

Sunday, Feb 18, 2018

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

Get outside your comfort zone this Lent

The desert's a great place to encounter the Holy, as a long tradition of desert fathers and mothers attests. But the desert's a traditional place to make intimate acquaintance with your demons as well—which is another reason Jesus, and generations of his followers, made friends with cacti. It's also why we symbolically enter the Lenten desert each year, fasting, praying, and giving alms. We allow the normal lifestyle padding to wear a little thinner and feel our vulnerable spots with more clarity. Make a commitment this Lent to explore your limits. Bring an extra supply of humility!

TODAY'S READINGS: Genesis 9:8-15; 1 Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:12-15 (23).
"The Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert, and he remained [there] . . . tempted by Satan."

Monday, Feb 19, 2018

LENTEN WEEKDAY

Root yourself in solidarity

Jesus' core message—that we are one—is surely one of the great mysteries of existence. This truth is so hard to accept because our senses tell a different story: We are separate, different, and alone. We need an image to help us realize what our senses cannot. Picture the giant redwood trees of California: Did you know they only grow in groves? Moreover, each tree's roots extend and grasp the roots of the surrounding trees, forming a strong, interconnecting network that serves to nourish and sustain all of them equally. The next time you are tempted to think of someone as "the other," remember the redwood trees and their invisible, interlocking roots.

TODAY'S READINGS: Leviticus 19:1-2, 11-18; Matthew 25:31-46 (224).
"Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me."

Tuesday, Feb 20, 2018

LENTEN WEEKDAY

Turn it over

One of the many advantages of memorized prayers such as the "Our Father" is that we can say them when we have no words of our own; we don't have to think. That's also one of their disadvantages: We don't have to think. In fact, we may have forgotten exactly what we are saying when we pray the "Our Father." For example, do we really mean, "Thy will be done?" or are there unspoken conditions attached: "Thy will be done—as long as it doesn't interfere with my carefully laid plans for my life"? To turn everything over to God is truly the only way to live without fear. It's what Jesus did; it's what we are called to do as well.

TODAY'S READINGS: Isaiah 55:10-11; Matthew 6:7-15 (225). "This is how you are to pray: 'Our Father who art in heaven.'"

Wednesday, Feb 21, 2018

MEMORIAL OF PETER DAMIEN, BISHOP, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

Stick with what is priceless

Peter Damien (1007-72) was a generous giver. But simony—the practice of buying spiritual offices or spiritual authority—was one kind of giving he detested. The activity was widespread in the medieval church and did great damage to the church's moral standing, so much so that Dante condemned those who practiced simony to the eighth circle of hell. Perhaps the venue largely has shifted from church to state—where we find corporate lobbyists and other influence-peddlers with lots of cash—but the sin remains

the same. Damien would not be amused to see simony persist in any form, and neither should we.

TODAY'S READINGS: Jonah 3:1-10; Luke 11:29-32 (226). "Just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation."

Thursday, Feb 22, 2018

FEAST OF THE CHAIR OF PETER THE APOSTLE

Pull up a seat

The Latin word for "chair" is *cathedra*, and a *cathedra*—you see where this is going—is the "seat" of a bishop, thus making the bishop's church a *cathedral*. Today's feast, however, commemorates a particular "chair": that of Saint Peter and the authority Jesus gave him to be the primary leader of the early church. Peter was martyred in Rome, and so the "see" (*sedes*—"a place to sit") of Peter became the Holy See, the seat of the pope as the first among bishops and the leader of the Roman Catholic Church. As the Liturgy of the Hours says, the Feast of the Chair of Peter the Apostle is a day to celebrate the "unity of the church founded upon that apostle."

TODAY'S READINGS: 1 Peter 5:1-4; Matthew 16:13-19 (535). "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church."

Friday, Feb 23, 2018

MEMORIAL OF POLYCARP, BISHOP AND MARTYR; DAY OF FAST AND ABSTINENCE

Be fruitful in faith

Polycarp died around the year 155 at the age of 87, so he was a very early Christian who lived while some of the original apostles were still alive. The apostle John appointed Polycarp bishop of the city of Smyrna (now Izmir in Turkey), where Polycarp faced many challenges during his long years in office. Christians were a persecuted minority, while most of the population still worshipped the Roman gods. During one persecution, Polycarp was captured and, even though very advanced in age, sentenced to be burned at the stake. But tradition has it that the flames would not burn him, so he was stabbed to death. His remains are entombed with honor in the church of St. Ambrose in Rome, and his long life of service to the early church is remembered each year on this day. The name Polycarp means "many fruits." May all of our lives be as fruitful!

TODAY'S READINGS: Ezekiel 18:21-28; Matthew 5:20-26 (228). "Settle with your opponent quickly while on the way to court."

Saturday, Feb 24, 2018

LENTEN WEEKDAY

Less is more

The phrase "less is more" catches our attention because at first glance it seems illogical. How can less be more? They're opposites, and of the two, "more" is often regarded as better. But taken in a different light, the phrase makes good sense. Maybe we exercise restraint during a tense meeting with a coworker, saying only what is needed instead of saying something further in order to "win" an argument. Maybe we forgive someone who has hurt us with a lie instead of reminding them over and over that our pain is their fault. With less, we become more—more peaceful, more caring, more Christ-like.

TODAY'S READINGS: Deuteronomy 26:16-19; Matthew 5:43-48 (229). "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

Invest just five minutes a day, and your faith will deepen and grow—a day at a time



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