



Bringing Home the Word

First Sunday of Lent | March 5, 2017

Framework for Conversion

By Mary Katharine Deeley

In the campus church where I work, more people show up on Ash Wednesday than on any other day. Practicing Catholics, Catholics who are a little or a lot out of practice, and non-Catholics who sense the need for a period of discipline stream through the doors to remember that they are dust and into dust they shall return.

With a cross smudged on their foreheads, they go out, sensing that this defined six-week block called Lent is a real chance to change course and renew

their lives. Many of them return each Sunday to hear ancient stories and try to live into the good intentions symbolized by the ashes.

Ash Wednesday creates a framework for conversion, and the first Sunday of Lent tells us why we need it. The Genesis story is an explanation for the brokenness of the world that comes not from God's error in creation but from our desire to be God and control our own destiny. The creature cannot be the creator. We cannot know fully what God knows. For Adam and Eve, such knowledge is power, and they aren't content with what God has given them.

In the desert, Jesus is also tempted to show his power and take control from his Father. He could refuse to subject himself to God's will. He could make bread and force God to care for him. Even more, he could give power over to one who is not God. Instead, Jesus gives his life over to God. With his grace, we can do the same. Where are you being tempted to push God aside and take control? †

Sunday Readings

Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7

"The LORD God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life."

Romans 5:12-19

"Through the obedience of the one, the many will be made righteous."

Matthew 4:1-11

"Then the devil left him and, behold, angels came and ministered to him."

*Lent gives us a chance
to change course
and renew our lives.*

A Word From Pope Francis

Only when the difficulties and suffering of others confront and question us may we begin our journey of conversion toward Easter. It is an itinerary which involves the Cross and self-denial....[The] elements of this spiritual journey: prayer, fasting and almsgiving (see Matthew 6:1-6; 16-18). All three exclude the need for appearances: what counts is not appearances; the value of life does not depend on the approval of others or on success, but on what we have inside us.

— Homily,
March 5, 2014



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS REFLECTION

- When have you been tempted to make something in your life more important than God?
- How can you give your life over to God this Lent?



Conversion as Dying/Rising

By Rev. James B. Dunning

Although conversion is no one-time born-again experience, each conversion is a new birth. All great moments of agony and ecstasy normally involve the trauma and triumph of birth. Especially at life's great turning points, we are like Abraham and Sarah setting out into the desert. Are we able to let go of control and journey in faith on uncharted paths?

Since Catholics are many times born again, we have sacraments and a liturgical year to celebrate and nourish this new creation. All of human life can be born

again. The ordinary is born again into the extraordinary; our faith vision helps us see this. Sunday after Sunday, Lent after Lent, year after year, we bring all this to liturgy so that all of life and all creation might be born again and again through God's Spirit who makes all creation new.

A second image of conversion is the paschal mystery, namely, our entering the dying/rising of Jesus. This image is grounded in the RCIA. There the Church offers a vision of conversion for new members. The RCIA states that this also holds true for all members,

since conversion is an ongoing journey. Again, the Catholic version of conversion is sacramental. Initiation is the first sharing in Christ's dying/rising. But all sacraments, especially the Eucharist, celebrate our experience of the death and resurrection of Christ.

For many people, dying often means a crisis. Dying can also mean the day-to-day dying of people who love, for example, in marriage, friendship, serving others. In Italian, *amore*, "love," has its roots in *morte*, "death." In the quiet dailiness of our relationships and vocations, we experience death to self and to our needs. This kind of dying is part of one's care, compassion, sensitivity, and love for others. We experience the new life that death brings. When we turn to God as the source of that life, conversion happens. †

Source: *Catholic Update*,
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The Way to Conversion

By Mary Carol Kendzia

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us, "Jesus' call to conversion and penance, like that of the prophets before him, does not aim first at outward works, 'sackcloth and ashes,' fasting and mortification, but at the conversion of the heart, interior conversion. Without this, such penances remain sterile and false" (CCC 1430).

A heart can be changed in a moment with a thought, a prayer, an insight, the gift of grace. Conversion integrates that change into our lives, our work, our

practices, and our prayer. Conversion takes the divine spark that illuminates our very being and makes it real in the comings and goings of our days.

Few of us have that born-again, fall-off-the-horse conversion experience of St. Paul on the road to Damascus. Most of our conversion takes place slowly, daily, through the Spirit's more subtle action enfolded in people and events.

Lent after Lent, year after year, we turn our minds and our hearts to God in a deeper and more focused way through the practices of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving. Repenting for the times and ways we turn from God, we seek to renew our lives, dying to our self in order to rise again on Easter. We also prepare to go into the baptismal water at the Easter

Vigil and emerge a new Christian, a believer more firmly grounded in faith and committed to discipleship.

This is the promise held out to us each Lent. †

Source: *Liguorian*, © March 2014, Liguori Publications



Lord, deepen my awareness of and respect for your presence in creation and in the people around me.

—From *Mindful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time*,
Rev. Warren J. Savage and
Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

March 6–11

Mon. Lenten Weekday:
Lv 19:1–2, 11–18 / Mt 25:31–46
Tue. Lenten Weekday:
Is 55:10–11 / Mt 6:7–15
Wed. Lenten Weekday:
Jon 3:1–10 / Lk 11:29–32

Thu. Lenten Weekday:
Est C:12, 14–16, 23–25 / Mt 7:7–12
Fri. Lenten Weekday:
Ez 18:21–28 / Mt 5:20–26
Sat. Lenten Weekday:
Dt 26:16–19 / Mt 5:43–48

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Bringing Home the Word

Second Sunday of Lent | March 12, 2017

A Faith So Strong

By Mary Katharine Deeley

Some people get excited about moving. I'm not one of them. I don't like the boxes and the mess, and I find it hard to get settled in a new place. So I can't imagine what seventy-five-year-old Abram thought when God told him to leave his homeland and set out for a place he had never seen.

I stand in wonder of faith so strong that it finds the word of God compelling with no evidence that the promises will come true. But in our long history as a people of God, God is forever waking

people up or giving them a vision of a different life, usually far from where they are.

So it is with our spiritual life as well. In today's Gospel, Jesus leads Peter, James, and John up a high mountain and into a vision of Jesus as the glorious Son of God. Wherever they had been in their faith, this was a radical call to move, to grow deeper, and to embrace the identity of the man they called Jesus. Until that moment, Jesus was a compelling preacher and healer. On top of that mountain, he became the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets (Moses and Elijah represent those parts of the Old Testament canon).

When Peter, James, and John heard "Listen to him" coming from the cloud, they could no longer pretend this was an ordinary religious figure. They would never be the same, and the journey would lead them to the cross and beyond. Are you being asked to move in your spiritual life? Where will that take you? †

Sunday Readings

Genesis 12:1-4a

"I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing."

2 Timothy 1:8b-10

"Bear your share of hardship for the gospel with the strength that comes from God."

Matthew 17:1-9

"But Jesus came and touched them, saying, 'Rise, and do not be afraid.'"

*Atop the mountain,
Jesus became the
fulfillment of the
Law and the Prophets.*

A Word From Pope Francis

The first duty of the Christian is to listen to the Word of God, to listen to Jesus, because he speaks to us and he saves us by his word. And by this word he makes our faith even stronger and more robust. Listen to Jesus! "But, Father, I do listen to Jesus, I listen a lot!" "Yes? What do you listen to?" "I listen to the radio, I listen to the television, I listen to people gossip." We listen to so many things throughout the day, so many things....But I ask you a question: do we take a little time each day to listen to Jesus?

—Homily,
March 16, 2014



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS REFLECTION

- Where is your Lenten journey leading you?
- Do you believe in God's promises without question? Or have you struggled to believe this Lent?



Mountaintop Moments

By Kathleen M. Basi

Every year the story of the transfiguration comes around on the second Sunday of Lent. The poor disciples don't quite know what to do during this experience. Peter wants to build altars to try and capture the moment. He catches a lot of flak for it, but maybe he was on to something. After all, sometimes you need a beautiful vision to hang on to when the going gets tough.

After leaving the mountain, Jesus and the disciples journey to Jerusalem. Jesus

goes from being proclaimed the Messiah to hanging on a cross, tortured and murdered, his band of followers broken by betrayal and scattered by fear.

We all experience transcendent moments when life seems picture perfect and our dreams seem to be taking tangible form. But all too often these moments of glory are followed in short order by some excruciatingly difficult experience—doubt, loss, devastating illness. Sometimes life spins us around

and sets us back down in the same place and we discover the life we once found so full of joy is now crowded with suffering.

Perhaps those “mountaintop” experiences are a free gift of grace, a glimpse of what is real, of what is pure, lovely, and gracious. They give us something to cling to when life seems to be falling to pieces around us.

Jesus probably needed that moment to fortify himself for the passion—but his human companions needed it more. The disciples were about to have their faith shaken to its foundation. They were about to question whether everything they had come to believe about this man was wrong. Up on that mountain, God gave the disciples a preview of the glory that lies beyond the valley of the shadow. †

Source: *Liguorian*,
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God Behind the Scenes

By Kathleen M. Basi

Several times over the past few years, I've made major life shifts on the spur of the moment. For instance, starting a weight-loss program or potty training a toddler. One day, without any discussion or preparation, I said, “That's it, I'm doing this now.” And I did.

As time passes, though, I'm beginning to realize that these “abrupt” direction changes aren't sudden at all. Always, in the weeks or months before the turning point, there's an undercurrent of awareness buried deep down. Questions form in unguarded moments but go unanswered.

Weight loss and toilet training may

seem like trivial examples, but they illustrate a deeper truth. God is always working in the background, and God will eventually punch through our distractions and nudge us in a new direction.

That's not to say we can just sit by and wait for God to beat through the tangled web of busyness we build around our consciousness. It's our job to navigate the “undercurrent” until it melds into smoother waters. We have to nurture the spiritual life and be open to God's guidance—on his timeline, not ours. The most important insights and decisions cannot be rushed. God works through processes, and there just aren't any shortcuts.

Embrace these times, even when they make life uncomfortable. There's a purity of mind in discerning and pursuing new directions that automatically brings our focus toward God. In these moments,

when we become aware of that deep, quiet current running beneath the clutter and static of life, we can feel that God abides within us. And that is a great blessing. †

Source: *Liguorian*,
© February 2016, Liguori Publications



Lord, open my ears to hear your invitation to listen to your Son in the word of God and my heart to discern what it means to be your humble servant.

— From *Mindful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time*,
Rev. Warren J. Savage
and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

March 13–18

Mon. Lenten Weekday:
Dn 9:4b–10 / Lk 6:36–38

Tue. Lenten Weekday:
Is 1:10, 16–20 / Mt 23:1–12

Wed. Lenten Weekday:
Jer 18:18–20 / Mt 20:17–28

Thu. Lenten Weekday:
Jer 17:5–10 / Lk 16:19–31

Fri. Lenten Weekday:
Gn 37:3–4, 12–13a, 17b–28a /
Mt 21:33–43, 45–46

Sat. Lenten Weekday:
Mi 7:14–15, 18–20 / Lk 15:1–3, 11–32

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Bringing Home the Word

Third Sunday of Lent | March 19, 2017

Source of Life

By Mary Katharine Deeley

The conventional wisdom of fitness experts and health professionals is that we should drink eight glasses of water a day. This suggestion is the product of a country with the luxury of clean, abundant, easily accessible water. Some of us are so used to processed water that we balk when we have to drink well water.

Some people think bottled water is a necessity because, in their minds, it tastes better. It rarely hits home that in much of the world safe drinking water is scarce,

if it's available at all. People who live in those areas have to make do with the little good water they have for drinking, cooking, and washing.

In the desert regions of the Middle East, wells were a source of life and a social meeting place. Asking for water took a little courage in a place where water was rare. Offering someone water was a great gesture of hospitality.

Jesus' request invited the woman's hospitality and led to so much more. She opened her life to Jesus; in turn, Jesus revealed who he was and the gift of life he brings.

Living water must have sounded like a dream to a woman with a stagnant well, and maybe it does to us, too, but we do know this: Those who drink eight glasses of water a day will eventually die as surely as those who fight for even one.

On the other hand, Jesus promises that if we drink the water he gives, we will have eternal life—for he *is* Living Water. Have you had your glass today? †

*All of us need
the living water
of Christ, our Lord.*

A Word From Pope Francis

[Repentance] is the call to change one's life. Conversion is not the question of a moment or a time of the year, it is an undertaking that lasts one's entire lifetime. Who among us can presume not to be a sinner? No one. We are all sinners. The Apostle John writes: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins..." (1 John 1:8-9). And that is what is happening during this celebration and throughout this day of penance.

—Homily,
Celebration of Penance
March 28, 2014



Sunday Readings

Exodus 17:3-7

"Is the LORD in our midst or not?"

Romans 5:1-2, 5-8

"And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts."

John 4:5-42

"Many of the Samaritans of that town began to believe in him because of the word of the woman who testified."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- What about your faith have you taken for granted because it's as abundant as water?
- How can you offer the precious gift of faith to someone this Lent?



Coming to Faith and Living Water

By Raymond E. Brown, SS

The story of the woman at the well illustrates how difficult it is to come to Jesus in faith because of obstacles. Many people have a chip on their shoulder toward God because they feel beaten down by the inequalities in life. The woman smarts from the Jewish dislike for Samaritans, especially for Samaritan women. And that is her first obstacle to dealing with Jesus.

Jesus does not answer her objection; he is not going to change instantly a

whole world of injustice. Yet he can offer something that will enable the woman to put injustice in perspective, namely, living water. He means water that gives life; she misunderstands it as flowing water, asking him if he thinks he is greater than Jacob, provider of a well.

Ironically, as John expects the reader to recognize, Jesus is greater than Jacob; but Jesus refuses to be sidetracked from his main goal. He explains that he is speaking of the water that springs up to eternal life,

water that will permanently end thirst. With a masterful touch, John shows her attracted on a level of the convenience of not having to come to the well every day for water.

To move the woman to a higher level, Jesus shifts the focus to her husband. Her reply is a half truth, but Jesus shows that he is aware of the real story. Confronted with Jesus' surprising knowledge of her situation, the woman is still not fully convinced. She poses to the villagers the question, "Could this be the Messiah?" The villagers come and encounter Jesus for themselves. We are left to surmise that, by being instrumental in bringing others to believe, the woman's own faith came to completion. And at last she drank of the water of life. †

Source: *Catholic Update*,
© March 1996, Liguori Publications

Season of Lent Is Very Baptismal

By Rev. Lawrence E. Mick

The key to understanding the meaning of Lent is simple: Baptism. Preparation for baptism and for renewing baptismal commitment lies at the heart of the season. Our challenge today is to renew our understanding of this important season of the Church year to see how we can integrate our personal practices into this renewed perspective.

Why is baptism so important in our Lenten understanding? Lent as a forty-day season developed in the fourth century from three merging sources.

The first was the ancient paschal fast that began as a two-day observance before Easter but was gradually lengthened to forty days. The second was the catechumenate as a process of preparation for baptism, including an intense period of preparation for the sacraments of initiation to be celebrated at Easter. The third was the order of penitents, which was modeled on the catechumenate and sought a second conversion for those who had fallen back into serious sin after baptism. As the candidates for baptism (catechumens) entered their final period of preparation for baptism, the penitents and the rest of the community accompanied them on their journey and prepared to renew their baptismal vows at Easter.

Lent, then, is radically baptismal, and whether we are lifelong Catholics or new

to the faith, we are all called to reapproach our faith this season with the spirit of a new convert and a penitent. †

Source: *Catholic Update*,
© March 2012, Liguori Publications



Lord, you created me to be a member of the human family. Empower me to show respect and love to all people, regardless of their racial, cultural, religious, and social background.

— From *Mindful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time*
Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

March 20–25

Mon. St. Joseph: 2 Sm 7:4–5a, 12–14a, 16 / Rom 4:13, 16–18, 22 / Mt 1:16, 18–21, 24a

Tue. Lenten Weekday: Dn 3:25, 34–43 / Mt 18:21–25

Wed. Lenten Weekday: Dt 4:1, 5–9 / Mt 5:17–19

Thu. Lenten Weekday: Jer 7:23–28 / Lk 11:14–23

Fri. Lenten Weekday: Hos 14:2–10 / Mk 12:28–34

Sat. Annunciation of the Lord: Is 7:10–14; 8:10 / Heb 10:4–10 / Lk 1:26–38



Bringing Home the Word

Fourth Sunday of Lent | March 26, 2017

Seeing as God Sees

By Mary Katharine Deeley

“Do you see what I’m saying?” The question came at the end of a difficult conversation about a hurtful remark I’d made. I hadn’t intended it to hurt—I was going for a cheap laugh in a group of people, and I got it. But, as my colleague made clear to me, the laugh came at the expense of her comfort and, to some extent, her dignity.

The very fact that she had to call it to my attention meant that I had not been paying attention. I didn’t “see” her—I saw only myself scoring laugh points with the

seven or eight people we were with. Let’s face it: I was blind to her and to the effect of my words.

In today’s Scriptures, Samuel is chastised for his narrow vision because he believes a king must surely look like Eliab, someone of stature and importance. He saw only what impressed him. He couldn’t look into the heart as God did, so he didn’t see as God did.

The Pharisees, too, are called to account for their own constricted sight, which couldn’t accept that a man born blind might know the presence of God more surely than they ever could. When we’re convinced of our own righteousness and consider ourselves more important than anyone else, we become blind to others and to God.

Today our prayers ask God for holy sight—the grace to see the world and all in it as God sees. Many things can make us blind, but God can open the eyes of our heart if we simply come to him and ask him to help us see. †

Sunday Readings

1 Samuel 16:1b, 6–7, 10–13a

“Then Samuel, with the horn of oil in hand, anointed [David] in the midst of his brothers.”

Ephesians 5:8–14

“Live as children of light, for light produces every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth.”

John 9:1–41

“Jesus said to them, ‘If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you are saying, “We see,” so your sin remains.’”

*Sometimes we
are blind to the effect
of our words.*

A Word From Pope Francis

We all have within us some areas, some parts of our heart that are not alive, that are a little dead...a true spiritual necrosis! And when we are in this situation, we know it, we want to get out but we can’t. Only the power of Jesus...can help us come out of these atrophied zones of the heart, these tombs of sin, which we all have. We are all sinners...all of us, who are sinners, do not end up attached to sin, but... hear what Jesus said to Lazarus: “He cried out with a loud voice: ‘Lazarus, come out’” (John 11:43).

—Homily,
April 6, 2014



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS REFLECTION

- What have I been blind to this Lent?
- How can I begin to see through God’s eyes this Lent?



Just Jesus?

By Kathleen M. Basi

At first blush, the catch phrase “just Jesus” makes a lot of sense. Christianity is, after all, a lifelong pursuit of a relationship with a person—Jesus. That’s the critical thing, and yet it’s easy to get stuck on rules and regulations instead of relationship. As the saying goes, it’s one thing to know about Christ; to actually know him—that’s something different.

On the other hand, relationships walk hand in hand with responsibility. Parents must put their convenience second to

their children’s needs. Spouses must count each other’s well-being as equal to their own. Coworkers must treat each other with respect.

The trouble with the phrase “just Jesus” is that it seems to suggest our actions aren’t really important. But Jesus didn’t just sit on a mountainside telling nice stories. He spent his days healing the sick and offering acceptance, forgiveness, and a new start to people who thought they were beyond salvation. He chose a simple life and the pursuit of God in all things, to the point where he didn’t really have a home or a job or any of the security

human beings crave. He put God’s will first, even when that meant giving up his very life. That was how he built relationships.

Jesus lives within every person, and that means our relationship with every other person is our relationship with Jesus. It’s a whole lot more than a profession of faith or a pious feeling. It’s expressed through what we do. It must shape our words. It must direct every action and decision, from the small (like what to see at the movies) to the life-changing (like natural family planning). †

Source: *Liguorian*,
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Be More Like the Divine

By Fr. Bruce Lewandowski, CSsR

On news and information services, reporters often refer to terrorists as radicals. This automatically puts *radical* on the list of bad words—but it’s not bad. The difference between extremists and radicals is simple. Radical means to return to the root or origin of something. So a radical Christian would seem very similar to Jesus or a radical Muslim would appear very much like Muhammad. An extremist is one who holds ideas or beliefs that can result in action that is beyond the norm of what is normally expected or acceptable.

Pope Benedict XVI wrote in *Deus*

Caritas Est (2005) that “the Christian who prays does not claim to be able to change God’s plans or correct what he has foreseen. Rather he seeks an encounter with the Father of Jesus Christ.” And still further, “A personal relationship with God and an abandonment to his will can prevent man from being demeaned and save him from falling prey to the teaching of fanaticism and terrorism.” Prayer seeks an encounter. Relationship is the key.

The disciples spent a lot of time with Jesus, and in doing so they began to speak as he spoke and act as he acted. They became Christlike simply by spending time with him. Something of Jesus rubbed off on his followers. People could see Jesus in them. Radical prayer calls us back to this kind of relationship: spending time with Jesus; lingering before the Lord; passing time in the

presence of the Holy One; and staying with him long enough to have something of Jesus rub off on us. Through radical prayer, we start to look, think, and act like the Divine, and others can see something of Jesus in us. †

Source: *Liguorian*,
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WEEKDAY READINGS

March 27–April 1

Mon. Lenten Weekday:
Is 65:17–21 / Jn 4:43–54
Tue. Lenten Weekday:
Ez 47:1–9, 12 / Jn 5:1–16
Wed. Lenten Weekday:
Is 49:8–15 / Jn 5:17–30

Thu. Lenten Weekday:
Ex 32:7–14 / Jn 5:31–47
Fri. Lenten Weekday:
Wis 2:1a, 12–22 / Jn 7:1–2, 10, 25–30
Sat. Lenten Weekday:
Jer 11:18–20 / Jn 7:40–53

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PRAYER

Lord, you are the Word of God that shows me what is good, right, and true. Make me a faithful witness to your Word.

— From *Mindful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time*
Rev. Warren J. Savage
and Mary Ann McSweeney