

“Cursed is the one who trusts in human beings; he is like a barren bush in the desert; he stands in a lava waste, a salt and empty earth.”

And a happy Valentine’s Day to you, Jeremiah!

“Woe to you who are rich; woe to you who are filled now; woe to you who laugh now; woe to you when all speak well of you.”

And a happy Valentine’s Day to you, too, Jesus!

I wouldn’t look for these Sunday readings on your Valentine cards (tomorrow, today).

And yet, if you dig deeply enough – believe it or not – there is a Valentine card buried there in those words. To discover it, you have to remember that the Bible is basically a love story, a story about God’s love for us, and how deeply God wants to be part of our lives – as we have seen over the last 5 weeks since the end of the Christmas season.

Sometimes, love means having to do something we’d rather not do – something we don’t particularly *feel* like doing. Sometimes, to teach a lesson, a parent has to insist that their child give everyone in their class a Valentine card, instead of just those they like. Sometimes a parent has to discipline their child. Sometimes a parent has to stand by and let their child make a few mistakes, so they see the implications of their choices. Sometimes a spouse has to sacrifice his/her own desire for the good of the other, or for the good of the relationship. Sometimes calling a person on his/her dishonesty is a sign of how deeply they love that person. Sometimes a warning is the best thing someone can do for another.

This is what Jesus is doing in today's gospel. He puts forth those "woes" because he loves us so much.

The great Jesuit preacher, Walter Burghardt, says we dare not to try to avoid today's gospel. He says that to ignore Luke today is to negate the essence of the gospel. This gospel reminds us that all we are and all we have is God's gift – not ours to own, but ours to share. Gifts of God are given to be given.

In this regard, one of the most important valentines the church gives us begins this coming Wednesday – the Season of Lent. Lent is a time for us to look seriously at the warnings Jesus gives us in today's gospel, and do what we must do to heed his advice. On Ash Wednesday, Jesus gives us three penances: prayer, fasting, almsgiving. We have many opportunities for each.

Prayer: Again this year, you will receive our "Day-by-Day" listing – a listing of all the many opportunities in our cluster for prayer. Mass, of course, is always the best prayer, and we encourage you to consider attending mass not just on Sunday, but on one other day of the week. With the exception of two days this Lent, we'll have mass everyday in our parish. It's offered at a variety of times during the week to appeal to different schedules. We'll again have our 7:00 a.m. mass on Thursdays. Stations of the Cross, Sacrament of Reconciliation – both individual and communal, times of adoration, and other special prayer opportunities are available.

Fasting: Another traditional Lenten penance. The purpose of fasting is not to lose weight. When we fast, we set something aside; it can be anything, it doesn't have to be food. We set something aside to make a little more room for Jesus to enter in. That's the purpose of fasting – to make room for Jesus. If anger and impatience is a problem, try fasting from that. If cursing and swearing is a problem, try fasting from that. If lying has taken over our lives, try fasting from that. The fast and abstinence regulations for Ash Wednesday and Friday of Lent are in today's bulletin.

Almsgiving: There's a ton of opportunities for almsgiving. Actually, this has already been going on in the collection for Haiti. Last Wednesday at our Presbyteral Council meeting, the Bishop announced that our Diocese has sent almost \$450,000.00 to CRS for Haitian relief so far. Over \$11,000.00 is from our parish. Thank you for your wonderful generosity. Next weekend, we'll have an envelop attached to the bulletin for our parish "Loaves and Fishes" fund, which has been totally depleted over this past holiday season. We also have the Annual Catholic Appeal coming up in the near future (as previously announced). Also during Lent, we have the annual collections for Eastern Europe and for the Holy Land shrines. Another opportunity for families each Lent is the annual Rice Bowl collection. Your children will bring one home this week; and we'll have Rice Bowls at the entrances of the church next weekend for any others who would like to give alms in that way. Obviously, not everyone can give to everything. We encourage your involvement in some almsgiving, and appreciate your generosity!

Sometimes, love means having to do something we'd rather not do – something we don't particularly *feel* like doing. So, from Jeremiah and Jesus, from our parents and all those other people who love us: Happy Valentine's Day.