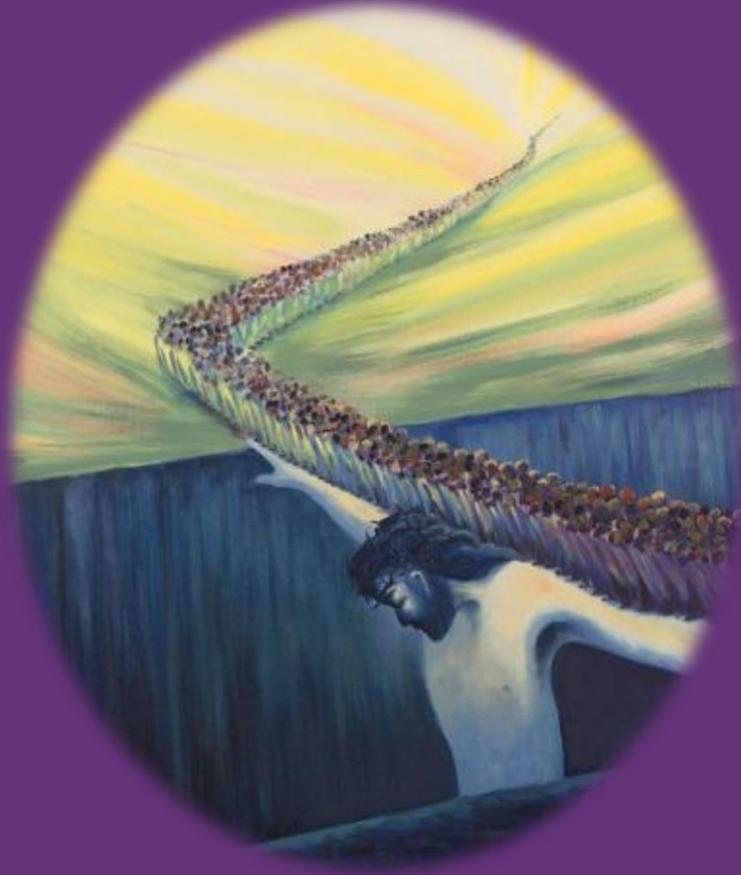


# “BRIDGES”



Reflections for the Season of Lent  
2018

The West Virginia Institute for Spirituality  
Charleston, West Virginia

**March 17, 2018**

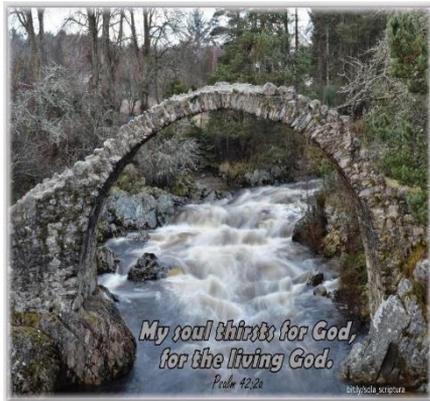
*O God, You are my God. I shall seek You earnestly.  
My soul **thirsts** for You, my flesh yearns for You.*

As I read these words from Psalm 63, I'm reminded of a song – which is based on another Psalm... Psalm 42.

**“As the Deer Thirsts for the Water” by Dennis Jernign.**

As the deer thirsts for the water,  
Lord so my soul longs for You  
My soul thirsts for the Living God.  
Yes, my soul longs after You.

And I pour out my soul deep within  
me.  
Deep within me, I pour out my soul.  
Take me deeper, Lord,  
Deeper, Lord, in You.  
Take me deeper, Lord,  
Deeper, Lord, in You.



Hope in God for the help of His presence.  
Hope in God, O, my soul.  
Hope in God for the help of His presence.  
Hope in God, O, my soul.

How many times do I find myself longing for God, seeking and searching for God? How many times do I find myself thirsting for God, yearning and longing for God? How many times do I find myself hoping for the help of His presence, for a deeper sense of His presence touching my soul? How many times do I find myself wondering... where do I find that bridge between us?

**Prayer Practice:**

Today, spend a few minutes in quiet solitude pondering the words in this song or Psalm. Choose one word or a phrase and spend some time talking to God about what that means to you. Then ask God what that means to Him – and listen – in silence. Then take a few minutes to ponder... where do you find your bridge?

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**March 18, 2018**

*The Lenten spring shines forth,  
The flower of repentance!  
Let us cleanse ourselves from all evil,  
Crying out to the Giver of Light:  
“Glory to You, O Lover of man!”  
Thomas Hopko – The Lenten Spring*

I noticed in my church bulletin that on Ash Wednesday the church was serving an all-you-can-eat Pancake Dinner. I thought to myself, “Why Pancakes?” Researching, I found that throughout history, on the day before Ash Wednesday, there were feasts of pancakes to use up the supplies of fat, butter and eggs. These were foods forbidden during lent.

Now during the Lenten season Christians make a point of self-examination, of considering what wrongs they need to repent and what areas of spiritual growth they need to ask God’s help with.

**Prayer Practice:**

Consult with Jesus Christ in prayer and worship, not only, during this Lenten Season but every day.

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**March 19, 2018**

*Blessed are those who dwell in your house, O Lord;  
they never cease to praise you. PS 84:5*

Meditation is an important part of my daily prayer practice. I am inspired by Thomas Merton who invites me into a special place to "...surrender to the silence, discover for yourself how patiently God waits in silence for all your inner noise to exhaust itself, so that, finally, impoverished and spent, you can begin to hear God uttering you and all things into being." *Thomas Merton: A Book of Hours*, p. 10.

Similarly, Thomas Keating has helped me find this bridge to inner freedom. He has taught me to take twenty minutes of silence in Centering Prayer. Keating says that "through grace we open our awareness to God whom we know by faith is within us, closer than breathing, closer than thinking, closer than choosing – closer than con-consciousness itself." *The Method of Centering Prayer: The Prayer of Consent*, by Thomas Keating, Contemplative Outreach pamphlet.

In this season of Lent, we need more of this golden silence that God offers unceasingly. I seek to dwell in this house of the Spirit, this "point of nothingness" Merton describes as – a place within "...untouched by sin and by illusion, a point of pure truth, a point of spark which belongs entirely to God..." *Book of Hours*. How sweet it is that God has graced me with an instrument to listen and a temple to fill!

For me that point of nothingness should be beyond even the sound of human voices, the chirping of birds, or the wind wisp. The silence is a safe place because it's where I seek the abiding Presence.

Today is the feast of Saint Joseph. Could he have been meditating when he heard the voice of the Angel Gabriel?

Prayer Practice: Try meditating at least once a day. Ask a Spiritual Director for guidance.

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March 20, 2018



In the reading from John today we hear the words: “ I am going away and you will look for me... where I am going you cannot come. I belong to what is above. You belong to what is below. If you do not believe that I AM, you will die in your sins. “Jesus continues to encourage his followers to change, to listen to Him, and to know that the one who has sent Him is the Father. Jesus is the common ground between his Father and us. He always does the will of the Father, no matter how difficult; he encourages us to do likewise. “The one who has sent me is true, and what I heard from him I tell the world. When I am lifted up you will realize that I AM, and I do nothing on my own, but I say only what the Father has taught me. The one who has sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, because I always do what is pleasing to the Father.”

As I slowly listen to these words of Jesus I cannot help to see how Jesus is the way to the Father, Jesus is the bridge to our oneness with the Father. As I journey this day I pray to be encouraged and at one with the Father who loves me more that I can ever imagine. I pray to realize deep in my being Jesus bring me to His Father.

During this day may I be like Jesus and be the connection, the bridge, to the Father for others and for myself. May my actions and words bring all to the Father.

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**March 21, 2018**

Resurrection

Fighting prostate cancer for a decade, I'm ever tested by the medical profession. The latest episode led to my being catharized for a most painful week, ending in my urologist's office this morning. Soon after the device was withdrawn, I felt lightheaded and promptly passed out. As witnessed by my wife, "He turned gray, began to gag and convulse, and blood pressure dropped precipitously to 60 (the larger number), while his surgeon became wide-eyed." Then my gurney and entourage became stuck in an elevator as they tried to get me to the hospital next door. Through mist, flirting with marginal consciousness, I thought, "So this is how it ends." I prayed God to accept my recent failures to get to confession . . .I'd been sick lately . . .and accept me "as is". After the crisis passed, I thought: today's experience was this mortal's version of a resurrection. Christ came back from death, saving our souls, including (I hope) mine!

**Prayer Practice:**

Give thanks for your ability to breathe.

The Rev. Dr. William Brown

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**March 22, 2018**  
*I will lay me down*

It was the early 1970's. After too many years in the seminary, ordination to the priesthood was finally becoming a goal within reach rather than a distant dream. And over the airwaves wafted the musical genius of Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel, voices already well-familiar, with a song that tugged at my heart: "Bridge Over Troubled Water." The lyrics promised comfort, friendship, and an open hand to one in pain, sorrow and darkness. In a time when so many people longed for peace and healing from ongoing war, violence and division, the song's message spoke powerfully; it became the artists' signature song, highly acclaimed around the world, their best-selling recording.

And it spoke to me: The many years of language that were integral to seminary curriculum back then had taught me a sensitivity to the original meaning of words. "Pontifex," an ancient Latin word for "priest," is actually comprised of two words that together mean "bridge-builder." The priest is called to be a bridge-builder, reconciling person to person and people to God. Or as the song puts it, *"I'll take your part when darkness comes, and pain is all around. Like a bridge over troubled water, I will lay me down."*

This also became an image of the price one must pay to live the vocation of priesthood: A bridge-builder tries to bring all sides together. And the reward? A bridge gets walked on from every side! Not such an appealing image after all!

Jesus knew that price. As today's Gospel tells us, it was as obvious as the stones in the hands of his antagonists (*Jn. 8:51-59*). In spite of his efforts to be a bridge and restore the covenant relationship between God and people, a growing number wanted to kill him.

Ours too is a time of hatred, division and violence of many types. Indeed, divisiveness has become politically potent. And that brings up another word: "diabolein," a Greek word that means "to divide or separate," a word that translates into English as "diabolical." Anything, or anyone, who sets out to divide or separate is, quite literally, diabolical. We need only look around to see our desperate necessity for people, ordained or not, willing to pay the price, to "lay me down," to be a bridge, a bridge-builder, as Jesus himself was. He would lay down his life for us all. How might you be called to follow him?

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**March 23, 2018**

*The Jews picked up rocks to stone Jesus (John 10:31).*

In today's Gospel, "The Jews picked up rocks to stone Jesus." How furious they were! You need only to watch the evening news to see scenes like this—violent mobs, ready to kill...and sometimes succeeding.

Jesus performed miracles. He spoke with authority, not as the Scribes, Scripture tells us. He was a people magnet, giving his followers the Good News. He had no notes, and, yet, every word out of his mouth was directly from God, his Father, through the Holy Spirit. He had no army, no weapons. How was he a threat to the angry mob? Why were they furious?

Because they couldn't prove him wrong. When a statement is true, "The Father is in me and I am in the Father," how could they prove otherwise. They *did* see his works. The miracles were not magic tricks. They *did* hear his words. His preaching was indisputable.

But, Jesus asked them to believe first. Only then would they understand. They couldn't do it. The gift of faith was not theirs. They could not—would not—believe in Jesus. They believed in themselves.

Throughout my life, I've picked up stones because I didn't understand God's ways. "Prove yourself!" I shouted to the heavens. "You're wrong, and I'm right! Give me what I want or I'm out of here!" Oh, that I had the faith to believe first. Then...only then...would understanding be possible.

**Prayer practice:**

Surrender to faith. Confess our need to control, ask for forgiveness, and let God steer for a change. He knows the direction, the speed, and the destination.

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*Rooted and growing in the light of God's love.*

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