



Contributed by Fr. James M. Donohue, C.R.

Father Jim has been a Resurrectionist for priest for 38 years. He is the Knott Professor of Theology at Mount St. Mary's University in Emmitsburg, MD, where he has taught since 1996. His research and publications deal primarily with the rites of sickness, dying, and death. He teaches courses in systematics, such as Belief in Today's World, Encountering Christ, and Sacraments. Fr. Jim has written a book with his colleague, Dr. David McCarthy, called *Moral Vision: Seeing the World with Love and Justice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2018). Podcasts with Fr. Jim and David McCarthy on the Gospel of Mark, under the heading "Catholic Town," can be found at:

<https://msmary.edu/alumni-and-friends/stay-connected/podcast/index.html>

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT—YEAR B **March 7, 2021**

GATHERING TIME (10-15 Minutes)

Introduction to the Word:

I have a friend who is a retired professor from Mount St. Mary's University. I collaborated with him on many projects over the years. I learned a great deal from him and I admire him greatly. He and his wife decided to move to another state, but he was still teaching part-time at the Mount and so he lived with me whenever he was in Emmitsburg. This went on for several years. He was a great "roommate." He is a "business" person, and he and his wife had a great plan for retirement. But then something happened. Something unexpected. Something that changed their lives. They had a granddaughter who was born with a chromosomal irregularity—Trisomy 6. Most babies die very early with this condition. Due, in large part, to the single-minded attention of her mother and grandparents, this child was accepted, nourished and loved beyond all imaginings. She is eleven now—really a medical miracle—but she cannot speak or see or walk. She needs constant care. From the "outside" it could look as though my friend's retirement was "ruined." All the plans that he and his wife had made were exchanged for the care of this little girl. As I said, looking from the outside, we might be sad for him. But, when my friend talks of this experience, when he talks about Kiera, he describes her as the greatest blessing of his life!

I thought about my friend in terms of the second reading, which describes God's foolishness as wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness as stronger than human strength. In terms of the world, my friend might seem foolish and weak. In terms of the gospel, and certainly in my eyes, I think my friend is acting like God.

Warm-up Activity (about 8-10 minutes):

The gospels are filled with sayings that defy common sense: strength is manifested in weakness, life comes out of death, real authority is service, only by losing ourselves do we find ourselves, greatness

is measured by being the least, the servant of all. Can you think of times where you made “gospel” choices that were contrary to “common sense?” In particular, do you remember a time when you did something that seemed “foolish” in the eyes of the world? What happened? What did you learn about yourself, about God, about others?

The Table of the Word

Lent is a time for us to prepare ourselves to be recreated in Christ. The Church’s centuries-old practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving, which help prepare us for this transformation, manifest themselves in the Ten Commandments that God gives Israel. Prayer can help us to reorient ourselves from thinking that we are God, and to remember that it is the Lord God “who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” Fasting can assist us to name the false gods that we nurture and worship, and come to recognize how we have forgotten God’s demand: “You shall have no gods except me.” For its part, almsgiving can help us to turn our attention from self-needs to the needs of others, especially those who are most unfortunate in our neighborhood, parish, city, and world.

Penitential Rite:

God reaches out to us and raises us up – in creation, and in the new creation through the Paschal Mystery of His Son. At times, we are faced with our ‘fallen’ nature, and our tendency to say “No” to God. Yet, in His love and mercy, God reaches out to us to bring us back, to be His faithful children, His chosen people.

Lord Jesus, you redeem us through your suffering, death and resurrection, **Lord, have mercy.**
Christ Jesus, you call us to embrace this season of grace, **Christ, have mercy.**
Lord Jesus, you call us to fullness of life in you, **Lord, have mercy.**

Let us pray:

Almighty God, we are your people, the sheep of your flock.
Grace us in the following of Your Son, so that His life and light may shine in us,
and through us to the world He came to save.
Bless us abundantly as we raise up our humanity, to truly reflect who you created us to be.
Grant us forgiveness and mercy for the failure to embrace that humanity redeemed in Christ.
We ask this through your Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord,
who reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME (45 Minutes)

*(As Christians we believe that the **WORD** of God we hear proclaimed each Sunday is an empowering Word, and that God is present in the Word proclaimed. This is the Word that God wants us to hear today. The dynamic of the Small Christian Community, namely, reflecting on our life-story within the context of this Word, and sharing the insights of these reflections, is such that God’s Spirit becomes present, and the gifts of the Spirit are experienced as empowering and life-giving.)*

FIRST READING: (Exodus 20:1-17)

God spoke all these words. He said, “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”
“You shall have no gods except me.”

“You shall not make yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything in heaven or on earth beneath or in the waters under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God and I punish the father’s fault in the sons, the grandsons, and the great-grandsons of those who hate him; but I show kindness to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.”

“You shall not utter the name of the Lord your God to misuse it, for the Lord will not leave unpunished the man who utters his name to misuse it.”

“Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. For six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath for the Lord your God. You shall do no work that day, neither you nor your son nor your daughter nor your servants, men or women, nor your animals nor the stranger who live with you. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth and the sea and all that those hold, but on the seventh day he rested; that is why the Lord has blessed the Sabbath day and made it sacred.”

“Honour your father and your mother so that you may have a long life in the land that the Lord your God has given to you.”

“You shall not kill.”

“You shall not commit adultery.”

“You shall not steal.”

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.”

“You shall not covet your neighbour’s house. You shall not covet your neighbour’s wife, or his servant, man or woman, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is his.”

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God**

SECOND READING: (1 Cor. 1:18, 22-25)

Brothers and sisters: the message about the Cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

While the Jews demand miracles and the Greeks look for wisdom, here are we preaching a crucified Christ; to the Jews an obstacle that they cannot get over, to the pagans madness, but to those who have been called, whether they are Jews or Greeks, a Christ who is the power and the wisdom of God. For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God**

GOSPEL: (John 2:13-25)

A reading from the holy gospel according to John. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

Just before the Jewish Passover Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and in the Temple he found people selling cattle and sheep and pigeons, and the moneychangers sitting at their counters there. Making a whip out of some cord, he drove them all out of the Temple, cattle and sheep as well, scattered the money changers’ coins, knocked their tables over and said to the pigeon-sellers, “Take all this out of here and stop turning my Father’s house into a market.” Then his disciples remembered the words of scripture: Zeal for your house will devour me. The Jews intervened and said, “What sign can you show us to justify what you have done?” Jesus answered, “Destroy this sanctuary, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews replied, “It has taken forty-six years to build this sanctuary: are you going to raise it up in three days?” But he was speaking of the sanctuary that was his body, and when Jesus rose from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and the words he had said. During his stay in

Jerusalem for the Passover many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he gave, but Jesus knew them all and did not trust himself to them; he never needed evidence about any man; he could tell what a man had in him.

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ**

Pause for a brief reflection on the scripture readings.

COMMENTARY:

First Reading: The Ten Commandments ought always to be connected with the Exodus of Israel out of Egypt. This was God's marvellous act of salvation of the people of Israel from slavery and death. Departure *from something* leads to entry *into something*. In this light, the Ten Commandments are the guideposts of the new society into which God welcomes this enslaved people so that they can live in freedom with God and with one another. At times, Christians find it hard to believe that the Law can bring salvation. In this light, Christians will say that they are not saved by the Law, but by Christ. The German theologian Gerhard Lohfink raises an interesting question in this context when he asks how a person comes to believe in Christ. His answer: "One becomes a member of the Church and so of the one people of God, the people that began with the faith of Abraham, the Exodus from Egypt, and the gift of the Torah at Sinai. To put it more clearly: Faith in Christ happens precisely through a person's entering, through baptism, into an exodus from the old society and being saved into the new society of the people of God, through which the preaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus has received its eschatological form; and there is no such thing as a society without a model, a social order, a system of law and justice" (*Does God Need the Church?* [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999], 76).

Second Reading: St. Paul is dealing with the reality of Jesus' crucifixion in light of the expectations of both the Jews and the Gentiles. In the case of the Jews, we might think of the story in Luke's gospel of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (24:13-35). As they walk along, the disciples are sharing an unhappy story, which they are trying to make sense of. In their conversation, they summarize Jesus' career and the messianic hopes they had, but they have the conventional understanding of Messiah which does not include suffering, humiliation, and death, DESPITE the many times that Jesus has spoken of this (passion predictions). It is Jesus who puts their story within the larger story, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, who declared that the Messiah would not immediately be a glorious king, but on the contrary, it was necessary that He should suffer and die before entering into His glory. Paul argues that, in light of this thread in the Scriptures, the suffering and death of Jesus does not destroy the messianic credentials. For their part, the Gentiles think it is simply "madness" to worship one who has been crucified. Cherishing wisdom, they had come to appreciate the practical knowledge that comes from learning. For them, the experience of Christ crucified defied any "practical" knowledge. Paul reminds both groups that God's ways are not our ways, and what seems to be foolishness and weakness is the wisdom and power of God.

Gospel Reading: The gospel indicates that Jesus' anger was directed against "people selling cattle and sheep and pigeons, and the moneychangers sitting at their counters there." Surprisingly, to many of us, these people provided valuable services to the pilgrims who visited the Temple in Jerusalem. Since many came from far-away places, it would be inconvenient, if

not impossible, for travellers to bring animals with them for sacrifice in the Temple. Similarly, many coins had the image of Caesar or other pagan gods stamped on them, making it necessary to exchange these coins for ones without a “graven image” in order to pay the Temple tax. In this sense, the people selling the animals and those who exchanged the coins were providing a service. So, what was the problem? Why was Jesus so angry? One explanation is that Jesus was inaugurating the eschatological (final) reign of God that envisioned Israel’s conversion in such a way that it would attract all the other nations to join with Israel in praise and worship of God (see Isaiah 42:6; Isaiah 49:6; Isaiah 52:10; John 8:12; Acts 13:47; Acts 26:23). This movement of Israel’s conversion, becoming a “light” that would attract all the nations is often called the “pilgrimage of nations.” If the people selling animals and those exchanging coins had spilled over into the Court of the Gentiles in the Temple, Jesus’ action was a prophetic sign that indicated that the day of salvation had come, that the longed-for prophecies were being fulfilled, and that all the nations were about to be gathered.

*(Allow about 5 – 10 minutes for the participants to react to the **Commentary** to identify a newly discovered insight or idea.)*

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. *“I am the Lord your God”* (Exodus 20:1-17)

God reveals that we are in a relationship with God. The Commandments reflect the nature, or ‘parameters,’ of that relationship.

How do you see these Commandments as guidelines in that relationship with God, and with family and community?

Which of the Commandments is your greatest struggle?

Which faithful following of a Commandment has been your ‘salvation,’ and led to an outpouring of God’s grace?

2. *“Christ who is the power and the wisdom of God”* (I Corinthians 1:22-25)

God reveals Godself, God’s truth and God’s power in mysterious ways. At times we can only identify them in hindsight.

How has this power of wisdom been made manifest to you in your life?

How has God’s wisdom been made manifest to you in your life?

3. *“What sign can you show us to justify what you have done?”* (John 2:13-25)

Jesus’ action of “cleansing” the temple was a sign of the inauguration of God’s final reign that would unite all people in life and love. While Jesus directed most of His attention to Israel, this was so that Israel would enter a full conversion and become a light to attract all the other nations.

How might I need to change to become a light that attracts others to God and God’s ways?

In what ways do I need to work to be more inclusive of all people?

How does my heart need to change to do this?

CARING - PRAYING TIME

1. **Word for the Week:** “For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength” (1 Corinthians 1:25).

2. **Suggestions for the Week:** Jesus' action in the temple was to prepare for the "pilgrimage of the nations"—the welcome of all people into God's reign. Think of something you could do to welcome and include someone who is left out and excluded.

3. **Intercessions:**

On our Lenten journey, let us bring our prayers and petitions to God, who calls us to holiness in Him. Let our response be: **Sanctify us, Lord.**

That our Church leaders, universal, diocesan and local, will continue to discover the fullness of life in Jesus Christ, we pray ...

That our faithfulness to God's commandments will not only unite us to God, but heal and strengthen relationships in our families, communities, Church, and world, we pray ...

That, through our dependence on God's grace, even our struggles with our weaknesses will bring for grace and salvation for us, and others, we pray ...

That our words and actions may consistently proclaim Jesus Christ to be truly God and truly human, we pray ...

That we may cherish our humanity, shared with Christ, and respond well to all His invitations to share one day in His eternal and divine life, we pray ...

For Pope Francis' monthly intention: that we may experience the sacrament of reconciliation with renewed depth, to taste the infinite mercy of God, we pray ...

And how can we help you in prayer this week?

Let us pray:

Almighty God, on our Lenten journey help us to seek and find Your will.
May we recognize what is truly holy and cherish it, respect it and share it.

Let us begin in recognizing our own holiness,
a free gift from you, as we respond to your countless graces.

May our words and actions proclaim your Son as truly God and truly man,
the source of our salvation.

We ask this in His name, in union with the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

With hands and hearts united in gratitude for God's favours on us today, we pray that all those in our influence be moved to be open to your Word and your Spirit, while we say as one, OUR FATHER ...

Celebrating the Word, Resurrection Ministries of the Congregation of the Resurrection Ontario-Kentucky Province (including the former Resurrection Centre), 265 Westmount Road North, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 3G7. (**Celebrating the Word** was founded by Father Frank Ruetz, C.R., now deceased). For information or subscriptions: E-mail provincialoffice@resurrectioncollege.ca website: www.resurrectionists.ca The Scripture version used in this commentary is the **New Revised Standard Version** (copyrighted by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA).