

# **Spirituality in the season of Lent**

## **Resources for the Lecture**

- Pastoral Services
- Stature of Waiting

## **Introduction**

### Lent complex origins

1. Post-Epiphany baptismal preparation associated with 40 day wilderness temptation – Alexandrian church
2. Public penance with ministry of restoration – Roman church
3. Extension backwards of Triduum into Holy Week and then 3, then 6 or 7 week period of Paschal anticipation

### Three clear themes

**REMEMBER:** recollection, confession of faith, learning and catechesis

**REPENT:** ministry of reconciliation: self-examination, restoration and reconciliation

**PREPARE:** with discipline, struggle and asceticism

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### But first, the character of Lent is **PAUSE**

1. David Hay in *Why Spirituality is Difficult for Westerners*, speaks of three spiritual impulses in his research: awareness of the here-and-now, of mystery and of value. Awareness of mystery involves intent observation, about which he says: *‘The appropriate method is to observe intently, using a method very similar to that advocated by the great Harvard zoologist Louis Agassiz to his student Samuel Scudder.’*<sup>1</sup> *The young student thought that after ten minutes’ examination of the fish given to him by Agassiz to study, he had seen all there was to see. After the three days of contemplation insisted upon by his teacher, Scudder began to see much more. **Contemplation requires time, patience and the ability to wait.***<sup>2</sup>
2. The special joys of super-slow reading, expanded in, and as, *Reading with God: Lectio Divina*, by David Foster:
  - a. Lectio: *‘There are many ways of slowing down, besides repeated reading. Early monks learned the text or portions of it by heart; others carefully copied it out. The merit of reading aloud has already been mentioned.’*<sup>3</sup>
  - b. Meditatio, which Foster calls ‘receiving the Word.’ *‘This kind of meditative work is not done quickly. Monks used to spend several hours a day with lectio divina! But one possibility to try is to spread lectio over a whole day. That is to say, in the morning we can do the reading and have an initial time of prayerful reflection. Later on we can revisit the passage and allow more time for prayer to come out of the more mature reflection that is then possible.’*<sup>4</sup>
  - c. Oratio
  - d. Contemplatio

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<sup>1</sup> described in an article in 1874 entitled ‘Look at your fish!’

<sup>2</sup> Hay, op. cit, p. 11

<sup>3</sup> Foster, op. cit, p. 35

<sup>4</sup> ibid, p. 71

3. Waiting – Stature of Waiting – Jesus as the object, the passive recipient, in his suffering, waiting for people to do to him what they would, and in receiving their doing, their crucifying action, our crucifying action, becoming the Saviour of the world. Read the vignette on page 67.
  4. The World Institute of Slowness: *‘Sometimes I sit down to think; sometimes I just sit down.’ ‘Grab a slow moment.’*
  5. *‘The only thing for certain is that everything changes. The rate of change increases. If you want to hang on you better speed up. That is the message of today. It could however be useful to remind everyone that our basic needs never change. The need to be seen and appreciated! It is the need to belong. The need for nearness and care, and for a little love! This is given only through slowness in human relations. In order to master changes, we have to recover slowness, reflection and togetherness. There we will find real renewal.’ Guttorm Floistad*
  6. The pause of ‘stabilitas’
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### **PREPARE: with discipline, struggle, asceticism**

The example of fasting:

- a. is commended by the Holy Scripture as having a singular power to cast out the Devil;
  - b. to obtain the Holy Ghost for ourselves and others;
  - c. to avert God’s anger from a particular Person, City or Country;
  - d. to reduce concupiscence, to dispose the mind for prayer, to increase all virtues in us in this life, and our crown of glory in the other.
  - e. if I fast to afflict and humble myself before God Almighty, my fasting is an act of **repentance**;
  - f. if I eat less myself that I may have more to give to those that are in necessity, my fasting is an act of **charity**;
  - g. if I fast the better to dispose myself for prayer, ‘tis an act of **religious devotion**;
  - h. if I fast, judging myself not worthy of any delicacies, nor of my fill of even the coarsest fare, ‘tis an act of **humility**, and disposes my soul moreover as little to affect fine clothes or commodious lodgings, as I do good victuals, and consequently moderates my desire of money and riches;
  - i. if I fast that I may be the better able to pay my debts, or provide my children’s portions, ‘tis an act of **justice** and Christian paternal piety;
  - j. if to moderate my inordinate appetite of meat and drink, ‘tis an act of **temperance**, and strangely disposes to temperance in the whole course of my life..
  - k. In *fine*, ‘tis hard to name a virtue which fasting does not strangely help to procure, maintain and increase.<sup>5</sup>
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## **REPENT: ministry of reconciliation: self-examination, restoration and reconciliation**

Chaucer's Parson's Tale

Quote 1 =

Sir priest," he asked, "can you a vicar be?  
Are you a parson? Tell truth, by your fay!  
Be what you will, break not our jolly play;  
For every man, save you, has told his tale,  
Unbuckle, show us what is in your mail;  
For truly, I think, judging by your cheer,  
You should knit up a mighty matter here.  
Tell us a fable now, by Cock's dear bones!"  
This parson then replied to him at once:  
"You'll get no foolish fable told by me;  
For Paul, when writing unto Timothy,  
Reproves all those that veer from truthfulness  
And tell false fables and such wretchedness.  
Why should I sow chaff out of my own fist  
When I may sow good wheat, if I but list?  
But if, I say, you something wish to hear  
In which the moral virtues will appear,  
And if you now will give me audience,  
I will right gladly, in Christ's reverence,  
Give you such lawful pleasure as I can.  
But trust me, since I am a Southern man,  
I can't romance with 'rum, ram, ruff', by letter,  
And, God knows, rhyme I hold but little better;  
But if you wish the truth made plain and straight,  
A pleasant tale in prose I will relate  
To weave our feast together at the end.  
May Jesus, of His grace, the wit me send  
To show you, as we journey this last stage,  
The way of that most perfect pilgrimage  
To heavenly Jerusalem on high.

Quote 2 =

Many are the spiritual ways that lead folk unto Our Lord Jesus Christ and to the Kingdom of Glory. Of which ways there is a right noble way and a proper one, which will not fail either man or woman who through sin has gone astray from the right way to the Heavenly Jerusalem; and this way is called penitence.

Quote 3 =

Now shall you understand what is necessary to a true and perfect penitence. And this stands upon three things: contrition of heart, confession by word of mouth, and restitution.

The tasks

1. self-examination
  - a. tools for identifying sin
    - i. lists
    - ii. other people
    - iii. conscience
    - iv. the issue of besetting sin
    - v. diarise the confession [Richard Foster]
  - b. contrition: the possibility of a *lectio divina* to facilitate

- c. confession: variants
    - i. to a confessor
    - ii. to a friend
    - iii. publicly
    - iv. in private prayer
  - d. counsel
  - e. restitution/penance
  - f. absolution: Richard Foster puts it like this: *‘The followers of Jesus Christ have been given the authority to receive the confession of sin and to forgive it in His name... The assurance of forgiveness is sealed in the spirit when it is spoken by our brother or sister in the name of Christ.’*
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**REMEMBER:** recollection, confession of faith, learning and catechesis

Two kinds of remembering

- positive remembering – the good news
- negative remembering – the bad news brought into the light, and healed

Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World*, speaks of ‘the “hammering insistence” on memory’ in the Christian and Jewish traditions as a central feature of our religious belief and practice, with 4 components:

1. Sacred memory defines our identities. *‘To be a Jew is to remember the Exodus. To be a Christian is to remember the death and resurrection of Christ.’* In HC, in remembering Christ, we remember ourselves as part of a community of people who have died and risen together with Christ and whose core identity consists in this spiritual union with Christ. We remember Christ’s story not just as his story but also as our story. [paraphrase].
2. These memories are communal memories. The creeds are communal creeds. Our memory is sustained over time within a group. For me, the experience of belonging to Church is that it, they, we carry the memory. I do not carry it alone. I am not burdened by it alone. Nor do I rejoice alone, for that matter.
3. Remembering is also a future event: in remembering, I remember the future, what will be. Remembering makes us a people of hope. *‘Sacred memory is not just a “space of experience” (the past made present in memory) but also a “horizon of expectation” (the future made present in that same memory).’*
4. Sacred memories are memories of God. *‘When we remember in this way, we make a commitment to keep the object of our love present in our minds and hearts, to live in consideration of a relationship that matters to us.’*

How do we practise this remembering in Lent?

1. This is probably what Alpha and Emmaus type courses do for a lot of Christians...
2. Say the Creeds more often!
3. Read theology devotionally.
4. Excavate the Scriptures.

In general, we spend so much time as Christian leaders doing that we don’t often stop to reflect on what we actually believe, and then we wake up one day and we’ve forgotten how to believe. We owe it to ourselves and to the church to **REMEMBER**.

O Lord God<sup>6</sup> our Father in heaven,  
we thy miserable children upon earth,  
beseech thee mercifully to look upon us,  
and lend us thy grace,  
that thy name may be sanctified among us and in all the world,  
through the pure preaching of thy word,  
and true knowledge and understanding of the same,  
and through earnest charity in our daily conversation and living,  
seclude thou graciously from us all false doctrine and evil living,  
whereby thy worthy name might be blasphemed and slandered.

Oh let thy kingdom come,  
and be great to all sinful and blind people,  
and such as be holden captive of the devil and his kingdom,  
bring thou Lord us to true repentance  
and to the knowledge of the true faith,  
in Jesus Christ thy son.

Strengthen us Lord with thy grace,  
to do thy will in all godly works,  
and to suffer the same in life and in death,  
in well and in woe,  
that our will may be always broken, offered up and mortified.

Give us our daily bread,  
preserve us from all covetousness and immoderate carefulness of the belly,  
that of thee we may be assured to have abundance of all good things necessary for us.

Forgive us our trespasses,  
that we may have a glad and quiet conscience in thee,  
in that we receive forgiveness of our sins,  
as we be willing to forgive all them that trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation.  
But strengthen us, Lord, with thy Spirit,  
to subdue the flesh,  
to despise the world with the vanities thereof,  
and to overcome the devil with all his crafty assaults,  
and finally deliver us from all evil,  
both bodily and ghostly,  
temporal and eternal,

for thine is the kingdom,  
the power and the glory for ever.  
So be it.

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<sup>6</sup>

from Anon, *A Good and Godly Prayer to be said at all times, of every Christian, both man and woman, with a prayer upon the Pater noster or paraphrase upon the same*, London, 1563