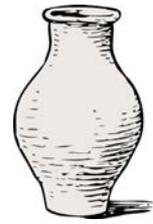


THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT



Daily Offering

Dear Lord, I really don't feel like praying today; but I'll give it a go.

Nick King SJ

Entering into Prayer

Choose a method of entering into prayer that you are comfortable with, or if the mood takes you, try something different. If you're finding it difficult, talk to God about the things on your mind.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

John 4: 5-42 (abridged) - Alternative Gospel

Jesus came to the Samaritan town called Sychar. Jacob's well is there and Jesus, tired by the journey, sat straight down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'. The Samaritan woman said to him, 'What? You are a Jew, and you ask me, a Samaritan, for a drink?'—Jews do not associate with Samaritans. Jesus replied, 'If you only knew what God is offering and who it is that is saying to you: Give me a drink, you would have been the one to ask, and he would have given you living water.' 'You have no bucket, sir,' she answered, 'and the well is deep: how could you get this living water?' Jesus replied: 'Whoever drinks this water will get thirsty again; but anyone who drinks the water that I shall give will never be thirsty again: the water that I shall give will turn into a spring inside them, welling up to eternal life.' 'Sir,' said the woman, 'give me some of that water, so that I may never get thirsty and never have to come here again to draw water.' 'Go and call your husband,' said Jesus to her. The woman answered, 'I have no husband'. He said to her, 'You are right to say, "I have no husband"; for although you have had five, the one you have now is not your husband. You spoke the truth there.' 'I see you are a prophet, sir,' said the woman. '... I know that Messiah – that is, Christ – is coming; and when he comes he will tell us everything.' 'I who am speaking to you,' said Jesus, 'I am he.'

At this point the disciples returned, and were surprised to find him speaking to a woman. The woman put down her water jar and hurried back to the town to tell the people, 'Come and see a man who has told me everything I ever did; I wonder if he is the Christ?'

Many Samaritans of that town believed in Jesus on the strength of the woman's testimony; and they begged him to stay with them. When he spoke to them many more came to believe; and they said to the woman, 'Now we no longer believe because of what you told us; we have heard him ourselves and we know that he really is the saviour of the world.'

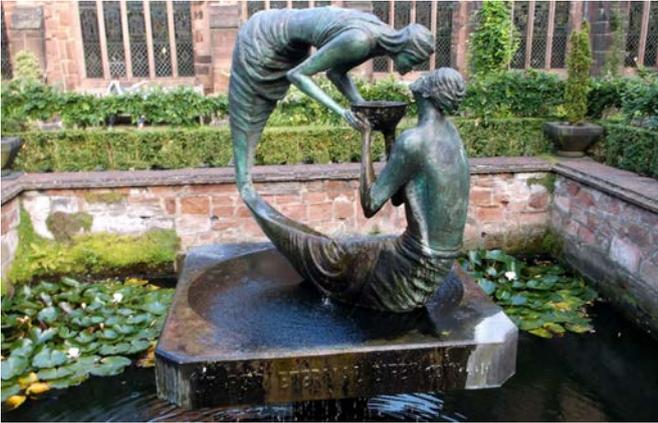


Image for the Day

How does this image make you feel?
 Spend some time conversing with Jesus today.

Food for Thought

Jesus encounters a Samaritan woman. Samaritans were Jews who interbred with foreigners brought by the Assyrian conquerors in 722BC to settle the land with loyal inhabitants. Jews considered Samaritans and their possessions ritually unclean. Jacob's well still exists. It is not, as were many other wells, a cistern filled with collected rain water that became stale and polluted in hot weather. It is fed by underground springs, so the water remains fresh and cool. People called the water from this well 'living water'. As well as the literal meaning of this phrase, it is an Old Testament expression meaning 'divine revelation' or vitality. In St John's Gospel, it indicates the Holy Spirit. Most women would collect water in the cool early morning, but Jesus and the woman meet in the midday heat. The woman may have avoided the earlier time, feeling ostracised because of her past. Jesus ignores traditional social barriers where men spoke directly in a public place only to women who were blood relatives. Jesus counteracts societal divisions: gender discrimination, ritual purity, religious hostility, the moral stigma attached to many marriages. Jesus's gift of life is open to everyone.

Suggestions for Prayer

As I begin my prayer, I try to become still and quiet in the presence of God. I take all the time I need; God welcomes me in love just as I am – there is no need to rush. I ask the Holy Spirit to help me.

I read the Gospel passage again slowly, perhaps several times, noticing the details of the encounter between the woman and Jesus. Perhaps I try to imagine myself sitting by the well in the quiet noontide heat that surrounds the weary, thirsty Jesus, and the Samaritan woman with her empty water jar. I hear their words, notice their tone of voice. I see how Jesus wins her trust and awakens her thirst for another kind of water.

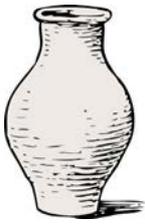
What does living water mean for me? I let Jesus look at me and speak with me. I allow myself to be surprised that Jesus asks me for something to satisfy his thirst. What can I offer? What would I like Jesus to offer me in my tiredness, in my seeking; for what am I thirsting ...? I speak with Jesus. I wait before him, trusting that he knows my deepest needs. After a while, I end my time of prayer by thanking the Lord for his presence with me.

How are you going to respond today?

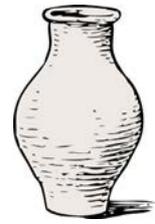
The woman is surprised by her encounter with Jesus, and the town dwellers come to believe in Jesus on the strength of the woman's testimony. Today may be a day to notice how God becomes present to me in my daily life in surprising, unexpected ways. How might I be able to share this Good News with others who are thirsty and searching for meaning in their lives?

Examen (review of prayer)

When you come towards the end of your time of prayer, or at the end of your day, talk to God about what has come up for you, what went well and what didn't.



MONDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK



Daily Offering

Holy Spirit, help me to see your surprises today and to welcome them with open hands.

Simon Bishop SJ

Entering into Prayer

Today is the Feast of the Annunciation, so you might like to begin your prayer with the 'Hail Mary' or another prayer connected to Mary, the Mother of God.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Luke 1: 26-38

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, so highly favoured! The Lord is with you.' She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. Listen! You are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus.

He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob for ever and his reign will have no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I am a virgin?' 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you,' the angel answered, 'And the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. Know this too: your kinswoman Elizabeth has, in her old age, herself conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God.' 'I am the handmaid of the Lord,' said Mary, 'let what you have said be done to me.' And the angel left her.



The Annunciation
by Henry Ossawa Tanner



There is a Praying with Art Video featuring this painting:

pathwaystogod.org/praying-art

Pathways
TO GOD

Image for the Day

How does this image make you feel?

Spend some time meditating on this scene today and Mary's 'Yes'.

Food for Thought

From the earliest recorded history, the feast of the Annunciation has been celebrated on 25 March. In writings as early as AD 240 it is suggested that Creation, the Incarnation and the death of Jesus took place on this date. Similar calculations are found in the early and later Middle Ages. The dates of the feasts of the Annunciation and of Christmas owe their origin to these writings.

A betrothal in Jewish Law is the first part of the marriage ceremony, and betrothed couples are considered man and wife, joined in a spiritual union. Later, marked by a second ceremony, the husband and wife come to live together and their marriage is consummated. Mary would already have regarded Joseph as her husband. To become pregnant in such circumstances risked being accused of adultery, for which the penalty was death. We witness Mary's faith and courage in accepting to conceive a child by cooperating with the power and plan of God – a plan that cannot be fulfilled without her.

Suggestions for Prayer

I read this familiar story, asking the Holy Spirit to show me what it is that God wishes to reveal to me today. Then, putting the text aside, I try to be present in the scene, watching the story unfold in my imagination or, if this is difficult for me, describing it as if to a small child. I listen to the words spoken by the angel and by Mary; I notice their reactions – Mary's surprise and confusion, the angel's joy and conviction; Mary's acceptance. Perhaps I speak to Mary or to the angel about what is happening. The angel tells Mary, 'Do not be afraid ... Listen!' Are there areas in my life now where I am fearful, where I need to listen and to trust more fully in God? Or can I see places or times where God has given me courage to listen and to persevere? I share these with the Father or Jesus or Mary. The angel tells Mary of the son she will conceive and, while Mary is focused on the practicalities of how this might happen, the angel promises the Holy Spirit's overshadowing presence. I take time simply to rest quietly in the presence of God, setting aside for a while my concerns and activities for today, which I entrust to the Lord.

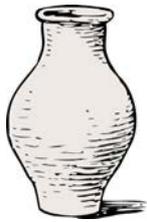
Can I pray with Mary, accepting to be God's servant, or is this challenging for me? Perhaps there are others, like Elizabeth, who will help me? I ask for whatever grace I need.

How are you going to respond today?

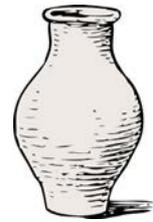
As I go through today, I may like to notice whether there are times when I am held back from serving God our Lord more fully by my fears, my doubts or uncertainties. Where I perceive this and without self-recrimination, I simply offer these times to God who loves me just as I am, asking for the grace of Mary's courage and faith. Where my trust in God is strong today, I rejoice and thank him for inspiring this faith in me.

Examen (review of prayer)

When you come towards the end of your time of prayer, or at the end of your day, talk to God about what has come up for you, what went well and what didn't.



TUESDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK



Daily Offering

Let me recall some of the good memories that I have today, Lord, the memories that sustain me on my journey through life. I offer each of them to you with my thanks.

Paul Nicholson SJ

Entering into Prayer

Before I read the psalm, I settle down in my favourite place; maybe outside, or maybe indoors surrounded by things that help me come to quiet: a candle, a cross, a favourite picture or icon. I focus on my breathing, without changing it. The air I breathe is God's special gift to me. Gradually, I try to leave all my everyday concerns behind.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Psalm 24 (25), vv 4-10, 14 (Grail version)

R. / Lord, make me know your ways.

Lord, make me know your ways.

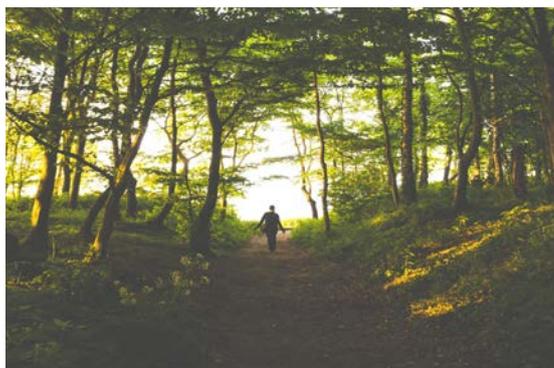
Lord, teach me your paths.

Make me walk in your truth, and teach me:
for you are God my saviour. (R.)

Remember your mercy, Lord,
and the love you have shown from of old.

Do not remember the sins of my youth,
because of your goodness, O Lord. (R.)

The Lord is good and upright.
He shows the path to those who stray,
he guides the humble in the right path;
he teaches his way to the poor. (R.)





The Hilly Path, Ville d'Avray
by Alfred Sisley

Image for the Day

What do you see in this image?

What do you feel about the path before you? Where is God leading you?

Food for Thought

The text we are praying today is one of the psalms; texts that we know Jesus prayed. He probably knew them by heart. Perhaps I can picture his mother Mary teaching him the words. How does that make me feel?

The structure of this psalm is that of an acrostic. In the Hebrew version each verse started with a different letter following the order of the alphabet. It made it easier for people to memorise.

In this extract, the psalmist addresses the Lord personally in the first two stanzas and then speaks about God's qualities and work in the third, perhaps addressing people in the synagogue. The key themes are a surrender to God and an entreaty for him to show, teach and lead us in his ways.

The psalmist begs the Lord to forget his past, and in his goodness to remember him. Praying this psalm can be a useful preparation to the sacrament of reconciliation.

Suggestions for Prayer

If circumstances allow, I read the text out loud, or on my breath. I listen to its rhythm. I stop when I feel drawn and ponder. Maybe I am struck by the way the psalmist speaks to the Lord in the first two stanzas. How do I speak to him?

I reflect on my journey so far. Has it been easy to follow the way of the Lord or have I needed him to guide my steps on his path?

Perhaps the Spirit leads me to focus on the 'sins of my youth'. Was I able to speak to the Lord about them at the time? How have things changed now? With hindsight, in what ways have his mercy and his love helped me to grow? How has God's faithful love shaped my life?

Before concluding my prayer, I thank God for his steadfast love and ask for forgiveness and healing for my failures to love. I might him how grateful I am for his gentle guidance every time I have strayed away from his path.

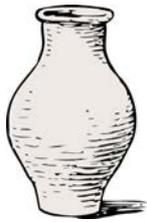
How are you going to respond today?

Today, perhaps I can look around me and discover the 'humble' ones. I ask the Lord to show me how in simple, practical ways, I can show them his mercy, love and faithfulness.

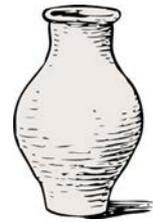
Examen (review of prayer)

Hopefully you are in a habit now of reviewing your prayer, but if you find this difficult, you might find the audio examens on our website useful (<https://www.pathwaystogod.org/my-prayer-life/examen>).

You could also write about your prayer in a prayer journal.



WEDNESDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK



Daily Offering

Lord Christ, Alpha and Omega, may my life centre on you and be fulfilled in you.

Tom Shufflebotham SJ

Entering into Prayer

As previously, find a way to enter into a prayerful frame of mind.

“Before I read the scripture, I focus on today: ‘Lord, what do you want to show me today?’ You may find it helpful to read the text two or even three times...”

TODAY’S SCRIPTURE

Deuteronomy 4: 1, 5-9

Moses said to the people, ‘And now, Israel, take notice of the laws and customs that I teach you today, and observe them, that you may have life and may enter and take possession of the land that the Lord the God of your fathers is giving you. See, as the Lord my God has commanded me, I teach you the laws and customs that you are to observe in the land you are to enter and make your own. Keep them, observe them, and they will demonstrate to the peoples your wisdom and understanding. When they come to know of all these laws they will exclaim, ‘No other people is as wise and prudent as this great nation’. And indeed, what great nation is there that has its gods so near as the Lord our God is to us whenever we call to him? And what great nation is there that has laws and customs to match this whole Law that I put before you today?’

‘But take care what you do and be on your guard. Do not forget the things your eyes have seen, nor let them slip from your heart all the days of your life; rather, tell them to your children and to your children’s children.’

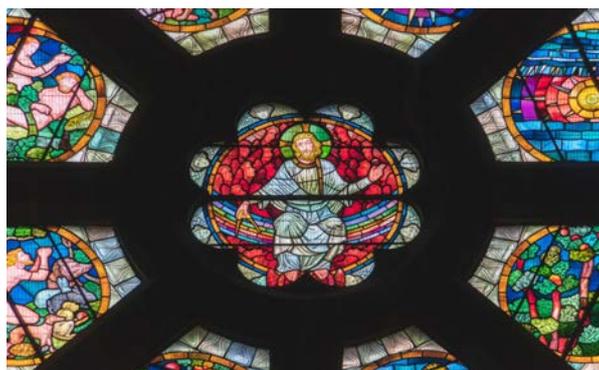




Image for the Day

How do you feel about this image?

Were you taught the Ten Commandments by other people, or did you read them in scripture?

Do you pass them on to others in your life? Talk to God about that.

Moses and the Ten Commandments
by
Rembrandt

Food for Thought

As a younger man, Moses gave God several reasons why he wasn't remotely suitable to lead the people of Israel. But in today's reading (part of a monumental 'sermon' that occupies the whole of Deuteronomy), we hear him gathering up some of the strands of his lifelong mission with great conviction.

Moses, now very aged, has brought the Israelites to the very last leg of their forty-year journey through the wilderness. They will soon reach the land that God has promised them as their very own, even though Moses himself will not go with them. But first they are urged to remember and pass on all the details of the Law that God has revealed to them through Moses. These laws and customs will give you life, Moses tells them. They will enable you to enter the promised land, to know that God is close to you, and lead others to see that you are a great, wise nation. Hang on to these laws; live by them; keep them in your heart; teach them to your grandchildren: they are for you, today!

Suggestions for Prayer

I read and reread the text slowly, reverently. I notice any word or phrase that seems to 'light up' for me, and allow it to sink deeper.

Perhaps I picture Moses standing high up on the Plain of Moab near the River Jordan, addressing this great crowd that he has led through the wilderness. I may choose to stand with them, sensing that God is very close, watching over his chosen people ... watching over me. He is there if I call to him ... and if I need to, I call on him now, with confidence.

Moses is still revered as one of history's great leaders. Who are the important leader figures in my own life, or who have they been? Perhaps I think particularly of those who have guided me through a period of wandering, or who have helped me 'arrive' at a certain place. I give thanks to God for his gift of these people.

Moses speaks of the Law not in terms of tedious rules and regulations, but as a God-given gift that brings life and wisdom. I ponder this. What are the 'laws and customs' that enable good things in my own life ... in others' lives ... and what are those that bring challenges? I speak to the Lord of this ... and allow space to listen to him. Moses reminds God's people of their responsibility to future generations. What are the things within my heart that I most wish to pass on to others? I ask the Lord for any grace I need.

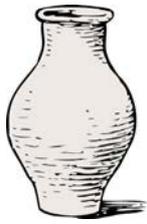
As I end my prayer, I thank God for all that gives us life, and ask for the wisdom and discernment that I need to follow Jesus this day.

How are you going to respond today?

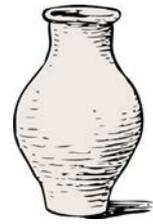
Today I might take time to pray especially for those in positions of leadership who have featured in the news this week, especially those who occupy prominent positions on the world stage. I give thanks for all who try to make good laws and live by good customs that bring life to others, especially those whose lives are marked by suffering.

Examen (review of prayer)

When you come towards the end of your time of prayer, or at the end of your day, talk to God about what has come up for you, what went well and what didn't.



THURSDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK



Daily Offering

Holy Spirit, help me to hear your voice in the all the sounds and silences of today.

Simon Bishop SJ

Entering into Prayer

Listen to the sounds you can hear around you.

If you are indoors, allow yourself to notice sounds without and within the room.

Identify each sound as you are able.

Gently, slowly, without judgement, focus your attention on each one.

Return your attention back to where you were before.

If a sudden sound or distraction occurs, acknowledge it and name it. Don't try to ignore it.

When ready, become aware of the sound of your own breathing.

Through the sounds, be attentive to the invitation of God, who dwells in creation...

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Jeremiah 7: 23-28

These were my orders: Listen to my voice, then I will be your God and you shall be my people. Follow right to the end the way that I mark out for you, and you will prosper. But they did not listen, they did not pay attention; they followed the dictates of their own evil hearts, refused to face me, and turned their backs on me. From the day your ancestors came out of the land of Egypt until today, day after day I have persistently sent you all my servants the prophets. But they have not listened to me, have not paid attention; they have grown stubborn and behaved worse than their ancestors. You may say all these words to them: they will not listen to you; you may call them: they will not answer. So tell them this, 'Here is the nation that will not listen to the voice of the Lord its God nor take correction. Sincerity is no more, it has vanished from their mouths.'



Jeremiah
by
Enrico Glicenstein



Image for the Day

How do you feel about this image?
Have you ever felt that others did not listen to you?
Perhaps you are aware that you do not always listen to God?
Talk to Jesus about that.

Food for Thought

The prophet Jeremiah lived in very turbulent political times. During his life, Babylonia succeeded Assyria as the dominant power in the Middle East. Jeremiah was a witness to the return to worship of the Lord, instituted by the Judean king Josiah; after Josiah's death, Jeremiah also witnessed the return of many to paganism. Yet true to his Covenant – 'I will be your God and you shall be my people' (Leviticus 26:13) – the Lord sends Jeremiah to help the people in Judah. What can this difficult political situation tell us about our world today? Are there parallels to be drawn? Is the Lord continuing to be true to his covenant to us? Who are the prophets he sends us?

Suggestions for Prayer

What immediate reactions come to me as I read Jeremiah's words? Maybe I feel I have nothing in common with these ancient peoples, or think that they received their just desserts for not listening to the Lord. Or perhaps I respond in another way? I acknowledge my feelings and thoughts. I try not to judge them. Perhaps I feel prompted to look at myself and at the way I respond to what seems to me to be the will of God. Do I listen to him? When in the last few days have I felt his presence in my life?

In the evening, I might want to reflect on my day and bring to mind the times when I felt him close to me, but also the times when I turned my back or did not want to accept that he was near.

For these times, I give thanks or express my sorrow.

I look around me ... at my family, my work colleagues, my community, my church. How far do they listen to the Lord? How could following 'the way marked out for them' help them to make a positive difference?

After a few moments of pondering, I turn to the Lord and tell him what is in my heart, what comforts me, what I find difficult. I ask for his help, confident that he loves and understands me as I am. I listen to him. I conclude my prayer with a slow, reverent sign of the cross.

How are you going to respond today?

Today, I might want to be more consciously aware of the presence of God in me and around me by listening to others with a sincere heart and paying attention to their needs. My desire will be not to turn my back to the Lord, but to follow him more closely and love him more nearly day by day.

Examen (review of prayer)

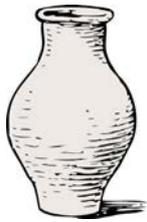
Sit or stand and let God look at you. Breathe in God's love. Breathe out into God how you are right now. Ask for God's light as you look over the day. What makes you glad? Breathe it in.

What makes you sad? Let yourself feel it. Do not be afraid. Breathe in God's love.

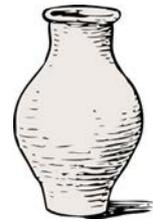
What do you need to help you? Let God know.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit

As it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be, Amen.



FRIDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK



Daily Offering

Father, as day breaks, open my heart to those who I will meet today so that they may glimpse in me the heart of your Son.

Philip Harrison SJ

Entering into Prayer

Listen to the sounds you can hear around you.

If you are indoors, allow yourself to notice sounds without and within the room.

Identify each sound as you are able.

Gently, slowly, without judgement, focus your attention on each one.

Return your attention back to where you were before.

If a sudden sound or distraction occurs, acknowledge it and name it. Don't try to ignore it.

When ready, become aware of the sound of your own breathing.

Through the sounds, be attentive to the invitation of God, who dwells in creation...

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Mark 12: 28-34

One of the scribes came up to Jesus and put a question to him, 'Which is the first of all the commandments?' Jesus replied, 'This is the first: Listen, Israel, the Lord our God is the one Lord, and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this: You must love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.' The scribe said to him, 'Well spoken, Master; what you have said is true: that he is one and there is no other. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself, this is far more important than any holocaust or sacrifice.' Jesus, seeing how wisely he had spoken, said, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God'. And after that no one dared to question him any more.





Image for the Day

How do you feel about the idea of loving your neighbour?

What helps you follow this commandment?

What if anything hinders you from loving your neighbour? Talk to Jesus about that.

Food for Thought

In today's Gospel we witness an unexpected encounter between Jesus and a scribe – a man expert in all the traditional complexities of Jewish Law. These two very different teachers face one other. Do we expect their conversation to be hostile? If so, we might be surprised by the level of mutual respect. The scribe wants Jesus's opinion on a really burning question. Of the hundreds of commandments to be obeyed, which is the greatest? Jesus seems to hear a deeper searching behind this enquiry, and his answer leads this learned man to much greater understanding.

The first commandment (the Shema Yisrael, still prayed daily by orthodox Jews) is that we love God as our one and only Lord, with every fibre of our being, says Jesus. And it is paired with a second – that we try to love others in the way we'd like to be loved ourselves.

The scribe now begins to see: it is not the details of Temple rituals and sacrifices that matter, but loving. And Jesus encourages him warmly, for however outwardly different this man may seem from the disciples, Jesus knows his heart is very close to God.

Suggestions for Prayer

I take time to read this short passage slowly, reverently. Perhaps I imagine myself present in the Temple as this conversation between two respected leaders takes place ... the learned scribe questioning the young itinerant preacher. I look from one face to the other, noticing their expressions; what passes between them; the different nuances in their speech. What has drawn this man to Jesus? What is it that draws me?

Jesus has no difficulty cutting through the raft of legal complexity to the real essentials of being a disciple. It's all about trying to love in the way that Jesus loves. I ponder this bedrock of our life with Christ Jesus.

Perhaps I think of times when I haven't found it easy to love God single-mindedly, or I've been more concerned with legalities or details. I speak to the Lord of this from my heart, remembering that love is God's gift to me; it is not my own work. Now I hear Jesus speaking about loving my neighbour as myself.

Who in my own life has helped me to experience and learn about love, or led me to know that I am loved? Gratefully, I bring them to the Lord. Who are my neighbours, including people who may seem 'different' from me, or hold very different views? I ponder what it means to love them.

I ask the Lord to help me see his own face in all those around me.

As I draw my prayer to a close, I give thanks anew for God's great gift of love, and ask for the grace to respond to his invitation to love ever more deeply and generously this Lent.

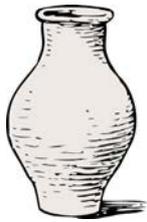
How are you going to respond today?

Today I might learn from the scribe by trying to come to any conversation I have, including unexpected ones, with openness and generosity. I ask to be particularly aware of God's presence, and that God might deepen the gift of his love within me and all those I encounter today.

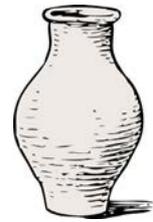
Examen (review of prayer)

Let God look at you with love. What are you doing for Lent this year? How is that working out? What's going well? And less well? What do you need from God to help you? Talk with God about your Lent. Be still in God's gaze again.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.



SATURDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK



Daily Offering

Breath of God, speak within me today so that with my words I may create harmony and peace with those you send me. Let not a violent word pass through my lips.

Phil Harrison SJ

Entering into Prayer

Beginning at the top of your head and passing down through the body to the feet be attentive to each part of the body in turn.

Gently focus in turn on each part ... head ... face ... eyes ... neck ... shoulders etc.

For each part, allow a few moments to become aware of what is being felt, without making judgement upon it. Move on in turn until you have given attention to your whole body.

Then consider your whole self you as a person made in God's likeness ... you in whom God chooses to dwell...

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Luke 18: 9-14

Jesus spoke the following parable to some people who prided themselves on being virtuous and despised everyone else, 'Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee, the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood there and said this prayer to himself, 'I thank you, God, that I am not grasping, unjust, adulterous like the rest of mankind, and particularly that I am not like this tax collector here. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes on all I get.' The tax collector stood some distance away, not daring even to raise his eyes to heaven; but he beat his breast and said, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner'. This man, I tell you, went home again at rights with God; the other did not. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the man who humbles himself will be exalted.'





Image for the Day

What do you see in this image? Does it remind you of anyone or any group of people? How might it help you reflect on what it means to be virtuous? Talk to Jesus about that.

Food for Thought

Today Jesus speaks of our response to God through the gift of prayer. A little earlier in Luke's Gospel the disciples had begged Jesus, 'Lord, teach us to pray!'. So now Jesus continues their education with a witty account of two very different characters who pray in very different ways. Outwardly the Pharisee prides himself on being a paragon of virtue, outdoing everyone else by fasting and paying tithes at a level well beyond what the Law requires. But he also knows just how marvellous he is. His wordy prayer is completely focused on himself and he dismisses others out of hand. By contrast, the scorned tax collector can think of nothing but his own unworthiness. His short prayer is full of remorse, but it comes from deep within his heart. He pleads with the Lord and trusts that he'll be heard – and he goes home vindicated.

What matters, Jesus seems to say, is that if we come before God just as we are, in complete honesty and trust, we will discover God's generous heart. Regardless of our failings and shortcomings, here in prayer we meet the God who yearns only to love us.

Suggestions for Prayer

I might like to spend a moment pondering how my own prayer is going this Lent. I imagine Jesus telling this parable himself, perhaps with a touch of humour. I picture the Pharisee, proud to be in the public gaze, and the tax collector cowering behind him. What do I notice about the way each of them prays? Perhaps I take a moment to notice where my own attention is focused ... towards God, or inwards at myself? I ask the Lord to gently direct my gaze, and in turn to help me be aware of his loving gaze upon me.

The Pharisee spends much time making comparisons, though it gets him nowhere. I reflect on how I regard others. Do I tend instinctively to judge, or do I find it more natural to respond with compassion and tolerance? I speak to the Lord about this, asking for any help I need.

The tax collector, in contrast, approaches God with great sorrow. Trusting in God's love and mercy, I share with him anything that troubles me, or I know troubles someone else I know. I may like to make my own the 'Jesus Prayer' inspired by the tax collector's own words: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me'. As I end my time of reflection, I give thanks that my prayer is never just my own work, but the gift of the living God who loves me enough to die for me.

How are you going to respond today?

Today might be a day to put aside any concerns I have about praying in the 'right way', or with the right words. Rather than focusing on my achievements or failings, I simply offer myself with an open heart, trusting in the God who loves me and yearns to meet me just as I am.

Examen (review of prayer)

With God: With God I review my day

Thanks: Where do I find joy?

Sorry: Where do I find sadness?

Please: What do I ask from God?

Amen