



Friday after Ash Wednesday



Date: Friday, February 16, 2024 | **Season:** Lent | **Year:** B

First Reading: Isaiah 58:1–9a

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 51:3–6ab, 18–19 | **Response:** Psalm 51:19b

Gospel Acclamation: Amos 5:14

Gospel Reading: Matthew 9:14–15

Preached at: St Peter Faber Jesuit Community in the Archdiocese of Melbourne, Australia.

On Wednesday, we heard from Brendan about how we should focus on our reconciliation with God, or rather, God’s reconciliation with us – and Brendan was right to remind us, as St Paul did, that “God has reconciled the human world to himself in Christ – fundamentally and absolutely.” He then went on to talk about how we should also reconcile with our selves. Today our readings complete the triptych of right relationships and stirs us to reflect on how we can live our call to reconcile with other people. The answer, we are told is by becoming agents of reconciliation and justice – truly men and women for others.

After the fall of Jerusalem, the people of Israel observed four days of fasting, which they did to recall God’s relationship with them, embodied as it was in the presence of the Temple. But the people of Israel in the first reading want to know why God ignores them when they fast. Their fasting did not make their society more just – or help them to enter into right relationships with one another. The Prophet Isaiah says:

“This, rather, is the fasting that I wish: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; Setting free the oppressed, breaking every yoke; Sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless; Clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own.” (Is 58:6-7)

Micah, also echoes Isaiah more succinctly when he says we should aim “to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with our God.”

Brendan reminded us about the importance of being in right relationship with Self, God and Creation. The pursuit of a relationship with God we realise cannot be done outside of our community with each other and our common home. The Prophet, in the reading we just heard, and our own General Congregation, are both explicitly calling us to be in right relationship with other people too. It stated:

“Our pastoral, educational, social, communication and spiritual ministries have increasingly found creative ways of implementing this mission, a service of faith and promotion of justice, in the challenging circumstances of the modern world. Different ministries carry out the mission in ways that are appropriate to them. However, all have experienced [this] mission as the grace of being “placed with the Son”. [GC 35, d3. §48]

“In this global world, there are social, economic, and political forces that have facilitated the creation of new relationships among people, but there are other forces which have broken the bonds of love and solidarity within the human family.” [GC 35, d3. §69]

In these last two days we have been grateful to Frances and Michael for leading us through the First Spiritual Exercises. We have been reminded how St Ignatius wanted those going through the Spiritual Exercises to recognize the seductive and complex ways the Evil Spirit works – especially ensnaring individuals in a complex web of social and structural sin. Our work of reconciliation needs to fulfill this service of faith and promotion of justice that the prophet Isaiah and our Congregation highlights. The Exercises are also a time to reconnect with the voice of the Good Spirit, who is always inviting us to return. Sometimes our returning needs to be accompanied by acts of penance and Lent is that perfect penitential season – preparing us to welcome the Risen Lord into our hearts at Easter, in the fourth week – and beyond.

So in this time of Lent we are called to fast. Some think that because of our fasting, Lent must be a sad time. But the season of Lent is not meant to be a sad season – and fasting should not engender sadness. Jesus asks in the Gospel why his disciples should mourn when the bridegroom is with them?

We Tertians are going to be spending this Lent doing the Spiritual Exercises – a time where we will draw closer to Christ in a deliberate and deeply privileged way. Our fast shall be one of withdrawing from the world, from relationships with others, in order to prioritise that relationship with God and God’s relationship with ourselves so that we might be better men for and with others. In a real sense, we shall experience again the joy of being “placed with the Son” in our missions, and in that place, how can we be sad? We should still remember, that though the Father places us with his Son, he does so at the Cross. This will still be a joyful moment because it is precisely from that place at the cross, together with Christ, that we will have the opportunity to form right relationships with others. Right relationships that model and nurture and call forth the best in each person and reminds them of their own belovedness.

Let us pray this afternoon that our hearts might be disposed to joyfully draw nearer to God this Lent, so that we might – out of love – draw closer to those to whom we shall be sent – to those on the margins and fringes of society, who have yet to experience God’s good news the way we have. We give thanks, too, for the relationships we have formed among ourselves. Let us pray that we might be given the courage, generosity & grace to be in right and just relationships with others. And though we shall be fasting – let us rejoice that this year we get to support each other in this fast – which promises, in fact, to be a sumptuous feast, rich in the love and grace of God.

Source: <https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/homilies/2024-02feb-16-yb-lt-af/>

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