

LENT and **LABELS ARE FOR JARS™**

This Lent, you are invited to participate in **Labels Are For Jars**, an effort to help feed hungry people in Lawrence, MA. **Labels Are For Jars** offers this daily guide for Lenten reflections, as well as a unique opportunity to help feed some of our neediest brothers and sisters through our Lenten almsgiving.

LENT

Lent, the period of weeks leading up to Holy Week and Easter, is a unique gift from God. During Lent, we are invited to renew our relationships with God, turn away from sin, and experience reconciliation with God and others.

We traditionally embrace three disciplines during Lent: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. None of these is an end in itself. Instead, each discipline helps us better focus on God and on living God's love.

PRAYER

The goal of Lenten prayer is to dedicate more of ourselves to building our relationships with God. To make best use of this **Labels Are For Jars Lent Guide**, you are invited to set aside some period of time each day during Lent (perhaps half an hour) to communicate with God through reflective prayer. Each day, you are invited to read in your bible the Gospel passage listed in this guide, and then to consider the reflections and questions for the day. You may want to keep notes of your reflections each day.

FASTING

Through fasting, we recall that God gives us all the gifts we have in life - not just food, but breath, health, speech, thought, love, and every material good. By choosing to deny ourselves some food and drink during Lent, we gain a better perspective on all of the material blessings God gives to us. In addition to observing the Lenten fasting regulations of the Church, each of us chooses particular ways to fast during Lent.

ALMSGIVING

Almsgiving is our sharing the best of our treasure with people who are in need. All that we are and all that we have are gifts from God. It is tempting to grasp those gifts for ourselves, without considering God or other people. When we sacrifice the best of our gifts for people in need, we become better focused on God and others. We grow closer to God and all of our brothers and sisters by living God's generous love.

Labels Are For Jars is a fantastic focus for Lenten almsgiving. **Labels Are For Jars** raises money to help feed hungry people in Lawrence, MA. In Lawrence today, 75% of children are at risk for hunger. **Labels Are For Jars** raises money to provide food for hungry people in Lawrence through the Cor Unum Meal Center. Cor Unum provides free hot meals to hundreds of people every day, 365 days a year. **100% of the alms you contribute to Labels Are For Jars during Lent will help provide food through Cor Unum.**

To participate in the Labels Are For Jars Lenten program, all you need is an open heart, the desire to grow in the Lord, and a jar.

ASH WEDNESDAY and **LABELS ARE FOR JARS™**

Wednesday, 2/17 (Ash Wednesday): Matthew 6.1-6, 16-18

Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Around 2000 years ago, He came to this world because all human beings had fallen away from their original union with God and one another. Humanity could not save itself from these realities. Jesus came to save the world from its fallen state - to make it possible for all people to be fully reunited with God and one another. The ultimate outpouring of Jesus' love for the world was his passion, death, and resurrection - the complete, merciful giving of His entire self for the salvation of sinful humanity. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus continues to invite all people to experience salvation by saying "Yes" to being His disciples. During Holy Week and Easter, we will respond to this offer of salvation in the most profound way. We will be invited to say "Yes", we believe Jesus is the Son of God, and "Yes", we commit our lives to living as His disciples. No one will force us to say "Yes". The meaning of our "Yes" will depend upon our sincerity and depth. Lent is the season through which God offers us the opportunity to be purified to say the most sincere and real "Yes" to belief in Jesus Christ and the most sincere "Yes" to the commitment to live as His disciples. To respond to these opportunities, our goal during Lent is to grow closer to Jesus Christ by turning away from sin and being increasingly faithful to His gospel. Is this your goal for Lent? Speak to God about this.

ALMSGIVING!

To begin Lent, put a Labels Lent Jar wrapper on an empty jar. Place your Labels Lent Jar in a location that is very visible to you, and each day during Lent place in it an amount of money that will be a reasonable daily sacrifice for you. Your sacrifice will help feed some of the neediest of our brothers and sisters through the Cor Unum Meal Center.

Thursday, 2/18: Luke 9.22-25

All through His public ministry, Jesus is clear with people that His constant mission is to do His Father's will. In today's passage from Luke 9, Jesus explains to His disciples the consequences of His choosing to do His Father's will: He must suffer greatly, be rejected by prominent enemies, be killed, and on the third day be raised. We can understand that Jesus is predicting that because He chooses to do His Father's will rather than to do His enemies' will, He must endure a passion, but ultimately will be raised from the dead. By entering into the passion of choosing to do His Father's will, Jesus will receive eternal glory - complete victory over sin and death. Jesus tells His listeners that if they wish to come after Him as His disciples, they are guaranteed a similar path. They must daily choose either to do His will or not to do His will. If they choose to do His will, they will enter the passion of rejecting what they themselves might otherwise deeply want to do. What is your reaction to these ideas - that to grow closer to Jesus during Lent is likely to involve the passion of rejecting what you might otherwise deeply want to do, but that is opposed to Jesus' will? How do you react to the proposition that during Lent you may be challenged to reject parts of yourself that oppose the will of Jesus Christ, in order to share His glory now and eternally?

Friday, 2/19: Matthew 9.14-15

From the first chapter of the Book of Genesis, we learn that God gives us food in order to foster the life that God gives us. Food is meant to nourish us as people filled with God's life and love. When people are aware of their distance from God - their sinfulness - they often fast. In fasting, a person withdraws from some food in order to refocus on God. Fasting reminds us that God is the source of all we are and all the good we have. Fasting prompts us to recognize our equality with all other people and our responsibility to share with them. Fasting helps focus our prayer and reflection. In our society, fasting can be a spiritual aid in our understanding better our abuse of food, drink, and chemicals. One Christian perspective in evaluating what we consume is: Does my consumption of a particular food/drink/chemical foster in me life and love, or does it draw out of me life and love? Does my consumption of a particular food/drink/chemical make me a stronger instrument of God in the world, or does it make me a weaker instrument of God in the world? It would be good to reflect today on your plans for fasting during Lent - to be sure you are clear about what you are doing and what are your intentions.

Saturday, 2/20: Luke 5.27-32

In today's passage from Luke 5, Jesus scandalizes some religious leaders by eating and drinking at a banquet with sinners. Jesus directly replies to them: "Those who are healthy do not need a doctor, but the sick do. I have not called the righteous to repentance but sinners." Jesus wants to enter

into the homes and lives of sinners because he completely loves sinners and powerfully wants to be with sinners. Jesus loves sinners and wants to establish intimate relationships with them. During the past few days, we have explored some of our motivations and intentions for entering into Lent. Today, spend some time reflecting on this passage's beautiful revelation of why God has blessed us with the grace of Lent: because Jesus Christ wants to get closer to us, because He wants to enter into our homes, and because He wants to intimately share our lives. Our limitations and sinfulness have moved us to try to get closer to Jesus Christ during Lent. This reading reminds us that our limitations and sinfulness have moved Jesus Christ to try get closer to us during Lent. How do you feel about this?

THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT AND **LABELS ARE FOR JARS™**

Sunday, 2/21: Luke 4.1-13

Today's reading from Luke 4 reminds us that Jesus fully experiences the same kinds of temptations that we experience. He is tempted to choose pleasure, power, and pride according to the will of the devil, rather than according to the will of His Father. Jesus - and every one of us - is meant to experience abundant pleasure, power, and pride in life. The question is whether these realities will be pursued according to the will of God. Jesus takes seriously each of the devil's offers. He considers their content and origin. He reflects on the will of His Father in relation to each offer. He recognizes that the will of His Father is different from the will of the devil. Jesus ultimately chooses to pursue the will of His Father and to reject the will of the devil. In the end, Jesus experiences the pleasure, power, and pride that His Father intends Him to experience, which is infinitely greater than what the devil offers. As you begin this First Week of Lent, does Jesus' example in this reading offer a pattern for how you might make daily choices to turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel?

ALMSGIVING!

During the past few days, you hopefully have figured out how you will fast during Lent. This week, calculate the cost of the food from which you are fasting during Lent, and add that to your Labels jar. By doing this, you are both offering your fast to God and directly offering the equivalent of what you would have eaten to help feed the hungry through Labels. Also this week, consider spending some time on www.labelsareforjars.org learning the details of our project, so you can explain it to other people.

Monday, 2/22: Matthew 25.31-46

As we begin the first full week of Lent, we are offered the passage from Matthew 25 in which Jesus most clearly reveals the standards by which all people are judged by God now and eternally. Jesus explains in detail how God judges our choices to pursue His will or reject His will. It is God's will (1) that we recognize the practical needs of whatever person is right in front of us, particularly the least of our brothers and sisters, and (2) that we take action to address these needs. When we do these things, we say "Yes" to Christ. When we do not do these things, we say "No" to Christ. Our choices for and against God, love, and life are as straightforward as that. Reflecting on this passage, focus today on paying attention to whomever is right in front of you at any given moment. Try to recognize that person's needs. Make a decision about whether to address those needs. At the end of the day, spend some solid time reviewing with God what you have done with this exercise.

Tuesday, 2/23: Matthew 6.7-15

In the heart of the Lord's Prayer, we ask God to forgive us our trespasses "as we forgive those who trespass against us". Jesus makes clear that the reciprocity suggested in this prayer is real: "If you forgive men their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions." To forgive a person means to treat a person who has offended us with the basic dignity and Christian love God teaches us to offer every person, despite the offense that has been committed. Combining today's passage with yesterday's, focus again today on paying attention whomever is right in front of you at any given moment. Consider whether that person in one way or another needs your forgiveness. If this is the case, make a decision about whether to share forgiveness with that person. At the end of the day, honestly review your day's decisions with God.

Wednesday, 2/24: Luke 11.29-32

In this passage from Luke 11, Jesus tells a large crowd that they do not need further signs to believe in Him. He has already revealed to them enough of Himself and the truth for them to make a decision whether to follow Him. They must decide whether to believe. Jesus' words resonate with our observance of Lent. Despite all that is still mysterious to us about Jesus, and despite all of our personal limitations, whatever Jesus has revealed to us about Himself and the truth is enough for us to choose a response to Him. We must decide how to respond to whatever He has already given us. On Monday, we heard Jesus' most straightforward revelation about the choices we make daily to say "Yes" or "No" to Him. Yesterday, we heard Jesus' most straightforward revelation about the choices we make daily to say "Yes" or "No" to Him by forgiving other people. Today, continue to listen to the words of Jesus from Monday and Tuesday. You do not need a further sign, wonder, or revelation to understand these words. You need to make a choice. Remain attentive to each person you encounter today, and strive to make conscious choices of how you interact with each person based on the texts you read Monday and Tuesday. At the end of the day, speak to God about the choices you have made.

Thursday, 2/25: Matthew 7.7-12

If you have been pursuing the spiritual exercises suggested here during the past few days, you may have had the experience of encountering a particular person, looking for that person's need - including that person's need for forgiveness from you - and responding to that person's need according to the way of Christ. This is very good. It is likely that you have also encountered many people whose needs you have decided not to discern, or whose needs you have decided not to address according to the way of Christ - especially if some people's needs are for forgiveness from you. If you are honest enough to acknowledge your limitations in recognizing and addressing the needs of the people you encounter in daily life, spend some time today considering what graces from God you might need in order to change. Jesus assures His disciples in today's passage that God gives "good things to those who ask Him." What help might God offer to lift you beyond your limitations, to be a person more living in Christ the realities introduced by the scripture on Monday and Tuesday? If such help is available from God, would you want to receive it and use it?

Friday, 2/26: Matthew 5.20-26

In today's passage, Jesus describes the state of unreconciled people as a "prison" that requires much payment to escape. It is likely this image refers to God's holding us accountable for our choices not to forgive one another. The image may also reflect the spiritual and psychological isolation, enclosure, and darkness that we experience when we do not share forgiveness with one another. When relationships are bad or serious wrongs have occurred, it is usually easier to not forgive other people. Withholding forgiveness can feel pleasurable and powerful. Over time, however, lack of reconciliation does begin to be a prison - a prison that is much easier to enter than to exit. To what extent do you relate to this?

Saturday, 2/27: Matthew 5.43-48

Jesus today offers two motivations for loving our enemies: (1) God continues to give life to bad and unjust people, and (2) there is a valuable recompense for God for those who love their enemies. When you consider people whom you do not choose to forgive, are you at all moved by Jesus' saying that you should respect the dignity of their lives because God wants them alive? Does the fact that God will reward you for loving your enemy move you in any way? Speak directly and honestly to God about this.

THE SECOND WEEK OF LENT AND LABELS ARE FOR JARS™

Sunday, 2/28: Luke 9.28b-36

Jesus' disciples who witness His transfiguration catch a glimpse of His true glory - God's ultimate revelation, the One who will lead God's people to freedom, the Son of God, the One to whom they should listen. The challenges that Jesus presented to the disciples and their own limitations were surely put into a more clear, powerful, wonderful perspective when they experienced a taste of the glory that was to unfold through Him. The transfiguration did not magically change the disciples, but it clarified for them what was offered to them through following Jesus - the full glory of God. On this Third Sunday of Lent, take some time to reflect on the fact that what the disciples witnessed on the mountain is what is offered to you if you choose to grow as a follower of Jesus Christ. God loves you so much that He has sent His Son to offer you a full share in His glory. Lent is our opportunity to clarify and purify our response to this offer. How do you feel about this?

ALMSGIVING!

Most of the people who are helping feed the hungry through Labels Are For Jars have heard about the project by word-of-mouth. This week, consider ways you might help expand the number of people sacrificing to help feed the hungry by telling other people about the project and encouraging them to get involved in Labels. For inspiration and images, you might visit the website of the Cor Unum Meal Center, www.corunummealcenter.org.

Monday, 3/1: Luke 6.36-38

At the beginning of today's reading from Luke 6, Jesus says "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." Knowing that no human being is nearly as merciful as God our Father, it's safe to guess that Jesus is not stating a commandment that can be immediately fulfilled, but revealing a possibility in which we may over time grow. To begin this week's reflections, consider today what you know about the mercy of God. What are examples of God's mercy that you have recently witnessed in the world? What important experiences of God's mercy have you personally experienced? Can you think of scripture passages that reveal the truth of God's mercy?

Tuesday, 3/2: Matthew 23.1-12

Jesus' words in Matthew 23 may be some of the most important instructions He offers His disciples: "The greatest among you must be your servant." Today, reflect on the ways that you currently are a Christian servant for others. Do not drift into reflections about your life in the distant past, or speculate about how you might live in the future. Focus on your present-day life. Since the beginning of this calendar year, how have you lived as a Christian servant for other people?

Wednesday, 3/3: Matthew 20.17-28

Today's passage from Matthew 20 includes a clear statement from Jesus that reiterates yesterday's reading: ". . . whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave." Combining our quotations from Matthew 20 and 23 with Monday's exhortation to "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful", spend time in prayer today considering the ways you have recently served other people by offering them mercy. Try to recall your thoughts on Monday about God's mercy. How have you recently chosen to extend this same kind of mercy to other people? Once again, do not look back on your life in the distant past or imagine your possible life in the future. Focus on how you have actually been serving others by offering them mercy during the past two months.

Thursday, 3/4: Luke 16.19-31

In today's parable about the rich man and Lazarus, dogs have the natural inclination to lick the sores of Lazarus. By instinct, the dogs extend mercy to Lazarus. The rich man for some reason/s has so distanced himself from Lazarus that he does not even extend to him the mercy naturally shown by dogs, let alone the mercy supernaturally shown by a godly person. Since this is a parable, it's fine to imagine that Lazarus is the most awful, nasty, harmful person on the planet, and that he has done terrible things to the rich man. Imagine that the rich man entirely dislikes Lazarus and has good reason to not want Lazarus as a friend or even to be near Lazarus. Even if all of this is the case, Jesus' clear teaching is that the rich man should make the fundamental choice whether to extend to Lazarus the basic mercy that dogs by instinct extend. When I was hungry, you gave me to eat. When I was thirsty, you gave me to drink. When I was naked, you clothed me. When I was ill, you cared for me. The rich man chooses to extend no mercy to Lazarus. In honestly reflecting on the choices you must make to serve others by offering them mercy, are there ways you can relate to the rich man? It may be helpful to think about some of the people whom you least like.

Friday, 3/5: Matthew 21.33-43, 45-46

In explaining today's parable from Matthew 21, Jesus states that the Kingdom of God belongs to those who "produce its fruit". He makes clear that religious people who choose not to produce the fruit of the Kingdom of God will have it taken away from them. Recall the insights you had yesterday regarding some of your weaknesses in living as a servant of God's mercy for other people. Consider the proposal that the fruit Jesus is expecting us to produce is mercy-in-action-for-others. How do you react to this parable's revelation of the important consequences - now and eternally - of your choosing to produce this fruit, or choosing not to produce this fruit?

Saturday, 3/6: Luke 15.1-3, 11-32

Our reading today from Luke 15 may be Jesus' most powerful revelation of the nature of God's love. God the Father entirely and only loves every person. He allows us complete freedom to do what we want with the gifts He has given us. When we wander away from Him - including our wandering far, far away from Him - He is on constant watch for our return to Him. If we choose to return to Him, He rushes to welcome us back. He affirms our freedom, gives us abundant gifts, and celebrates abundantly our return. In all we are doing during Lent, if we are being honest about ourselves, taking a sincere look at our lives, recognizing our limitations and sins, and returning to God with a desire for reconciliation, we are meant to have the same experience as the son who returns to his father in today's parable. Especially if your Lenten reflections have been challenging for you, does this parable help put into perspective the reason for and potential of this spiritual journey?

THE THIRD WEEK OF LENT AND

LABELS ARE FOR JARS™

Sunday, 3/7: Luke 13.1-9

This passage from Luke 13 emphasizes both the urgency of Jesus' call to repentance and the patience of Jesus' love for us. As long as we are breathing, both realities are at work. At all times, Jesus calls us to turn away from sin and change our lives, or we will "perish". At all times, the fact that we are alive - which only happens because God wants us to be alive - is the proof that God continues to give us time to change. Hopefully, your observance of Lent has made you more conscious of both of these realities. Spend some time today speaking with God about your current desire to grow in holiness, your understanding of the consequences of your choices, and your reaction to the truth that He sends His Son to "cultivate" and "fertilize" your spiritual growth.

ALMSGIVING!

In many cases, the economically poor and hungry must beg in order to live. Your almsgiving through Labels this Lent makes it possible for more people to be given the food they need - not to have to beg for it. This week, would you be willing to stand in for your hungry brothers and sisters by asking some of your family members, friends, neighbors, and coworkers to make contributions to your Labels jar? How could this be done creatively?

Monday, 3/8: Luke 4.24-30

Everything Jesus says reveals the truth to His listeners. Jesus speaks the truth so that people may hear the words that lead them to God and to the fullness of human life. Jesus speaks the truth in season and out - no matter the reaction of His listeners. In today's passage, Jesus' listeners react to His words by trying to kill Him. He continues to speak. This week, we will explore some of our strengths and weaknesses in imitating Jesus as speakers of God's truth. To begin, reflect today on your reactions to the proposal that you are meant to be God's mouthpiece to the world around you today.

Tuesday, 3/9: Matthew 18.21-35

Jesus tells Peter a story about a servant who receives forgiveness of his great debt from a king, then refuses to grant forgiveness of a small debt to his fellow servant. Any time you have sincerely sought God's forgiveness, you have received it. During the past two months, when have you spoken words of forgiveness to another person? On these occasions, have you witnessed an impact in the life of the other person? Have you witnessed an impact in your own life?

Wednesday, 3/10: Matthew 5.17-19

The Lord today tells his disciples that whoever "obeys and teaches" God's commandments "will be called greatest in the Kingdom of heaven." Whatever we know about God's law is never meant to be kept just within ourselves or shared with a small group of people. Everything we know about God's law is meant to be shared with all people, especially those who are least familiar with God. How do we know this? Because this is the way Jesus lives. He speaks the truth to all people - especially those who are furthest away from God. We live in a society in which so many people of faith are afraid to speak to others God's truth. During the past two months, what are specific occasions in which you have chosen to speak what you know to be God's truth to other people? Have any of these experiences been challenging for you?

Thursday, 3/11: Luke 11.14-23

In today's passage from Luke 11, some of Jesus' opponents claim that he drives out demons by the power of Satan. Jesus responds to these absurd accusations with clear logic and obvious respect. In our society, many people who consciously or unconsciously oppose Jesus Christ make absurd claims against His teaching and his followers. In response, some Christians speak the truth, but many remain silent or back down. Speaking the truth has consequences - God's Kingdom somehow grows. Silence and backing down has consequences - forces opposed to God grow. During the past two months, what are circumstances in which you have encountered people saying unfair things that oppose the way of Christ? How have you spoken in response? How have you remained silent or backed down?

Friday, 3/12: Mark 12.28-34

Jesus in Mark 12 is asked a question by a scribe, responds to the question, listens to the scribe's reaction, and replies with powerfully encouraging words. In every generation, Jesus reveals the truth through sincere people who ask questions about God, offer answers that are based on His teaching, listen to one another, and affirm one another's growth. During the past two months, have you had any conversations with other people that fit this pattern? If not, have there been opportunities for such conversations that you have missed?

Saturday, 3/13: Luke 18.9-14

Jesus teaches today that "everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted." Our self-exaltation and humility are commonly revealed in our words to others. What are ways that your words reveal your self-exaltation? What effects do these words have on other people, and on you? What are ways that your words reveal your humility? What effects do these words have on other people, and on you? Honestly, do you prefer one type of words over the other?

THE FOURTH WEEK OF LENT AND

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Sunday, 3/14: Luke 15.1-3, 11-32

We reflected on this passage just over a week ago (see 3/6). A critical character in the parable is the son who refuses to enter his father's house because he resents the father's forgiveness of his brother. Because the father does not conform to this son's expectations, the son will not accept his father as he is. We can be this way with God. If God does not conform to our expectations, we may not accept God as He is. Beginning tomorrow, we will be offered daily readings that describe people's refusals 2000 years ago to accept who Jesus was. In many cases, because Jesus did not conform to people's expectations about holy people or possible messiahs, people did not accept Jesus. Many became His enemies. Some plotted against His life. Some killed Him. In looking back on these realities, we may learn more about the historical reasons for Jesus' death. More importantly, we will be invited to reflect on how opposition to Jesus 2000 years ago sheds light on the rejection of Jesus by us. Are you willing to honestly enter into this spiritual experience?

ALMSGIVING!

If you have been pursuing the almsgiving possibilities offered during recent weeks, you are doing much to grow in union with God and to be more connected daily with your brothers and sisters in need. This week, consider whether there are other material areas of your life that you might like to redirect toward doing God's work for the economically poor. If those areas are near at hand, consider redirecting the treasure involved to your Labels jar.

Monday, 3/15: John 4.43-54

In this passage, Jesus states that many people will not believe in Him unless they "see signs and wonders". They have conditions that they expect Jesus to meet in order for them to believe in Him. Do you currently have conditions you expect Jesus to meet in order to believe in Him, or to grow in your belief? When you reflect on "your" conditions that you expect Jesus to meet, it may be helpful to think about yourself personally, your family, your faith community, and the rest of the Church.

Tuesday, 3/16: John 5.1-16

In this account from John 5, Jesus heals a man who has been ill for 38 years. This is clearly a godly action - in fact, a miracle. Some religious leaders begin to persecute Jesus because He performs this healing on the Sabbath - something that does not conform to their expectations of how religious

people should act. Are you ever bothered by people who seem to be doing godly things, but do not behave according to your expectations of how religious people should act? Why do these people bother you? As was the case yesterday, it may be helpful to consider "your" expectations as your personal expectation, as well as those of the individuals and communities in which you live.

Wednesday, 3/17: John 5.17-30

This is a very important passage. Jesus calls God His Father, thus making Himself "equal to God". This claim infuriates some religious leaders, who try "all the more to kill" Jesus. Their reaction is easy to understand. For them, the ultimate blasphemy is for a person to equate himself with God. They do not believe that Jesus is equal to God, and in their age and context they believe this blasphemy deserves death. The group for whom this passage is most pressing is not a group of religious leaders 2000 years ago, but us today. Most of us say we believe that whatever God says or reveals is the truth. We profess belief that Jesus is the Son of God - equal to God the Father. However, when we encounter teachings of Jesus with which we are not comfortable, we may exert a great deal of effort to ignore, water down, or deny what He reveals. How does this apply to you (you personally, your family, your faith community, and the world around you)?

Thursday, 3/18: John 5.31-47

In today's reading, Jesus describes to His enemies some of the supernatural sources that testify to His identity. These are God's revelations. However, Jesus states, His enemies ignore these gifts and focus on the testimony of people who are not of God. His says directly to His enemies: ". . . you do not have the love of God within you" - a very powerful condemnation from the Son of God. As with yesterday's passage, this text is most pressing not in relation to Jesus' enemies 2000 years ago, but in relation to us. No matter how limited our backgrounds, we have been offered much revelation of the truth by God. God offers us superabundant resources - the scripture, the teaching of the Church, prayer, sacraments, Christian action - to accept and live out in order to understand the truth of Christ. Yet, when teachings of Christ are challenging for us, we so often open ourselves to non-godly testimonies, rather than godly testimonies. How does this connect with your life?

Friday, 3/19: John 7.1-2, 10, 25-30

In these verses from John 7, some people who have an obviously limited understanding of scripture and religious teaching allow those limitations to block their recognizing Jesus for who He is. Instead of recognizing their limitations and opening their minds and hearts to what Jesus has to say, they focus on their limitations and close their minds and hearts to what Jesus has to say. This behavior, which exasperates Jesus, is very common in our society. It is one of the ways we most profoundly say "no" to accepting the growth God wants us to experience. Does it connect with your life?

Saturday, 3/20: John 7.40-53

Today's passage describes a mob mentality that grows as opposition to Jesus increases. Many of Jesus' opponents seem to lack confidence in their own convictions, and resort to fear tactics when people do not go along with them. It is an everyday occurrence in the United States for people who oppose the truth of Christ to direct fear tactics at people who do. Do you ever find yourself part of such a mob mentality when you find Jesus' teaching difficult to accept or understand? This reflection requires great honesty.

THE FIFTH WEEK OF LENT AND

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Sunday, 3/21: John 8.1-11

Today's story about the woman who is about to be executed for having committed adultery, with Jesus' famous words, "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her", often appeals to us when we recognize in it Jesus' forgiveness of our greatest sins. It is important to remember Jesus' concluding words to the woman He has saved from death: "Go, (and) from now on do not sin anymore." The complete love of Jesus includes both forgiveness of the most grave sin and the command to turn away from sin. At the beginning of Lent, we resolved to make this a season of turning away from sin and growing in faithfulness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. As we enter the Fifth Week of Lent, where do you stand on turning away from sin and growing in faithfulness to the gospel? In the week ahead, we will consider some concrete choices we might make to remain with Jesus in the passion of Christian life today.

ALMSGIVING!

This week, as you continue your pattern of Lenten almsgiving, assess what you've been doing. Take a look at your Labels jar. All the money you've collected in there will help feed the hungry. How do you feel about that? What are your thoughts about the material sacrifices you've been making? Are you better off having made them? When Lent comes to an end, will you want to continue any of these sacrifices? How do you view your experience of telling others about Labels, and of asking others to sacrifice for the poor? Are those experiences you would like to be permanent parts of your life?

Monday, 3/22: John 8.12-20

Jesus tells some of his critics in today's reading "You judge by appearances. . . ." They see and hear Jesus in a limited way, do not like what they see and hear, and so do not pursue more deeply who He is. When we encounter Jesus' words or teachings that do not appeal to us, we can do the same. How might you strengthen yourself as someone who pursues the depth of who Jesus is, especially when you are not attracted to His words or teachings? Your observance of Lent hopefully helps this reflection.

Tuesday, 3/23: John 8.21-30

In this passage from John 8, Jesus tells some of His critics, "You belong to what is below, I belong to what is above. You belong to this world, but I do not belong to this world." What do you think Jesus is saying to these people? Hopefully benefitting from your observance of Lent, how might you strengthen yourself as someone who "belongs to what is above"?

Wednesday, 3/24: John 8.31-42

Jesus state in today's reading, "If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." Based on what we've considered during Lent, we know that "remaining in Jesus' word" means listening to Him and putting His will into action. Jesus contracts this possibility with being a "slave" of sin. Enlightened by insights you have experienced during Lent, what are the areas in which you need to be particularly careful not to slip into slavery to sin? What concrete, daily decisions would be helpful for helping you avoid slavery to sin?

Thursday, 3/25: John 8.51-59

In this passage from John 8, Jesus tells His listeners that "whoever keeps my word will never see death." The ultimate goal of earthly life is to live eternally. You probably believe at the core of your soul that Jesus offers eternal life to those who keep His word. What could you do to be sure that the priority of eternal life through Jesus Christ remains at the forefront of your consciousness in day-to-day life?

Friday, 3/26: John 10.31-42

Today's reading offers a scene in which people pick up stones to throw at Jesus because He equates Himself with God the Father. These people do not believe Jesus is the Son of God. In every generation until this world comes to an end, many people who oppose Jesus stand up and throw rocks at Him - in a direct attempt to kill Him. Disciples of Jesus must inevitably take a public stand in relation to this attempt to silence and assassinate the Lord. If you believe Jesus is the Son of God, what might you do to strengthen your standing up publicly to affirm that truth, especially when His opponents try to kill Him? This question involves challenges to Jesus that run much deeper than certain obvious social debates.

Saturday, 3/27: John 11.45-56

In today's passage from John 11, Jesus knows that his enemies are conspiring to destroy Him. People wonder if Jesus will enter Jerusalem for the Passover, since He knows His enemies are in that city. Jesus does choose to enter Jerusalem, because He knows that living the passion before Him is the fulfillment of His Father's will to save the world. Hopefully benefitting from purification that has taken place during Lent, how might you strengthen your willingness to live as a disciple of Jesus, specifically recognizing some of the passion that you will face if you do so?

HOLY WEEK AND

LABELS ARE FOR JARS™

Sunday, 3/28: Luke 22.14-23.56

On this Palm Sunday, we read Luke's extended account of the passion and death of Christ. There are two areas on which you might focus as you prayerful read this text. First, the passion account details the failures to stay true to Jesus of most of his closest disciples. Most of these same disciples were presumably responsible for passing on the accounts of their own failures. Surely they wanted us to learn from their weakness and sin. When you read the details of Jesus' disciples' failures to stay true to Him when His passion begins, how do you recognize in their weaknesses and sins your own weakness and sin? Second, it is clear that when Jesus enters into His passion He reveals the fullness of who He is - the Messiah who is willing to endure the worst injustice, abandonment, betrayal, physical torture, and spiritual agony in order to bring salvation to the world. Jesus in his passion and death shows us the fullness of who He is and what love is - completely emptying, selfless, merciful love for the worst sinners, even to the point of death. It is this Jesus in whom we have the freedom to believe. To believe in Him, as we have examined during Lent, means to put into practice His love in our own lives. As you look at this suffering Messiah - the real Jesus - to what extent to you want to live in Him?

Monday, 3/29: John 12.1-11

The final three days of Lent's readings invite us to consider the actions of one of Jesus' closest disciples: Judas. In today's passage, Judas objects to the anointing of Jesus' feet with expensive oil, saying the oil could have instead have been sold, with the proceeds given to the poor. The gospel writer explains that Judas does not actually care about the poor, but wants to steal the money that could be earned through selling the oil. Judas, who was at one point presumably a sincere disciple of Jesus, has obviously fallen far away from Him. What are your reactions to the example of a person who falls so far away from Jesus?

Tuesday, 3/30: John 13.21-33, 36-38

In this account of the Last Supper from John 13, Jesus knows that Judas will betray Him. He tells Judas to go do quickly what he is going to do. Judas immediately leaves and goes off into the night. Spend some time today reflecting on what you imagine might be going on inside Judas in this scene.

Wednesday, 3/31: Matthew 26.14-25

In this passage from Matthew 26, Judas asks some of Jesus' enemies what they are willing to give him if he hands over Jesus to them. Honestly, is there something you would accept in exchange for abandoning Jesus?

YOUR JAR!

After this Wednesday, we begin the observance of the holiest days of the year, the Triduum: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter.

Your helping to feed the hungry through **Labels Are For Jars** is a wonderful gift for God and the neediest of our brothers and sister. Please remove the money you've collected in your **Labels** jar. Count it, then put it in the form of a check or money order and mail it to **Labels Are For Jars**, 118 South Broadway, Lawrence, MA 01843. One hundred percent of the money you have collected will be used to feed hungry people through the Cor Unum Meal Center!

It is likely that the almsgiving you've pursued during Lent is meant to somehow continue to grow in the future. What are your thoughts and feelings about the material sacrifices you've made during Lent? Are you better off having made them?

For all of the hungry people whose lives you have changed through your sacrifice for **Labels Are For Jars**, many thanks! We hope that you will stay in touch with **Labels Are For Jars** in the months and years ahead! **God bless you!**