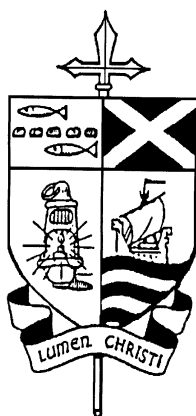


Reflections on the Lectionary for Lent 2009

The Year of Mark



Rt. Rev. Christopher Budd
Bishop of Plymouth



Essentially, Lent is about Holiness. The essence of Holiness is the authentic development of our being the image and likeness of Christ, the perfect image of the Father. Forever patient and long suffering with us, the Lord gives us all a lifetime to develop into the person that we are called to be. The gift of grace in baptism is about this, and the moral demands of the Christian life form us into Christ's Holy People. Lent is about that Holiness.

May I make three suggestions for this Lent:

First, celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation. There the mercy of God is permanently available to us as we engage in the moral struggles of our Christian journey. We need to face ourselves honestly and to work out a strategy for bringing about those changes in life that honesty and truth require of us.

Secondly, carry out a review of life so that we can address those relationships, be they family or other, where forgiveness and healing are needed. We may need to move ahead gently, but Lent is the opportunity when broken and sinful relationships can be dealt with. One step at a time should guide us.

Thirdly, we need to live more simply as a way to peace. If we aspire to being builders of peace, we will need a reliable and regular commitment to prayer and to living in a way that is purposely moderate. All three of these are ways to holiness

May God bless you all

Rt Rev Christopher Budd

Bishop of Plymouth

January 2009

ASH WEDNESDAY

**“HAVE MERCY ON US, O LORD,
FOR WE HAVE SINNED”**

2 Corinthians 5, 20-6-12

The weeks of Lent are not a time for us to scrub away at our “sin” spots, so that we can look better by the time we come to Easter. They are not primarily centred on ‘me’. They are God-centred and the most important question is; “What is God asking of me now, this Lent in 2009?”

If we look at our Second Reading, a couple of things might come to mind. Through us God wants to give a message to our contemporaries. The message is “be reconciled to God”. The catalyst of this is Jesus Christ. He identified himself with sinful humanity (“for our sake God made the sinless one into sin”), so that we could be freed from the poison of sin (“so that in him we become the goodness of God”). In other words, because Christ became one of us, we can now live according to our real truth – we are made in the image and likeness of God.

Christ has done that for us, and it is now the Good News – we are related again to God in the way that the Lord himself desires. This appeal in Christ is for our benefit. Lent is about our seeking reconciliation with the Lord, in whatever way is needed. May I strongly recommend that the Sacrament of Reconciliation itself has an important part to play, both in Lent and at other times of the year.

A second thought is that we must not miss the bus! Lent 2009 will never occur again. There is open to us during these weeks an opportunity of grace that is unique and timely, and we must not miss it. As St. Paul puts it, stressing the divine initiative, *“At the favourable time, I have listened to you; on the day of salvation I came to your help. Now is the favourable time; this is the day of salvation”*.

During these weeks, the Lord is asking you to engage with him, so that he can do something in your life that needs to be done. Do not miss out!

Pray for the ability to listen to the Lord
(Joel 2, 12-18 & Matthew 6, 1-6 & 16-18)

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

“GOD’S COVENANT WITH HIS CREATION”

1 Peter 3, 18-22

Our baptised status should dominate our reflections during Lent. During the celebration of Easter, we will be invited to renew the Covenant with God as we renew our baptismal promises. From God’s side, this Covenant is made firm and reliable in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus is the source of everything that flows from God to us.

God’s Covenant with Noah, after the flood, was a pledge that never again would there be death and destruction for us and the whole of creation. As our Second Reading puts it: *“That water (flood) is a type of the baptism which saves you now, and which is not the washing-off of physical dirt, but a pledge made to God from a good conscience, through the salvation of Jesus Christ”*.

Our baptised status, and the relationship with God that it gives us, cannot be over overstated.

It makes us, who we are, and enables us to live in a way worthy of that status.

This Christian way includes our ability to embrace other people as our brothers and sisters, and to share the goods of the earth with them. Perhaps here we have scope for quite a penetrating and probing examination of conscience.

If we relate to other human beings in the right way, we cannot avoid relating correctly to the rest of creation. We have a profound solidarity with the rest of creation. All this is gift, and the way we treat and nurture it will be a good indicator of the health of our Christian moral life.

Both areas of our lives – the way we relate to each other as brothers and sisters and the way we treat our universe and planet - offer us a Lenten agenda. By this means, we can examine our lives and develop a discipline, not just for Lent but for the rest of our lives.

Pray for the gift of honest self-insight

(Genesis 9, 8-15 & Mark 1, 12-15)

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

CHRIST – GOD’S GIFT TO US

Romans 8, 31-34

The second Sunday of Lent will always be dominated by the scene of the Transfiguration: the Lord Jesus revealing his true status to the chosen three. It is always interesting to note Jesus’ injunction that the three should not speak about their experience until Easter, “*after the Son of Man had risen from the dead*”. Paul in his letter to the Romans takes up and develops the gifted nature of Jesus’ coming among us and putting his life “on the line” for us.

Paul sees the gift of Christ as the sure and reliable sign that God is on our side. What Christ does and suffers is for our benefit:

*“God did not spare his own Son,
but gave him up to benefit us all”.*

Jesus is such a gift that anything we need will not be refused by God. Unfortunately we often think of things we need that really have little to do with our benefit and yet we think they do (e.g. success, getting rich fast).

The benefit that Jesus (God's gift to us) brings will always affect the way we relate to God; and how that is promoted and developed. After such redemptive work, God will not refuse us anything – he forgives our sins and reconciles us to himself. Paul puts it powerfully; *“Can anyone accuse those that God has chosen; when God acquits, could anyone condemn?”*

The permanent effect of Jesus being given to us is that we are invited to give our life to God.

Lent is about doing a reality check on our discipleship. Abraham's story is a powerful instance of the faithful disciple's willingness to give his own life back to his Lord in the form of his son, Isaac. It also prefigures God's original gift to us in Jesus.

Pray for “the obedience of faith”
(Genesis 22, 1-2; 9-13; 15-18 & Mark 9, 2-10)

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

THE WISDOM OF GOD

1 Corinthians 1, 22-25

On this Sunday in the year of Mark we are invited to listen to the Ten Commandments as recorded in Exodus. It is interesting how the liturgy of the Church links this to a short passage from St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians about the wisdom of God. For Paul, the wisdom of God is firmly and irretrievably embodied in the crucified Christ (*"an obstacle to the Jews and madness to the Greeks"*).

It is difficult to unpack this wisdom, because how can it be that the majesty and might of God can be revealed and disclosed to us in such an act of weakness as the crucifixion? The only answer is love, a love that knows no bounds and can do the "craziest things" to demonstrate it.

The incident in the Gospel (Jesus clearing the traders from the Temple) also shows an interesting side of the Lord. He cannot abide abuse of his Father's house. The activities there obscured the real business of that house – a

place where people could access the love of God without let or hindrance.

The wisdom of God is expressed in a truly accessible way in the Ten Commandments – God's attempt to define the moral boundaries for being a faithful disciple. The Commandments can also be seen as the distillation of human wisdom at its best being completed and recognised by the Lord.

In our present century, the Commandments, with their wholesome values, are God's wisdom. Many of our contemporaries see them as seriously infringing our personal autonomy. Our seriously living them can be a useful challenge to much that is amiss in our society.

Pray for the gift of wisdom
(Exodus 20, 1-17 & John 2, 13-25)

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

THE GIFT OF GOD'S LOVE

Ephesians 2, 4-10

The Reading proclaimed today gives real depth and foundation to the title of this Sunday, **Laetare**. Lasting joy is not based on passing shallow experiences that constitute a “feel-good” factor in our lives. God is not into “tickling our ego” by providing a series of feel-good experiences. He treats us with much more respect than that. It would be easy for God to con us and let us pretend all is well and that the divine intention is to make us feel good. The Lord and we give a big ‘No’ to that. It hardly acknowledges our dignity as human beings.

The Lord's purposes in our regard are expressed in the way God loves us: “*When we were dead through our sins, he brought us to life with Christ*”. We experience God's love, particularly as mercy and generosity. We have no claim on it. God could very reasonably have left us to wallow in our self-imposed sin, impotent to do anything about it and being swept along into death and decay as our final destiny.

No; God is not like that. As the First Reading recalls, his dealings with his people throughout the Old Testament were providing them with second chances. In Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus he insists that, despite sin, *"God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost, but have eternal life"*.

The God who is revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus is a God who is rich in grace and mercy. We are not saved by our own efforts or any good things we may do. We are given direction and meaning by a totally gratuitous and loving intervention of God to get us back on track. The reason we take our sinfulness seriously (Lent in particular is a good time to check that out) is that we also desire God's mercy and love in Christ to transform our lives.

As our Second Reading puts it, *"We are God's work of art; created in Christ Jesus to live the good life as from the beginning he had meant us to live it"*.

Pray for the gift of forgiveness

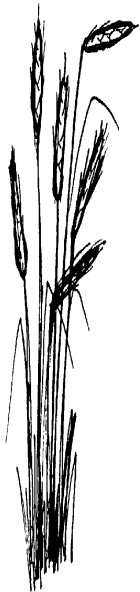
(2 Chronicles 36, 14-16; 19-23 & John 3, 14-21)

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

THE GRAIN OF WHEAT

Hebrews 5, 7-9

Often we unthinkingly say the words of institution during the Eucharistic prayer and utter the words “the blood of the new and everlasting covenant”. Today in a small passage from Hebrews we are given an opportunity to focus on the One whose blood became that blood of the new covenant. We are not just looking at someone’s actions; we are looking at the person who is the doer of these actions, the Son, the bearer of the new covenant. This is the new covenant, to which Jeremiah refers in our First Reading, which transforms us internally and gives us a new heart. It is the new covenant brought about by the grain of wheat falling into the ground and dying, and in doing so producing much fruit.



The agent of all this is no other than the Son. The Son through “*prayer and entreaty, aloud and in silent tears*”, who lived and **died** in a way that was acceptable to the Father and thus opened up a new relationship for all of us.

There is a powerful sentence in this short passage: *“Although he was Son, he learned to obey through suffering”*. The Son did not need to learn to obey, because from eternity he was in perfect unity and harmony with the Father. As one of us he had to learn and teach us how to enter into our correct relationship with the Father. He does this by showing his Father and us a love that is refined and made perfect. In and through Christ, we can and do re-learn the meaning of **love**, **obedience** and **suffering**, which has been modelled by Jesus and enables us to achieve eternal salvation.

As we move towards our annual celebration of the central mysteries of our redemption, we learn through the Lord's death and resurrection the meaning of life, a life that will endure. The permanent sign of this is the Cross which defines our way of life. Christian love and obedience will always involve suffering as we learn to overcome our sinfulness and love God in the energy of grace.

Pray for the gift of obedient love
(Jeremiah 31, 31-34 & John 12, 20-33)

HOLY WEEK TO EASTER WEEK

‘During Holy Week the Church celebrates the mysteries of salvation accomplished by Christ in the last days of his life on earth, beginning with his messianic entrance into Jerusalem until his blessed Passion and glorious Resurrection.’ (Diocesan Ordo)

Palm Sunday

SELF-EMPTYING

Philip 2, 6-11

As we enter the most important section of the church's year, we need to bring any Lenten discipline we have undertaken to the only place to which it can lead us – the person of Jesus Christ. We have not undertaken Lenten discipline in order to boast how well we have done. Any discipline is to enable us to be better disciples. There is no boasting allowed in discipleship for the reason so powerfully given in the letter to the Philippians.

There is a “mind” that we need to put on and it is the “mind” that Jesus reveals in the movement of the incarnation. Christ did not stay as he was, in the divine life of Father and Holy Spirit. That is where he belongs and we, sinful and created humanity, have no claim on him.

It was love that persuaded him to leave behind what was his and take on what is ours, so that we can move from what is ours to share what is his.

The way that this has been done is through death and resurrection. The way of death is very much of our making: our destiny is death, which we chose with our continuing sinfulness.

God's gift of his Son into our history was the most personal way of redefining our destiny. We had opted for death. Christ showed us the way of life, whereby death delivers us to life, a life that is without end. Jesus had to do that for us. We could not do that for ourselves.

Holy Week is about what Jesus - and Jesus alone - can do for us, so that we can live in a different sort of way - a way of self-emptying (kenosis) - so that we can be fulfilled.

There is a profound paradox at the centre of Christianity, giving a structure to the life of the disciple: *"unless the grain of wheat dies...(etc) we die in order to live; out of death comes life."*

Pray for the spirit of discipleship.

(Mark 11, 1-10; Isaiah 50, 4-7 & Mark 14, 1-15 & 47)

THE EASTER TRIDUUM

Thursday - The Lord's Supper

THE GIFT THAT HAS BEEN HANDED DOWN TO US

1 Corinthians 11

We need today to leave space for those wonderful words we hear at the start of this passage: "*This is what I received from the Lord*".

We are dealing with gift. Paul is talking about the wonderful gift that he has received and which he is committed to handing on to others. It is so easy to see the basic structure of the Eucharist in what we read and hear. We are not dealing with abstract propositions; we are dealing with the drama and action of the Upper Room. Just reflect on this early version of the words of institution:

The Lord Jesus took some bread; thanked God; broke the bread; my Body for you; do this in my Memory. Then (after supper) took the Cup; New Covenant in my blood; Drink this and do this as a Memorial of me.

All this is the **action** of redemption in sacramental signs.

Then we have that lovely invitation – **keep doing it until I come**. *“As you drink this cup and eat the bread you proclaim the death of Jesus”*.

The Church must celebrate the Eucharist. It is her most typical action because it is the Lord's gift to her. We need to proclaim the Lord's death because it gives us meaning, energy, strength and a sense of direction.



The washing of the feet becomes a primary model of our discipleship, flowing from the service the Lord renders to us in his death and resurrection. In sacramental signs, we are made part of that service, and we extend that service to the way we relate to each other.

Pray for a deeper appreciation of the Eucharist
(Exodus 12, 1-8; 11-14; John 13, 1-15)

Good Friday – Celebration of the Lord's Passion

THE ONE WHO DIES FOR US

Hebrews 4, 14-16; 5, 7-9

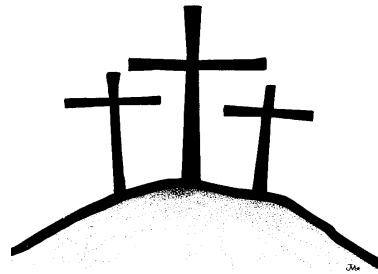
Jesus is the High Priest. He can do something in relation to God that we cannot do. He is the One, who can so sacrifice himself that all previous ritual sacrifices are declared redundant and that a new era of relationships between God and humans is inaugurated. This is done by the One who has shared the frailty of being human, even though he alone is the sinless one.

Because of this sharing we have confidence to approach God. We have those immensely consoling words, *“Let us be confident in approaching the throne of grace, that we shall have mercy from him and find grace when we are in need of help”*.

The help we need is vital - help to be endowed with a life that endures. This has been made available to us because the One who is Son learned to obey through suffering. Somehow the Sonship, which was his, is made manifest and

expresses itself through suffering (out of love), carrying out the Father's will against all opposition and showing an obedience that led to his being made perfect. From Jesus we learn both the meaning and the practice of obedience (no longer the slaves of sin and disobedience).

Christ's death enables us to live the obedience of faith, and so live to God as we are called to do. We can now turn our back on sin.



Pray for an appreciation of the crucified Christ
(Isaiah 52, 13 – 53, 12 & John 18, 1-19; 42)

Easter Vigil

THE GRANDEUR OF BAPTISM

Romans 6, 3-11

On Easter night the lengthy vigil of prayer, readings and songs is to enable us to appreciate both what the Lord has done for us and the gift that he has left for us: the gift of baptism - a share in his life that only he has a right to. We are caught up in his life and thereby move away from sin.

It is the genius of baptism that we are taken up into the action of Christ's redemptive work. We are no longer outsiders. We belong to the heart of what Christ has done.

We die to sin with Christ: we enter into the tomb with him and shed the old self, our sinful self. We rise to new life with him in his rising from the tomb. He can die no more and becomes a reliable source for our new life. The source is firm, the victory over death is total. This gives us a chance to live again and in a new way.

This Easter night is the night when we can live that “second chance”; the renewal of our baptismal promises is about that “second chance”. Our calling to holiness is again “in with a chance”, as we are taken up and transformed by the action of Christ, through his dying and rising.

We cannot put it better than St. Paul when he says *“When we were baptised in Christ Jesus we were baptised in his death, in other words, when we were baptised we went into the tomb with him and joined him in death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father’s glory, we too might live a new life”*.

That is what Easter is about!

ALLELUIA

Pray:

Give thanks to the Lord for the gift of baptism

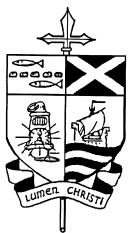
(Mark 16, 1-7)



“O, send forth your light
and your truth let these be my guide.

Let them bring me
to your holy mountain
to the place where you dwell”.

Alleluia!



Bishop's House
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