Have you ever been in a real desert? There are many kinds, some with huge sand dunes and others with just rocks. Some are very hot, others quite cold. The important thing about deserts are that they are usually empty and quiet.

After a rain shower, things change. It does not rain very often in deserts, but when it happens it is beautiful. Suddenly bright, colorful flowers spring up overnight. They don't last long, but for a while, the desert flowers spread a glow. This shows that even in the most unfriendly places, beauty can appear.

People in the bible often used to go off into the desert. Even today, people still do it to find quiet and avoid distractions. If they are patient they see the beauty.

You need to be alone sometimes. You need a quiet place where you can think about your life and where you are going. This is especially true during the season of Lent. Give yourself a rest. Find a "desert" in your room, in the woods or in church. Wait for the flowers of God's love to come to life. Be patient. They won't blossom right away, but they will bloom eventually.



THE ROOM OF CROSSES

The young man was at the end of his rope. Seeing no way out, he dropped to his knees in prayer. "Lord, I can't go on," he said, "My cross is too heavy to bear."

The Lord replied, "My son, if you cannot bear its weight, just place your cross inside this room. Then open another door and pick out any cross you wish."

The man was filled with relief. "Thank you, Lord," he sighed, and did as he was told. As he looked around the room he saw many different crosses; some so large the tops were not visible. Then he spotted a tiny cross leaning against a wall. "I'd like that one, Lord," he whispered.

And the Lord replied, "My son, that's the cross you came in with."

A SINGLE RIGHTEOUS ACT





Paul gives his explanation of what the Church would later call "Original Sin". The selfishness of Adam, the first human, brought about a pollution of the human race. The result of this sin was death for all who followed Adam. Even those who did not commit a serious sin suffered from the corruption of humanity. Paul suggests that Jesus is the new Adam. His unselfish death on the cross has removed the effects of the sin of Adam.

Paul uses the term "just" to refer to the right (or correct) relationship with God that has been restored by Jesus.



THE NEW COVENANT

A Covenant is a personal agreement or contract between two or more people. Unlike a commercial contract, a Covenant is a commitment to share lives. The best human examples are the marriage vows in which a man and a woman agree to share a common life with faithfulness, love and honor. In the Sundays of Lent we shall look at the Covenants that God made with his people in the past. These included Covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses and the people of Judah during the exile. God agreed to protect these people and their descendants provided that they agree to follow a path to holiness. To be "holy" is to be "like God". Sadly, though God kept His part of the bargain, the people rarely did.

Jeremiah predicted that God would create a new permanent Covenant. Jeremiah was a prophet who lived in the 6th century B.C. He taught that under this new agreement, people would instinctively know God and His guidance. God would "engrave" it on our hearts. Jesus brought the New Covenant into being by His obedient death and resurrection.



LEGEND OF THE DOGWOOD

There is a legend, that at the time of the Crucifixion the dogwood had been the size of the oak and other forest trees. So firm and strong was the tree, that it was chosen as the timber of the Cross. To be used thus for such a cruel purpose greatly distressed the tree, and Jesus, nailed upon it, sensed this, and in His gentle pity for all sorrow and suffering said to it: "Because of your regret and pity for my suffering, never again shall the dogwood tree grow large enough to be used as a Cross. Henceforth it shall be slender and bent and twisted and its blossoms shall be in the form of a Cross...two long and two short petals. And in the center of the outer edge of each petal there will be nail prints, brown with rust and stained with red, and in the center of the flower there will be a crown of thorns, and all who see it will remember."



ONE SOLITARY LIFE

He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman.

He grew up in still another village where He worked in a carpenter shop until He was thirty.

Then for three years He was an itinerant preacher.

He never wrote a book.

He never held an office.

He didn't go to college.

He never visited a big city.

He never traveled two hundred miles from the place where He was born.

He did none of the things one usually associates with greatness.

He had no credentials but himself.

He was only thirty-three when the tide of public opinion turned against Him.

His friends ran away.

He was turned over to His enemies and went through the mockery of a trial.

He was nailed to a cross between two thieves.

While He was dying His executioners gambled for His clothing, the only property He had on earth.

When He was dead, He was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

Nineteen centuries have come and gone, and today He is the central figure of the human race and the leader of humanity's progress.

All the armies that have ever marched, all the navies that have ever sailed, all the parliaments that have ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned put together have not affected the life of humanity on earth as much as that One Solitary Life.



For all the negative things we have to say to ourselves, God has positive answers:

You say: "It's impossible."

God says: All things are possible. (Luke 18:27)

You say: "I'm too tired."

God says: I will give you rest. (Matthew 11:28-30)

You say: "Nobody really loves me."

God says: I love you. (John 3:16 & John 13:34)

You say: "I can't go on."

God says: My grace is sufficient. (II Corinthians 12:9 & Psalm 91:15)

You say: "I can't figure things out."

God says: I will direct your steps. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

You say: "I can't do it."

God says: You can do all things. (Philippians 4:13)

You say: "I'm not able."

God says: I am able. (II Corinthians 9:8)

You say: "It's not worth it."

God says: It will be worth it. (Romans 8:28)

You say: "I can't forgive myself."

God says: I FORGIVE YOU. (I John 1:9 & Romans 8:1)

You say: "I can't manage."

God says: I will supply all your needs. (Philippians 4:19)

You say: "I'm afraid."

God says: I have not given you a spirit of fear. (II Timothy 1:7)

You say: "I'm always worried and frustrated."

God says: Cast all your cares on ME. (I Peter 5:7)

You say: "I don't have enough faith."

God says: I've given everyone a measure of faith. (Romans 12:3)

You say: "I'm not smart enough."

God says: I give you wisdom. (I Corinthians 1:30)

You say: "I feel all alone."

God says: I will never leave you or forsake you. (Hebrews 13:5)



THE CARPENTER

An elderly carpenter was ready to retire. He told his employer-contractor of his plans to leave the house-building business and live a more leisurely life with his wife enjoying his extended family. He would miss the paycheck, but he needed to retire. They could get by.

The contractor was sorry to see his good worker go and ask if he could build just one more house as a personal favor. The carpenter said yes, but in time it was easy to see that his heart was not in his work. He resorted to shoddy workmanship and used inferior materials. It was an unfortunate way to end his career. When the carpenter finished his work and the builder came to inspect the house, the contractor handed the front-door key to the carpenter. "This is your house," he said, "my gift to you." What a shock! What a shame! If he had only known he was building his own house, he would have done it all so differently. Now he had to live in the home he had built none too well.

So it is with us. We build our lives in a distracted way, reacting rather than acting, willing to put up less than the best. At important points we do not give the job our best effort. Then with a shock we look at the situation we have created and find that we are now living in the house we have built. If we had realized that, we would have done it differently.

Think of yourself as the carpenter. Think about your house. Each day you hammer a nail, place a board, or erect a wall. Build wisely. It is the only life you will ever build. Even if you live it for only one day more, that day deserves to be lived graciously and with dignity. The plaque on the wall says, "Life is a do-it-yourself project." Who could say it more clearly? Your life today is the result of your attitudes and choices in the past. Your life tomorrow will be the result of your attitudes and the choices you make today.



GARDENING GOD'S WAY IN THE 'SPRING' OF LENT

Plant three rows of peas:
Peace of mind
Peace of heart
Peace of soul

Plant four rows of squash:
Squash gossip
Squash indifference
Squash grumbling
Squash selfishness

Plant four rows of lettuce:
Lettuce be faithful
Lettuce be kind
Lettuce be obedient
Lettuce really love one another

Plant three rows of turnips:
Turnip for meetings
Turnip for service
Turnip to help one another

Water freely with patience and cultivate with love.
There is much fruit in your garden because you reap what you sow.

To conclude our garden
We must have thyme:
Thyme for God
Thyme for study
Thyme for prayer



IF GOD SHOULD GO ON STRIKE

How good it is that God above has never gone on strike -

If only once He'd given up on us and said, "That's it, I'm through, I've had enough of you on earth, so this is what I'll do."

"I'll give My orders to the sun, cut off the heat supply, And to the moon give no more light and run the oceans dry. Then just to make things really rough and put the pressure on, Turn off the vital oxygen till every breath is gone."

You know He would be justified, if fairness were the game. For no one has been more abused or met with more disdain Than God, and He carries on, supplying you and me With all the favors of His grace, and everything for free.

Folks say they want a better deal, and so on strike they go, But what a deal we've given God to whom all things we owe. We don't care who we hurt to gain the things we like, But what a mess we'd all be in if God should go on strike.

Picture of the Cross:

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