

PUTTING THE LOVED ONE INTO THE CENTRE

Lent 1 (Year C) - 09.03.2025

Deuteronomy 26:1-11 | Psalm 91:1-11 | Romans 10:8b-13 | Luke 4:1-13

READING

4 *Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, 2 where for forty days he was tested by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over he was famished. 3 The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." 4 Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'" 5 Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6 And the devil said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. 7 If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." 8 Jesus answered him, "It is written, '**Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.**'" 9 Then the devil led him to Jerusalem and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, 10 for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' 11 and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" 12 Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" 13 When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time. (Luke 4:1-13)*

PRAYER

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. **Amen.**

SERMON

I. SPRING CLEANING DURING LENT

Dear friends in Christ,

March is traditionally a month when many individuals do their spring cleaning. This custom dates back to before the invention of the Hoover cleaner. Especially in the damp environment of North America and Europe spring was an excellent time to clean the house after a long, chilly winter. The windows could be opened because it was already warm enough. However, it is cold enough that insects will not be a problem.

Another motivation for spring cleaning is the numerous cultural festivals that take place during this season. There is, for example, the Iranian New Year celebration known as Nowruz, the Jewish Pesach or Passover festival, and, of course, the Christian Easter celebrations. There are various cleaning rituals preceding these important festivals, and the cleaning is also intended as a spiritual exercise in preparation for these festivals.

Following the dark months of winter, it is simply healthy to leave filth and dust behind and open the windows to let light into your home. Life returns after the cold season, when nature has taken a deep sleep. Well, I believe it is no coincidence that we call this 40-day time of preparation before Easter "Lent". The term is a shortened version of an old English word that simply refers to the time when daylight increases. That is to speak, spring. The old German term "Lenz" takes the same pathways. Therefore, the motivation for spring cleaning may also be to let go of the past and be ready for the new life or the future.

My Lent routine was inspired by one of my order's Franciscan sisters. It involves giving up stuff for around 40 days and thinking about what you value most. Giving away, rather than discarding, one household item on the first day of Lent is the first step. On day two, you give away two things and so on until the 40th day of Lent. As you may expect, it is simple at first. But it's difficult to give away thirty or forty items at the end, though. However, I must admit that this is the reason I rarely complete my Lent exercises. But I restart it every year,

and it is a useful exercise for reflecting on my priorities. As you give up more items, you have a better understanding of what matters most to you.

II. LOOKING AT THE MEANING OF OUR POSSESSIONS

Most of us in Western societies have a lot of stuff: Bags, books, clothes, cars, toys, jewellery, furniture, iPads etc. People can reach a point where their possessions cause them to become disorganised, both physically and psychologically. They are becoming increasingly disenfranchised and occasionally mentally ill. People can become possessed by their belongings, unable to give anything away at all. There's a reason why TV stars like Marie Condo, make a lot of money by assisting people in bringing order to their possessions and lives. Kondo has written four books about organising, which have sold millions of copies around the world.¹

In some respects, the objects we own serve as a means of communication with one another. We express who we are and who we wish to be. They express our desires. They're linked to memories and emotions. They are linked to relationships and past travels. And once we die, they remain and, in some ways, serve as our legacy. Our possessions are, in some respects, extensions of our selves. That is why it is so distressing for many people to lose everything due to a disaster or robbery. It is due to the memories associated with the things, rather than the objects themselves.²

The hidden motives, intentions, memories, and emotions behind our possessions can reveal a lot about ourselves, our relationships, and our values. That is surely one of the reasons why fasting and self-denial have always been an important part of Lent. It raises questions: What am I missing? What keeps me trapped, or perhaps obsessed? What is truly essential to me? In what or whom may I put my trust? What is really at the heart of my life?

1 Cf. <https://konmari.com/>

2 Cf. <https://www.bps.org.uk/psychologist/psychology-stuff-and-things>

III. PUTTING GOD BACK INTO THE CENTRE OF OUR LIVES

These questions lead us to the heart of Lent and the mystery of the Easter season. The season teaches us that we are a part of God's love story with his creation, and he wants to be the most important figure in our lives. He wishes to be in a relationship with us. He gave up everything for us, humbled himself, became a human being, and even died for us because of his unending love, and was raised after three days and came back to life.

At our baptism we and God entered into a loving covenant. We or our parents gave a solemn "yes" to God. At our Confirmation, we said "Yes" again. God invited us on a lifelong journey. But what is the current state of our friendship with him? Does he truly hold an essential role in our lives? Lent could be viewed as a type of relationship therapy in which we get the opportunity to focus on our connection to God. And, as Christians, we are called to follow Jesus' example and develop in God's company.

Today's Gospel provides an excellent focus for our reflection throughout Lent. The so-called narrative of "the temptation (or testing) of Jesus" in the Gospel of Luke transports us to the time right before Jesus' public life path. Jesus prepares for his ministry by walking into the desert for 40 days. The 40 days symbolise the 40-years of migration of the Israelites before entering the promised land. And accordingly we and many Christians also observe 40 days of lent as preparation time before Easter. All three preparation periods are occasions for learning and reflection. The most significant subject is to totally trust God, his saving power, and learn to follow his commands.

In today's gospel Luke, the evangelist, is particularly focused in presenting Jesus as an example for our lives as humans. Jesus responds to the temptation to worship the devil by saying, "*Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.*" His response is a quotation from a paragraph of the Torah, the law, in which the people of Israel are warned not to forget God and to serve only him because he has blessed them abundantly. Accordingly, following Jesus, the Son of God and Messiah, requires putting God at the centre of human life and to remember what God has already done for us.

All of today's scriptural verses urges us to remember what God has done for us. All readings urge us to be thankful for and enjoy the plenty we have already received. Our first

reading explained that God freed his people from slavery with a powerful hand and an outstretched arm. Psalm 91 affirms that God is our stronghold and safety. He protects those who put their trust in Him. Paul's letter reminds us that God generously granted us salvation through Jesus.

IV. FOLLOWING THE LOVED ONE BY TURNING TO THE POOR

God offers a loving and passionate relationship to us. He cares for us like a lover cares for a partner and he wants us to love him. Shouldn't we focus on him for that reason? Shouldn't it be natural in our love relationship with God to think about all of the blessings we've already received, to be grateful for everything he's done for us in and through Jesus, and to follow him? In particular, loving and following Jesus requires knowing what he desires or what his mission is. In his gospel, Luke makes it very obvious that God in Jesus shows us his special fondness for the poor, the unfree, the sick and downtrodden, and the outcasts of society. When Jesus returned from his 40-day stay in the wilderness, he went to a synagogue and read the following passage from the prophet Isaiah, which can be interpreted as a form of a mission statement at the start of his ministry:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”³

God is on a mission through and in Jesus Christ. We are all loved by God, and he wants us and all of his creation to live in abundance. He has a strong affection for the underprivileged and disenfranchised people in society. Placing God at the centre of our lives and imitating Jesus entails two things: first, being motivated and inspired by his example; second, fulfilling his purpose and leading a life that inspires hope and provides a glimpse of God's love to people around us.

3 Luke 4:18-19, cf. Isaiah 42:7, Isaiah 58.6, Leviticus 25:10.

V. REMEMBERING THE BAPTISMAL VOWS DURING LENT

Finally, let us revisit the concept of spring cleaning and Lent as a relationship therapy. During this Easter season, it may be useful to think on what is most important to us, to consider the state of our relationship with God, and to identify the things we must give up in order to put God back at the centre of our lives. Perhaps our baptismal promise can help us to recall what should be at the heart of our relationship with God. The liturgy for baptism makes this obvious. Following the baptism with water, the celebrant tells the candidate:

*"... today God has touched you with his love and given you a place among his people. God promises to be with you in joy and in sorrow, to be your guide in life, and to bring you safely to heaven. In baptism God invites you on **a life-long journey**. Together with all God's people you **must explore the way of Jesus** and **grow in friendship with God**, in **love for his people**, and in **servicing others**. With us you will **listen to the word of God** and **receive the gifts of God**."⁴*

Amen.

SUMMARY

Lent is a time to reflect on the things that are truly important to us. Abstinence and renunciation are good strategies to get insight into the things we cherish most and appear to be the focal point of our lives rather than God. We try again to concentrate our lives on God (especially what He has done for us through Christ's cross and resurrection) and to follow His instruction to love one another out of love for Him. Focussing on our baptismal covenant is a useful practice during Lent.

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