

Wellspring Fransalian Center for Spirituality

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

One of the traditional spiritual discipline during the Season of Lent has been celebrating the sacrament of Penance and experiencing a thorough cleansing of the soul. This practice often ends up being a ritual confession and absolution of sins. This year, let us make it a little more meaningful and life changing experience.

Let us make it a more personal experience of “Naming the sinful and the unhealthy’ in our life and doing something about it. With a little bit of reflection, most of us can name things that make up our ordinary behaviors, habits and ways of being who we are, that we are not very proud of – things we do and things we never get around to doing. The season of Lent calls us to change our attitudes, our behavior patterns, our self-absorption, our way of interacting with others, etc. Perhaps a spouse, a loved one, a friend, a family member, or a co-worker has told us something about us that gets in the way of communication, that makes relating to them difficult. Maybe we don't take God very seriously. We go to Church on Sunday, and contribute our share, but we don't really take time to deal with our relationship with God.

We may name a number of self-indulgent habits. We may realize that we rarely, if ever, hear the cry of the poor, and can't remember when we have answered that cry. It could be that dishonesty on all kinds of levels has become a way of life. One of the roadblocks in our relationship with God and others may be deep wounds or resentments from the past, things we continue to hold against others or ourselves.

Lent is a wonderful time to name the sinful, the unhealthy and the self-centered patterns of living. We could do a good soul searching, a good examination of conscience, a personal scrutiny of life, a process of discerning what needs change or conversion or transformation in our life. Let us take time to explore the possibility of a change of heart and mind - a change of our attitudes, our dispositions, our values, our priorities, etc.

I encourage you to take a few moments during this week to search through your life and scrutinize your daily living and acting and name the sinful and the unhealthy. Prayerfully discern what you need to and want to change. Discern what seems to be important and urgent and begin the process of conversion and transformation. Pray for the Grace of God to help you discern and begin the process of conversion. Blessings and prayers are on your way...

Fr. Gus Tharappel, msfs

Fifth Week of Lent

March 27-April 1, 2023

March 27 – Monday, Fifth Week of Lent

**May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God
and to the steadfastness of Christ.**

(2 Thessalonians 3:5)

Daniel 13: 1 – 62

The story of Susanna, a good, beautiful and God-fearing woman who was falsely accused of adultery but declared innocent through the prayer of Susanna and the wise counsel of Daniel. Susanna's people praised God for saving the innocent who trusted him.

Be gracious! Be compassionate! Be non-judgmental!

Psalm 23 - The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want...

John 8:1-11

The Story of the woman caught in adultery. Caught in sin, paraded before the crowd, accused by the law abiding people, shamed before the public, embarrassed beyond compare...in the midst of such humiliation and powerlessness came a stranger who refused to condemn...the spotlight was turned on the accusers...accusers had to walk away! This story moves us with the message of forgiveness and the power of Grace to bring forth new life.

The stranger brought the gift of Grace, forgiveness and freedom. In the stranger, the woman who was alone and desperate found the Messiah. Jesus showed compassion for the one who was alone, ashamed, embarrassed and afraid. This story involves great challenge...the woman was confronted with the challenge of living a sinless, Grace-filled life.

Jesus came bringing forgiveness and healing and new life. He came to tell us not to live in our past failures, mistakes and sins. He came to call us to live a new life, a life of Grace and truth and walk in forgiving love. Life may have become a mess and we may very well have messed it up. In Jesus, there is always new meaning, new opportunities, and another chance at life.

Jesus affirmed a "trust" in human nature. To the woman of "loose morals", Jesus said, "go and sin no more". His message was not a lecture about what a miserable sinner she was, but a simple and profound challenge to begin new and make a difference.

No sin is an embarrassment to Jesus. Bring all your embarrassing moments, actions, events and situations in your life to Jesus. He will transform them into Grace-filled moments and opportunities for transformation of your life.

Saint of the Day, March 27 - St. Lazarus and 7 other saints are remembered this day.

Lazarus was the friend of Jesus, the brother of Martha and Mary. Jesus raised him from the dead and of him, the Jews said, "See how much he loved him." We have very little historically accurate knowledge of Lazarus. There are many legends about him after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Lazarus is supposed to have left a written account of what he saw in the next world before he was called back to life. Some say he followed Peter into Syria. Another story is that despite being put into a leaking boat by the Jews at Jaffa, he, his sisters, and others landed safely in Cyprus. There he died peacefully after serving as bishop for 30 years.

A church was built in his honor in Constantinople and some of his reputed relics were transferred there in 890. A Western legend has the oarless boat arriving in Gaul. There, he was bishop of Marseilles, was martyred after making a number of converts, and was buried in a cave. His relics were transferred to the new cathedral in Autun in 1146.

It is certain that there was early devotion to the saint. Around the year 390, the pilgrim lady Etheria talks of the procession that took place on the Saturday before Palm Sunday at the tomb where Lazarus had been raised from the dead. In the West, Passion Sunday was called Dominica de Lazaro, and Augustine tells us that in Africa the Gospel of the raising of Lazarus was read at the office of Palm Sunday. Devotion to Lazarus was commonplace in the early Church.

March 28 – Tuesday, Fifth Week of Lent

**Though the mountains fall away, and the hills be shaken,
My love shall never fall away from you, nor my covenant of peace
be shaken, says the LORD, who has mercy on you.**

(Isaiah 54:10)

Numbers 21:4-9

Tired, hungry, thirsty and impatient, the Israelites complained against God and Moses. They

became sick with bitterness and suffered and some of them died. Moses turned to God and prayed for forgiveness and God had compassion on them and healed them.

Psalm 102 - O Lord, hear my prayer and let my cry come to you...

John 8:21-30

Jesus spoke about going away and they did not understand. Jesus said that the reason for their lack of understanding is because they follow the way of the world and think as the world thinks. They are not open to the Spirit of God.

Jesus said that they would die in their sins because they are not open to the revelations of the spirit. Jesus also said that they would realize what they missed when he is gone and will search for him and not find him.

God sends us many opportunities to know him and understand his wisdom. It is up to us to remain open and welcome the opportunities that God sends. Missed opportunities may never return.

Time waits for no one. Treasure every moment you have. You will treasure it even more when you can share it with someone special. Now is the moment of Grace. Treasure every moment you have.

Jesus again made bold statements, difficult for the listeners to grasp. He said that he always did what was pleasing to his Father. It is to do the will of the Father that he came, and he remained obedient to that will. We are called to follow the way of Jesus, the way of faithfulness and obedience.

Reflect on how you have been doing what was pleasing to the heavenly Father.... how you have been obedient to the will of the Father as revealed in Jesus.

Saint of the Day, March 28 - St. Catherine of Bologna and 12 other saints are remembered this day.

St. Catherine was born on September 8, 1413, in Bologna, Italy to an aristocratic family. Her father, a diplomat to the Marquis of Ferrara, sent her to court when she was 11 to be a companion to the Marquis' daughter, Princess Margarita. At the time, the city of Ferrara was becoming a cultural center, and so the young girls had an excellent education in music, literature, painting, and dancing. Catherine particularly excelled at miniature painting, Latin, and the viola.

When Margarita became engaged, she wanted Catherine to remain her companion, but Catherine felt called to the religious life. At 14, she became a Franciscan Tertiary, an order of lay

women who followed the ways of St. Francis. A few years later, dissension in the community led Catherine and others to join the Poor Clares, a contemplative order founded by St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi. Catherine willingly served in the humbler roles at the convent, including laundress, baker, and caretaker to the animals.

In 1456, she and 15 other sisters were sent to establish a Poor Clare monastery in Florence. As abbess, Catharine worked to preserve the peace of the new community. Her reputation for holiness drew many young women to the Poor Clare life. She continued in her artistic pursuits, playing the viola (even on her deathbed), painting religious pictures (her painting of St. Ursula hangs today in a gallery in Venice), copying out and illuminating her breviary (once belonging to Pius IX and now on display at Oxford), and writing spiritual guides and poetry.

At age 49, she became gravely ill and died on March 9, 1463 in Bologna. As was the custom of the Poor Clares, she was buried without a coffin. She was exhumed 18 days later after visitors noticed a sweet smell coming from her grave and some experienced miracles. Her body was found to be flexible and uncorrupted. Six hundred years later, her body remains intact. Her skin has blackened from exposure to oil lamps and soot, but still she sits, clothed in her nun's robes, on a golden throne behind a glass case in the Church of the Saint in Bologna. She was canonized in 1712.

March 29 - Wednesday, Fifth Week of Lent

**O Lord, you are so good, so ready to forgive,
so full of steadfast love for all who ask for your help.**

(Psalm 86:5)

Daniel 3:14-20, 91-92, 95

King Nebuchadnezzar built a golden statue and commanded all men to worship it. Three young men who disobeyed the King's orders and remained faithful to their faith traditions were thrown into a furnace of extreme heat. They walked unharmed in the midst of fire. The king saw a fourth person, who looked "like a son of God", in the furnace with the three young men whom he had condemned. The King experienced a change of heart and praised the God of Israel.

Be faithful. Be strong. Stand strong in face of challenges, difficulties and struggles which life brings!

Daniel 3:52-56 - Bless are you, O Lord, the God of our fathers...

John 8:31-42

Jesus said: “If you remain in my word, you will be my disciples”. There is much about “remaining in me” and “abiding in me” in the Gospel of John. There is also much about “sonship” in the Gospel of John. Today’s Gospel passage reminds us that our conduct must reflect our “sonship” in God. Sons of God are sons of life and love. The disciples of Jesus must live the way Jesus lived and reflect the character of Jesus.

Being a disciple of Jesus means staying in touch with him, remaining in him, abiding in him – close, personal intimate relationship with Jesus. It is from the master that the disciple draws inspiration and strength, and it is from the master that the disciple goes forth to fulfill his mission.

The mission of the disciple is the mission of the master, and it is the truth of the master that the disciple must proclaim.

So the disciple of Jesus must constantly learn from Jesus, the master and be strengthened and graced by Jesus, the master. This is what gives the disciple the freedom to proclaim the good news he is sent to proclaim.

Saint of the Day, March 29 – St. Ludovico of Casoria and 13 other saints are remembered this day.

Ludovico was born Arcangelo Palmentieri in Casoria, near Naples, on March 11, 1814. He apprenticed as a cabinet maker in his youth. He entered the novitiate of the Order of Friars Minor on July 1, 1832, taking the name Ludovico. He was ordained a priest five years later and was appointed to teach philosophy, mathematics, and chemistry to the younger members of the Order at the Franciscan priory of San Pietro in Naples.

In 1847, he had a mystical experience which he later described as a cleansing. After that, he dedicated his life to the poor and the infirm, establishing a dispensary for the poor, two schools for African children, an institute for the children of nobility, as well as an institution for orphans, the deaf, and the speechless, and other institutes for the blind, elderly, and for travelers. In addition to an infirmary for friars of his province, he began charitable institutes in Naples, Florence, and Assisi.

To help continue these works of mercy, in 1859 he established the Gray Brothers, a religious community composed of men who formerly belonged to the Secular Franciscan Order. Three years later, he founded the Gray Sisters of St. Elizabeth for the same purpose.

Toward the beginning of his final, nine-year illness, Ludovico wrote a spiritual testament which described faith as “light in the darkness, help in sickness, blessing in tribulations, paradise in the

crucifixion, and life amid death.” The local work for his beatification began within five months of Ludovico’s death. He was beatified in 1993 and canonized in 2014.

March 30 - Thursday, Fifth Week of Lent

**Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the clouds.**

(Psalm 36:5)

Genesis 17:3-9

Abraham had to uproot himself from the old culture and give humanity a new start. He had to be renamed, go through “radical change”, to become the father of a “multitude”. Through this process, he would achieve the “immortality” which the builders of Babel desired: his soul would expand and grow in his descendants who would influence the world. But it was God who was doing it and Abraham just had to be faithful, obedient.

Be open to change! But be obedient! Be faithful!

Psalm 105 - Give thanks to the Lord, invoke his name...

John 8:51-59

“If anyone keeps my word, he will not see death for ever”. “keeping the word” refers to faithfulness, obedience born out of intimate relationship. The person who is faithful to the “Word” has entered into an intimate relationship with God, a relationship which neither time nor eternity can sever - death has lost its finality. He does not move from life to death, but from life to life, death is only the welcome into the fullness of life, into the intimate “presence of God”. **Keep the word! Be faithful! And don’t forget, honor your word as well!**

Jesus claims a unique knowledge of God. He claims to know God as no one else has ever known or ever will. In and through Jesus we come to the very “heart” of God. In him we see our God made visible. In Jesus, we see a “unique obedience” to God. In Jesus we come to know and understand the real meaning and value of “obedience”. In him, we come to know what God wants us to be and to do.

Discipleship demands obedience! Fidelity and Obedience show strength of character.

In you, the world around you must see signs of the presence of a loving, caring, compassionate God.

Saint of the Day, March 30 - St. Peter Regalado and 14 other saints are remembered this day

Peter Regalado was born of wealthy and devout parents at Valladolid in Spain in 1390. He lost his father at an early age. At the age of 13, he was allowed to enter the Conventual Franciscans. Shortly after his ordination, he was made superior of the friary in Aguilar. He became part of a group of friars who wanted to lead a life of greater poverty and penance. In 1442, he was appointed head of all the Spanish Franciscans in his reform group.

Peter led the friars by his example. A special love of the poor and the sick characterized Peter. Miraculous stories are told about his charity to the poor. For example, the bread never seemed to run out as long as Peter had hungry people to feed. Throughout most of his life, Peter went hungry; he lived only on bread and water. Immediately after his death on March 31, 1456, his grave became a place of pilgrimage. Peter was canonized in 1746.

March 31 - Friday, Fifth Week of Lent

**To be steadfast is to be firm in purpose, resolute, unwavering,
tenacious, faithful and loyal just as our God is.**

Jeremiah 20:10-13

The Prophet is constantly surrounded by the wicked - even his friends turned against him. They are on the watch to catch him saying or doing something false. But Jeremiah stands strong, even in desperate moments and affirms his faith: "the Lord is with me like a mighty champion".

Psalms 18 - In my distress I called upon the Lord and cried out to my God...

John 10:31-42

Jesus was surrounded by hostile forces trying to catch him in something that they can use against him. But Jesus stood his ground, ever faithful to his Father's will.

It was in the midst of hostile forces that Jeremiah and Jesus had to remain faithful to their call. They had to face the absence of comfort, consolation, encouragement and support. They had to face loneliness. Jeremiah called the people to conversion and change. They hardened their hearts and responded with hatred. The experience of Jesus was the same and more. They were sustained by deep awareness of the presence of God in their life. Their strength was in that experience of intimacy: “the Lord is with me like a mighty champion” said Jeremiah; “the Father is in me and I in Him”, said Jesus.

The daily cost of discipleship can weigh heavy on us. Great is the temptation to give up and join the crowd. We can get lost in what others say and do and value. We need wisdom and courage to stand strong. The same spirit that strengthened and sustained Jeremiah and Jesus dwells in us. We need to trust the Spirit within us and be empowered by that Spirit.

Pray for courage and wisdom to face difficult situation. Pray for those who have to live in hostile situation. Remember those who have heavy burden to carry. Remember the innocent, especially children and the helpless who have to suffer without support.

Saint of the Day, March 31 - St. Benjamin and 7 other saints are remembered this day.

Benjamin was born in Iran around the year 329. We do not have information about his early life. He was a deacon martyred around 424 in Persia. He was executed during a period of persecution of Christians that lasted forty years and through the reign of two Persian kings. The persecution began in response to the burning of the Temple of Fire, the great sanctuary of the Persians, by Bishop Abdas in 420. King Isdegerd threatened to destroy all the churches of the Christians unless the Bishop would rebuild it.

Abdas refused to comply and the threat was executed. Churches were demolished, Abdas himself was put to death, and a general persecution began which lasted forty years. Isdegerd died in 421, but his son and successor, Varanes, carried on the persecution with great fury. The Christians were submitted to the cruelest tortures.

Benjamin was imprisoned for a year for his Christian faith, and later released with the condition that he abandons preaching or speaking of his religion. His release was obtained by the Eastern Roman Emperor Theodosius II through an ambassador. However, Benjamin declared that it was his duty to preach about Christ and that he could not be silent. As a consequence, he was tortured mercilessly until his death in the year 424 in Persia.

April 1 - Saturday, Fifth Week of Lent

**God is love and so He cannot but love. It is his nature.
It is who he is. He is steadfast.**

Ezekiel 37:21-28

The Prophet Ezekiel proclaims a new “hope” for his, alienated and suffering people. God was going to do something very new: there would be one God, one nation, one covenantal people, one temple and one law. Yahweh was doing it – establishing an eternal covenant of peace. “I will be their God and they shall be my people”.

Pray for unity and harmony among all peoples and nations.

Jeremiah 31:10-13 - He who scatters Israel now gathers them together...

John 11:45-57

Hatred of the Jews for Jesus increased day by day. The Sanhedrin met to discuss about what had to be done with Jesus. These were people who did not know what was good for them and did not know how to receive blessings and grace.

Be open to the blessings and grace which God sends through unexpected sources.

Caiaphas proposed that it was better for one man to die than for the whole nation to be destroyed. He was thinking of the death of Jesus to avoid trouble with the Romans.

Jesus was to die for the nation and for all of God’s people.

In response to this, Jesus withdrew from that region with the disciples and did not move freely in Jewish circles. The Jews wondered whether Jesus would come for the Passover festival. The authorities had made plans to apprehend Jesus.

Jesus was not reckless. He discerned and waited in patience for his time to come according the plan of His Father. Be discerning! Wait patiently...with open arms!

Saint of the day, April 1 - St. Hugh of Grenoble and 16 other saints are remembered this day.

St. Hugh was born in 1053 in southeastern France at Châteauneuf-sur-Isère, near Grenoble in the western foothills of the Alps. He showed piety and theological facility from a young age.

While still a layman, he was made a canon of Valence. At the Council of Avignon in 1080, he was elected bishop of Grenoble, though he was not yet ordained.

Hugh was selected to carry out reforms of abuses within the Church which had been instituted under Pope Gregory VII, who ordained Hugh in Rome after his election as bishop. Corruption seemed to loom in every direction: the buying and selling of Church offices, violations of clerical celibacy, lay control of Church property, religious indifference and/or ignorance. After two years of successfully battling abuses in Grenoble such as simony (the selling of church positions) and enforcing rules about clerical celibacy, Hugh wanted to retire to the great Benedictine monastery at Cluny. However, Pope Gregory ordered him to remain in his position as bishop. He was well-known for his inspired preaching and his generosity to the poor.

In 1084, Hugh helped St. Bruno of Cologne and six of his companions found the great Carthusian monastery "La Grande Chartreuse" high in the Alps. They devoted their monastic life to prayer and study and were visited by Hugh often. Hugh adopted the monastic way of life, practiced by the monks at Chartreuse. After many years of illness which he endured in patient silence, St. Hugh died on April 1, 1132 and was canonized two years later by Pope Innocent II.

Fr. Gus Tharappel, msfs

**Courage doesn't always roar.
Sometimes courage is the little voice at the end of the day that says I'll try again tomorrow.**