



Bringing Home the Word

Third Sunday of Lent

February 28, 2016

Trusting the Gardener

By Janel Esker

When our daughter was born, my husband and I bought a tree at an end-of-season sale to plant in her honor. It sat all winter looking quite dead. As warmer temperatures arrived in the spring, I anxiously watched for signs of budding, quite aware of the one-year guarantee on my sales receipt—if the tree didn't blossom within the first year, I could uproot it and return it for a full refund.

I'm not sure how I'd have responded if a gardener had begged me to keep the

tree past the deadline. I'd lose my chance at a refund, and what would be the likelihood of the tree really "coming back to life" after a fruitless first year? It would take a lot of trust in the gardener and in the tree's potential to give it another chance.

In today's Gospel, God is both owner and gardener. There comes a time for God's judgment on us, but God is also the one who continually offers graced opportunities to repent and change our behaviors. We also hear Jesus speak of the untimely deaths of innocent people in his community.

These stories remind us that our lives are fragile and we don't know when our time on earth will end. God expects us to be prepared always to meet him and his judgment.

Are we taking advantage of this Lent as a grace-filled opportunity to root out sin and prune our lives of unfruitful tendencies?

God expects much, and God graces us with much—it's up to us to do the growing. †

Sunday Readings

Exodus 3:1–8a, 13–15

"I have come down to rescue them...and lead them out of that land into a...land flowing with milk and honey."

1 Corinthians 10:1–6, 10–12

"They drank from a spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was the Christ."

Luke 13:1–9

"I shall cultivate the ground around it and fertilize it; it may bear fruit in the future."

A Word From Pope Francis



To become merciful, we must first acknowledge that we have done many things wrong: we are sinners! We need to know how to say: Lord, I am ashamed of what I have done in life... Acknowledging that we have sinned against the Lord, and being ashamed in his presence is a grace...With this attitude of repentance we will be more capable of being merciful, because we will feel God's mercy for us.

—Morning Meditation, "Mercy and Judgment"; March 17, 2014



Lord, you are patient with me and never withhold your love and mercy. Strengthen me with your grace to become fully human, fully alive in the world.

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

Evangelizing Our Emotions: From Shame to Humility

By Raymond F. Dlugos, OSA, PhD
Part 4*

Shame is the emotion we feel whenever we become aware of, or are revealed as, being inadequate, imperfect, or incomplete. Shame can range in intensity from mild embarrassment in response to a simple mistake to deep self-loathing for our continual failure to measure up. Shame motivates us to hide ourselves from the scrutiny of others and results in isolation and loneliness. Shame drives us into silence, darkness, and hiding. In the loneliness, shame tells us lies that reinforce its power over us. Those lies may include distorted ideas such as, “I am the only one who is inadequate”; “Worthy human beings never fail”; or “Because I am imperfect, I will never be lovable or loved.”

Jesus came to proclaim the gospel first and foremost to our shame. He called us to come out of the darkness and silence and into the light of others and of God. While shame thrives in darkness and silence, it cannot survive in the presence of light and love and therefore seeks to avoid them. To accept this gospel invitation is risky. The light will reveal us as we are. Like the woman caught in adultery in John’s Gospel, our inadequacies and imperfections will be brought before everyone. But as it was for her, our shame will be transformed into the merciful acceptance and love of



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- How has God revealed his patience, mercy, and care this Lent?
- What parts of my life need cultivating or pruning?

Christ.

More than courage is required to overcome the effects of shame. Acceptance of Jesus’ warm and welcoming invitation requires the virtue of humility. Humility is the willingness to allow our inadequacies, imperfections, and incompleteness to be seen as true and real parts of our essence. In genuine humility, we bring ourselves as we are, far

from finished and refined gems, before the eyes of the One who made us in his image, imperfections and all.

We evangelize our shame when we allow the light and love of Jesus to bring us out of darkness and hiding. We evangelize our fear when, filled with fear, we allow the voice of Jesus to call us out into the storm and risk doing something for the sake of love. We allow the Gospel to be preached to our sadness when we enter the emptiness of loss and find ourselves in the company of Jesus, who emptied himself ahead of us. The Word of life brings redemption to our anger when we allow our anger to bring our neediness, selfishness, and real values into the light where they can be questioned and challenged.

We are not apart from God when we experience our emotions; we are close to God. We must know that God is angry and outraged at the deprivation and abuse of God’s children. In fear and anxiety, Jesus sweated blood before risking his life for the sake of love. In our sadness, we are one with all who have lost, including God, who certainly feels the loss of those taken captive by sin. In our shame, we are more united with God and others than at any other time. All people share the experience of being inadequate, imperfect, and incomplete. Emotions—which seem so powerful in their ability to separate and isolate us from God and others—are powerfully able to join us together in communion with God.

** This is the final excerpt from the article originally published in Liguorian magazine as “Feeling Good About Feeling Bad.” Earlier sections appeared in prior weeks of Bringing Home the Word.*

WEEKDAY READINGS

February 29–March 5

Mon. *Lenten Weekday:* 2 Kings 5:1–15ab / Luke 4:24–30
Tue. *Lenten Weekday:* Daniel 3:25, 34–43 / Matthew 18:21–35
Wed. *Lenten Weekday:* Deuteronomy 4:1, 5–9 / Matthew 5:17–19

Thu. *Lenten Weekday:* Jeremiah 7:23–28 / Luke 11:14–23
Fri. *Lenten Weekday:* Hosea 14:2–10 / Mark 12:28–34
Sat. *Lenten Weekday:* Hosea 6:1–6 / Luke 18:9–14