

From Ashes to Living Water



*Photo of Margaret River Bush Fire taken from 9km away on the Cape to Cape Track near Ellensbrook
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LENTEN PROGRAM 2012

Practicing Lent Together



Diocesan Pastoral Office ... empowering for mission:
one people—one mind—one mission



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our annual Lenten pilgrimage and to this resource from the Pastoral Office!

We begin with a word about the title of this year's program.

Most of us can recall the devastating events of just over a year ago in the Perth Hills, when bushfires claimed so many homes and ravaged so many families. And only weeks ago in our own Augusta-Margaret River region, we watched as homes, communities and families were affected and threatened by more bushfires. Often the media leave us with disturbing images of charred landscape, flattened homes and a sweep of grey ash. Bushfires are merciless; and we wonder how long will it take for the land and our lives to recover?

It is testimony to the human spirit and the grace of God, that so often in the face of disaster, men and women stand tall with courage and compassion. One such person is Rev. Jan Boyle from the Anglican Parish of Armadale. She assisted in setting up an evacuation centre during the Perth hills fires and counselling people afterwards. In the newspaper recently, she was reflecting on how the community was recovering one year after the bushfires. Rev. Boyle acknowledged the trauma some people are still dealing with, but she said "the community is wonderful and we have grown into a place of beauty. You can look at some faces now and you know their lives have changed. There's a lot of empathy in the community now. They have a sense of relationship that I think is missing in a lot of our neighbourhoods."

The scars of last year's bushfires; the ashes that broke so many hearts, are slowly yielding to a new spirit and a renewed connection between people. There are signs of 'life' where 'death' once engulfed the land and its people.

Strange as it may seem, our Lenten journey begins in ashes. We acknowledge that some of the fire of our Christian life has gone out. Our weaknesses have overcome our good intentions. Our apathy has left the world unchanged. Our limitations and destructive choices have wounded others. We forget we are mortal creatures totally dependent on God. So, we begin Lent by coming 'down to earth' in a gesture of radical honesty before God and each other. We put on ashes to 'own' that which is dead and deadly within us. We put on ashes as a cry for God to breathe into us anew the life of the Spirit.

The ashes of Ash Wednesday set us on a journey to the Easter Vigil and beyond. This is a journey to the Easter water our Catechumens are baptised in; and the Easter water we once again are sprinkled with as we renew our dedication to Christ and his mission. The waters of Easter are 'living waters'; they bring us (catechumens and baptised) the life of the Risen Christ. They bring us the Spirit of Christ that creates a community of courage, compassion and love...a community constantly renewing the face of the earth.

May this Lenten programme nourish you on this journey. It contains reflections on the Sunday Gospels of Year B, as well as a focus on Lenten practices that sustain and deepen our openness to God's action this Lent.

God bless your Lenten journey!

Pastoral Office Staff.

TIPS FOR LEADERS

The leader's role is to help the Lenten group run smoothly. Two hours is a good length of time, and suggested times for each part are set out below. Please do not feel that you must stick to these times, as each group will operate differently. As the leader, you may like to suggest that group members invite someone along who is not a regular mass-goer. This is a good way to help people come back to the practice of their Catholic faith.

1. GATHERING TOGETHER:

Welcome everyone, ask them to make themselves comfortable, and pray together the GATHERING PRAYER for the appropriate week.

(Suggested time 10 minutes)

2. PROCLAIMING AND HEARING THE GOSPEL:

Read the Gospel reading out loud, from this text, or from a bible. After reading, pause for silent reflection. (Suggested time: 15 minutes)

3. A LENS ON THE TEXT:

The LENS ON THE TEXT can be read by each person silently, or out loud by a volunteer. Having heard the gospel and the commentary; encourage the group to silently record their thoughts and answers to the questions in the TAKING THE GOSPEL TO HEART section.

(Suggested time 15 minutes)

4. SPEAKING THE WORD TOGETHER:

This is time for discussion on the questions in the TAKING THE GOSPEL TO HEART section. Encourage the group to discuss each of the questions, and encourage everyone to be involved.

(Suggested time: 30 minutes)

5. FOR THE COMING WEEK:

This section includes an explanation of a particular Lenten Practice, and some concrete suggestions for how group members can put this into practice during the week. Encourage group members to put these into practice to help deepen their Lenten experience between meetings.

6. CONCLUDE WITH A SENDING PRAYER:

Offer the provided intercessions together. (Suggested time: 5 minutes)

7. After the prayer, organise anything that needs to be done for the next Lenten group gathering. E.g. readers, morning tea etc. Thank everyone for coming together. (Suggested time: 5 minutes)



GATHERING PRAYER

Lord our God,
you formed man and woman from the clay of the earth
and breathed into them the spirit of life,
but they turned from your face and sinned.
In this time of repentance
we call out for your mercy.
Bring us back to you
and to the life your Son won for us
by his death on the cross,
for he lives and reigns for ever and ever
Amen

PROCLAIMING AND HEARING THE GOSPEL

A reading from the Gospel according to Mark. (1: 12-15)

The Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness and he remained there for forty days, and was put to the test by Satan. He was with the wild beasts, and the angels looked after him.

After John had been arrested, Jesus went into Galilee. There he proclaimed the gospel from God. 'The time has come' he said 'and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News.'

A LENS ON THE TEXT

The story of Jesus being tempted in the desert comes immediately after his baptism. Jesus begins his public ministry with his confrontation with evil and darkness. The rest of his life and ministry will continue this great battle and struggle: casting out demons, healing, struggling for the truth against corrupt leaders and even dealing with the blindness of his own disciples. Throughout this ministry Jesus proclaims the good news that the time of God's loving and healing reign is near. God's truth and love is stronger than distortion and injustice. Believe the good news and it will change your life.

SILENCE – TAKING THE GOSPEL TO HEART

1. *As I hear this Gospel, which words and phrases stay with me?*
2. *What responses and questions does it prompt in me?*
3. *In what way does it speak to my own experience of life?*

SPEAKING THE WORD TOGETHER

1. What temptations are we facing in our Parishes, communities and world at the moment?
2. Angels cared for Jesus in the desert. What gives you strength and hope as you face the challenges of being a Christian?
3. Share your Lenten hopes and prayers for this year with the group. What do you think are helpful Lenten practices today?

Personal Reflection

4. What drives me into the 'desert' to face the sin within myself and find the mercy of God is...

LENTEN PRACTICE OF AWARENESS

If there's one word that might be said to characterise the Christian gospel as a whole and the season of Lent in particular, it is the word "Awaken", the call to awake from slumber and to be "aware", that is, to be present in depth to the reality in which we find ourselves. It is a call to come back to the heart of reality and to what is really important in our life.

So often we find ourselves living outside of ourselves, swept along almost unconsciously from one thing to another, from one task to another, with little if any time to draw our breath or think in any depth of what it is we are doing and where it is we are going. It's as if we were not so much living our life as that life was living itself in and through us, regardless.

The Lenten call of today's gospel, "Repent", while it literally means a call to "change one's way of thinking", to "turn one's life around", is in reality a call to practice "awareness". And this for the reason that no true or effective "turning" or "conversion" in one's life is possible without the practice of awareness.

To practice "awareness" is to practice returning to one's still 'centre', to one's innermost heart beyond the noise and flurry of thoughts and activities within and around us. It is to make contact with the presence of God within us and so to find our true and deeper selves as grounded in and upheld by that divine presence. It is to listen to the inner voice of God and so learn to put on the mind and values of Christ. In this way we learn to take control of our lives and cease being driven by our fears, by external forces, by circumstances happening around us. Then, living mindfully, we learn to live life in its depths, aware not only of the presence of God within but also outside and around us, present and to be found in all people and in all things.

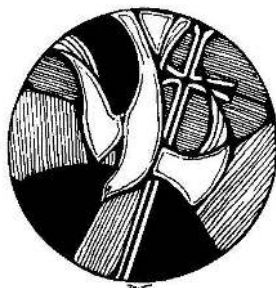
The practice of awareness then becomes primarily not something we do but something we **are**. We are aware that we are in God. We are aware that we are in love. Things will happen to us because we are aware, simply because awareness makes us different kinds of persons who are going to act in new ways. But we will only achieve these new ways of being and acting as we practice and grow in awareness: awareness of God and of people and of God's presence throughout God's world.

FOR THE COMING WEEK...

Thich Nhat Hanh, a Buddhist monk, was visited one day by Jim Forrest, the leader of a prominent Christian movement for peace and reconciliation. They had dinner together. Nhat Hahn's custom was to wash the dishes before serving tea and dessert. So they finished dinner and Nhat Hahn said he would wash the dishes before getting tea. Jim offered to do the dishes while Nhat Hahn was preparing the tea, but Nhat Hahn said: "I am not sure you know how to wash dishes." Jim laughed at him and said, "Of course I know how to wash dishes. I've been doing it all my life" "No," the monk said, "you would be washing the dishes in order to have your tea and dessert. That is not the way to wash dishes. You must wash dishes to wash dishes."

There is a profounder wisdom in that simple statement than we might at first realise: "You must wash dishes to wash dishes." It's the "*age quod agis* ["do what you do"] of the early Christian tradition and *The Imitation of Christ*. We must do what we are doing and give our whole attention to it. We must do it mindfully, for there we shall find God who is present in and throughout his creation and in everything we do. For as Scripture tells us, "There is only Christ, He is everything and He is *in* everything. (Colossians. 3:11). This is really what "ordinary awareness" is all about. It means doing each individual thing with full attention and full mindfulness, so that wherever you are and whatever you are doing, you are there totally and doing what you are doing mindfully. And doing it mindfully, according to the mind of Christ, you are meeting Christ and God there.

1. In order this Lent to practice and grow in awareness, this week choose one activity and resolve to do it mindfully: It could be to wash the dishes mindfully in the presence of Christ. It could be to say "Good morning" or "Hello" to the people we meet, conscious/ aware that in greeting them we are greeting Christ.
2. At night, as you retire, examine not only your conscience but your consciousness: Ask yourself, where did I meet God today? Was I aware that God was in that meeting with so and so? What was God asking of me in that encounter?



SENDING PRAYER

Response: Lord, create a new spirit within us.

Leader: Let us bless our Redeemer, who has brought us to this day of salvation.

Response

Leader: Christ, our Life, we were buried with you in baptism to rise from the dead;
Lead us this day along the new path of life.

Response

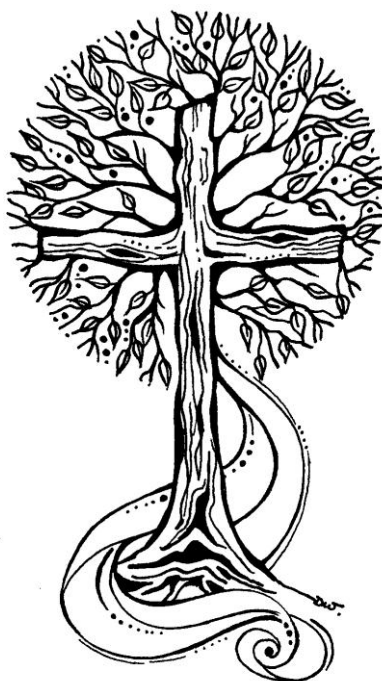
Leader: May your word take flesh in our lives and your truth shine forth in our
actions; may your love burn brightly within us.

Response

Leader: Open our hearts this week to your Lenten grace,

All: May the Lord bless us and strengthen us.

Amen





GATHERING PRAYER

Father of Light,
in you is found no shadow of change
but only the fullness of life and limitless truth.
Open our hearts to the voice of your Word
and free us from the original darkness that shadows our vision.
Restore our sight that we may look upon your Son
who calls us to repentance and a change of heart,
for he lives and reigns with you for ever and ever.
Amen

PROCLAIMING AND HEARING THE GOSPEL

A reading from the Gospel according to Mark. (9:2-10)

Jesus took with him Peter and James and John and led them up a high mountain where they could be alone by themselves. There in their presence he was transfigured: his clothes became dazzlingly white, whiter than any earthly bleacher could make them. Elijah appeared to them with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus. Then Peter spoke to Jesus, 'Rabbi,' he said, 'it is wonderful for us to be here; so let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.' He did not know what to say; they were so frightened. And a cloud came, covering them in shadow; and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him.' Then suddenly, when they looked round, they saw no one with them any more but only Jesus.

As they were coming down from the mountain he warned them to tell no one what they had seen, until after the Son of man had risen from the dead. They observed the warning faithfully, though among themselves they discussed what 'rising from the dead' could mean.



A LENS ON THE TEXT

Last Sunday we began Lent 'down' in the desert. This week we are taken 'up' to the mountain top, the place of revelation. Jesus is revealed to the disciples with a glimpse of his glory, as the 'beloved Son'. The story of the transfiguration in the gospel of Mark follows Jesus' first warning of his suffering and death. The disciples found this impossible to accept. Now on the mountain top the voice from heaven tells them 'listen to him'. The disciples are slowly being prepared for the scandal of the cross, and the new life and glory that comes through it. Resurrection and glory can only be understood in the mystery of suffering and dying.

SILENCE – TAKING THE GOSPEL TO HEART

- 1. As I hear this Gospel, which words and phrases stay with me?**
- 2. What responses and questions does it prompt in me?**
- 3. In what way does it speak to my own experience of life?**

SPEAKING THE WORD TOGETHER

1. Where have you seen 'glimpses' of God's glory lately? e.g. in creation, other people, liturgy etc. How have these moments affected you?
2. What is it like to struggle against the Cross in our lives? Why do we do it? What strengthens us to embrace our crosses?
3. Who sustains you in the 'ups and downs', the 'deserts' and 'transfigurations' of your Christian life? Who needs you to sustain them?

Personal Reflection

4. What needs to die in me so that I might experience God's joy and glory?

LENTEN PRACTICE OF PRAYER

Following from our first Lenten practice, once we have begun to make some progress, however small, in the “practice of awareness”, we become increasingly sensitive to the reality of God’s presence in all and everything around us. We begin to appreciate that God is as present in our round of everyday ordinary activities as he is present in Church, though in different ways. This sense of God’s presence in our daily life and world leads unfailingly to the practice of prayer. For to acknowledge, reverence and live in God’s presence is already to pray.

This helps us to make sense of Jesus’ command that we should “pray without ceasing and never lose heart” [Luke 18: 1,7; I Thess. 5:17]. It’s not that we are to be saying “Our Fathers” or “Hail Marys” all day long, a task impossible for even the most stalwart among us. It is to be aware of God’s presence in our daily life and activities and to respond to that presence. And of course we can respond to God’s presence in any number of ways, corresponding to the many different “forms” of prayer. So we may simply practice the prayer of awareness, a silent acknowledgement of God’s presence with us and a resting in that presence, letting ourselves be loved and refreshed by our God; or we may use words to speak with God through what is called oral prayers, using such hallowed prayers of our tradition as the Our Father or Hail Mary, the Memorare, or some other personal favourite; or we may spend some time quietly reading and reflecting on the Word of God in Scripture [lectio divina] or pray prayers of intercession for our needs and those of the world.

Whatever the particular form of prayer one follows, *our approach to prayer needs to be simple*. For a number of years in the city of Rochester in New York authorities had been trying to untangle a highway scramble that commuters had been living with for a long time. Affectionately dubbed the “Can of Worms”, it was a very busy location and had cars going east and west meeting at the same spot with cars going north and south. With a lot of nerve and a little bit of luck, one was able to make it through “the Can” unscathed. It would have been so much simpler if it had been originally built as it has now at long last been rebuilt, with east-west traffic on one level and north-south on another.

Sometimes we have to cut through the “can of worms” that we build around our prayer life. The road marked “awareness” is simple and uncomplicated. We have to leave it that way and let it lead us to that deep consciousness that we are in God as is everything else that is. This is the goal of life. It is also the beginning of new life. For it is only when we become aware of God’s great love for us that we come to know who we truly are and so begin really to live. Then we live fully in the here and now, experiencing something of the fullness of Life promised us by Jesus.



FOR THE COMING WEEK...

All prayer is grounded in and proceeds from awareness, an awareness of God as a Person present within us, as he is also present in every circumstance of our life and world. To pray is to be aware of that presence, to enter into conscious relationship with the God who is constantly present to us, awaiting and actively seeking our response that he might bless, love and support us into the fullness of life and living that he wills for us.

St Therese of Lisieux instructs us in a simple way of prayer, how to “connect’ with God, even in our times of dryness, how to engage in loving relationship and “conversation” with God.

“For me”, she writes, “prayer is an uplifting of the heart, a glance towards Heaven, a cry of gratitude and of love in times of sorrow as well as of joy. It is something noble, something supernatural which expands the soul and unites it to God”.

“To secure a hearing there is no need to recite prayers composed for the occasion... I have not the courage to search through books for beautiful prayers; they are so numerous, that it would only make my head ache, and besides, each one is more lovely than the other. Unable either to say them all, or to choose between them, I do as a child would do who cannot read – I just say what I want to say quite simply and God never fails to understand.”

This week, to grow in the Lenten practice of prayer;

1. Set aside a definite time in your day, it need be no more than a quiet 15 minutes or so, and practice the prayer of awareness. Sit quietly in a place where you can be undisturbed. It could be a quiet corner in the garden, or a comfy chair in the lounge, wherever. Try then to let all your thoughts and concerns fall from you, and simply BE in God’s presence. If thoughts and concerns intrude, do not engage them. Simply let them float by like little boats passing down the river of consciousness. You might anchor yourself in God’s presence by using a simple word like ‘Jesus’... Sitting thus in the presence of the Son, though you may feel you are doing nothing, you will be changed as God’s presence gradually takes hold of you to transform you. Or,
2. Spend 15 minutes apart from your everyday routine. Select a passage of scripture that speaks to you. Read it slowly and meditatively. Chew and digest the different words, thoughts and feelings as these arise in you from your reflective reading. Let God speak to you through his word. Respond slowly as the Spirit leads you and speaks through your own spirit.

SENDING PRAYER

Response: Lord, create a new spirit within us.

Leader: Let us bless our Redeemer, who has brought us to this day of salvation.

Response

Leader: Help us to put aside our selfish ways and let us put on Christ, the new man.

Response

Leader: Almighty Father, grant us a spirit of prayer and penance and grant that we may love you and one another.

Response

Leader: Open our hearts this week to your Lenten grace,

All: May the Lord bless us and strengthen us.

Amen



WEEK THREE



GATHERING PRAYER

*God of all compassion, Father of all goodness,
to heal the wounds our sins and selfishness bring upon us
you bid us turn to fasting, prayer, and sharing with our brothers and
sisters.*

*We acknowledge our sinfulness, our guilt is ever before us:
when our weakness causes discouragement,
let your compassion fill us with hope
and lead us through a Lent of repentance to the beauty of Easter joy.
Grant this through Christ our Lord,
Amen*

PROCLAIMING AND HEARING THE GOSPEL

A reading from the Gospel according to John. (2:13-25)

Just before the Jewish Passover Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and in the Temple he found people selling cattle and sheep and pigeons, and the money changers sitting at their counters there. Making a whip out of some cord, he drove them all out of the Temple, sheep and cattle as well, scattered the money changers' coins, knocked their tables over and said to the pigeon-sellers, 'Take all this out of here and stop turning my Father's house into a market.' Then his disciples remembered the words of scripture: *Zeal for your house will devour me.* The Jews intervened and said, 'What sign can you show us to justify what you have done?' Jesus answered, 'Destroy this sanctuary, and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews replied, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this sanctuary: are you going to raise it up in three days?' But he was speaking of the sanctuary that was his body, and when Jesus rose from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and the words he had said.

During his stay in Jerusalem for the Passover many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he gave, but Jesus knew them all and did not trust himself to them; he never needed evidence about any man; he could tell what a man had in him.

A LENS ON THE TEXT

In John's Gospel one of the first things Jesus does as he begins his ministry is to drive the money changers out of the Temple. His whole life and work are summed up in the words; "zeal for your house will consume me". Everything Jesus says and does is based on the loving relationship he has with his Father. Throughout John's Gospel Jesus will invite others into the relationship he shares with the Father. The Temple in Jerusalem is being replaced by the Temple of Jesus' body. Jesus the crucified – glorified Lord is the "way" to the Father. Faith and trust in Jesus leads us to share the very life of God.



SILENCE – TAKING THE GOSPEL TO HEART

- 1. As I hear this Gospel, which words and phrases stay with me?***
- 2. What responses and questions does it prompt in me?***
- 3. In what way does it speak to my own experience of life?***

SPEAKING THE WORD TOGETHER

1. Jesus is the 'living temple' of God among us. Where do you see signs of his presence in your life, your Parish and wider community?
2. Everything Jesus does in his ministry is based on the loving relationships he has with his Father. What are the priorities in your life and Parish? What needs changing?
3. Have you ever felt upset with the Church? How did you deal with it?

Personal Reflection

4. If Jesus were to visit you as his Temple, what would need cleansing?

LENTEN PRACTICE OF FASTING

We pay a lot of attention today to what we eat. Sometimes it is to 'lose weight' or just to 'get in shape'. Other times it is to improve our overall health.

Lent is a time to pay particular attention to our eating habits; but this time it is for our spiritual/personal health! One of the practices encouraged in many religious traditions is the practice of fasting. It is also an honoured practice of our Lenten tradition. But, why limit the amount of food and drink we consume, to the point of feeling hungry?

Like all practices the answer is best discovered in the actual experience of the practice, but here are some pointers.

- To deliberately allow ourselves to feel hungry and physically 'empty' awakens the deep sense of our hunger and emptiness for God. Emptiness and hunger help us get in touch with our deeper longing for God: the very hunger of our soul. From such a place we are more open and aware of God.
- Fasting heightens our awareness and makes us more 'alert'. It changes our consciousness, and focusses our attention in a powerful way. This is an aid to prayer as it makes it easier for us to listen to God more openly.
- Fasting joins us with the majority of the world who are forced to fast because of the physical shortage of food and drink they live with every day. This solidarity prompts us to active compassion.

FOR THE COMING WEEK...

Catholics are required to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Consider building into your Lenten journey one day of fasting each week. Limit the amount of food you consume, (obviously aware of your health and nutritional needs) and become aware of the physical sensation of hunger. Reflect and pray throughout the day as you go about your daily tasks. Call out to God from your hunger and emptiness. Pray for a just world that deals with poverty and hunger. Give of yourself.

Sometimes people also choose to 'fast' from diversions in their lives that distract them on their Lenten journey e.g. watching too much television (limit it to an hour a day?) indulging in idle chatter (resolve to say nothing mean about anybody?)

SENDING PRAYER

Response: Lord, create a new spirit within us.

Leader: Let us bless our Redeemer, who has brought us to this day of salvation.

Response

Leader: Father, may we hear your voice this Lent and pass with Christ from death to life.

Response

Leader: Purify your Church in these days of salvation and make her the living witness of your presence in the world.

Response

Leader: Open our hearts this week to your Lenten grace,

All: May the Lord bless us and strengthen us.

Amen.

WEEK FOUR



GATHERING PRAYER

God our Father,
your word, Jesus Christ, spoke peace to a sinful world
and brought mankind the gift of reconciliation
by the suffering and death he endured.
Teach us, the people who bear his name,
to follow the example he gave us:
may our faith, hope, and charity
turn hatred to love, conflict to peace, death to eternal life.
We ask this through Christ our Lord,
Amen

PROCLAIMING AND HEARING THE GOSPEL

A reading from the Gospel according to John. (3:14-21)

Jesus said to Nicodemus: 'The Son of Man must be lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him. Yes, God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life. For God sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world, but so that through him the world might be saved. No one who believes in him will be condemned; but whoever refuses to believe is condemned already, because he has refused to believe in the name of God's only Son. On these grounds is sentence pronounced: that though the light has come into the world men have shown they prefer darkness to the light because their deeds were evil. And indeed, everybody who does wrong hates the light and avoids it, for fear his actions should be exposed; but the man who lives by the truth comes out into the light, so that it may be plainly seen that what he does is done in God.'

A LENS ON THE TEXT

John's Gospel loves 'double meanings'. The reference to Jesus being 'lifted up' is a case in point. On the one hand it refers to Jesus being placed high on the cross. And just as the Hebrews who had been bitten by poisonous snakes found healing by looking upon the bronze serpent (first reading), so all who look with faith upon the crucified one will find fullness of divine life in Him. For on the cross, "God gave his only Son" out of love for the world.

However, being 'lifted up' also refers to Jesus 'exalted'. The cross is Jesus' throne of glory; He is King of the Jews and Saviour of the world.

Our response to God's love revealed in Jesus is to 'believe' in 'his only Son'. This is more than internal assent. It is choosing the light and living in the truth.

SILENCE – TAKING THE GOSPEL TO HEART

- 1. As I hear this Gospel, which words and phrases stay with me?***
- 2. What responses and questions does it prompt in me?***
- 3. In what way does it speak to my own experience of life?***

SPEAKING THE WORD TOGETHER

1. "God so loved the world..." When and how have you experienced this love of God for YOU?
2. The 'serpent' (first reading) and 'cross' (Gospel) both bring death, but also bring LIFE. Have you had an experience of new life and hope coming out of suffering, struggle and death? Share some of this mysterious action of God.
3. In the remaining weeks of Lent, what would help you and your Parish become more alive?

Personal Reflection

4. I might come closer to the light this Lent if I...

LENTEN PRACTICE OF GENEROSITY

Almsgiving has always been an important part of Lent. Project Compassion is almost synonymous with Lent here in Australia.

The Spanish mystic St John of the Cross said that in the evening of life we shall be judged according to our love. *Matthew 25* makes concrete for us the very nature of love. It is not primarily a feeling, conviction or attitude. Love is a concrete act on behalf of those in need; bearing another's burden.

Generosity though, is not simply giving what I have left over or making a donation to a cause. It is a basic attitude of heart. I realise **ALL** I have is a gift; given to me to be shared. Sharing with others becomes a personal priority. It is not something I tack on after I have taken care of all my needs; giving from my leftovers. Rather giving becomes one of my needs! Gradually I grow into a spirit of selfless giving.

Lent is a wonderful time to practice selfless giving. And it does take practice. With the practice comes a sense of solidarity with the poor who share with each other, without having any excess. The practice invites us to Christ who gave himself completely for us; it brings us a deep joy and gives life to others.

When a man asked the English Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins what he must do in order to believe, Hopkins replied 'give alms'.

FOR THE COMING WEEK...

During the week (or all the weeks of Lent) perform a particular and sustained act of love.

- It may be to make several visits to a relative in a nursing home.
- It may be to converse regularly with a lonely person in your street, or in the Parish.
- Repair a broken friendship.
- Bring together bickering factions at your workplace.
- Make a number of financial contributions to a life-giving cause e.g. Project Compassion.

You may find that you practice generosity and love, you will come to believe more deeply and enter more fully into friendship with God – who is love.

SENDING PRAYER

Response: Lord, create a new spirit within us.

Leader: Let us bless our Redeemer, who has brought us to this day of salvation.

Response

Leader: Christ our Lord, you gave yourself up for the Church to make her holy and renew her once more through the spirit of repentance.

Response

Leader: May your word take flesh in our lives and your truth shine forth in our actions and may your love burn brightly within us.

Response

Leader: Open our hearts this week to your Lenten grace,

All: May the Lord bless us and strengthen us.

Amen



GATHERING PRAYER

Father in heaven,
the love of your Son led him to accept the suffering of the cross
that his brethren might glory in new life.
Change our selfishness into self-giving.
Help us to embrace the world you have given us,
that we may transform the darkness of its pain
into the life and joy of Easter.
Grant this through Christ our Lord,
Amen

PROCLAIMING AND HEARING THE GOSPEL

A reading from the Gospel according to John. (12:20-33)

Among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. These approached Philip, who came from Bethsaida in Galilee, and put this request to him, 'Sir, we should like to see Jesus.' Philip went to tell Andrew, and Andrew and Philip together went to tell Jesus. Jesus replied to them:

'Now the hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified.

I tell you, most solemnly, unless a wheat grain falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest.

Anyone who loves his life loses it; anyone who hates his life in this world will keep it for the eternal life. If a man serves me, he must follow me, wherever I am, my servant will be there too. If anyone serves me, my Father will honour him. Now my soul is troubled. What shall I say: Father, save me from this hour? But it was for this very reason that I have come to this hour.

Father, glorify your name!

A voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.'

People standing by, who heard this, said it was a clap of thunder; others said, 'It was an angel speaking to him.' Jesus answered, 'It was not for my sake that this voice came, but for yours. 'Now sentence is being passed on this world; now the prince of this world is to be overthrown. And when I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all men to myself.'
By these words he indicated the kind of death he would die.



A LENS ON THE TEXT

In this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus refers to the 'hour' three times. But in John's Gospel the 'hour' does not refer to a particular time of day. Rather it refers to a significant period in the life of Jesus: his passion, death, resurrection and ascension. This is a drama that unfolds as one event revealing the glory of Jesus.

But Jesus is glorified through his death. Just like a grain of wheat that dies in order to produce much fruit, so the death of Jesus is the supreme act of love that brings new life to the whole world.

Like those in the Gospel we want to 'see' Jesus. John's Gospel makes it clear that Jesus can only truly be 'seen' when he is 'lifted up' on the cross of glory. Those who have a living faith in Him will find 'eternal life'.

SILENCE – TAKING THE GOSPEL TO HEART

- 1. As I hear this Gospel, which words and phrases stay with me?**
- 2. What responses and questions does it prompt in me?**
- 3. In what way does it speak to my own experience of life?**

SPEAKING THE WORD TOGETHER

1. Can suffering and death 'produce fruit'? In what ways? For whom? Share something of your experience.
2. The followers of Jesus are 'servants', giving their 'lives' to others. Who are some people who have been true 'servants' to you? How did they serve you?
3. What are the 'rulers of this world' e.g. structures, attitudes, etc. that need to be identified, confronted and cast out? In your community? Australia? The planet?

Personal Reflection

4. What am I learning from my struggles and suffering at the moment?

LENTEN PRACTICE OF PENANCE

Traditionally Lent has always been seen as a season of penance. And within that tradition, penance has always been viewed as predominantly something negative, a "giving up" of something that we might otherwise have enjoyed, and this for the sake of "making up" for the sins and transgressions we may have committed in the course of the past year. The practice was certainly a sound one, calculated to redress the injuries and imbalances to our spiritual life incurred in the passage of the previous year and to return us to full spiritual health. While respecting this tradition, we have today come to see that penance can also be seen in a more positive light as any action or practice that contributes to growthful progress in one's Christian spiritual life.

In fact this understanding is really not so new at all, for it was the understanding of the early Church itself. On this understanding, anything that contributed to the spiritual health of the individual or community was seen as an expression of penance, i.e., of the restitution of health to the Body of Christ. Thus an act of forgiveness offered to someone who had deeply hurt one, a Mass devoutly attended, an act of kindness and understanding to a stranger, an initiative calculated to build up the spirit of the community – all these were included under the rubric of penance, seen as contributing to the general health and well-being of the community.

There is a sound psychology behind this more positive approach to the practice of "penance". No one denies, of course, that there is a place for discipline and effort. But there is a kind of effort that is counter-productive. The more we fight with 'the enemy' the more power we give to it. The more plans we make – the avoidance, for instance, of our smoking companions as we try to give up smoking, the rerouting of our way home so as to avoid the pubs, the changing of our daily newspaper for one less committed to racing and gambling, the control of the kitchen environment so as to lessen the eating-binge temptation – the more uptight and unsuccessful we may find ourselves to be. Effort, whatever form it takes, does not always lead to growth

or positive change. In the wisdom of the early Christians, it was an appreciation of the power of the positive over the negative that led them to recommend the embrace of positive practices over simple repression as a more healthful and creative way to practice penance and so grow in the life and likeness of Christ.

FOR THE COMING WEEK...

The practice of the good is the best way to overcome the deficits of the bad. As a means of practicing “penance” this week, you may want to adopt one of the following strategies, or devise one of your own:

1. Make a point of going to visit some elderly “shut-in” or sick relative at the expense of the precious time you had set aside to see a show or to socialise with your friends.
2. Be positive and generous and respond with a smile when your husband or wife asks you to do something when you had other things in mind you wanted to do.
3. Instead of watching that late TV show, use the time to talk with your spouse or to share a scripture reading or to pray together.
4. Donate the monies you would ordinarily spend on drink or entertainment to the Vinnies or to some other good work of your choice.

SENDING PRAYER

Response: Lord, create a new spirit within us.

Leader: Let us bless our Redeemer, who has brought us to this day of salvation.

Response.

Leader: Help us to do what is right and good and let us seek you always with all our heart.

Response.

Leader: Help us to care for our neighbour and show your love for all and through us let the light of your salvation shine in the world.

Response.

Leader: Open our hearts this week to your Lenten grace,

All: May the Lord bless us and strengthen us.

Amen.

