



The Year of the Word: Reflection 6



Your Word is a lamp for my steps
and a light for my path.
Ps 118 (119): 105

On Ash Wednesday, the 26th of February, we entered the Season of Lent with all its customs, practices and observances that make it a remedial season of grace. This time is brimming with great potential, it is a gift given to us by the Lord, but we have to unwrap it and apply its remedial and healing prescriptions; by undertaking and completing our Lenten Journey we will receive that much needed grace offered and be made ready to celebrate the Resurrection. God does not need Lent, we do!

The 40 Days of Lent are a classroom in which we learn to conquer "the world, the flesh and the devil" so we are able to live differently, beginning now: The Lord in whom we now live through Baptism, is Risen from the Dead. He is walking through time now, in his Body, the Church. He wants to save us and set us free as we live our lives in that new world which is the seed of the Kingdom to come. Therefore, He offers us another chance to look at our lives and to make changes for the better; He desperately wants us to accept His offer. However, we must remember that "Lent won't work unless you work it!"

This ancient practice of setting aside 40 days in order to enter, metaphorically - with and in Jesus - into the desert places in our own daily lives and confront the temptations and struggles we face is a gift that will help us overcome the devil in order to achieve change and transformation that will benefit everybody. It comes from the Lord and is offered through the Church who is our mother. The Church as mother and teacher knows just what we need. We all know this is the truth and need to be honest, particularly during Lent. We should take the time to open our eyes, ears, minds and hearts to God and His call: return to the little things, the simple things that can make a great impact the more we do them; display the Gospel values and strengthen the Christian virtues throughout Lent; learn how to be humble by using the Saints, like St Francis of Assisi as our role model, for it is God who has given us everything. All that God achieved in creation was good and was given to us as a gift. But mankind has fallen and squeezed the primacy of the Creator out of daily life. We have succumbed to the seduction of the modern world and we have given ourselves over to the idolatry of self. Yet, Lent offers us the chance to change all this, gain redemption and Eternal Life with Our Father in Heaven. We should remember it is not a time to be sad and downcast, to show off or to be a hypocrite by demanding or saying one thing but practising another but a time of preparation and renewal, a time of self-denial and self-growth, a time to deepen our knowledge and understanding of God and our relationship with Him. If we welcome Lent and make the best use of it then it will benefit not just ourselves but also our families and friends, and our local, national and global communities.

We all struggle with disordered appetites and unconverted ways of thinking and living. We also demonstrate in our daily lives a lack of charity in our relationships with others. We have developed unhealthy habits which cause us untold sadness and impede our progress in virtue. None of these set us free or help us to flourish as human persons. They are the bad fruit of sin. Therefore, the desert of Lent invites us to journey with and in Jesus, so that we have the strength to abandon wrong and to start a new life, just as Jesus did when He left the desert. It is here, in that place of struggle or on the field of engagement, where we can learn the root causes of our challenges and be equipped with the weapons of our warfare to fight what the Scriptures and Tradition refer to as "the world, the flesh and the devil." It is where we are given the opportunity to learn to conquer them through the One who both shows us the Way and is Himself the Way.

The temptations Jesus, the Word made Flesh, engaged in the desert are the prototype of all of the challenges we face as we respond to the continuing call to conversion. After all, the Christian vocation is just that - a continuing call to conversion. It is up to us if we respond the Lord's invitation. The first temptation Jesus faced was to His identity. After all, he IS the Son of God! We, through our Baptism, have also now become Sons (and Daughters) of the Father in Him. The next temptation was to idolatry. We regularly commit the horrid sin of idolatry, succumbing to its lies almost on a daily basis. Like the Christians in ancient Rome, we live in an age which has "exchanged the truth of God for a lie, worshipping created things rather than the Creator. (Rom. 1:25) Finally, there was the subtle but deadly temptation to violate integrity, to use the gifts and power of God improperly and put the Lord to the test. How clearly this poisonous serpent lurks in our daily life!

Yet, in each of these encounters with the Tempter, Jesus shows us the method to defeat sin by, by confronting the lies of the truth of God's Word. He is the Living Word, and we, through our Baptism, now live our lives in Him - that is how we enter the desert IN Him; we do this by living within the communion of the Church which is His Risen Body on Earth. The Church is not some-thing but Some - One. There, in the Lord, we find the resources we need to grow in holiness and struggle against the lingering effects of sin. There we embark on the journey of holiness, becoming what the Scriptures call "perfected" or completed in Jesus Christ. His Divine Life (Grace) is mediated to us through the Sacraments, in the Living Word and the Communion of Love in which we now live.

So, we are invited during these 40 days to take every gift, every grace, offered to us. We are invited to learn to wield the weapons of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. By these practices we grow in freedom by putting away the "old man/woman" and putting on the "new man/woman", created anew in Jesus. It is Jesus in His Sacred Humanity who fully reveals that new man. He is the model, showing us the method we can use to defeat anything we are faced with. In His Divinity He is Himself the Means. In Him we are redeemed. We are also capacitated to grow in holiness and virtue by overcoming temptation. Through His Saving Life, Death and Resurrection, he makes it possible for us to live new lives, in Him - beginning now and leading into eternity.

The best source to support us is by reading the Bible or other religious books of Scholars that explain the Word - praying, meditating on their meaning and putting into action the message of Jesus' teaching will ensure that we really do work Lent! Scripture shapes our actions, our choices and how we relate to God, to ourselves, to our neighbours and to our world. It guides all our relationships and how we live our lives. Scripture teaches us how to live in society, to respect each human being and to work towards the common good. The Scriptures inspire us to put faith into action, living God's word and doing God's word.

GOD NEEDS YOU!

How can we live God's Word?
In what good ways do we live God's Word?
Where are there gaps?
Is anyone excluded?
What new ways and opportunities are open to us?

We can live God's word by:
Cherishing life at every stage.
Using and sharing our resources fairly.
Protecting the weak, the poor and the marginalised.
Being the best version of ourselves all the time.



Readings for Reflection from the Gospels

Matthew 4:1-11 The Temptation in the Desert
Matthew 18:21-22 The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant

Podcasts to listen to St Matthew's Gospel in Lent
<https://www.cbcew.org.uk/series/reading-matthew-in-lent/>



Adam was expelled from the earthly paradise, the symbol of communion with God.... Now, in order to return to that communion and thus to eternal life we must pass through the desert, the test of faith. Not alone but with Jesus (the second Adam) who precedes us and who has already conquered in the fight against the spirit of evil

Prayer

Father,
through our observance of Lent,
help us to understand the meaning of your Son's death
and Resurrection,
and teach us to reflect it in our lives.

Amen

FOOTPRINTS IN THE SAND

One night I dreamed I was walking
along the beach with the Lord.
Many times from my life I had
noticed the way, in each case I
noticed footprints in the sand.
Sometimes there were two sets of
footprints, other times there was only
one. This bothered me because I
understood during the few periods of
my life when I was suffering from
anxiety, sorrow or despair,
I could see only one set of footprints,
and said to the Lord:
"You promised me Lent,
but if I followed you, you would walk
with me always. Did I have noticed
that during the most trying periods of
my life there has only been one set of
footprints in the sand.
Why, when I needed you most, have
you not been there for me?"
The Lord replied:
"The years when you have seen only
one set of footprints,
my child, is when I carried you."

Will you make Lent work, give up, not bother
or say it's not my job?

This is a little story about four people
named Everybody, Somebody,
Anybody, and Nobody.

There was an important job to be
done and Everybody was sure that
Somebody would do it.

Anybody could have done it, but
Nobody did it.

Somebody got angry about that
because it was Everybody's job.

Everybody thought that Anybody
could do it, but Nobody realized that
Everybody wouldn't do it.

It ended up that Everybody blamed
Somebody when Nobody did what
Anybody could have done.