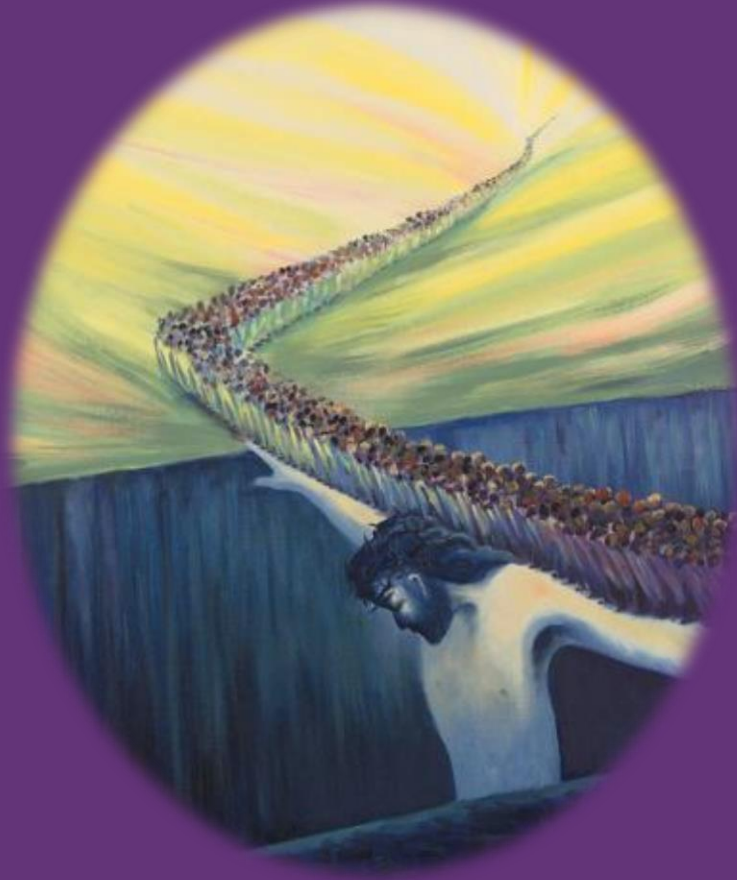


“BRIDGES”



Reflections for the Season of Lent
2018

The West Virginia Institute for Spirituality
Charleston, West Virginia

March 10

It is love that I desire, not sacrifice; and knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

Hosea 6:6

When I first began to speak about becoming a priest, some people said things like “what a great sacrifice that is”. At 14 years, I understood sacrifice as loss, pain, and suffering. Later, when ordained and preparing couples for marriage, some talked about what they would have to give up, loose. They seemed to want some compensation. Later I would learn that virtue is its own reward.

We need ‘knowledge of God’ and each other as a bridge to move from “sacrifice” to “generosity”. Knowledge is better understood as ‘experience’. The experience of loving and being loved, uniquely, individually, not generically but personally is what motivates and transforms us.

“*What return can I give to God for all God has done for me?*” (Psalm 116:12) We have some choices here:

- Give up, sacrifice, empty oneself of one’s attachments to what is unhealthy, creating a void that reminds us of our dependence on God and that only God’s love can fill and satisfy.
- AND give, generously, freely, as Christ gives forgiveness, compassion, helpfulness, faithfulness to people and commitments.

Prayer Practice:

God, today, what is the choice you are inviting me to choose? Bless my choice so I can be strengthened and fulfill it faithfully.

March 11, 2018
4th Sunday of Lent - Laetare Sunday
 Daylight Savings Time Begins

And this is the verdict, that the light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light, because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come toward the light, so that his works might not be exposed. But whoever lives the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God.

John 3:19-21



Building Walls - 7 Deadly Sins	Building Bridges – 7 Virtues
Lust	Chastity
Gluttony	Abstinence
Greed	Liberality - Generosity
Sloth -sadness	Diligence
Wrath - rage	Patience – ability to forgive
Envy	Kindness – Charity
Pride	Humility – Selflessness

Prayer Practice:

Are you a wall builder or a bridge builder? What can you do in these remaining three weeks of Lent to build more bridges – to move toward the Light?

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March 12, 2018

God, so that my wellbeing can praise you, and not be silent, you changed my sadness into dancing; forever will I praise you. Psalm 30:13

Too often, I have felt that God is not acting fast enough. The official in the Gospel shows me that trust is a bridge to wellbeing, his own and his servant's, as well as to new life.

“Above all, trust in the slow work of God. We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay. We should like to skip the intermediate stages. We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown and something new.

And yet it is the law of all progress that it is to be made by passing through some stages of instability—and that it may take a very long time. And so I think it is with you: your ideas mature gradually—let them grow; let them shape themselves, without undue haste.

Don't try to force them, as though you could be today what time (that is to say, grace and circumstances acting on your own good will) will make of you tomorrow.

“Only God could say what this new spirit gradually forming within you will be. Give our Lord the benefit of believing that his hand is leading you, and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete.”-- Pierre Theihard De Chardin, S.J., from Hearts on Fire.

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March 13, 2018

EZ 47:1-9, 12

Wherever the river flows, every sort of living creature that can multiply shall live, EZ 47:1-9, 12

...there is a pool in Jerusalem where a large number of ill, blind, lame and crippled are immersed... JN 5:1-16

This beautiful scripture with the theme of water, reminds us of the importance of water in our daily lives, as the source of nourishment for our bodies and the promise of life through the sacrament of baptism.

It immediately brought to my mind my daily work as an aquatic therapist who witnesses the healing effects of water. Just as in John's scripture, large numbers of people come to the pool, bringing their physical, emotional and spiritual ailments with a common request for relief of pain and hope of healing. I have witnessed the birth of awareness to the present moment as their stress and worries float away. The pool provides the atmosphere of weightlessness and relief, allowing a deeper revelation of "I am, I feel, and I hope". I have witnessed the healing of acceptance, as people reach out to help others as they witness their suffering.

Water signifies great blessings and evidence of the Lord's presence and offers HOPE for the future. Water gives and maintains life.



Prayer Practice:

Immerse yourself in water, in some way: in a pool, in the bath tub, or simply immerse your hands or hold water to your face as you become present in the moment. Sink into the awareness of silence...witness your feelings, your emotion, and the gratitude of LIFE. Allow your prayer to be the awareness of God in your being.

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March 14, 2018

*For these things I weep – My eyes! My eyes!
They stream with tears!
My children are desolate;
The enemy has prevailed. Lamentations 1:16*

Lent, a period of prayer and repentance involves crossing the forty-day bridge commemorating Jesus's transformation from Humanity to Divinity. It culminated with the Last Supper followed by a night of profound Agony in the Garden. He took upon Himself all the sins that were, or ever would be committed. So fervently did He pray; tears mingled with blood streamed down His face. Jesus wept.

My reflection centers on two life-changing visits to the concentration camp at Auschwitz, Poland – part of the country annexed at that time by Nazi Germany. The tour was horrifying: Large rooms were bins stacked high with human scalps and hair, worn out shoes and battered trunks and suitcases bearing the name of those who owned them. Historical films depicted millions of starved, gaunt emaciated prisoners as they were led to their death, suffocating in the gas chamber, then on to the crematorium. Other bodies were left to decay, lying wherever they may have fallen. So gruesome was this experience that many in the tour group could not continue.

The risen Jesus looked down upon this unfathomable inhumanity to man for which He suffered crucifixion. And Jesus wept.

Prayer Practice

1. Devote some extra prayer time contemplating the Crucifixion-perhaps reciting the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Holy Rosary, and meditating on the fourteen Stations of the Cross,
2. Pray for the souls of all those who suffered under the afflictions of vicious evildoers.
3. Pray for the conversion of sinners, that they seek repentance and BELIEVE.
4. Treat everyone you encounter, every day, with kindness, consideration and respect.

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March 15, 2018

I was glad when they said to me,
Let us go to the house of the Lord! Psalm 122:1, NRSV

Tuesday mornings I wheel our garbage container and recycling crate to the street for pick-up, a task I never do before 6:30 a.m. for that's when the birds awaken and fill the dusky morning skies with their songs. I want to make sure I catch the first chorus, and I listen always with gladness believing that listening opens doors to understanding. Sometimes it is difficult to tell which bird is singing; surely the robin, perhaps the sparrow, certainly the bluebird and all his siblings. A few steps more and I am convinced that the trees around me, the wispy, long-tailed clouds, and the peek-a-boo sun - all of them - join this aviary choir, including me, or so it seems. Such soft and solemn and perfect music doesn't last for more than a few minutes. It's one of those transcendent times grateful people like to talk about.

I recall one Sunday morning and the alleluias of a church choir billowing heavenward coaxed by musicians - artists, really - who crafted the soul of an anthem, a prelude, with curved fingers to ivory. I remember the bells and the hands creating melodic tones rivaling the lush, full-throated symphony of dawn's winged choir. Surely what was said about these offertories is true, that such rich, full, glorious music doesn't last for more than a few minutes.

Those of us who love the morning's cadences - whether under a tree or in the pews - know this; once you've been there transfixed by godly voices, you want to be there forever. A resurrection moment! What the psalmist says about these moments is true, "THIS is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."

Listen! In the coming weeks, the purple hues of Lent will give way to Easter's vivid palette. The morning sky will break like that first morning in Eden when the blackbird's song filled the air with sweet praises of second chances. Is it spring? Is it morning? Are there trees near you? Does your own soul need reassurance? Then open the door of your Sunday heart and fly to the Lord's house where God's re-creation of the new day is sung with elation!

Prayer practice: Pause for a moment and join the heavenly chorus greeting the dawn with strains of favorite hymns.

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March 16, 2018

*One does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes
from the mouth of God. Mt. 4:48*

*If I write what you may feel
it does not make me a poet but a bridge.
And I am humbled and I am grateful to assist
Your speaking your heart.
Mary Oliver*

Everything is a bridge... a path to openness of heart... every word that comes from the mouth of God in such diverse expressions... Scripture, poetry, music, art, relationship... creation itself.

Yesterday a beautiful snow fell gently and silently in Chapel Hill, a major deviation from the normal. With it came great surprise, awe and wonder. Everyone was closeted in a forced sanctuary.

As this snow drifted down, every pine bough and every small twig held this light gentle snow. My husband said it was as if the angels were placing each snowflake upon another so carefully that nothing was lost on each branch. My spirit followed the movement of that gentle drifting down and for the entire day every window I passed offered to me that interior movement of descending into the depth of stillness. Such gentleness, ease, quiet and rest. That snowfall was a bridge.



Last night the temperatures plummeted and all that snow froze. This morning the bushes, pines and skeleton trees were laden with this frozen snow. I felt the weight of that snow on the branches that were now bent and groaning. I contemplated that heaviness, aware of some heavy circumstances. Then I was drawn to gaze at the interior of the bushes...drawn to a sanctuary where it was green, dark, warm, secluded and protected. That frozen snow was a bridge.

Practice for today: Contemplate the bridges in your day. Where did they lead you? Give thanks.

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