



Bringing Home the Word



Fifth Sunday of Lent

March 22, 2015

New Life Is Waiting

By Janel Esker

When my husband and I learned I was pregnant, we felt so many wonderful emotions—joy, disbelief, anticipation. It wasn't until the nonstop nausea occurred and the endless to-buy lists piled up that we became utterly aware of the sacrifices required. Sure, we knew *about* such sacrifices, but until my body and our lives began literally making room for new life, we didn't truly comprehend what letting go meant. We were definitely

dying to our previous life, like the grain of wheat that must die to produce fruit.

But there are multiple experiences of dying to a familiar life that aren't as joyful as pregnancy. There's letting go of health and independence when aging or illness take hold. There's adjusting to singlehood after divorce. There's changing course when a rejection letter arrives from a university. Most often we don't "choose to lose" our way of life—it's chosen for us. It's rarely easy.

Today's Gospel reveals that Jesus, too, struggled to let go of his familiar life. For him, this meant truly dying to experience eternal life. But it wasn't easy for Jesus. We hear him say, "I am troubled now." He talks about the dying grain, perhaps not only to teach his disciples but also to reinforce to himself what he must do. Though he chooses this path freely, it's not an easy choice. He needed courage just as we do.

Even when losing our familiar life isn't our choice, we can choose as Jesus chose—and trust that God has new life waiting for us beyond every death. It may not be what we planned, but it's what God has planned. Our trust is grounded in Jesus—who felt what we feel and who waits to share with us the new life he has experienced. †

REFLECTION
QUESTIONS

ONE? TWO?
REFLECTION

- What do I need to let go of from my past?
- How is my obedience to God made manifest in my life?

**PRAYER**

Lord, you have sent us into the world to help bring about your kingdom of love. Free me to love my sisters and brothers and reach out to those in need.

—*Mindful Meditations for Every Day of Lent and Easter*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

Sunday Readings

Jeremiah 31:33–34

Because Israel broke the original covenant, the Lord will establish a new one in which God's law is written "upon their hearts" and all shall know the Lord.

Hebrews 5:7–9

During his life, Jesus prayed to the Father out of obedience and wisdom of God's saving power. God made Jesus perfect and "the source of eternal salvation."

John 12:20–33

Jesus proclaims the importance of faithful service, saying, "unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies," it will not bear fruit. Then a voice from heaven glorified him.

The Stations of the Cross: A Journey of Remembrance and Meditation

By Gretchen L. Schwenker, PhD

The Stations of the Cross, practiced in our parishes during Lent, is a journey of remembrance and meditation. We remember, believe, and see our way forward as disciples of Christ.

An Evolving Devotion

The desire to connect with the places of the passion occurred as early as the fourth century, when pilgrims began to make their way to Jerusalem. From the early thirteenth century, custody of the shrines in the Holy Land by Franciscan friars provided stability. Stations were first placed in Jerusalem late that century to mark the way it was believed Jesus took to Golgotha. These stations made the passion palpable; people practicing the devotion could pray over each visualized sorrowful event.

With time, stations were erected in local communities of the faithful, and the devotion spread across Western Europe. Franciscans promoted its practice, and the fourteen traditional stations were used in their communities in Spain by the seventeenth century.

Stations were officially allowed inside churches and chapels in 1731. Today most Catholic churches display them as paintings, engravings, small reliefs, sculptures, or tableaux made of materials such as wood, plaster, marble, or metal.



Stations can still be found outside along wooded paths near shrines or roads leading to churches.

Praying the Stations

Prayers for the traditional stations have been written by St. Francis of Assisi and St. Alphonsus Liguori. The scriptural Stations of the Cross came into usage when first celebrated by Pope John Paul II on Good Friday 1991. Unlike the traditional stations, which begin with the trial condemning Jesus, the first station in the scriptural version is that of Christ's agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. Still, both versions end with Joseph of Arimathea collecting the body of the Messiah and laying it to rest in his own tomb.

Committing to Love

The passion accounts stir our souls. When we pray the stations, it's overwhelming to realize that this

sacrifice was made for our salvation. Jesus fulfilled the work entrusted to him. In meditating on the mystery of our redemption, we open our hearts to see the powerless among us and to love others as God wants us to. The stations testify to how we are to respond to those who live in peril at the margins of our world. We are to minister to those who are persecuted, imprisoned, ill, mourning, poor, and in the midst of violence, war, and famine.

Around Catholic communities today, examples of this work is seen in Good Fridays that may begin prior to the traditional observance with serving others in an activity as direct as giving food to a local soup kitchen or pantry. A Lenten walk for justice may also be held as a contemporary Way of the Cross, fostering Catholic social teachings like the dignity of the human person, rights and responsibilities, and options for the poor by relating stations to pressing social concerns. Devotion to the passion can also be expressed in subtle ways, such as spending an hour with someone who needs our presence.

Living as Disciples

A prerequisite to discipleship is denying this life to take up the cross. The passion attests to this burden, but there is the promise of new life. Meditating on the passion doesn't take away the pain of the Lord's suffering and death, but we can walk with Jesus as if we stood among those who lined his path to Golgotha, witnessing the sadness and trust of that day. †

WEEKDAY READINGS March 23–28

Mon. *St. Turibius of Mogrovejo:*
Daniel 13:1–9, 15–17, 19–30, 33–62 /
John 8:1–11
Tue. *Numbers 21:4–9 / John 8:21–30*
Wed. *The Annunciation of the Lord:*
Isaiah 7:10–14; 8:10 /
Hebrews 10:4–10 / Luke 1:26–38

Thu. *Genesis 17:3–9 / John 8:51–59*
Fri. *Jeremiah 20:10–13 / John 10:31–42*
Sat. *Ezekiel 37:21–28 / John 11:45–56*