

Lent 2025

Daily

Devotions

Lent Devotions 2025

In the Church Year we follow a pattern: Repent Celebrate Grow Repent Celebrate Grow. So it is like a waltz, 1-2-3, 1-2-3, and the seasons are Advent Christmas Epiphany, Lent Easter Pentecost. What makes the two seasons of repentance different from each other is that Advent is more like preparing the house for a party whereas Lent is more like getting rid of the clutter that's choking the house. There is a social aspect to Advent that everyone else can see – lights, decorations, treats, parties – but Lent is more introspective and personal with its traditional fasting and privations. No one gives up anything for Advent, if anything we take more on, but during Lent we try to shed the things that cause us to be a poorer version of ourselves.

These daily devotions for the Lent Season will draw on a wide range of genres: Bible, wisdom literature, fables, fairy tales, humor, folk maxims, anecdotes. Whether you use them individually, or at family time, morning, afternoon, or night, I hope they help you find the person you wish you were all the time.

In Christ,

Pastor Joel

Wednesday, March 5, Ash Wednesday

“From dust and ashes you came and to dust and ashes you shall return.” GENESIS 3:19.

This reminder that we are mortal and organic, and that our only hope lies in God, is the traditional way to begin Lent. Ashes are a symbol of repentance, grief, and wanting life to change. As you start your Lenten journey I encourage you to embrace the changes you want to make but do so without showing off – between you and God. We tend to make everything a competition and we tend to judge others. Just you and God. Quietly and with humility.

Let us pray: Creator and Eternal God: I acknowledge my weaknesses and my shortcomings. Help me to own the change I want to make in my life. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Thursday, March 6

The Three Little Pigs was a childhood favorite and we wore out the Disney Sing-a-Long 45 *“Whose afraid of the big, bad wolf?”* The Big-Bad-Wolf huffs and puffs and straw house pig escapes to stick house pig and then both pigs escape to brick house pig and Big-Bad-Wolf blows a gasket and all live happily ever after. In the European version of the Three Little Pigs the wolf is not the big, bad wolf—it is simply the wolf. And the first two little pigs get eaten, not because the wolf is evil, but simply because that is what wolves do. When carnivores find wayward piglets they ask few questions. The fairy tale is a lesson telling us that the harder we work the more likely we are to survive whatever nature throws at us. The garden we plant in the spring, we weed in the summer, we pick and can in the fall, is the one we eat during the winter. Change is hard work but keep yourself focused on what you want to be and embrace the work.

Let us pray: All Powerful God: help me have the strength and will power to work the changes I want in my life. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Friday, March 7

There are a lot of people that get invited to speak at milestone events for young people and these speakers are invited to speak because they have attained a certain level of respect because of their age and personal successes. It is amazing how many of them say, in some shape or form, the same thing, **"The first thing you do every day, the very first thing, is make your bed."** Take the effort every morning to start your day with a good habit and that will give you the strength for whatever might come next. Making your bed does not guarantee a good day but it does mean that a neatly made bed will greet you at the end of it. Most successful people are slaves to boring habits. These habits help us **to order our days and deeds in peace** (from the traditional Eucharistic Prayer).

Let us pray: Merciful Lord, help me begin each day simply. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Saturday, March 8

Dr. Amit Sood, the compiler of the “**Mayo Clinic Guide to Stress Free Living**”, noticed that not all patients recovered or healed or coped at the same rate. All things being seemingly equal not all people handled illness the same. He was able to do some follow up visits and he noticed a correlation between messy refrigerators and well-being. The outside of the refrigerators that were covered with photos, crayon drawings, newspaper clippings – all of loved ones – seemed to belong to people who healed and coped better. What he found when he scratched below the surface was that those people with the messy refrigerators were more likely to be grateful for all of the special lives they were part of. Being grateful correlated with better healing and better coping. Every time they went to the refrigerator they were drawn into thanksgiving

Let us pray: God of all the living, help me be grateful, help me name out loud all those beautiful lives that you have given me:

.....
.....
.....
.....

In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Sunday, March 9

LUKE 4:1-13. The First Sunday in Lent begins with the newly baptized Jesus being led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit to be tempted for forty days. Forty is not an accident. It rained for forty days in Noah's flood, Moses was up the mountain visiting with God for forty days, the spies spent forty days scouting the Promised Land, Goliath taunted Israel for forty days before David said, "Enough!", Elijah traveled forty days fleeing Jezebel before God spoke to him in the cave, Jonah gave Ninevah forty days to get its act together, and the resurrected Jesus had a forty day Galilee School with his disciples. In all of these instances the people who began the forty days were quite different from those who finished them. Forty is the number of change. Forty days (not counting Sundays) is the length of Lent. Psychological studies have shown that if you can do something for forty days you are likely to be able to keep doing it. As Jesus came out of the wilderness a different person, and as God gave him the strength to endure the wiles of the tempter, may God give us the tools we need for our forty days....and the days that follow.

Let us pray: Be with us God as things get tough. Give us your Holy Spirit that we may withstand the creativity and the craftiness of temptation. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Monday, March 10

The European Church tells the ancient story of two Christian monks journeying from one monastery to another. Along the way they reach a swollen stream that they must cross. On their side of the stream was a solitary woman who must cross but the modesty of the time insisted that she must remain completely clothed even though her heavy skirts would obviously drag her under and drown her. As the monks girded their robes to cross the stream, one of them simply offered and picking up the woman carried her to the other side. Setting her down on the opposite shore and continuing on his journey, his companion monk, upon getting out of earshot of the woman, started berating him, **“Brother! We took a holy vow to never touch a woman! You have put your soul and my soul at peril.”** This and other statements to the effect continued for several miles.

Finally, the offending monk turned to his brother and said, **“I left that woman by the side of the stream safe and sound: you’re still carrying her!”**

We all carry more than we need to carry – colloquially we even refer to it as baggage. And sometimes our ‘friends’, or we as ‘friends’, insist that baggage continue to be carried.

“Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” – Jesus. MATTHEW 11:28-30.

Let us pray: Wise God, help us know what to carry and what to shed. And help us to know when it is time to let go. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Tuesday, March 11

“Whether the pitcher hits the stone or the stone hits the pitcher, it's going to be bad for the pitcher” is from the **“Man from La-Mancha”** and it is an ancient proverb from Spain. Shards of pottery and broken glass litter archaeological digs throughout the world, speaking to how these vessels will always be vulnerable to breaking regardless of the cause. When something in a vessel was particularly precious people would weave a heavy jute macramé around the jug or bottle to give it and its contents a better chance of surviving mishap. I often view worship and devotions and good works as that protective coating to keep our fragile vessels a little safer. Whether addictions and bad decisions from within, or accidents and victimizations from without, or illness and aging, we are constantly aware of how we carry the precious gift called life in a fragile vessel.

II CORINTHIANS 4:7-12.

Faith gives us the confidence to live and love rather than hide and survive.

Let us pray: Eternal God, You sent Your Son to redeem our lives from death's shadow so that we could fully live and love in the now. Strengthen us and help us strengthen each other that we live life as fully and joyously as possible. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Wednesday, March 12

Aesop told of a gathering of the creatures in which to everyone's delight the monkeys put on a hilarious show. Only the camel was not part of the everyone and it poo-pooed the low brow nature of the monkeys' antics while secretly being jealous of the attention they garnered. **"I'll show you how easy it is"** the Camel said and it started prancing around and trying to act like a monkey. The performance was so dismal and insulting and unamusing that the other animals drove the camel out into the desert where it was made to stay. The moral of the story is: Never let your arm extend farther than your sleeve. Which is a fancy way of saying be and let be. When a society looks down on some talents while esteeming others, or when jealousy for what others can do causes us not to appreciate what we can do, things get out of whack. A healthy society appreciates the talents of all its members.

I CORINTHIANS 12.

Let us pray: Creator of us all, help us to find the good in each other and help us find acceptance for ourselves. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Thursday, March 13

“Time flies like the wind and fruit flies like a banana.” -Groucho Marx. Groucho also famously quipped: **“Outside of a dog a book is man’s best friend. Inside of a dog it’s too dark to read.”** Humor looks at the world from an odd angle and sees the rarity. When people are expecting a verb instead they get the noun (flies and flies). Instead of talking about dogs it becomes about inside-outside. The ability to see the multiple possibilities of language is a clever form of humor and is blessedly Rated-G. Love is like that. Often in love we see in another person what no one else seems to see. One of the journeys of faith is coming to the acceptance that God sees you like no one else does and God likes what He sees.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, you thought us worth saving and sent your Son, Jesus Christ, to do just that. Help us wrap our minds around such love. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Friday, March 14

I watch people walk dogs by my office window and inevitably the dogs will several times try to stop and smell something and get a taut encouragement from the leash to keep moving. It turns out that dogs have noses forty times more sensitive than humans and while the human is holding a smart phone and checking email the little doggie wants to check pee-mail but loses out. It turns out that women tend to have 43% more olfactory sensors than men - and I believe that. We tend to find these differences frustrating rather than interesting or entertaining. One of the things about living in community is seeing how we are all made differently and seeing it as a blessing and not a curse. For ages dogs were perimeter security in farms and they could smell trouble coming and warn us. Long before thermometers and preservatives one knew when food was ready, or if it was bad, by the subtle changes in its smell - luckily caught by the more sensitive noses. These differences served an important purpose in the survival of the whole. We are stronger together with our differences than apart in our arrogances.

Let us pray: Creator of all, help us to appreciate what everyone brings. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Saturday, March 15

The brilliant humorist Douglas Adams wrote a series of books called the “**Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy**”. Like all humor and science fiction it is commentary on modern society. Because cloaking devices are scientifically complex, and hideously expensive, Adams pointed out that flying saucers and bug-eyed monsters are actually all around us but are simply hiding behind an **SEP Field**. **SEP** stands for **Somebody Else’s Problem**. The **SEP Field** (operated with three AA batteries) plays on the human penchant to not see what is actually there. We would leave out baskets of laundry to be folded but five children could walk by them several times a day and not see them. Dish racks to empty, empty toilet paper rolls, dishes to do, grass to mow, the list is actually endless. We see something, then decide it is **Somebody Else’s Problem**, which allows us to quickly unsee it, before it inconveniently plants itself in our conscience and we have to do something about it. Like I said: brilliant. We could pretend that there is no hunger or abuse or racism or lying but choosing to not see it does nothing but allow it to think it has a right to exist. God despises these things and sees them whether we choose to or not. The measure of a Christian is not the technical quality of their worship but the ability to work mercy and reversal in a broken world.

Let us pray: All Conscious God, help us to see and help us to act appropriately. May the world’s sufferings be reversed. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Sunday, March 16

LUKE 13:31-35. In today's Gospel, assigned for this Second Sunday in Lent, we see that Jesus refuses to be deflected in his mission in spite of the politicians' insecurity or Jerusalem's belief it doesn't need a savior. The shakers and movers of Jerusalem, whether priests, kings, or Roman overseers, see the problem as power and the right solution will be for the right people to have power. Jesus knows that deep down it is our fear and anger over death that is the root of every single sin. That Jerusalem refuses to understand this does not deflect Jesus from his sacred mission. Grace comes from the heart of the grace giver and not from the worthiness of the recipient. Probably a good thing, too.

Let us pray: We give You thanks, Almighty God, that Your Son did not let an unappreciative people keep Him from bringing salvation to the world. Make us as relentless in faith and good works as Jesus was. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Monday, March 17

I used to begin the confirmation year by holding a \$100 bill in front of the students and telling them that was for their party fund at the end of term. I told them that if they ever said "It's not fair", or if they looked at their phones, or if they used profanity, that I would take \$5 away from the fund. For several years we had \$95 for the party. One year though.....one of the young people was extremely brutal to the party fund. By the 3rd week of class they were well below zero, thanks mostly to the 'efforts' of this one boy. I visited with his parents. They said, "**Don't worry about it. We'll pay for the party at the end of the year. That's grace, right?!**"

It was difficult to teach after that, the party was an expensive blowout, and the word got around to the classes that followed that the \$100 bill thing wasn't serious because they believed that getting bailed out by an enabling adult would be the norm. Enabling is not grace. A lack of accountability is not grace. The \$100 bill and the \$5 fines were to show the kids that their actions mattered, that they would be accountable for their behavior. But once they knew that the party would happen regardless of their behavior, they learned their actions didn't matter, and they acted as if their actions didn't matter. The parents who would not let their kid be held accountable thought they were being good parents.

You pet the cat and it purrs; you pull its tail and you get scratched. Both are a result of the preceding action. Actions matter. I think accountability teaches us that actions matter. Grace teaches us that we are accepted but the expectation that we do good never goes away.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, we know right from wrong, we know good from bad, help us to do what is right and good. May Your forgiveness and grace lead us to work all the harder to be part of the good of the world. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Tuesday, March 18

In Aesop's Fable, "**The Hare and the Tortoise**", the two animals race. It is obvious to even the most nature challenged person that the rabbit is by far the fastest and so should easily win the race. Of course the rabbit doesn't take the competition seriously, flits around here and there, naps, dines, while the tortoise plods relentlessly along. The tortoise wins. The moral: slow and steady wins the race. It seems that the things we have to work hard at, and stick with, are the things we appreciate the most. I can food. The salsa, spaghetti sauce, apple sauce, the green beans, the jelly, I put up on the shelves are much harder work and much more time consuming than simply running to the store, but the taste of them is appreciated. Marathons, Birkebeiners, weight loss goals, 300 games, are usually the result of hard, repetitive work and sticking to it. Goals are most often achieved by steadily sticking to the program.

Let us pray: All powerful God, give us the strength and long focus to do the hard work that pays off. In the changes we want to make bless us. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Wednesday, March 19

As a last act of contempt before heading back to Germany, retreating Nazi soldiers blew up a French village's beloved bronze statue of Jesus. Occupying American troops offered to collect the pieces and reconstruct the statue. The day of unveiling arrived and when the curtain dropped the villagers were shocked to see the statue was intact except that it had no hands. As hard as they tried they could not locate the hands in the debris. Attached to the statue was a handwritten note: **"I have lost my hands – may I use yours?"** We are Jesus' hands and feet, his eyes and ears and voice, everywhere we go. The body of Christ is not only all believers together but it is also our bodies being used to show God's love and mercy in the world.

Let us pray: Creator God You have made us, and You sent Your Son to redeem us from the power of death. Help us to give our energy away to show Your love to the world. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Thursday, March 20

A notorious skin flint could not believe how many thousands of dollars hearing aids were going to cost him and he loudly expressed his frustration to the hearing aid specialist. The hearing aid specialist said that if he didn't like the \$3000 high tech models he did have some \$5 hearing aids.

“Now you're talking!” The old miser was interested in knowing more.

The audiologist said, **“I take a used lozenge tin and glue old Walkman headphones to it. You put the tin inside your shirt pocket with the wires leading up to your ears.”**

“And it amplifies everything?” the thrifty old man asked excitedly.

“Oh no,” said the sound man, **“when people see it they have pity on you and talk louder.”**

Sometimes things cost more because they are worth it. Jesus thought we were worth dying for on the cross.

Let us pray: Father in Heaven, help us to hold priceless the great gift of forgiveness and eternity earned for us by Jesus Christ. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Friday, March 21

The story is told that the Queen of Sheba offered great wealth to King Solomon if he could tell what was real from what was fake. She gave him two potted flowers – one real and one fake – and challenged Solomon to decide which was which. They each looked exactly alike. They each smelled the same. They reacted the same to wind and water. Solomon appeared stumped. Suddenly grinning, Solomon took the two pots out to his orchard where the royal bees made their honey. The bees quickly swarmed around one plant while ignoring the other. The smirk on Solomon's face told the Queen of Sheba that a significant part of her treasury was heading to Jerusalem. A wise person does not have to know everything but a wise person does know where the knowledge is kept.

Let us pray: Help us, Heavenly Father, to live the gift of life wisely. Help us pay attention to what has been learned, help us recognize what nature is telling us, help us make good decisions. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Saturday, March 22

The story is told of a British nobleman who had over the years amassed quite a collection of fine art. In his old age he thought it would give him joy to share his art. So he turned his estate into a museum and invited all the locals to come for free and see the fine works. A women's gardening club bused over to the estate and over tea on the lawn talked about what they had experienced. When asked how she felt about the displays one lady said, "**Wonderful, I didn't see a speck of dust anywhere.**" We talk about the lenses through which we view life. Sometimes we go as far as calling them blinders. The truth is that we often train ourselves to only look for certain things and it can keep us from taking in the everything. Life is full of beauty and wonder if we are just open and willing to see it.

Let us pray: Creator God, help us to daily delight in the good and beauty that you have put in everything. Free us from what blinds us. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Sunday, March 23

Luke 13:1-9. In the Gospel today Jesus tries to dismantle the peculiarly common trait among the religious to interpret tragedy as judgment from God. Tragedy is tragedy, period. Tragedy is a wake up call that reminds us that life can be fragile and that we don't always get a chance to make things right or reconcile or forgive or say I love you. The time for those things is always now. Tragedy happens distressingly randomly, and, though the religious use it as a chance to self-righteously judge, the faithful use it as a call to compassion and good works.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, we live in a world in which things don't always make sense. Keep us mindful of your eternity and your promise to gather all of us in forgiveness and eternity. May we respond with compassionate good works to the bad news in the world. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Monday, March 24

In a Polish village in the 1800s a woman, a notorious gossip, complained to her rabbi saying: **“Rabbi! Tell the villagers to treat me better. No one talks with me. I am the last to be served at the market. I am made to pull my own bucket out of the well.”** The rabbi knew that all of this was true and that she was treated more poorly than all the other women in the village. Taking an old pillow that he was going to throw out he tore it open and asked the woman to go through the village and put a feather on every doorstep in the village. Grudgingly she agreed, she followed his instructions and came back to the rabbi. Then he told her to go and retrieve every feather. Of course she found not a single feather because just the slightest breeze or door opening and closing sent the feather on a merry journey. She complained loudly about the injustice of the task.

The rabbi then said, **“Gossip is like a feather. Once said it cannot be unsaid. Once loosed there is no catching it. You are shunned because you are a gossip. Speak well and truthfully and things might turn around.”**

Let us pray: All Knowing God: good seed makes good fruit. Help our words and deeds to build up community. And when people truly repent help us to give them another chance. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Tuesday, March 25

In a small town an elderly lady lovingly maintained a border of rose bushes that fronted the sidewalk in front of her humble home. A grandfather and granddaughter were walking by one day when the little girl shrieked with delight at all the beautiful roses.

“Smell them,” the old lady said while rocking on her porch, “Pick one and take it home if you like.” This scene was played out regularly all through the summer months, to whomever passed by, as daily the old woman gently and carefully took care of the roses in the morning cool and rocked the afternoon away on her porch.

The little girl was startled to learn that the old woman was blind. She worked up the boldness to come up the walk to the old woman’s porch and asked with the directness possessed only in the very young and the very old, **“Why do you grow roses if you can’t see them? What good does it do to have such a pretty garden? How come?”**

Patently the old woman replied. **“Oh I know they’re pretty. I see them through the eyes of everyone who cannot keep silent about how happy the roses make them feel.”**

It would take many years but the little girl would grow up to learn that there is no pleasure quite like the pleasure of making someone else happy.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, keep us from making everything about ourselves and help us find the life we only find when we bring joy to others. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Wednesday, March 26

I am a person of faith and I firmly believe my faith switch is in the ON position. But when Jesus talks about healing, casting out demons, etc., I feel a sense that I don't have enough faith. I hold that faith is a quality and not a quantity but when it comes to these calls from Jesus to heal I feel my faith is inadequate. But maybe my head is the problem. A dearly beloved couple from First Lutheran might have shown me something. They ran a grocery store on Main Street, she was a devout reader but he not so much. A medical procedure went badly that left her blinded. No more reading. But we found in going through the church library a great many books checked out by him, he who didn't read. He checked out the books and read them to her. He loved her so he became her eyes. Maybe healing the blind and the lame is a whole lot more possible than the younger me thought.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus use me to be your healing touch in the world. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Thursday, March 27

An ancient tale tells of a simple quarry man spending his days chinking away at the base of an immense mountain. **Chink-Chink.** Metal on stone. In the hot sun. Day after day. He cursed and said, **“I wish I was the sun. Nothing is as powerful as the sun.”** And because he wished it, he was it. There he was radiating down on the earth, on that mountain and on that quarry.

But then a shadow crept into his vision and pretty soon his powerful rays were blocked by a cloud. **“I wish I was a cloud.”** And because he wished it, he was it. He was a powerful cloud, shutting out the sun, carrying water wherever he wished.

But soon he approached a mountain and upon running into the mountain he was broken up and dissipated by the mountain and gathering himself together on the other side was nearly impossible. **“I wish I was a mountain,”** he yelled. And because he wished it, he was it. And there he was anchored in place, the heaviest, the most immovable object in the world. And then, from deep at the bottom of his base he heard the unmistakable sound of metal on stone. **Chink-Chink.**

Let us pray: Father in Heaven, help us to know our strengths and our weaknesses. Free us from disabling envy and shortsightedness and help us to appreciate all the skills that make for a healthy community. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Friday, March 28

I have a great many books on religion and many religions have not just one god but in fact many gods. The word for this is pantheon. In a lot of these pantheons the gods seem to be cast from a really cheesy drive-in movie. Usually there is a lustful male who does nothing to tame his libido. Often there is also an equally sex charged female who delights in the power she has over men. Not unusual for there to be a big brute whose default mode is rage. Most pantheons have a fool and many a trickster. Hedonism runs rampant as none of the gods deny themselves any pleasure. There is usually a matchmaker and various gods in charge of water and soil and seeds and animals and fertility. They embody the worst of human personalities.

In most of the stories involving these pantheons their contact with the mortal world is usually a cause of dread. When gods show up order is disrupted; chaos ensues as these immortals show intense jealousy and insecurity. Matter of fact, in most all the stories the realm of the average rabble would be content for the gods to simply have a cocktail party in whatever valhalla they've dreamt up and leave the rest of us alone. Whenever God does something in the Bible God or the angels have to first say, "**Fear not!**" Reason? Our mythologies have told us that it is dangerous to have immortals monkeying around in mortal business. We still believe this. A billboard on a busy highway in Texas reads: "**Don't make me come down there! -God.**" Why? God came down and created. God came down and rescued Israel. God came down and gave us Bethlehem. God came down and gave us the cross and the empty tomb. God came down and gave us Pentecost. When God comes down wonderful things happen.

Let us pray: Lord God, You show Your goodness in creation, salvation, and the work of the Church. Help us to be ambassadors of Your presence in the world. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Saturday, March 29

Aesop tells of the **Oak and the Reed**. The oak was tall and strong and stately and he was teasing the reed because the reed quivered at the tiniest breeze.

The oak said, **“You should be strong like me. How can anyone respect you?”**

One day a huge storm came and laid down all the reeds. The tall stately oak, fighting the wind, was finally toppled roots and all. The reed, looking at the dying oak, said, **“I might bend but I don’t break.”**

Let us pray: Help us, all powerful God, to treasure all forms of strength. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Sunday, March 30

Today's Gospel for Sunday worship is the famously misnamed **Parable of the Prodigal Son**. Parables shouldn't be named because they can sometimes, by their title, limit our focus, put blinders or lenses on us, that keep the whole of the parable from challenging us. An argument could be made that **The Story of the Father that Loves Both His Sons** would be a more appropriate name.

Both sons are extreme in their lives. One pursues unchecked pleasure while the other goes overboard with his sober dutifulness. But the father loves both of them, wants the farm to be big enough for both of them, and for both of them to know that enjoying life and fulfilling duties do not have to be mutually exclusive.

Let us pray: Father, help us to balance our lives so that we find that elusive joy. You have made life good. With all of our senses, with our minds and bodies and spirits, in work and in play, may we experience the joy You give. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Monday, March 31

An island in a river was about to be inundated by rising waters. A benevolent turtle was ferrying to the safety of the main shore many mice and squirrels and rabbits. On his last trip back he found on the shrinking island a lone scorpion. The scorpion asked for a ride but the turtle hesitated.

The scorpion said, **“Would I really harm my only way to safety?”** Wanting to trust, the turtle let the scorpion aboard. Halfway to the safe shore the scorpion stung the turtle in the neck. Paralyzed and sinking into the current that would kill both of them the turtle looked askingly at the scorpion. The scorpion said, **“What did you think I’d do?”**

Sometimes people disrespect Christianity as being soft. Forgiveness does not mean forgetting. And grace does not mean that we are a doormat. Jesus said for us to **“Be wise as serpents and gentle as doves.”** Faith does not mean we forego intelligence or reason or forget the lessons of history.

Let us pray: Dear God, help us to be smart. Help us to learn the lessons of history: may we not repeat the worst, and may we emulate the best, of the lessons history teaches us. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Tuesday, April 1

A misnomer is when something is wrongly named or deceptively named. We call the plant deep in a submarine or power plant a nuclear reactor. It is not a reactor: it is a responder. A nuclear reactor is Nagasaki and Hiroshima: the uncontained unleashing of radiation and force and heat that shatters the atoms and destroys everything for miles around. The mushroom cloud is the sign of a nuclear reactor. The power plant uses a nuclear responder. The nuclear rods are brought in close proximity to each other and the electrons get excited and glow with a heat that is transferred to water which steams through a turbine which turns a generator which gives us electricity. It is all a very carefully controlled response.

First responders are trained people who respond to trauma on a human body. Whereas many might react at the sight of a harmed human being, first responders have been trained to respond – to thoughtfully follow their training and calmly restore and preserve life. Christians are God's responders. We respond with love to whatever the world shows us. Tragedy strikes and the worst in us wants to show rage or judgment or we want to hide: these are reactions. Instead, a steady dose of the Bible, and especially the Gospels, 'trains' us to respond with love.

Let us pray: Dearest Jesus, help us to learn and grow so that we do not react like the old Adam and Eve but become the new Adam and Eve, respondents to the world who are filled with love and compassion. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Wednesday, April 2

My cousins finally relented to an ad in their comic books and ordered **Sea Monkeys**. With the kit of **Sea Monkeys** came little tiny hoops that one could “train them” to swim through, some salt, a packet labeled **Sea Monkeys**, as well as some food. The salt was mixed with water, the correct amount of water, the “sea monkey” seeds were added and voila there were the monkeys. Only they were actually brine shrimp and if they did swim through a hoop it was purely random chance. Brine shrimp are pretty much a brain stem with a tail whose only purpose seems to be to eat and reproduce.

My cousins had been took. There was no fine print anywhere in the ads to alert them to the reality. The company didn't answer a phone or correspondence. My cousins finally did the only thing they could do: they told everyone how they had been took and made light of it. They accepted and found humorous. Daily we are confronted with the imperfect. Some is correctable. Some is correctable but might not be worth the effort. Some fixes will actually create more problems. Some things will be fixed only to come back again. Some things are just weird. Many things are truly harmless.

Let us pray: Help us to discern, wise God, what to spend our energy on and what to just live with. Help us to be wise with the gift of time and help us find humor. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Thursday, April 3

There are an abundance of wise sayings that often cut to a core truth. **“If all you have is a hammer then everything soon looks like a nail”** is one of them. You cannot use a hammer on a screw, or a nut, or a carburetor, or a watch, or a faucet. Hammers are for driving in nails.

I once knew a psychotherapist who was a huge disciple of Carl Rogers to the point he used the Rogerian technique for all conversations - everywhere. This is an example of Rogerian technique: **“I got soaked in a downpour while waiting for the bus!”** said the client.

“So I am to understand that you got damp,” responded the therapist. Imagine that going on endlessly. It was the only tool he used.

A fun thing to do is ask people to pick what ten tools they would have in a tool box. Mine would be: hammer, regular screwdriver, Phillips screwdriver, needle nose pliers, crescent wrench, channel-lock pliers, tape measure, a ring of allen keys, a level, and a flashlight. Good stewardship of a home requires knowing what tool to use and how strongly to use it.

In **GALATIANS 5** Paul was putting the tool kit together for an ideal Christian he recommended: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Let us pray: Fill us, Dear Lord, with all we need to be Christians in the world. Help us to recognize and utilize all our talents that the Church may be esteemed and the vulnerable cared for. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Friday, April 4

In every parish I have interviewed at I have been asked in some way or another, will I allow electronic music? But I hear the anxiety in the question as the cheapness and simplicity of push button music seductively offers itself. They know that once they take the step to push button music it would be difficult to come back.

I've always said the same thing: **“I believe that music is best when it is made by the musicians in our midst rather than from a button.”** But the question is more existential than that: it is all about that worst of all human feelings – the feeling of being helpless. As long as we can make our own music we are not helpless. As long as I can bake or cook I am not helpless. Think about the skills we used to get in school: home economics (which both genders were required to do in Rochester, MN), typing, woodworking, electronics, power mechanics, and math, and physics, and English, and history. I am not helpless because of the life skills I was taught. If the power were to fail I know how to make a fire, cook over it, and I even have a deck of cards and a set of dominoes to entertain myself. We fear the push button world rendering us helpless. The more we can do ourselves the less helpless we are. That can-do spirit is infectious and life giving.

Let us pray: We pray, Dear Lord, for all useful arts to flourish. Help us to nourish all our giftedness that our community is strong. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Saturday, April 5

In case you didn't know it I like to bowl. All strikes are satisfying, when all ten pins fall it is enjoyable. But, the most gratifying strike is one in which all ten pins are in the pit – a booming no doubter in which the pin sweeper isn't required. Strange thing about this perfect strike is that the ball itself only takes out four pins, less than half. For a right-handed bowler the ball removes the 1-3-5-9. The 1-pin starts a chain reaction that knocks back the 2-pin, the 4-pin, and then the 7-pin. The 3-pin kicks to the right and removes the 6-pin then the 10-pin. The 5-pin takes out the 8-pin. The poor 9-pin has no one behind it to knock down so it simply lets the ball carry it away. One pin, the 9-pin, does nothing but the remaining six pins are all removed by the energy of just three pins, pins 1, 3 and 5. Sometimes, for a good thing to happen, it doesn't take everybody believing the same thing or having the same commitment or energy, sometimes it only takes a devoted few to move the whole thing along. Sometimes I am 1-pin, sometimes the 5-pin, sometimes the 10-pin. Sometimes my faith leads and sometimes I am caught up in the faith and witness of others. That's OK. It takes all of us. Ministry that happens outside the Church walls, evangelism and outreach, is a chain reaction. Some people's only contact with Jesus is when they meet those who have met Jesus in worship and study.

Let us pray: We thank you, Heavenly Father for the faithful who lead and the faithful who follow and for the opportunities the faithful have to pay Christ forward. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Sunday, April 6

Today's Gospel confronts us with Mary's extravagant gesture when she anoints Jesus with expensive perfume. Sometimes extravagance is what sets things apart from the ordinary. I wouldn't dare suggest McDonald's or Dairy Queen or Culver's as an appropriate spot for my anniversary dinner – as much as I may enjoy their food. The River Deck has become our go-to for that. Whether consciously or intuitively Mary recognizes that what Jesus is doing in this last passionate week of his life is beyond the ordinary. Mary's extravagance hints at the outrageous extravagance, the grace, that is Jesus and his work among us.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, Mary's sacrifice reminds us that great gifts beget great thanks. Help us be amazed at salvation, help us never to take Jesus' work for granted. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Monday, April 7

The little town I lived in had a cute little simple soul who loved to shovel snow. People hired him to shovel their walks and drives but even if you didn't hire him he would shovel your place if it was on his way to his other clients. Some paid, some took him for granted, but he was undeterred and nothing sapped his snow shoveling joy. Like all towns there were miscreants who liked to make their presence known by being little hemorrhoids. One of their favorite pranks was to abscond with unattended rakes and shovels. You could leave your car unlocked and your Pioneer stereo would still be there in the morning but woe to you if you left a yard tool unattended. Tragically, the cute little simple soul died and we as a community had to own him and send him off with a deserving thanks and farewell and memorial service. Preparing for his service we found, behind the house he owned, a vast array of rakes and shovels, especially snow shovels. It wasn't the town miscreants after all. He may have been a pure simpleton but he wasn't a perfect angel and he knew in his heart that if people had their own shovels then they wouldn't need him so he 'stored', stole is such a pejorative word, he 'stored' their shovels. Shoveling was what he lived for and he had just enough cleverness to ensure that he'd be needed. Word, of course, got around and every implement made it back to its rightful owner. Weird thing is for the owners it became a matter of pride to have been one worthy of being robbed. Kind of the 21st Century equivalent of "John Dillinger slept here." But this anecdote speaks to the unique human desire to be useful. All healthy people want to be useful and it is one of the ways we show our love for our families, our neighborhoods, and our churches.

Let us pray: Creator God, You have gifted us with skills, time and energy. Grant us opportunity and willingness to be useful to Your good purposes. Protect us from being used or taken for granted and make us thankful. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Tuesday, April 8

The Church has funny names for things. Why say 'revealing' when you can say Epiphany? Why say 'spring' when you can say Lent? Why say 'foyer' when you can say Narthex? Why say gathering place when you can say Nave? Nave is a funny one. When the early church was on the ascendancy and it became time to meet in set aside spaces, churches, rather than homes, they of course wanted to build. Many of the stone buildings we associate with antiquity took decades, sometimes centuries, to finish, and were fiendishly expensive. Most of the building at the time, and in the area where the church grew, was ship building – wooden ships. Wood was cheaper than stone, easier to haul and mill and acquire and it reproduced of itself. Trouble was these shipbuilders really only knew how to build one thing. Ships. This was their life and their tools and skillset had been moulded that way. So everything was made as if it was part of a ship. You know: keel, ribs, thwarts and planking. Building a hovel, let alone houses, wasn't in their skillset. So they simply used their shipbuilding skills and built a ship for land – upside down. Keel becomes ridge board, ribs become rafters, thwarts become trusses, planking becomes siding. Less expensive, can be completed quickly, readily available skilled labor, renewable supply of building material. And they called it a Nave. It doesn't tax the imagination much to look up into the ceiling of a wood framed church and see yourself sheltering under an overturned boat. Nave is a nautical term from which we get navy. He who calmed the waters and stilled the storm gives us a sanctuary on *terra firma* as they say. People accuse the church of being stodgy and unchanging and slow moving. The church I know is adaptive and creative and resourceful – and cleverly humorous in what it calls things.

Let us pray: God of Pentecost, we give You thanks for all the saints whose hard work and creativity have brought the Church along to us today. May we too be resourceful in making sure Your love is heard and experienced everywhere. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Wednesday, April 9

There are fans and then there are fanatics. Each team has fanatics. The most fanatical Packer fans I ever knew were so in love with the Packers they couldn't even watch them. Come Sundays during the NFL season they would program their VCR to record the game. Then they would play cribbage all afternoon. They would never leave the house, wouldn't make any phone calls or receive any visitors, and when the LaCrosse Tribune was delivered the next morning they would then read about the previous day's game. If the Packers won then they would enthusiastically watch the game. If the Packers lost they would simply leave the game unwatched and tape over the offending game with the next week's game. They just had to know how the game turned out before they could face it. They had to know the ending. That's the **BOOK OF REVELATION**.

By the way: it is one revelation, singular, not revelations, plural. The whole thing must be understood as a complete and single revelation and not a collection of independent happenings.

Christians were living in fear and uncertainty. The writer of **REVELATION** simply showed them the ending – victory for the people of faith. Knowing the ending gave them the power to face the evil of the Roman Empire during a time of persecution.

Let us pray: God of Forever, forgiveness and eternity, that's what You have planned for us. Help us to face each day with confidence knowing that You have it all worked out. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Thursday, April 10

My beloved preaching professor at seminary talked about leaving Pumpkin Center, South Dakota, the family farm and essentially the only 300 square miles he had ever known, to go into the South Pacific as a Navy aviator during World War II. He was a tail gunner in a two man torpedo plane. Before leaving Pumpkin Center he filled a Mason jar with soil from his farm. That soil meant the world to him and if he were to die in some wreck in some far off corner of the world he wanted to at least be somewhat buried back home. He survived the war. He pastored in the Church. He was a synod bishop who led a trip to Japan that a great many World War II vets were part of. He taught preaching. He is 101 and now lives in Sun Prairie, WI. And he still has that jar of Pumpkin Center, SD soil. He has been all over the world, been honored and recognized for his various accomplishments, and he still hasn't left the farm. And he's good with that. It begs the question in me about what would I have taken and carried with me? And it makes me think of my baptismal identity – I carry baptized Child of God with me wherever I go. And I don't do the heavy lifting. God carries the identity Baptized Child of God. I can't drop or lose something I don't carry. And who can I trust better than the eternal Creator and giver of Jesus Christ?

Let us pray: We give You thanks, Heavenly Father, for our roots, for the places that birthed and owned us. And we give You thanks for the forever claim You make on us through the salvation Jesus worked on the cross. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Friday, April 11

I live in a house with no cracks in the walls or floors, no jammed windows, no jammed doors. Now either the people that finished the house were absolute alchemists and magicians or the builders of the house took the foundation and framing very seriously - it is the latter. I have worked on houses and I know that the effort made to make the foundation solid and level and true will mean it is much easier to make everything added to it straight and true. I have no doubt that the foundation for our home is fabulous and I have complete confidence that the mason that put up the basement walls used a plumb line and a transept to make everything square and true. I am quite sure that the framers of the house were spot on and made everything square and true as well. This sort of work is never seen - it all gets covered up by sheetrock and paint and flooring and windows and doors and trim. But one can tell that when the foundation and framing are done well all the finish work appears seamless. The most important part of any building is the part never seen - the foundation and the frame. This is true of a solid life. A good solid life comes from a foundation of what is important - faith in God, the ethics of the 10 Commandments, forgiveness and love, are the foundation of a quality life.

Let us pray: Teach us, God, to value and work at basic qualities that make for a good life. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Saturday, April 12

Carved into the limestone lintel of the only door in and out of the modest limestone chapel in LeChambon, France, in the Pyrenees by the Spanish border, are the words **LOVE ONE ANOTHER**. It quotes Jesus from the **Gospel of John**. During World War II this modest little village saved thousands of Jewish refugees by sheltering them and arranging for them to pass through the mountain passages into neutral Spain. Their bravery wasn't made public until after the war and many religious professionals and sociologists descended on the little village. The villagers were embarrassed by the attention and simply stated, "What else could we do?" With digging it was found that centuries of being simply told to **LOVE ONE ANOTHER** led them to think Christianity was really that simple.

Let us pray: Father in Heaven, we confess that we can complicate things and thus justify our own inactions. Help us to simply love others. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Sunday, April 13

Today is Palm Sunday where it is traditional to read about the parade of “**Hosannas**” that welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem’s suburbs and it is traditional to read the Passion, the biblical narrative of Jesus’ last five days of life. The losers that made up the outskirts of Jerusalem loved Jesus and were elated that he had come to see them again. These losers aren’t accustomed to impressive people caring about them and keeping their promises to them. What we celebrate on Palm Sunday is what makes Jesus so different from all of history’s powerful people.

Let us pray: Dearest Jesus, thank You for coming back to finish Your work. You took on our biggest enemies even though You could have walked away. Help us to live out this thanks with lives that are worthy. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Monday, April 14

The joke goes that a guide was giving a tour of the White House property and he learned that in the group there were three contractors: one from Boston, one from Chicago, and one from New York City. The guide said, ***“Well here is a coincidence. Three contractors and us with a fence that needs to be replaced back by the delivery area. It’s just 15 feet of fencing. How much do each of you think it will cost?”*** He looked at the Boston contractor: **“\$8000”** he calculated.

“And you, from Chicago?” “\$9000.”

“And what does New York say?” “\$18,000.”

“Eighteen thousand!? How can that be?”

“\$5000 for you. \$5000 for me. And we hire the guy from Boston.”

Because we are Church people the blatant selfishness and contempt and corruption of that story offends our sensibilities. The Church is the largest non-profit on the planet. The Church graciously gives away, constantly, its greatest asset, the Grace of God as shown in Jesus Christ. The Church does not obsess about what it can get - instead it concentrates on what it can give.

Let us pray: God, there is nothing that even comes close to Your Son and the Church. We have received Your great love by Your grace, help us to be gracious. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Tuesday, April 15

I was told in English Class that all classical literature has an antagonist and a protagonist. The antagonist is the villain who is trying to destroy what is right and good and lovely. The protagonist is the hero, one trying to move the story forward to a happy conclusion. Tragedies still have an antagonist and a protagonist it is just that in tragedies the protagonist fails. If we look at the story of Jesus from this standpoint it is obvious that the protagonist is Jesus Christ and the antagonists in the story are the powers of Rome, bad religion as represented by the Temple and the Pharisees, and evil itself. It can really appear that it was Jesus against the world. I think this is how Paul understood it in **Romans 8**. Looking at it this way then our faith is part of a great story - the story of God's love for the world.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, Your love for us is from before creation and onto forever. As our own personal stories move forward keep us mindful that You, the author of all life, have the last word and Your word is eternal love. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Wednesday, April 16

When we were overseas and our only contact with the outside world was a shortwave radio, one of the popular highlights for us was a **Voice of America** segment called "**Words and Their Stories**". It tells of the origins of some of the things we say. I remember a fascinating few minutes on **green** believe it or not. One of the things I always wondered about was the phrase "**You don't know doo-doo.**" It is used as a put down but I honestly can say that being an expert in doo-doo is something that never interested me. I don't like cleaning up after the dogs or cats and I feel the flush toilet may be the peak of civilization. Turns out that **You Don't Know Doo-Doo** was a putdown directed at a lousy farmer. Believe it or not there is a poem from Great Britain that tells of how the various types of manures can be used to transform the soil - cow, horse, sheep, goat, chicken, goose, duck - and all the manures have various qualities distinct from each other and the judicious use of them can make one's farm soils perform better and certain crops grow more heartily. And knowing that can be the difference in having a healthy and thriving farm that sustains a family and a living and a poor farm that cannot feed itself. So the put down **You Don't Know Doo-Doo** was a real thing and knowing doo-doo was how a farmer practiced wise stewardship of his land. Less than 2% of our population is rural today and way less than that actually farm - that we still use that putdown shows that long after something loses its relevance we keep it because of that sad part of us that likes putting people down. Christ calls us to elevate each other. Words can incite, words can kill, words can stomp on souls, and words can raise us to great things. Let's be wise and judicious in our words.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, Your Son Jesus, the Word Made Flesh, lived among us to make the everyday holy and precious. Help our words be words that build community and strengthen spirits. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Thursday, April 17

I have always said that anyone who desires public office should have to study the **Book of Ezekiel** first. Ezekiel, like most prophets, is disgusted with the state of society and worship and Ezekiel knows precisely whom to blame - the shepherds, the leaders. Ezekiel is brutal on failed leadership. There was an old drunk who would sit on his barstool and talk entertainingly of everything wrong with the world. Finally he was elected for an open city council seat by a write-in ballot and the people were excited to have a voice of common sense and reason, someone to rattle the cages. Turns out that he was a jerk with no political skills what-so-ever and the details and minutiae of governing, even if it was only a ward in a small town, was too much for him and his time on government caused severe dysfunction. On a barstool, where he had zero responsibility other than paying his tab, he was somewhat entertaining and his opinions and wisecracks had no real effect on anything. Suddenly, as a leader, his personality, his arrogance and meanness and his mental laziness in familiarizing himself with issues led to a malfunctioning government that hurt the lives of others. He was voted out of office at the next election cycle and there have never been any open seats on that city's ballots ever since. Leadership is a huge responsibility because one's actions have huge effect on the lives of others. In Ezekiel there is special judgment for leaders who fail. On this Maundy Thursday night the leaders in Jerusalem, the leaders among the Pharisees, the Temple, the Palace, and the Roman Empire, will all collude to get rid of a man whose only crime is that he wants people to know they are loved and to love one another. The governing were more concerned with their own power than in serving whom they governed and that made them see Jesus as a threat. Let that sink in.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, when the forces of power were aligned against your Son He left us with a gift of grace, Holy Communion, sustaining us still to this day. Help us always to align ourselves with love and mercy and help us to use whatever power we have to serve others. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Friday, April 18

On January 20th of this year I heard, for the first time ever, on Sirius Channel 33, **First Wave**, the Sinead O'Connor song "**Nothing Compares 2 U**". It was written by Prince and it was the song of the year in 1990, and it is gorgeous, and I wondered how did I not know this? How is it that I experienced this song for the first time 35 years after its release? It was the year we were overseas and our only source of news was the Voice of America and the BBC. The Voice of America was a branch of the CIA and Sinead O'Connor was hugely critical of US foreign policy. She was also Irish and the BBC is an outstanding news source as long as it's not reporting on Great Britain and its tenuous relationships with Ireland and Scotland. I didn't know about the song because my sources for what I needed to know decided I didn't need to know it. And life goes on. On this Good Friday Jesus is put on the cross because he had the audacity to share with everyone the information that they were loved and precious in God's sight. Power wanted to rule by fear and intimidation and Jesus was telling people they were loved and precious and forever. Power wanted to shut the story down. One thousand nine hundred and eighty two years later we are still talking about it.

Let us pray: God of love, You show Your commitment to Your world in rescuing us from sin and death and the power of evil. Help the story of the Cross be told over and over again until all the world knows it is loved. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Saturday, April 19

“You are the only Bible some people will ever read”, the wise old saying goes. Today, the Saturday between Good Friday and Easter, there is a tradition to have a Vigil of the Resurrection and reenact symbolically those who stood vigil outside Christ’s tomb, waiting for the sabbath to be over that they may honor Jesus with a decent burial rather than the frantic one done in haste on Friday. There is often a bonfire from which Easter’s Christ Candle is lit, and often baptisms occur, but always there is a lengthy series of powerful Biblical readings that demonstrate that the arc of history, that the bulk of the Bible, was always and inexorably leading to this great moment - the Cross and the Empty Tomb. The readings show that salvation was not an accident caused by a perfect storm of religion and politics but that it was in God’s plan all along. The trajectory of scripture and God’s consistent love and grace was building to this moment when all the forces that defy God will be proven impotent - sin, death and evil will lose. That is the message that Christians wear everywhere they go. As Christians respond with love and charity to the tragedies of the world, as Christians change the world through healing and education, people are seeing written on us God’s saving history.

Let us pray: Help us, Loving God, to bear the story of salvation everywhere we go, in all that we do. In Your Holy Name, Amen.