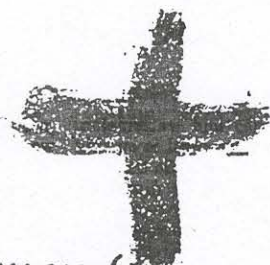


# The First Week Of Lent...The First Week Of Lent... The First W



Remember  
that you are  
dust and into  
dust you shall  
return.

## Seeing temptation

Sunday, March 5

Deut. 26:4-10  
Romans 10:8-13  
Luke 4:1-13

When I hear the words of the devil in today's gospel, I hear him say "if you were REALLY the Son of God you could turn these stones to bread," tempting Jesus, not with hunger, but with the human desire for proof. It leads me to look at my own desire to turn stones to bread.

The stones I want to turn to bread are mostly within me. They're the cold stones of anxiety over finances, impatience with other drivers, and a tendency toward dark depressions that I want to turn to bread. If I were REALLY a person of faith, I'd trust in God, I'd be patient and joyful in life. The temptation I face is my desire to have fasting, prayer, and the life of faith be FOR something.

Yet in Paul's letter to the Hebrews, after listing great deeds by heroes of faith of whom "the world was not worthy," he says that "they did not obtain what was promised." Jesus was still hungry when the devil left. Fasting is a practice of faith and faith is its own end. Faith is for faith, not for the turning of even the stones of my personality into bread.

As I begin in earnest the fasting of Lent, I pray to fast for faith, not to prove that faith can turn stones to bread.

These reflections on the Scripture readings for the first week of Lent were written by Dr. Aileen O'Donoghue, a professor of physics and astronomy at



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## Being holy

Monday, March 6

Lev. 19:1-2, 11-18  
Psalm 19, v. 8-10, 15  
Matthew 25:31-46

What does it mean to be holy?

A long list of specific acts defining how the Israelites should act follows this command. Yet the Pharisees who obeyed every rule scrupulously were criticised by Jesus. So what does it mean to be holy? The Gospel yesterday said it doesn't mean turning stones to bread.

Jesus left the stones as stones. And God, though he could have communicated to people with burning bushes and pillars of fire, and redeemed us with another flood, or a firestorm, sent Jesus, a man who wore sandals, sat on the ground, and ate fish. With gentle reverence, God told us through Jesus of his love and holiness and did not raise his hand to force our conversion even as we murdered his beloved Son.

That is God's holiness: reverence for all things in his creation, even those that give him pain. To be holy as God is holy, then, I need to revere all things, particularly other people, as holy. From this reverence, the acts of feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and visiting the lonely and imprisoned, arise naturally. That service to other humans that Jesus said he will look for is not so much the cause of holiness as its result.

Holy God, open the eyes of my heart that I might see "the holy" where I have not seen it before and spend this day revering your presence there.

## Faith in God's answers

Thursday, March 9

Esther C, 12, 14-16, 23-25  
Psalm 138:1-2, 2-3, 7-8  
Matthew 7:7-12

Jesus says in today's gospel that God will not give us rocks when we ask for loaves. After calling us yesterday to pray knowing our words will be heard, he calls us today to pray knowing that they will be answered with good things. But sometimes I feel like Charlie Brown in the Peanuts halloween special. As they "trick or treat," the kids stop after each house to see what goodies they got. One says "I got a candy bar," another "I got bubble gum." Charlie Brown looks in his bag and says "I got a rock."

Trying to believe Jesus, I look at the rocks in my life hunting for God's good answers to my prayers. The devil's temptation of Jesus in last Sunday's gospel comes to mind as I seek proof in events of Jesus' assertion in today's gospel. I hunt for goodness hidden in tragedy, trying to turn stones to bread. But it often isn't there. Surely there were prayers of holy people offered from Auschwitz and Rwanda, and of innocent children held by rapists and murderers. Yet they died terrible deaths. I sin if I try to turn such stones to bread.

Jesus calls us to faith in God's good answers to our prayers in the face of events in every country in every age that deny them. Only God can give me such faith.

Good and generous God, I pray today for faith.

*Week Of Lent...The First Week Of Lent... The First Week Of Lent...*

**Power of words**

*Tuesday, March 7*

**Is. 55:10-11**  
**Psalm 34:4-5, 6-7, 16-17, 18-19**  
**Matthew 6:7-15**

It's easy to forget the power of words. In the barrage of words from radios and televisions and chatter over coffee, words become like the snow and the rain, ordinary and seemingly unimportant.

Immersed in noise, it's hard to listen in reverence to the expression of self contained in another's words. Because, in speaking, that uniquely human activity, we express the part of us that is most US. We express the part of ourselves formed by God that he calls to holiness, and calls us to revere in ourselves and in each other.

But I rarely reverence words. I take them in by the handful like sunflower seeds and spit them out like the shells. Rarely do I pause to take note of any one ordinary sunflower seed and recognize that it has the potential to grow and blossom if only given a space in the dirt.

God says his words will blossom on the earth, and Jesus teaches us to speak few words in our prayer believing that they will be heard. Members of monastic communities, in seeking the holiness that God called us to in yesterday's readings, spend much of their time in silence, practicing reverence for the power of words. Because a word spoken in silence is as obvious as a sunflower in an August garden.

Help me to speak carefully today, and to pray in holiness, with reverence for you and for words.

**Voice of God**

*Wednesday, March 8*

**Jonah 3:1-10**  
**Psalm 51: 3-4, 12-13, 18-19**

Just as Elijah recognized the voice of God in the gentle breeze, so the people of Nineveh recognized the voice of God in the words of the reluctant prophet, Jonah. God's word achieves his end.

During Lent I look for prophets, for those who can tell me clearly of the path God would have me follow. But how many reluctant prophets do I miss because I do not want to hear them? Like those in Jesus' time instead of those of Nineveh, I do not want to be called to true repentance. Sitting in the sackcloth and ashes of regret, I can resolve to change my action, but changing my heart is profoundly difficult. Because changing my heart, my attitudes, my reactions, means recognizing ... and admitting ... that I had the freedom to be different all along.

I sometimes find myself clinging defensively to habits and attitudes that I know are wrong and that I'll even admit are wrong, because I don't want my choosing to be different to reveal that I chose to be wrong. I'm too embarrassed to change my heart.

Only God's love can give me the courage to face my past choices, seize my freedom, and turn from my evil ways so that I may someday stand with the people of Nineveh.

Please help me to hear your voice even in the reluctant prophets that speak to me today. And help me find the humility to truly repent.

**Holy in our hearts**

*Friday, March 10*

**Ez. 18:21-28**  
**Psalm 130:1-8**  
**Matthew 5:20-26**

The prophet Ezekiel speaks to me of Lent, today. Ash Wednesday brings upon me a somber sense of the nearness of the holy in the dark and cold of late winter. Piles of dirty snow along the roads represent how I feel within myself. It's a time for pulling back, for reflection, prayer, and atonement. I begin Lent seriously, embracing fasting and spiritual disciplines as though they quenched some thirst. But even as only this first week of Lent ends, the disciplines begin to fade into the ordinary rush of life and become mindless habits instead of spiritual endeavors.

Ezekiel instructs us that holiness can't be stored. Mindfulness in spiritual disciplines during the first weeks of Lent is not enough. We must remain mindful and alert to what we do "as sentinels wait for the dawn." And Jesus reminds us that it is not just our acts that must be holy. We must be holy in our hearts so that not murdering our sisters and brothers includes not murdering their feelings, their self-esteem, their characters, their reputations, or their images in our hearts. We must be holy as God is holy and revere our brothers and sisters.

Lord, help me revere my brothers and sister enough to not murder any of them in the least way...not with a word, a look or even a thought...today.

**The Lord's anointed**

*Saturday, March 11*

**Deut. 26:16-19**  
**Psalm 119:1-2, 4-5, 7-8**  
**Matthew 5:43-48**

Almost three weeks ago, on February 19, we read Luke's account of Jesus' call to love our enemies. The first reading that day recounted David's refusal to harm the sleeping Saul saying "I would not harm the Lord's anointed." In his homily, Father Harry Giroux said that Jesus' call to love our enemies makes all the world "the Lord's anointed."

There are some people I struggle to see as "the Lord's anointed." There are some in our prisons whom hardly any of us see as "the Lord's anointed." Some people are hard, cold stones that I would like to turn to bread before I revere them as "the Lord's anointed."

But Jesus calls us to revere, love, serve, and bless all people, and especially those truly hard people who annoy, frighten, threaten, and even harm us. The only possible way to even begin is to accept stones as God's stones, to pray knowing we're heard and that God answers with goodness, and to have faith that God's word, even when spoken by reluctant, uncooperative prophets like ourselves, shall achieve God's end.

Holy Lord, help me to see one difficult person in my life as your anointed one today and to interact with them differently than I did yesterday.