

On Holy Ground
A Lenten/Easter Journey
First Week of Lent



Monday

How many of our retreatants sense they are on “Holy Ground” when they come to Eastern Point and enter into the mystery of God in this sacred place? Perhaps you have had the opportunity to make retreat at different times of

the year. What a blessing to experience this “Holy Ground” during the four seasons. Given the powerful encounter with the beauty of creation here, reading the scripture from Leviticus which speaks of God’s commandments, one wonders why there are no “You shall not.....”s related to the earth, the ground on which we live and move and have our being? This reading lists the “don’ts”; what we shouldn’t do. The Gospel, however, tells us the “do’s”; what we should do for “the least.”

On Friday of the First week of Lent, we heard the words of the prophet Isaiah, chastising the people and their leaders for acting as pious people but neglecting the needs of the poor and disenfranchised.

This, rather, is the fasting that I wish:
releasing those bound unjustly,
untying the thongs of the yoke;
Setting free the oppressed,
breaking every yoke;
Sharing your bread with the hungry,
sheltering the oppressed and the homeless;
Clothing the naked when you see them,
and not turning your back on your own.

Our own government officials would be advised to take this admonition to heart!

When we listen to today’s Gospel, Matthew 25, we might think of Jesus’ remembering the words of Isaiah and using them in his parable of the sheep and the goats

And, yes, the “goats” get a bad rap. Goats are good. They can be aggressive and butt heads, but they also provide milk and cheese for many. We could change “goats” to “wolves” since they are predators, but why blame the animals at all? They are who they were created to be, God knows why! But we humans can choose to make war or peace to choose between peace and war.

Given the world in which we live which is so prone to war, violence and harm rather than peace, love, and healing, here’s a contemporary “rewrite” of today’s Gospel

Jesus said to his disciples:

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him.

And he will separate them one from another, The peacemakers on the left. and the warmongers on the right.

Then the king will say to those on his left, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father!

Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

For I was hungry for peace among nations and you devoted yourself to peace-making.

I was thirsty for justice for all and you worked for justice, a stranger, a refugee from the scourge of war and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you freed me.’

For whenever you did these things for a victim of war and terror, you did this for me.'

Then he will say to those on his right, 'Depart from me, you, warmongers, into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his angels.

For I was hungry for peace, and you made war.

I was thirsty for justice, and you killed the innocent.

You made me an exile, a refugee in an alien land.

You stripped me naked of my rights to a homeland

And you clothed yourself in wealth and luxury.

You imprisoned me with fear of your bombs, missiles, and convoys that would take away my freedom.

Then they will answer and say,

Lord, when did we see you as a victim of war and cruelty, hungry or thirsty or a stranger, or naked, or ill, or in prison, and not minister to your needs?

He will answer them, 'Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of the least ones, you did not do for me.'

And these will go off to eternal punishment but the righteous to eternal life.

Suggestions for Prayer:

At the beginning of this Lenten season, do you hear an invitation to care for the "holy ground" on which we live and move and have our being? Listen to the words of

“Laudato Si!” Ask for the grace to know God’s love for this Holy Ground and what is “due” to our Mother Earth.

<https://vimeo.com/411789126>

Spend some time with the Isaiah text (58:1-9). Read this in conjunction with Matthew 25. How do you respond to the challenge to that these texts offer you? What might you “do” this Lent in service to the “other?”

Pray with the revised Gospel. How do you see and hear God responding to the cries of those who are the victims of war and cruelty? Ask for the grace to know how you can best be a peacemaker in your life.

Tuesday



Just as from the heavens
the rain and snow come
down and do not return
there till they have
watered the earth,
making it fertile and
fruitful, Giving seed to the
one who sows and bread
to the one who eats, So
shall my word be

that goes forth from my mouth; It shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it.

Jesus says to his disciples, “Don’t babble on”. Keep your prayer simple. There’s no need for an excess of words. Speak from the heart and notice if the gifts of the spirit are “bubbling up” in you.

We usually don’t associate “joy” with the Lenten season. Joy always feels “light” where Lent has a heaviness to it. Whether it be the weight of the Cross, the weight of our sinfulness, the weight of the world, during Lent we are more weighed down than buoyed up. Easter is the time for bubbling and even babbling with sheer joy. Even in Lent, however, we can be surprised by joy.

If we listen closely to the babbling and bubbling of today’s scripture, the Spirit may not “brook” any opposition to the joyful sounds within and without. Isaiah begins with the beautiful image of the earth watered and made fruitful by the snow and the rain. During your retreats at Eastern Point, how has the weather affected your prayer? Rain, snow, blustery winds, serene seas, surf breaking over the rocks. How has the weather been a gift for you on this Holy Ground?

Reflect, as well, on the Word of God that you have heard in the liturgy or prayed with during your retreat time. Are there instances you can remember of the Word of God piercing your heart and transforming your spirit?

God's word is living, active and effective if we let it take root in us. God's Word is Jesus, himself and if we listen to him, and let him work through us, we may be delighted with what happens and the difference we can make as instruments of his peace and his joy.

There is a beautiful image in the psalm today: "Look to God and be radiant with joy and your faces may not blush with shame." Even in this Lenten season with all the worries of our world today, can we radiate joy that comes from seeing the face of God in creation and the face of Jesus in our brothers and sisters? The noted Jesuit preacher, Walter Burghardt is famous for saying, "It's Lent. Look redeemed!"

As you know, joy cannot be programmed. Joy is spontaneous and surprising. It's not up to us to decide to be joyful in the midst of these troubled times. Joy is gift and it comes when and where we least expect it. A joyful spirit may be an important reminder that the Spirit of God is still bubbling up, even when we "babble on."

Suggestion for Prayer

KIS! Keep it simple, as Jesus says. What's bubbling up in you as you pray with these scriptures. What is a source of joy for you during these times that bring such sadness? How is the "Holy Ground" on which you live, and move and have your being, a source of joy for you?

Wednesday

Resent, Repent, Relent. They could be the three “Rs” of the Lenten Season. Will you hold on to hurts, grudges, resentments or will you let go of them? To resent or repent and relent is at the heart of the Jonah story that is the first reading today.

Today’s text gives only the bare outline of the story and doesn’t let us see Jonah as the “unforgiving, cranky, sulky” guy he really is. The issue for Jonah is that he’s running away from God because he doesn’t like the fact that God is SO merciful. He knows that if he preaches repentance to the Ninevites, they will repent, and God will relent. After they do repent and God relents, Jonah resents God for his gracious mercy.

“He prayed to the Lord, “Isn’t this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.” (Jonah 4:2)

The photo of Brace Rock with the snow melting that you see at the beginning of this email could be a good image for today. Resentment is as hard as the rock that you see. Relenting comes from the word to be flexible or to melt. It also means to “bend back.” Think of God’s “bending over backwards” to show us love, compassion and forgiveness!

Suggestion for Prayer

Is there anything of Jonah that you recognize in yourself? What's God's invitation to you as you begin this Lenten journey? Speak to God as one friend speaks to another: How flexible are you? How flexible is God with you?