

**SAINT MARY PARISH, MILTON**  
**Lent 2010 – Seasonal Focus**

*The Season of Lent in the C cycle of readings invites us on a journey from where we are now in our lives to where we would like to be – to where God calls us to be. The journey involves having a clear vision of our goal – of where it is we are called to go; it involves making sure our priorities are straight; it involves repentance for past errors – correcting wrong turns; and it involves an openness to something entirely new, something we may never have thought of before.*

## **I. Priorities**

Each year, the Season of Lent begins and ends with Jesus being tempted by the devil. The gospel for the first Sunday of Lent is one of the stories of Jesus being tempted in the desert. This year we have Luke's story. On Good Friday, Jesus undergoes the Agony in the Garden, where he is again tempted to give up on the role God called him to do: "If it is possible, let this cup pass me by." The readings today assure us that God is with us on the journey through Lent; it is God who gives us faith – a faith directed by the Spirit. We are challenged to keep our priorities in the right order: in the first reading, the Lord comes first and is presented with "the first fruits of the products of the soil." The reading very briefly reviews salvation history, and the Israelites recognize the priority of the Lord God by giving him the first fruits. In the second reading, Paul reminds the Romans that belief is the priority: belief or faith makes salvation possible for us. "No one who believes will be put to shame." And in the gospel, Jesus clearly has his priorities straight, as he rejects three very attractive temptations placed before him by the devil. Lent is a time for us to look at our priorities, and orient or re-orient ourselves to the things of God.

## **II. The Goal**

Today's liturgy places the goal of Lent before us; it shows us where we're headed. In the first reading, God tells Abram to "look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can;" this is how many descendants he will have. And the covenant God makes with Abram is the means by which this goal will be accomplished. In the second reading, Paul describes to the Philippians the goal of the believer: "citizenship in heaven," or to say it in another way, being conformed to the glorified body of Christ. The gospel story of the transfiguration gives Jesus a glimpse of his future glory; it is also the future glory of Peter, John and James, present with Jesus on the mountain; and it is the goal, the future, of all believers. This is a vision we all need if we are to be successful in our struggle with the things of the flesh, with earthly things. We can't transfigure ourselves; it is the ultimate gift of God. Faith plays a major role: having the covenant with God (first reading); standing firm in the Lord (second reading); and listening to the Chosen Son of God (gospel).

### **III. Caution: Repentance Needed**

Today's liturgy serves as a caution to all would-be disciples of the Lord: repentance is a key part of redemption. In the first reading, as Moses approaches the burning bush, he is cautioned by Yahweh to be careful of the holy ground he is approaching. In the second reading, Paul cautions the Corinthians concerning their faith; even though all of their ancestors ate the same spiritual food and drink, some were struck down in the desert. Paul concludes: "whoever thinks he is standing secure should take care not to fall." In the gospel, Jesus cites two examples of the need for repentance; twice he cautions his audience: "if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did!" Still, there is a sense of rescue: in the gospel, the gardener suggests to the master that the fig tree be allowed to live and be given another chance to bear fruit before it is cut down forever.

### **IV. Vision: The Promised Land**

Today's readings reflect the vision of the Promised Land, and the way we get there. In the first reading, the Israelites have entered the Promised Land, and now enjoy the produce of the Land. They no longer have need of the manna. Reconciliation has been accomplished: "Today I have removed the reproach of Egypt from you." In the second reading, the Promised Land is described as the "new creation." Paul tells the Corinthians that it is "all from God who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation." The gospel is the parable of the prodigal son, for whom the Promised Land is his return to his father's house. He achieves it through reconciliation with his father. After he had spent everything, the story says he "came to his senses;" we have to be able to see what we have to do in order to be reconciled. It's a learning process, which we are invited into during the Season of Lent.

### **V. Something New**

Today's liturgy invites us to go forward, to look to the future, and not so much at the past. In the first reading (Isaiah), God announces that he is "doing something new;" the image is making water spring forth in the desert. He tells the Israelites to "remember not the events of the past." In his letter to the Philippians (second reading), Paul describes faith as total gift, "not having any righteousness of my own based on the law," everything is gift: "I have indeed been taken possession of by Christ Jesus." Yet, he has not attained perfect maturity, but must continue his pursuit so that one day he will possess it. The struggle is a source of hope. For the woman caught in adultery (gospel story), forgiveness is pure gift; nothing she has done merits it. This is truly something new, totally unheard of before! It is a gospel of great hope: Jesus shows what he can do with very few words. Today, we can be so intent on throwing blame – like the scribes and Pharisees in the gospel. Jesus shows us that there is another way.