



Bringing Home the Word



First Sunday of Lent

February 14, 2016

Hold the Word Close

By Janel Esker

It's said that people sometimes have to hear a message seven times before it sinks in. I'm not sure the Church leaders who constructed the *Lectionary* knew this, but they obviously believed there was something important for us to hear in Jesus' temptations by the devil, because we hear a version of this story every first Sunday of Lent. This story is a good check as to whether last Wednesday's ashes have truly sunk in—and whether we're indeed ready to fully enter into Lent.

We may not think temptations to turn

stones into bread and to rule all the kingdoms of the world are particularly relevant, but Jesus' temptations were all about control and the desire to do for ourselves what only God can do. In that light, they're completely relevant. I'm not sure a day goes by when I'm not tempted to take control from God.

Yet Jesus, in his tired and hungry state, managed to resist these temptations. The words of Scripture were easily on his lips and helped him stay focused solely on God. He modeled the quote from Deuteronomy that we hear in today's reading from Romans: "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart."

Most of us likely have favorite Scripture passages which, when we see and hear them, refresh and renew us. Perhaps we can commit some of these words to memory and hold them particularly close every day this Lent. Keeping God's word near us, readily on our lips and in our hearts as Jesus did, can help us release control and stay rooted in God. †

Sunday Readings

Deuteronomy 26:4–10

"We cried to the LORD, the God of our ancestors, and the LORD heard our cry."

Romans 10:8–13

"If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord...you will be saved."

Luke 4:1–13

"Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days."

A Word From Pope Francis



An evangelizing community knows that the Lord has taken the initiative, he has loved us first (see 1 John 4:19), and therefore we can move forward, boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast. Such a community has an endless desire to show mercy, the fruit of its own experience.

—*Evangeliium Gaudium* 24; November 24, 2013

PRAYER

Lord, give me the courage to accept the painful, ugly realities of life and the challenges of discipleship. May I become your advocate of truth and justice in the world.

—From *Mindful Meditations for Every Day of Lent and Easter*,
Rev. Warren J. Savage
and Mary Ann McSweeney

Evangelizing Our Emotions

By Raymond F. Dlugos, OSA, PhD
Part 2*

From Fear to Trust

Fear alerts us to the presence of threat and triggers our natural systems of protection and survival. The Gospel asks us to trust, but fidelity to the Gospel is never instinctive. We find that trust only when we are aware of our fears.

Scripture shows that fear accompanies the most significant experiences of revelation. When Moses saw the burning bush, he was afraid. When Isaiah was called to service as a prophet, he was terrified by the vision in the Temple. When Gabriel called Mary to be the Mother of God, “she was greatly troubled...” (Luke 1:29). Peter and the others were terrified at seeing Jesus walk on the water. The first witnesses to the resurrection were terrified when they encountered the risen Lord. The disciples were gathered in fear when the Spirit descended at Pentecost. Fear not only signals the presence of danger but also may signal God’s calling us to deeper courage and intimacy.

When we feel afraid of a call to forgive those who harm us, to care for sinners, to love our enemies, to speak openly against wrongdoing or about unpopular truths or values, we should avoid hiding, inaction, aggression, and hostility. Instead we should call forth a response to take significant risks.



We may have heard that fear is the mark of cowards; we may have been told that the strong and brave are fearless. Nothing could be further from the truth. The fearless are often dangerous, senselessly risking their own lives and the lives of others. Heroes and cowards alike share the feeling of fear. Their response is what makes them different.

From Sadness to Gratitude

Part 3

Sadness accompanies loss. The depth of sadness we feel is often commensurate with how much we loved what we lost. Sadness appears to lead us into a dark, empty, and lonely place in which we must face the reality that we will never replace what we lost.

Because sadness is painful, we are

tempted to avoid it. When we allow ourselves to feel sad, we may see ourselves as weak. Some of us fear that we will never climb out of the darkness. The sadness of others makes us uncomfortable because it reveals our powerlessness to remedy the loss or pain. We may avoid our own sadness so as not to make others feel uncomfortable or to avoid their pity. Sometimes people of faith think that sadness in response to death is somehow a betrayal of our faith in the resurrection.

So we work hard to minimize our sadness. We hide it by telling ourselves and others that it really isn’t that bad. We refuse to cry because it would reveal us as vulnerable. We move on too quickly, hoping to fill the hole left by our loss. The tragedy of this is that by minimizing sadness, we minimize love and opportunities to receive comfort. Jesus said, “Blessed are they who mourn...” (Matthew 5:4).

We honor and respect our love and others when we choose to let tears flow, express the rage of being deprived, and shake with fear that we will never again be whole. That emptiness and darkness is difficult, but eventually our eyes adjust and we begin to see that what seemed empty is filled with memories that cannot be taken from us. We find ourselves in the presence of love and learn the truth that Paul taught: that while everything else will end, “love never ends” (1 Corinthians 13:8).

** The article from which these excerpts were taken was originally published in Liguorian magazine as “Feeling Good About Feeling Bad.” The last section will appear in Bringing Home the Word on February 28.*

WEEKDAY READINGS

February 15–20

Mon. *Lenten Weekday:* Leviticus 19:1–2, 11–18 / Matthew 25:31–46
Tue. *Lenten Weekday:* Isaiah 55:10–11 / Matthew 6:7–15
Wed. *Lenten Weekday:* Jonah 3:1–10 / Luke 11:29–32

Thu. *Lenten Weekday:* Esther C:12, 14–16, 23–25 / Matthew 7:7–12
Fri. *Lenten Weekday:* Ezekiel 18:21–28 / Matthew 5:20–26
Sat. *Lenten Weekday:* Deuteronomy 26:16–19 / Matthew 5:43–48