

Homily for the First Sunday in Lent - Prayer – 2022

Christ our High Priest was in all points tempted like we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace so that we may obtain mercy and find grace in time of need. Gradual verse - Sunday Lent I – Hebrews 4:15-16.

Dear Faithful people, This year at Solemn Mass for the Five Sundays of Lent, some of the great disciplines of keeping Lent with the church will be addressed. Today, the theme is “Lent and Prayer.”

To give some very brief context to the season of Lent first. From the days of the Apostles themselves, the annual celebration of the Anniversary of Easter would appear to have been preceded by a commemoration of Our Lord’s forty days of fasting in the wilderness. This time of prayer, fasting and abstinence soon became the culmination of a lengthier period of instruction that was given to converts prior to their baptism at the great Easter Festival. Lent and Easter are the two most ancient seasons in the Christian year. Of that there is no doubt.

Today, we stand in solidarity with Christians of every generation from the days of the apostles to the present, in keeping the season of Lent as a penitential season of devotion to prayer, of fasting and abstinence, of almsgiving and of learning about our faith – especially, in that regard, a time of learning through Bible study and Bible reading.

The most simple and basic definition of prayer that I know of is ... **“prayer is talking to God.”** Now that very simple definition pre-supposes two vital things 1) belief in God and 2) belief that God hears us when we speak to Him. I’m going to assume that I am speaking to people who would understand all of that, as clearly, there is no time in 10 minutes to address belief in God and belief that God hears us when we pray before launching into the Season of Lent and Prayer.

The most basic and universal fundamental of keeping the season of Lent is our sincere desire both as individuals and as a community of believers to come into the presence of God in penitence and faith, and with God’s grace to grow into something or someone rather more like Jesus Christ our living Lord... as the Gradual verse said today ... let us *‘come boldly unto the throne of grace so that we may obtain mercy*

and find grace in time of need.' (That's a quote from Hebrews 4:15-16) We certainly need all the help we can muster to become more like Jesus Christ. In Lent, especially, we ask for that help through the Lenten disciplines.

Now, if we would be more like Jesus Christ, we would most certainly be individuals, and together we would be a church community as well, that is devoted to prayer. Why? There's a very simple answer to that...Jesus was, and He still is and ever will be, a man of prayer. Take these texts to heart, they are a small handful of dozens, as the proof of that..

1. Matthew 14:24 ... *'After He had sent the crowds away, Jesus went up on the mountain by himself to pray.'*

2. Mark 1:35 ... *'In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place and was praying there.'*

3. Luke 5:16 ... *'Jesus himself would often slip away to the wilderness to pray.'*

Hear also these moving words from the Letter to the Hebrews ... Hebrews 5:7-8 ... *'In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the One who was able to save Him from death and He was heard because of His reverent submission. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience through what He suffered and having been made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him..'*

Its so plainly evident that Jesus was a man of prayer, reverent prayer, heartfelt prayer, fervent prayer, submissive prayer. Right now, right at this very moment Jesus is praying for us and for all creation, pleading the merits of his perfect sacrifice before the throne of Heavenly Grace. As the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews, once again, says (see Ch 7:24-25) ... *'Jesus holds His priesthood forever, because He continues for ever. Consequently He is able for all time to save those who approach God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for us.'*

So, dear people, we pray because Jesus prayed. We pray with fervour; we pray with tears of deep contrition and some times with tears of sorrow and anguish,

because Jesus prayed that way; we pray with heartfelt devotion because that's how Jesus prayed. We pray alone in quiet and secret places because Jesus did. We pray to God with reverent submission, because Jesus did. We pray together in the community of the Church because, of an absolute truth, every time we pray together, Jesus is most certainly with us ... why do I say that? ... because He said He would be! Never forget Our Lord's words (Matthew 18:20) ... *'when two or three are gathered in My Name, there am I in their midst.'*

Lent is God's beautiful time of repentance and renewal for His faithful people. It is always a positive time, because during Lent we draw closer to Jesus especially in prayer. All the talk that goes on about the difficulty of keeping a faithful Lent, the negativity about seasonal acts of prayer, heartfelt acts of repentance, of the disciplines of fasting, abstinence and almsgiving... all that negative talk is the devil's talk and hasn't he has had a field day for the most part in the generally complete misunderstanding that abounds of this beautiful season of preparation for Easter?

Dear Christians, Lent is a time when we should all be striving, all earnestly seeking, all begging the Lord for the grace of the Holy Spirit to help us become more integrated and wholehearted in our practise of the faith and, hopefully, a lot less hypocritical about it. In that regard, if I'm not a Christian given to some daily prayer, that is talking to God day by day, no matter how simple it may be (and the simplicity of how we do pray is absolutely never an issue)... then there is a serious disconnect between what I'm supposed to be and what, in actual fact, I am.

Similarly, if I'm not a Christian who is a reverent and faithful weekly worshipper, whenever humanly possible on the Lord's day at the highest act of public prayer that there ever will be... that is the Holy Mass... once again, there is a serious disconnect, a really serious disconnect between what I claim to be and what I am.

Lent is the season when, as individuals and as a community, we make an attempt, with God's help, to be a bit more like what we are supposed to be as men and women who have been redeemed by the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ.

One very short prayer, that can be learned by heart in moments it's so brief, but which speaks so clearly of who Jesus is and of our relationship to him is the Jesus

Prayer... I commend it to you this Lent for your frequent daily use. *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me, a sinner.*

And here is a wonderful prayer, a very ancient prayer of confession, that was returned to liturgical use in Anglo-catholic churches in the mid 19th century. It is said in ASESK by the priests and ministers before we ascend the steps to the altar at every Eucharist. Its a great prayer of contrition which I humbly commend to all of you to say at the end of the day this Lent...

I confess to Almighty God, to Blessed Mary ever Virgin, to Blessed Michael the Archangel, to Blessed John Baptist, to the holy Apostles Peter and Paul and to all the Saints that I have sinned exceedingly in thought, word and deed; though my fault, through my own fault, through my own most grievous fault. Therefore I beg blessed Mary ever Virgin, blessed Michael the Archangel, Blessed John Baptist, the holy Apostles Peter and Paul and all the Saints to pray for me to the Lord our God.

Dear people, with all my heart I urge you to welcome Jesus Christ into your daily lives by grasping this Lenten opportunity to grow closer to Him. Maybe, like me, you have a long, long way to go in your journey to faithful Christian living. Maybe you are well on the road. Maybe you are still at the very beginning ... what ever the case may be, that furnace of love which is the Sacred Heart of Jesus is beckoning us. That ocean of mercy which is the Precious Blood of Jesus is calling us. Most certainly Jesus is athirst for our return. He wishes to bestow blessings on those who will persevere in his service and He is calling us so earnestly... *'Even now, Come back to me, come back to me with all your heart.'* (Joel 2:12)