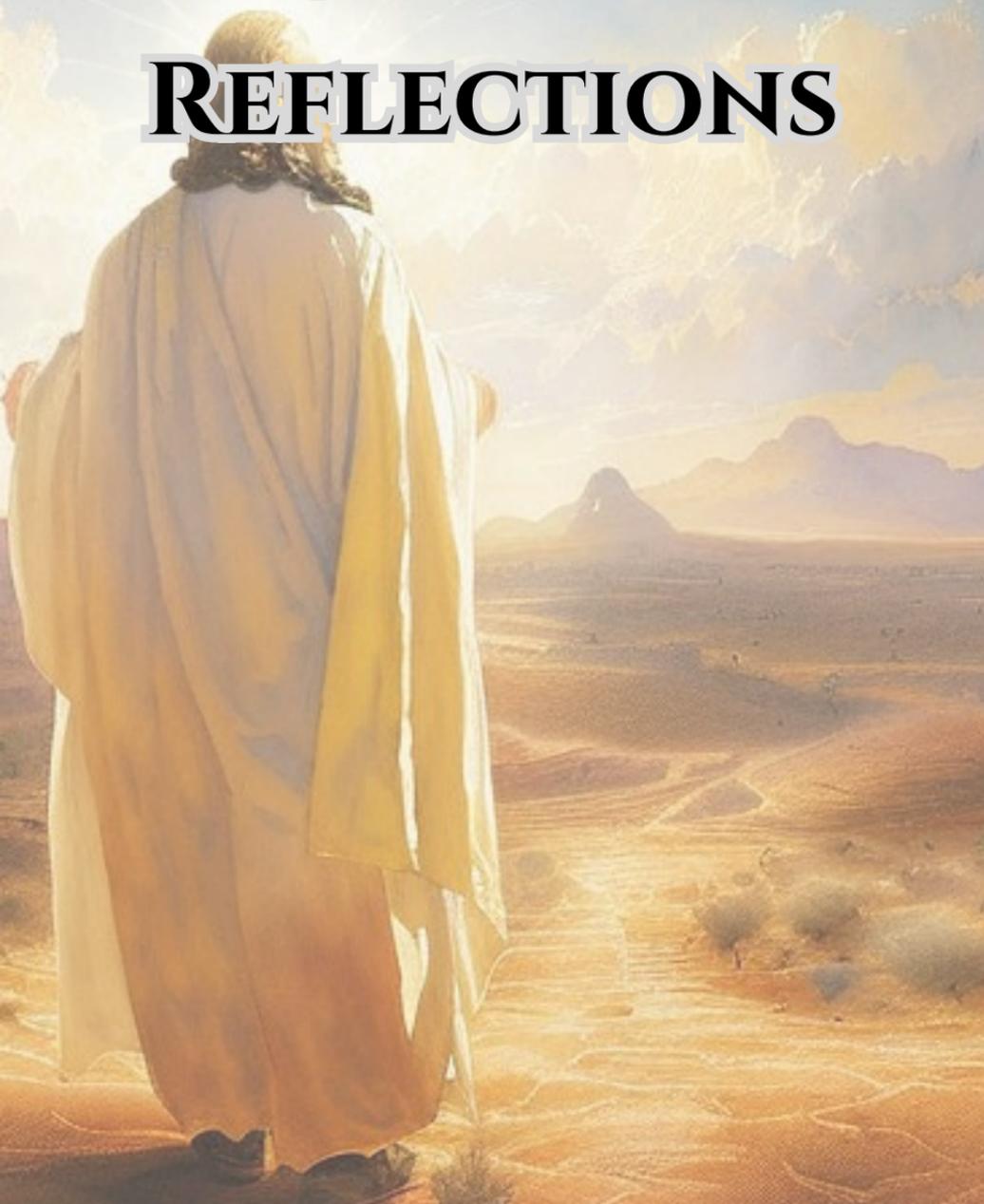


LENTEN DAILY REFLECTIONS



Introduction

The goal of Lent is to arrive at Easter. You have 40 days to prepare for the most significant feast day of the calendar. Nothing is greater than the defeat of death.

When I decided to run my first marathon, I needed a program—a day-to-day planner. Every day, I looked at the schedule and did what was required, such as long runs, intervals, hill work, or easy runs. I enjoyed the variety of workouts and watching my progress. When Marathon day came, I had a great time. I qualified for the Boston Marathon and placed third in my age group.

So, I want to offer you a daily planner for your arrival at Easter. I hope you get the most out of your 40 days.

- Fr. Peter Grover, OMV
St Clement Eucharistic Shrine
1105 Bolyston St, Boston MA 02215



Lent Daily Scripture Reading Schedule

Date	First Reading	Gospel
Feb. 14	Joel 2:12-18	Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18
Feb. 15	Deuteronomy 30:15-20	Luke 9:22-25
Feb. 16	Isaiah 58:1-9a	Matthew 9:14-15
Feb. 17	Isaiah 58:9b-14	Luke 5:27-32
Feb. 18	Genesis 9:8-15	Mark 1:12-15
Feb. 19	Leviticus 19:1-2,11-18	Matthew 25:31-46
Feb. 20	Isaiah 55:10-11	Matthew 6:7-15
Feb. 21	Jonah 3:1-10	Luke 11:29-32
Feb. 22	1 Peter 5:1-4	Matthew 16:13-19
Feb. 23	Ezekiel 18:21-28	Matthew 5:20-26
Feb. 24	Deuteronomy 26:16-19	Matthew 5:43-48
Feb. 25	Genesis 22:1-2, 9a, 10-18	Mark 9:2-10
Feb. 26	Daniel 9:4b-10	Luke 6:36-38
Feb. 27	Isaiah 1:10, 16-20	Matthew 23:1-12
Feb. 28	Jeremiah 18:18-20	Matthew 20:17-28
Feb. 29	Jeremiah 17:5-10	Luke 16:19-31
Mar. 1	Genesis 37:3-4,12-13,17-28	Matthew 21:33-43, 45-46
Mar. 2	Micah 7:14-15, 18-20	Luke 15:1-3,11-32
Mar. 3	Exodus 20:1-17	John 2:13-25
Mar. 4	2 Kings 5:1-15	Luke 4:24-30
Mar. 5	Daniel 3:25, 34-43	Matthew 18:21-35
Mar. 6	Deuteronomy 4:1,5-9	Matthew 5:17-19
Mar. 7	Jeremiah 7:23-28	Luke 11:14-23
Mar. 8	Hosea 14:2-10	Mark 12:28-34

Lent Daily Scripture Reading Schedule

Date	First Reading	Gospel
Mar. 9	Hosea 6:1-6	Luke 18:9-14
Mar. 10	2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23	John 3:14-21
Mar. 11	Isaiah 65:17-21	John 4:43-54
Mar. 12	Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12	John 5:1-16
Mar. 13	Isaiah 49:8-15	John 5:17-30
Mar. 14	Exodus 32:7-14	John 5:31-47
Mar. 15	Wisdom 2:1, 12-22	John 7:1-2, 10, 25-30
Mar. 16	Jeremiah 11:18-20	John 7:40-53
Mar. 17	Exodus 37:12-14	John 11:1-45
Mar. 18	Daniel 13:41-62	John 8:1-11
Mar. 19	2 Samuel 7:4-5, 12-14, 16	Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24
Mar. 20	Daniel 3:14-20, 91-92, 95	John 8:31-42
Mar. 21	Genesis 17:3-9	John 8:51-59
Mar. 22	Jeremiah 20:10-13	John 10:31-42
Mar. 23	Ezekiel 37:21-28	John 11:45-56
Mar. 24	Isaiah 50:4-7	Mark 14:1-15, 47
Mar. 25	Isaiah 42:1-7	John 12:1-11
Mar. 26	Isaiah 49:1-6	John 13:21-33, 36-38
Mar. 27	Isaiah 50:4-9	Matthew 26:14-25
Mar. 28	Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14	John 13:1-15
Mar. 29	Isaiah 52:13-53:12	John 18:1-19:42
Mar. 30	Genesis 1:1-2:2	Mark 16:1-7
Mar. 31	Acts 10:34a, 37-43	John 20:1-9

Ash Wednesday

The Strong Know Best Their Weakness

“For gracious and merciful is he, slow to anger, rich in kindness, and relenting in punishment. Perhaps he will again relent and leave behind him a blessing”

- Joel 2:13-14

Joel is an odd prophet. He gives us a story about the attack of the locust. We city folk do not feel threatened. What can a grasshopper do? But to a farmer, grasshoppers can be a disaster. Or let's say you enjoy a glass of wine with your meal. A locust plague will mean that you are going to be drinking water with your steak and fish dinners for a very long time. Sometimes, we think we are big and powerful, but we are not.

I like to fish in the evening because the fish like the low light, and I like to watch the sunset. So there I was, enjoying myself, and all of a sudden, sand fleas attacked me. It sounds rather harmless, but not to a fisherman. They are basically fruit flies with very sharp teeth. I thought about two options. First, quit fishing, leave the beautiful sunset, and leave all the fish that were in front of me. Second option, die. Out of nowhere, I felt this gentle breeze on my face. To a five-foot eleven-inch guy, a breath of air is nothing, but to a sand flea, it is a hurricane. To think I was absolutely powerless against these fleas. I could do nothing. If I can be powerless against a sand flea, I guess I am not so great and powerful. That is the prophet Joel's point. It is okay to need God. Farmers need God because there are locusts, fishermen need God because there are sandflies, husbands and wives need God because they have dental bills and college tuition for the

kids, and nurses and doctors need God because there is disease. Everyone will face something small that can change their life forever unless they have a power that is greater than them. That is why Joel exhorts the Israelites to turn back to God. God wants us to need Him; He wants to save us; He wants to help us. It is okay to want and need God. So listen to this good prophet, turn back to God this Lent because we will always need Him.

February 15, 2024

There Is A Reason We Do Not Pack A Bag Before Our Funeral

*“What profit is there for one to gain the whole world
yet loses or forfeits himself?”*

- Luke 9:25

When I was on vacation, my brother asked me if I wanted to camp with him on the top of the mountain. I agreed. So I grabbed my burlap potato bag and filled it with camping gear. My brother said, “You are not using that to take up the mountain, are you?” I replied, “That is all I have.” My brother answered, “I have an extra pack. It has lots of straps to disperse the weight around your waist.” I thanked him. So I started to fill his pack, and he asked, “Is that your sleeping bag? You are going to freeze up there on the mountain. Here is a high-tech bag. I have an extra one because I upgraded.” Then he added, “What is that?” I replied, “It’s a tent.” “Is it waterproof?” I stated, “Well...” He said, “I have a much better one. We will take mine.” In the end, I left all my stuff behind because my brother had better equipment.

That is what happens when we die. You will say to God, “Lord,

I spent my entire life building up my bank account. Can I take it with me?" And God will reply, "You will not need it. I have more wealth than you can imagine. You will have plenty of wealth." Then you will say, "Lord, I have a second vacation home in Florida. It is on the water, and I have thirty-foot boat. Can I take it with me?" And God will answer, "That piece of junk? Leave it. I have something much nicer for you than that." Then you will continue, "Did I waste my time spending my entire life building up a bank account and working to pay for a home in Florida?" And God will reply, "Yes, you fool."

I know a retired, successful businessman. He spends his retirement going to charitable functions, hearing their participants, and making out checks to them. Someone warned him that he was writing too many checks. The wealthy businessman answered, "I want to make sure that when I die, I am a poor man."

February 16, 2024

Hurting? What to Do to Heal Quickly

"This, rather, is the fasting that I wish...Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your wound shall quickly be healed."

- Isaiah 58: 6-10

I love to teach Scripture, and I work hard for my classes. I have PowerPoint presentations, share my notes with the students, give them resources to help with their research papers, hand in their graded papers, and return them within two hours. At the end of the year, I receive the student evaluations, and I get beat up. "He talks too fast. His quizzes are too hard. He gives out too much

reading.” One student charged me with teaching heresy. I was even called into the dean’s office. In short, I got beat up.

Another time, I was waiting at a red light, and the person behind me was leaning on the horn. I looked in the rearview mirror to see what was wrong and the guy behind me was shaking his finger at me, and it was not his index. Apparently, he did not see the “No turn on red” sign. Another time, I was on call for the hospital, and I was busy the whole night. I still had to work the next day. At the end of the day, I called Mom because I needed a little TLC. I got yelled at, “You are working too hard, you are taking on too much, and you need to slow down.”

We get beat up in life. We should not be surprised. Christ promised the cross, suffering, and opposition. I tell people that hurt is part of the deal when we follow Christ. That is why it is so important to heal quickly. For example, when we break an arm, we must do certain things to heal. We set the bone, rest it, sleep well, eat healthily, and be faithful to the therapy. How do we do this spiritually?

Isaiah tells us: “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.”

Next time you get beat up, have this list and heal quickly.

February 17, 2024

When You See Opportunity, Take It

“Jesus saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at the customs post. He said to him, ‘Follow me.’ And leaving everything behind, he got up and followed him.”- Luke 5:27

I knew a priest with a replica of a human skull on his bedroom dresser. It was the first thing he would see when he woke up. I asked, “Isn’t that a bit morbid?” He replied, “No, because the skull talks to me. It says, ‘Once I was like you, alive, energetic, and full of dreams. Someday, sooner than you think, you will be like me.’ It reminds me that I am very blessed today, right now, at this very moment, and I will make the most of it.”

One time, Matthew, the tax collector, was sitting at his money table, and the Lord said, “Follow me.” There he is with the best job: no heavy lifting, no climbing up ladders, no cleaning bathrooms. People just bring him money, and all he has to do is check off their name in the registry. How does someone walk away from a job like that? And not only did he leave but he got up and followed **immediately**. I always wondered about that. Didn’t Matthew have a few chores to do before he left his post? Didn’t he have to put the money in a box and secure it safely? And what about the record book that keeps tabs on those who had paid and who had not? He leaves it all behind, never to return. He saw an opportunity, and he took it. Today, we will have opportunities to forgive, be generous and kindness, and lift people up. We just have to see them.

February 18, 2024

Why the Shape of a Shoe Box?

“God said to Noah and to his sons with him: ‘See, I am now establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you.’”

- Genesis 9:8

Noah’s Ark: how do you envision it? If you picture a large shoe-box about the size of a football field and three stories high, then, congratulations, you have read your Bible. The Bible gives the exact dimensions and the shape of the ark. But this is my question: why would God make a boat the shape of a shoe box?

Picture this: I am back in the day, and I am walking my dog. I pass by the Noah residence, and in the front yard is this monstrosity. I stop and speak with Noah:

Me: “Hey, Noah, that’s pretty awesome. What is it?”

Noah: “It’s an ark.”

Me: “Oh, an ark...what’s an ark?”

Noah: It’s a boat.

Me: “It looks like a shoe box. How are you supposed to steer the thing?”

Noah: “You can’t.”

That’s right, you can’t steer the thing; you can’t control it. So there is God, looking down at the world. People are buying and selling, marrying, building, and everyone is doing their thing. And God notices that no one needs God anymore. Everyone is living independently of divine assistance, so God tells Noah,

“Alright, everyone in the shoebox.” So there you are in the shoebox for forty days and forty nights. There is a storm outside, and you are bobbing up and down in the waves. All that time, you can’t steer the boat, which means you can’t control where you are going, you have no future, no direction, and you are entirely dependent on God—the way life ought to be. After forty days, God recreates the world, which is beautiful again.

When the Israelites went into the desert for forty years, they had no food, no water, and no protection against pesky neighbors, the sun, poisonous snakes, or who knows what else lurks in such places. The Israelites were utterly dependent on God. After forty years, God made this nation the light of all the nations. The more we depend on God, the more we will live as God intended.

February 19, 2024

God Notices

“Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.”- Matthew 25:45

Look at the fingernail on your baby pinky. It is very small. That is the diameter of a Roman penny. If you hold the ancient coin between your thumb and forefinger, it will disappear. A widow was holding two pennies at the Temple treasury. No one noticed her donation. No one could see her contribution because it was buried between her two fingers. Jesus, however, noticed. He also noticed that she gave everything she had and was therefore more generous than anyone else had been. This moment shows that God notices our thankless jobs, unappreciated acts of kindness, and unanswered sacrifices.

One day, I picked up a friend at the airport. I was trying to be

nice but things went wrong. A state trooper made me move the car while I waited for my friend, and I got yelled at. The night before, I had parked along the street. An official had told me I could do so. He did not tell me that I could not park there after 8:00 p.m., so I arrived at my car a little after 8:00 p.m. I found a yellow warning sign on the windshield telling me that I had parked illegally and would be towed. In less than twelve hours, I had made two mistakes, and they were all over me. I wondered if anyone noticed all the good things I was doing. The Gospels tell me that Someone does notice. So keep on doing those thankless jobs.

February 20, 2024

Everyone Likes Short and Good

“Jesus said to his disciples: ‘In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him. This is how you are to pray: Our Father who art in heaven...’”

- Matthew 6:7-9

After the priest reads the Gospel at Mass, he gives a homily. There are four options: short and good, short and bad, long and good, long and bad. Take a wild guess: which of the four options is the most popular among the faithful in the pews? Of course, you want short and good! Unfortunately, you will never get that option. What do you think is the second most popular choice of the four: short and bad! So I'm just going to ask you a question. When you turn to God in prayer, do you think He likes long and bad. Do you think He likes it when we babble on and on? I don't think so. So, the Lord gives us a prayer that is short and

good. Do you know that I timed the Our Father? It takes only seventeen seconds. It is short, but it is also good. Everything God wants to hear from our lips is in that prayer.

According to the Gospels, Jesus prayed all the time when he was on earth. What do you think He prayed? You guessed it - the Our Father. When Jesus went into the desert for forty days and nights and was tempted by the devil, what prayer did Jesus say? He prayed Our Father: "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." When Jesus was in the wilderness, and He wanted to feed the five thousand rather than send them away, He took the only available food, a few loaves of bread. He looked up to heaven to pray. What prayer did he use? The Our Father: "Give us this day our daily bread." When Jesus was in the garden before his arrest, it says that Jesus prayed. What exactly was Jesus' prayer? Again, the Our Father: "Your will be done." When Jesus hung from the cross before He died, He turned to His Father in prayer. What prayer was on Jesus' lips? Again, the Our Father: "as we forgive those who trespass against us." The "Our Father" is the perfect prayer for us as well.

February 21, 2024

Why I Read the Bible

"When the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast and all of them, great and small, put on sackcloth." - Jonah 3:5

They say that breakfast is the most important meal of the day. The reason is simple. You have been fasting all night, and the first meal of the day breaks the fast. So, what is the most essential food item you can put in your body after a fast? Certainly not donuts or Lucky Charm cereal. Coffee is not at the top of the list either. It is water. Your body needs to hydrate. Why

did it take me fifty-eight years to figure that out? I used to eat donuts and sweet pastries for breakfast, but then I would have a sugar crash by mid-morning. Then I went to coffee. I loved it, but I would get the shakes and feel nervous all day. I quit coffee and started drinking only water because nothing goes well with water in the morning. My body loved it. I experienced no more crashes; I was energized. Just what I needed. So why did it take me fifty-eight years to figure this out? No one told me, and no one did it. That is why I read the Bible. It tells me stuff that no one else says or does. It gives me the best path to the best life to live. The people in the Bible are experts, so I pay attention. They tell me that if I believe God, I will fast and He will look favorably on me. Don't forget to have a steady diet of the Bible, and you will learn from the experts.

February 22, 2024

The Dullest Tool in the Shed Always Works the Hardest

“Simon Peter said in reply, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’”

- Matthew 16:6

One day I needed to use a chisel. The one I grabbed was so dull that it couldn't cut through pudding. No, I didn't throw it out. I brought it to my father, who knows how to sharpen chisels. When I handed it to him, I lamented, “Just look at this.” He replied, “Every chisel that works hard gets dull. That is what happens. You just have to sharpen them.”

I cite my father because no one worked harder than the apostle Peter. When Jesus walked on the water, Peter was the only disciple who jumped out of the boat to join his Lord. When Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do ‘you’ say that I am?” Peter was the only one to raise his hand and answer Him. When Peter

was in the boat and recognized that Jesus stood on the shore, he was the only one who jumped in the water and swam to shore. Rowing the boat would take too long. When Peter heard that Jesus' tomb was empty, he bolted out the door and ran with only one other disciple accompanying him. Peter was the hardest worker, and that is why he was flawed. Peter even admitted it. He slept in the garden when he was supposed to be praying; he denied Jesus when he was supposed to defend Him. But that did not stop Peter from working hard. He knew that if he were close to the Sharpener, close to Christ, he would always be okay. Jesus had a toolbox, and when he needed a chisel, He always picked Peter. Always. He gave Peter the keys to the kingdom; he made him the first pope; he picked Peter to see His Transfiguration. Why Peter? He is flawed. Jesus chose Peter because He knew that Peter would never leave the Sharpener; he would never leave Christ.

We get beat up in life but never stop working hard. We will always be alright if we stay close to our Sharpener—if we stay close to Christ.

February 23, 2024

Arrows Can Find the Bullseye Even If the Archer's Aim
Is Off

“Thus says the Lord GOD: If the wicked man turns away from all the sins he committed...he shall surely live, he shall not die.”

- Ezekiel 18:21-28

In the ancient world, archery was very popular. People set up targets and bulls-eyes as a way to measure the accuracy of a shot. Let's say you pull back the bow, and just as you release the arrow, you have a hiccup. The arrow will probably leave the path that

leads to the center of the bulls-eye. The ancients had a special word for this: hatta. It means missing the mark. The Jewish people used that word to best describe “Sin.” So, sin expresses the life of one who leaves the right path. Here is the problem with sin for the ancient Jew—the arrow, once in flight, cannot change direction.

Remember when Peter was amazed by the catch of fish? As his boat sank with the number of fish in it, Peter fell to his knees before the Lord and told him, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man.” What Peter was saying was that his life was like an arrow in flight that could not change direction. Do you remember how Jesus responded? He told him to “Follow me.” That is, Jesus could get Peter to the bullseye if he followed Him.

We get lost sometimes in life. It happens. But with Christ, I am no longer an ancient arrow in midflight that cannot change directions. By following Him, my life will be headed toward the bullseye.

February 24, 2024

Perfection or Finish the Job

“So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.”- Matthew 5:48

One of my favorite characters in the Bible is Joseph of Arimathea. Why? He arrives on the scene at the last hour of the last day of Jesus’ life. And it is not an easy hour. He had to secure permission from Pilate, which meant lots of government bureaucracy. Once he got permission, he had to supply a burial cloth, ointment, and provide a tomb, all of which are costly items. Then, he had to take the nails out of Jesus’ hands. How hard was that? Those same hands held a dead girl’s hand before

she came back to life, they touched and cured the leper, they broke the two loaves and fed thousands, they made mud that cured a blind man. The removing of the nails will be followed with the burial procedure that must be done before the Sabbath begins. This is the most critical job in the Gospels, because to have an empty tomb on the Resurrection day, you need to fill the tomb. None of the other disciples stayed to the end to finish the job.

Not long before Jesus died, He told His followers “to be perfect as My Heavenly Father is perfect.” The word “perfect” also can mean “finish.” It is the same word Jesus used before He died, “It is finished.” Maybe Jesus meant to say, “Finish the job, just as I finish the job and as my Father finishes the job.” For me this means I will finish life as a believer; I will finish life as a churchgoer, I will finish life as a religious priest.

The last mile of the marathon is the hardest. When I arrived at mile marker 25 of my 1st marathon, and I had one more to go, I said to myself, “Well, I got this far; I may as well finish.” When I crossed the finish line, I hunched over to catch my breath. A volunteer came over to me and asked if I was okay. I replied, “I never felt better.” The last hour of work is the most important hour because that is when we finish the job.

February 25, 2024

Checking Under the Hood

*“God put Abraham to the test.”
- Genesis 22:1*

I taught a catechism class for eighth graders on Monday at 4:00 in the afternoon. There could not be a worse time to teach

teenagers. The first thing I would do on the first day of class is tell them the rules, one being: “No talking while I am talking.” So what is the first thing they do immediately after I tell them not to talk while I am talking? They turn to each other and start talking while I am talking. I know what they are doing. They are poking me. They want to know how far they can push me. They want to see if I am a spineless marshmallow or an iron wall. They want to see if there is any bite to the bark. Oh, how I love it when they “poke the Peter.” They make me happy when they want to discover what I’m made of. You can be sure that I fixed their wagon wheels. They will not be testing me again.

God tested Abraham by telling him to sacrifice his only son. Why is God so hard on us at times? Why does He leave Abraham thinking that his only son is about to die? Why does He keep him in the dark until the last second when he draws his knife? God pokes us. What is wonderful about this story is that Abraham shows us what to do when God pokes us. It happens during the conversation with his son. As Abraham was taking his son up the mountain, the son turned to his father Abraham and asked, “Where is the lamb?” Abraham does not tell Isaac, “I was hoping you would not ask that question, my son. I guess we have to talk.” He doesn’t say, “God is not always fair and just.” He tells his son, “God will provide the lamb.” What does that statement mean? Abraham is convinced that God will bring about a great ending. The story will be great when it concludes because God never loses or would allow a sad ending. Abraham may not have known the plan, but he knew God would provide a great ending.

God will poke us. Now, we know what to do when God tests us. We say, “God will provide a great ending to this story.”

February 26, 2024

Generosity Is Never A Loss

“For the measure with which you measure will return and be measured out to you.”

- Luke 6:38

Once, I was sitting on a plane waiting for take-off. I had my carry-on on my lap, a nylon bag small enough that I could hardly fit a football in it. I was deciding which book I wanted to read during the flight. At the same time, the stewardess came down the aisle for the final check, and she turned to me and demanded, “Put that carry-on under the seat now.” And she said it in a harsh tone that made a few of the folks seated before me turn around to see the troublemaker. I thought, “I am going to cut her a break.” She may have been tired from a previous flight and unruly patrons. I smiled at her and said, “Ops, sorry.” And I stowed the bag. She noticed.

This is how I know she noticed. Later, during the beverage service, the same stewardess asked me if I wanted something to drink. I replied, “tomato juice.” She took a cup and filled it with ice, opened a can of tomato juice, and poured it into the cup. She handed me the cup, and then she handed me the can. I looked around, and no one else had a can. Here is the faith lesson. You will never regret being nice, merciful, and humble. Your kindness will always return back to you

February 27, 2024

The Greatest Opportunities Are Often Hidden

“Though your sins be scarlet, they may become white as snow; Though they be crimson red, they may become white as wool.”- Isaiah:1:18

After I got accepted into a doctorate program, I met with my director, and he asked me if I could read German. I told him I could not. So he advised me, “You need to learn.” So here was my strategy. I made hundreds of German flashcards, made stacks of 50, and put a rubber band around them. When I went out, I always grabbed a bundle of 50 and put it in my pocket. So this is what happened to me. I went to get some fruit, and naturally, I went to the shortest line at the checkout. There was a lady in front of me who had coupons, and one of them didn't register. So the manager came over and told her that it had expired. Then she went to pay with a credit card, and it didn't work. So she tried a debit card, then a gift card. She finally decided to pay in cash. “I may as well use up my change,” she said. So she took everything out of her pocketbook on the counter and started to dig into the bottom of her pocketbook for the loose change. Meanwhile, I am standing behind her in the line. What was I doing? Was I upset that I got into the wrong checkout line? Nope. Did I gather all my belongings in frustration and go to another line like everyone else behind me? No again. I was standing there quite content. How was that possible? Because every thirty seconds I had to wait, I learned a new German word. That is what I call opportunity. Every moment in life, even the most disappointing ones, presents an opportunity. We just have to see it. Isaiah says that no matter where you are in life, God always provides opportunities for you to make the most of the life He gave us. We just have to see it.

February 28, 2024

Everyone Loves A Walk Off Victory

*“The people of Judah and the citizens of Jerusalem said, ‘Come, let us contrive a plot against Jeremiah.’”
- Jeremiah 18:18*

A few seasons ago, Tom Brady tossed an interception near the end of the fourth quarter. He handed the ball to the team that was already winning the game with only one minute left. At that moment, forty thousand fans left the stadium. They were all probably very disappointed and didn't want to hang around to witness the inevitable. I called my father the next day and asked if he had watched the game. He answered, “I did.” I asked him what he did when Tom Brady threw the interception at the last minute of the game. He told me that he shut the TV off and went outside to rake leaves. So forty thousand and one people missed out on one of the best and most exciting comebacks in the franchise history. Tom Brady and the boys recovered the ball and marched down the field, and in the last few seconds of the game, dramatically threw the winning touchdown. Why did forty thousand and one fans miss out? Because they didn't let Tom Brady finish the game. Life can be filled with disappointments, losses, discouragement, and bad news. Yet, in the middle of the mess that we call life, there is a happy ending waiting for those who remain faithful to God. Jeremiah, the great prophet, personally experienced this. If you are with God, never give up hope because God always enjoys victories against all the odds.

February 29, 2024

What Do You Do With The Crumbs From Your Table?

“There was rich man who dressed in purple garments and fine linen and dined sumptuously each day. And lying at his door was a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who would gladly have eaten his fill of the scraps that fell from the rich man’s table.”

- Luke 16:19-21

One late afternoon in October, I decided to fish in Boston Harbor. I was standing and watching the water, and there was a feeding frenzy before my eyes. I immediately called my friend, Jack, who lives just up the street. I knew he would appreciate having such a phone call. Within a few moments, we were fishing side-by-side, each fighting a fish. I had a nice fish on, and I got too excited and snapped him off. Naturally, I lost my fly, so I reached into my vest to get my fly box. I soon realized that I left all my flies at home. I stood there blankly, looking out over the blue yonder. My friend asked, “What’s the matter?” I replied, “I just lost my last good fly.” Jack came over to me and pulled out his fly box. When he opened the box, a fly fell out onto the ground because the box was jammed with flies. I picked it off the ground, and he said, “Just keep it.” I looked at the fly, and you could tell it was used. The feathers were all mangled, dry seaweed stuck on it, and it looked like it had seen better days. It didn’t matter. I tied it on my leader with extra care so that I would not lose this one. Needless to say, I caught a lot of fish.

Now, if you were to ask my fly-tying friend, “What did you do today that would be considered great?” He would never say that he gave me one of his beaten-up flies that fell out of his box. He

would tell you that he wrote another chapter in his book, that he tied flies for a special gift box, or that he paid the rent. But if you rephrased the question, “What did you do with the ‘crumbs’ that fell from your table?” he would probably say, “I gave my friend one of my crummy used flies, and he had one of the best fishing days of his life.” It doesn’t take much to make a difference for someone. So at the end of the day, ask yourself what you did with the crumbs that fell from your table.

March 1, 2024

It Is The Ones We Love Who Can Hurt Us The Most

“So when Joseph came up to them, they stripped him of the long tunic he had on; they they took him and threw him into the cistern.”

- Genesis 37:23-24

I looked through my mother’s album when she was growing up, and there was a picture of her standing beside a boy. I asked my mother who he was. She answered, “That is my brother.” I didn’t know I had an uncle. I had never met him, I had no idea what he looked like or where he lived, and we never received a Christmas card from him.

After my uncle had graduated from high school, he had gotten into a big argument with my grandfather. Afterward, my uncle severed his relationship with his family. You would think that after fifty years of silence, he would reach out and say, “Well, I am a lot older now. I am better at life than when I was a teen. I should send him a card, call him, or take him to lunch. He is, after all, my dad.” I talked to my mother about this: “I want to meet my uncle. Maybe he will want to give me a Christmas present.” She said, “Oh no, Peter, you do not understand. I will

never hear from my brother again.” It was at that moment that I realized that sometimes the hurt is so deep that the relationship cannot be fixed.

That is not true with God. It is easy to reconcile because God is humble, merciful, slow to anger, rich in kindness, and compassionate. Because God has all those attributes, it is easy to overcome any hurt or separation that may exist because of our offenses and sins. Think about that. If only we could have some of that divine goodness in us. Then, it would no longer be hard, but very easy for us to reconcile.

March 2, 2024

Everyone Has Potential for Greatness,
We Just Have To See It

“My son, you are here with me always...But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again.”

- Luke 15:31-32

Not long ago, my father went to the trout club, and one of the members went over to him and said, “I brought my grandson to fish, but he hasn’t caught anything all day. Can you help him out?” So Dad went to the pond and looked at the grandson’s fly-rod. He replaced the leader, put on one of Dad’s “special” flies, and gave the kid some instructions. Dad and the grandfather watched the boy from the picture window inside the clubhouse as he made three casts and caught three nice rainbow trout. Needless to say, the kid thought my father was the greatest fisherman he ever met. A few days later, the grandfather bumped into me and told me the story. He said to me, “You know your father is a remarkable person.” I replied, “I know that.” He then continued, “You are very lucky to have him as a father.” And

I replied, "I know that...that is why we are best friends." The two sons in the parable of the Prodigal son do not know how lucky they are to have their father. They are blind to the Dad's greatness. That cannot be with us in our relationship with God.

March 3, 2024

Know When To Hold 'Em And
When to Fold 'Em

"Many of the Samaritans of that town began to believe in him because of the word of the woman who testified."- John 4:39

Do you ever play poker? What is the first thing you think when you look at the cards that were dealt to you? You ask, "Why do I always get lousy cards?" I was at a convention, and one night, we got together for a poker tournament. We got in groups of five. Someone dealt, and I got a 2, 4, 7, 9 and a jack. That was the worst hand you could possibly get. But do you know how I made it to the championship round? I learned this. The beautiful thing about poker is that you can get an awful hand and still win. It is not about the cards you are dealt. It is how you play the cards: you can hold 'em or fold 'em.

If anyone could say they had been dealt a lousy set of cards, it would have been the Samaritan woman. First, she is a Samaritan woman. You can't get lower on the social ladder. Second, she has five husbands, and the one she is with now is not her husband. Third, she cannot even go to the water hole with the rest of the women in the morning because of the gossip. Yet, she is responsible for the conversion of an entire village, and we still talk about her today. I would consider my entire life a success if I could bring one person to Christ. This woman converted a village, even with a lousy hand.

March 4, 2024

The Best Things In Life Take Lots Of Time

*“Now I know that there is no God in all the earth,
except in Israel.”*

-2 Kings 5:15

I was with one of my confreres while he was unpacking his belongings. He pulled out a bottle of liquor and said, “One of my friends in the parish gave me this as a going away gift; this is very good stuff.” I answered, “That doesn’t tell me anything.” So I asked him, “If I were to order a shot of this same stuff at a restaurant, how much would it cost?” He replied, “Easily twenty-five or thirty dollars.” I asked again, “How could such a little bit be worth so much.” He told me, “It is aged; it sat in a tank for a long time.” I replied, “So basically, you are saying that you are paying storage fees.” He answered, “Something like that.” I mention this dialogue because we may ask how valuable we are to God. In other words, are we really good at being a Christian? What is our worth? One way we can know how valuable we are to God is to see how long we can wait for the Lord. One example of this is Naaman, the leper who had to wash himself seven times in a river that was far away from his homeland. He had to cross over many rivers to get there. This did not make any sense to him, but he did it. And he was glad he did. Greatness is patience with God. It is in the waiting

March 5, 2024

Paul And His Letter of Tears

“Peter approached Jesus and asked him, ‘Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him?’”

- Matthew 18:21

After Paul had founded the church at Corinth, he moved to Ephesus for three years. Then he decided to return to Corinth. When he arrived, there were visitors from out of town who were turning the folks against Paul. They humiliated and ridiculed him, so Paul had to cut his visit short. He returned to Ephesus. There, he wrote a letter to the Corinthians that he called “The Letter of Tears” because he was devastated that the church he founded had rejected and disregarded him. He gave the letter to Titus to deliver. The painful experience paralyzed him from advancing his missionary ventures. He could not wait for Titus to return, so he met him halfway. When they finally convened, Paul found out that the Corinthians were very sorry they had hurt Paul, and they wished to have his forgiveness. Typically, when you are hurt, it is very difficult to forgive. But not for Paul. Immediately, he was overjoyed to do it. Paul knew forgiving like this was not normal, but it was easy for him because he had something he never had before—God’s spirit. Because of Christ, Paul possessed the God-like qualities such as humility, compassion, slowness to anger, and abundance in kindness. Paul’s message to us is we have all these qualities because of Christ’s Spirit. We just need to use it.

March 6, 2024

You Only Need One Reason To Listen To Christ

“Therefore, I teach you the statutes and decrees... for thus will you give evidence of your wisdom and intelligence to the nations, who will hear of all these statutes and say, ‘This great nation is truly a wise and intelligent people.’”

- Deuteronomy 4:1,6

When the crowd walked away because Jesus’s words were hard, Jesus turned to the twelve and asked them if they would leave as well. Peter told Jesus, “Where else are we going to go. You have the words of everlasting life.” But why did Peter reply in this way?

Peter was probably thinking, “Lord, remember when you told us to feed the crowd? We only had five loaves of bread and a few fish. I did the math and concluded that there was not enough food for everyone. Yet, you were right. Then there was the time when we went to Jairus’ home. We went to her daughter’s room, and you told the dead girl to get up. Everyone laughed at you. She was white as a sheet. She was dead, and she was not going to get up. But you were right again. Then the time you came on board and told me to head for the deep for a catch. It was my professional opinion as a commercial fisherman that we would come up empty. I was at it all night, and if you can’t catch fish at night when it is more opportune, then you are not going to do much in the day. I lowered the nets, and we nearly sank two boats with the fish. Once again, you were right—as you always are. You are always right. That is why you have the words of everlasting life.”

We may have a thousand excuses not to listen to the Lord. But we should never forget that there is one reason why we should listen. He is always right. And you will never go wrong if you listen to Him.

March 7, 2024

Even Devils Can Recognize God And Ask For Requests

“Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute, and when the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke and the crowds were amazed.”

- Luke 11:14

Remember when Legion possessed a man? What interests me about the scene is when the devils recognize Jesus. They do not run away from God as if they are in big trouble, nor do they fear being in the presence of pure goodness. They approach Jesus with great respect, recognize His power and greatness, answer His questions, and ask Him for a favor. I do the same thing. When I walk by a church, I do not run away or try to avoid it. I enter, recognize God's presence, acknowledge His greatness, and ask Him for favors. What is so special about that? Even devils do that.

The problem with the devils is that they have no remorse or regret for destroying lives. The man they possessed was separated from his family and friends, and they isolated him in a cemetery. Spirits can travel with the wind, they can walk through closed doors, and have access to great knowledge. Yet these spirits do nothing with their extraordinary skills and gifts to help people.

Remember Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector? They treated him

as if he was the devil, but when the tax collector encountered Jesus, he was the opposite of Legion. He tells the Lord that if he had hurt anyone and had taken too much money, he would give back four times the amount. He promised that half his wealth would go to the poor. And Jesus exclaimed, “Salvation has come to this house.” What is so special about asking God for favors? Even devils do that. What makes us special is our gratitude, generosity, compassion, and our asking for mercy.

March 8, 2024

If Happiness Is Fulfillment, Love Is Filling the Void

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” - Mark 12:33

Happiness means fulfillment. So when we are fulfilled, we will be happy. If true, then we have a problem. Take, for example, your wallet. Suppose I was going to give you a crisp one-hundred-dollar bill. I bet you would not say:

“I can’t take it.”

“Why not?”

“Because it will not fit in my wallet; it is full.”

“Well put it in your bank account,”

“I can’t because my bank account is full.”

We all know well that a teenager’s stomach is a container that cannot be filled. Or take my brain, for example; it is smaller than a football, but it is another container that cannot be filled. Your bank account will also never be full.

So why did God give us containers that can never be filled? Is it to frustrate us so we will never be happy? No, He gave us

containers so that other people could fill them. That is how we show our love for one another. We fill the void of need. Remember when Jesus told us to love our enemy? It is actually easy, and I'll tell you how I do it. I learned how to cook pies really well. It took some practice, but I now have flaky pie crust. I gave a pie to someone I can best describe as "not very helpful." A day later, the person described the pie as "no greater love than this." All I did was fill the void of need. Now that person is very helpful.

So here is my question: How do we love God? God has no containers that need to be filled. True, but we do. We have a heart, soul, and mind that only God can fill, and we let Him fill them.

Zephaniah, the prophet, wrote three sets of poems. The last poem is the best because he reports that God will save all of his people, lift them up from their hardships, and He will raise the nation to glory. After God does this, Zephaniah reports that God will sing. This is the only time in the Bible that we are told that God sings.

When I first read this, I thought about it. I wondered if God would be a tenor or a baritone. Perhaps He is a chorus. After all, He is God. I am sure His singing is as beautiful as His sunsets, as majestic as his mountain ranges, as deep and profound as the stars in the night sky, and as powerful as one of his hurricanes. God sings because he is happy when he saves. That is how we love God, with our containers that can never be filled, with our heart, soul, and mind. We love God when we trust Him. We just have to let Him in.

March 9, 2024

Pears Versus Apples

“Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

- Luke 18:14

In the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, the Pharisee appears a bit arrogant. Still, he is somewhat generous because he tithes and gives to those in need. It is the guy in the back of the temple, the tax collector, who will rob my grandmother of her social security check. Just this once, I'm in favor of the Pharisee.

However, Jesus amazingly chooses the tax collector. Why? Let me offer an analogy. I am an apple guy. That is because I like apple pie. I have nothing against pears, but you can't make an apple pie with pears. So, let's say that my good words represent apples. So I go to the seminary to be a priest, and that is an apple. Then, I go to school and work hard to get good grades. That is another apple. Then I was ordained a priest—another apple. I presided in a wedding that was enjoyed by everyone, another nice apple. I helped out at one of the parishes the other day—that is an apple. So, at the end of my life, I go to God with a truckload of apples from my good works. God says to me, “There is only one problem. I am a pear guy.” “What is a pear,” I ask? He replies, “A pear is humility and turning to God when you are in need.”

In the parable, the Pharisee brings to the Lord a lot of apples, but God is looking for pears. It is not about running around and doing a bunch of good works. Good doing comes from good listening. Listen to what God wants from us; that is, a kind heart toward others, and you will bring before the Lord lots of pears.

March 10, 2024

Character Is Determined By What We Do In Hard Times

*“Live as children of light, for light produces every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth.”
- Ephesians 5:9*

I do not know much about politics. I am not good at sports. I am not a scientist. I can't even turn on the TV in our house because there are five remotes with dozens of buttons on each of them. The last time I made an attempt to turn the TV on with a remote, someone asked me, “What are you doing? That is for the AC.” However, after years of study, I do know something about the first century I know that if God did not decide, “I will team up with this loser, Peter,” we would not be here today, and the Christ story would have faded out like an outdated Agatha Christie novel.

After the Patriots won the Super Bowl, Coach Bill Belichick appeared as a guest on David Letterman's Late Night Show. Letterman asked Bill, “When did you know during the regular season that your team was going to the Super Bowl?” Belichick answered “During the fourth quarter of the Kansas City game. We knew we were going to lose, but the players never gave up. They played like they were going to win. That is when I knew.”

We cannot win every time. This means then, at times, we will lose. Losing is really the most important time of our lives because how we deal with our loss is what counts. Remember this, the darkest hour can be the beginning of our finest moment. God didn't give up on Peter; He won't give up on us.

March 11, 2024

God Watches Over Us

“I will rejoice in Jerusalem and exult in my people. No longer shall the sound of weeping be heard there, or the sound of crying.”

-Isaiah 65:19

My parents had the most unfriendly cat I had ever met in my entire life. All I had to do was say, “Here kitty, kitty,” and she would bolt. I think I know how she got her disposition. My mother used to pick the cat up and give her a big hug: “Oh, you are so cuuuuute.” You could look in the cat’s eyes and see the hate. So one day I went into the house, and the cat was laying on its back on my brother’s lap, purring, mushy, and loving. Stunned, I asked my brother, “How did you get the cat to do that?” My brother, who suffers from bouts of depression replied, “The cat always seems to know when I am having a bad day, and she will not leave me.” I thought to myself, “If a cat with a personality disorder can feel for a human being and come to help, imagine how much God wants to come and help someone in need.”

When the cat died, naturally, my brother was devastated. I called Dad and asked him, “What are you going to do?” He answered, “I am going to get him another cat.” A few weeks later, my brother called me. I was in the office, and Carol, our office manager, told me “Your brother is on the line.” I asked him, “How is your new cat.” He said, “I don’t have to feel sad for the cat to like me, because this one likes me all the time.” I was so happy and relieved that I turned to Carol to share the good news. She answered me, “You see, God watches over us.”

March 12, 2024

What The Sabbath Really Means

“Now that day was a Sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who was cured, ‘It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to carry your mat.’” - John 5:9-10

Once, Jesus was in the synagogue on the Sabbath. He saw a woman who had been crippled for eighteen years. That means eighteen years without holding a baby in her arms, eighteen years of being unable to hold a job, eighteen years without contributing to society, and eighteen years without a comfortable night's sleep. She came to the temple, and the synagogue leader told her to return tomorrow to be cured.

Before we appreciate how Jesus replied, let me illustrate with an example from another scenario. Let's say the same synagogue leader was walking into the sanctuary on the Sabbath and slipped going up the stairs. He lands on his arm and breaks it. “Oh, my arm hurts,” he cries. Then Jesus starts to walk toward him. Do you think the synagogue leader is going to tell Jesus to come back tomorrow when it is not the Sabbath? I don't think so. The synagogue leader is going to say, “It's okay everyone. Jesus can cure me even though it is the Sabbath because there is a loophole in the law that states that God can cure important people on the Sabbath so they can continue His work.”

When Jesus sees this woman who is not regarded as very important, He calls her “a daughter of Abraham.” WOW, that is a higher rank than a queen. It is undoubtedly higher than a synagogue leader. You can't go higher than a daughter of Abraham. That is the answer to the question of whether Jesus

can cure on the Sabbath. That is why we want to pray on the Sabbath; God saves his important people on that day.

March 13, 2024

It Is What We Do Before We Do Something Great

“For the Father loves the Son and shows him everything that he himself does, and he will show him greater works than these, so that you may be amazed.”

-John 5:20

There was a surgeon who went into a patient's room to talk to him about his heart operation. After explaining the procedure, the doctor asked the patient if he had any questions. The patient replied, “I have one question. What are you doing tonight?” The doctor was perplexed but answered honestly. He stated, “After I talk to you and you sign the release form, I am going home. I will have dinner with my wife. I will enjoy some light reading, and then I am going to bed. Why do you ask?” The patient continued, “Because if you had said, ‘I am partying with the boys,’ or ‘I have the night shift in the OR,’ I would not have agreed to sign the release. But now that I know that you are going to be preparing your mind and your body for my surgery I will sign the form.” It is not about doing something great. It is what you do before you do something great. That is why Jesus does great things. He sees the Father first in prayer. He does everything the Father does. That is why we need to watch Christ in the Gospels. It is not about us doing great things but what we do before we do great things. We reflect Christ in our actions by first watching Him.

March 14, 2024

Never Give Up Despite the Obstacles

“But I have testimony greater than John. The works that the Father gave me to accomplish, these works that I perform testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me.”

- John 5:36

One morning, after fishing the morning tide, I waited in the parking lot for my friend to pick me up. A man, walking his dog, came up to me and asked if I had caught any fish. I truthfully told him, “No.” He said, “Morris Island is loaded with fish, but the parking lot is hard to find.” When my friend returned with lunch, we took off for the new fishing location. When we approached the area, there were road signs that read, “Keep Out,” “No Parking,” “Violators Will Be Prosecuted,” “We Hate Tourists; Leave Your Wallet and Go Away.” There were no signs that said “Welcome Visitors.” My friend suggested that we turn around. I insisted, “I am not giving up.” Finally, we turned a corner, and there it was. We pulled into the lot and discovered a bunch of fishermen looking really happy. They told me that the tide had changed, that the fish had taken off, and that I was too late. But I was still determined not to give up. We walked about a mile and a half down the beach to the end point, and guess what? It wasn’t over. The fish came back on the next tide.

Let me recap what happened. I received a valuable piece of information, and I left on a quest. During the entire journey, I had bad directions and lousy advice. I got no encouragement, and I had many reasons to give up. The only thing I had was a piece of valuable information to keep me motivated. That was all I needed. When you have valuable information, you may

encounter bad directions and discouraging advice. So, no matter what obstacles you may run into, never give up, ever.

March 15, 2024

We Are Surrounded By Unsung Heroes

“These were their thoughts, but they erred; for their wickedness blinded them, and they know not the hidden counsels of God; neither did they count on a recompense of holiness.”

- Wisdom 2:21

One day I had to cook for the community. I went to the grocery store with my list of items. There I was with hundreds of other tired and hungry people trying to get their food. Right away, I ran into a lady blocking the aisle with her cart. She was oblivious that I was there as she was reading price labels on the shelf. So I had to wait. Negative. I finally got to the checkout, and there were long lines. Negative. The person in front of me had lots of expired coupons, and the cashier carefully explained each one of them to the customer. Negative. I arrived at my car and I went to pull out when an elderly man walked in front of the car, sauntering. Another negative.

I finally got out of the parking lot only to jump into rush hour traffic—more negatives. I could live my life absorbed in all those negatives. But what if the lady who blocked the aisle with her cart was the nice person who helped me with my credit card problem when someone tried to buy Amazon.com with my card? Or what if the cashier was there since six in the morning but decided to stay longer to help the rush hour folks get home a little faster? What if the man who walked in front of my car was the doctor who saved my father's life when he had cancer

twenty years ago? What if my life is blessed because unsung heroes surround me? If positives have negatives, then negatives have positives. The negatives are more obvious, more visible, to us. That is why we need the wisdom of God and to know His hidden counsels.

March 16, 2024

Working With A Successful Boss Is Profitable

*“Others said, ‘This is the Christ.’ But others said, ‘The Christ will not come from Galilee, will he?’”
- John 7:41*

One time, I was watching the end of a golf tournament with Dad. Phil Michelson was examining his ball on the eighteenth hole. He was walking back and forth, studying the undulating green between his ball and the hole. He was taking his time because if the ball rolled into the hole, then he would win the tournament. If he missed, then he would go into sudden death with another player.

So what happened? He tapped the ball, and it dropped in. Loud cheers were heard, and Phil raised his hands over his head in triumph. Needless to say, he was thrilled. At that point, I turned to my father and asked him, “Dad, I can understand why Phil is happy but why is his caddie so happy?” “Because,” he replied, “when the ball went into the hole and he won, the caddie’s pay was just doubled.” That happens when you caddie for the best golfer in the world. The boss can double all your efforts. The reason why we are so happy that Christ is our King is because, like the caddie who works for the best golfer, we get to benefit from the graces of the Lord.

March 17, 2024

Do We Have Something Everyone Wants?

“Some Greeks who had come to worship at the Pass-over Feast came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and ask him, ‘Sir, we would like to see Jesus.’”
- John 12:20-21

Witnessing can benefit people. In John’s Gospel this week, the Greeks want to see Jesus. How do we show Christ to the world? Do we give them a book, offer a lecture series, or give them a to-do list? Remember, the best advertising is a happy customer. The best way we can witness God to others is how we live our lives. Be happy customers. We are hope-filled, generous, kind, and slow to anger.

There is a fable about a guy who walked up to a stranger in town holding a huge diamond that covered the palm of his hand. The guy asked the stranger how he came into possession of it. The stranger responded that he had found it while traveling. The stranger continued, “If you like it so much, you can have it.” So the man took the diamond, wrapped in a silk cloth, and placed it in the safe. He did not sleep all night. He got up the following day, took the diamond, and found the stranger. The stranger returned the diamond and declared, “I know that you have something more valuable than this diamond, otherwise you would not have given it up so easily. I want the thing you have that made it easy for you to give me this diamond.”

Well, we have that precious thing, and we need to let others see it. Witnessing can be very helpful to others.

March 18, 2024

Everyone Likes A New Start With God

“Has no one condemned you?’ She replied, ‘No one, sir.’ Then Jesus said, ‘Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin any more.’”

- John 8:10-11

Remember a few years ago when the Red Sox were in last place? Sportswriters criticized the players for their lack of energy and effort. Fans were furious because they had to pay the highest price for Major League Baseball tickets, only to see the team fold and lose every game. Five months later, thousands of happy fans walk by my church proudly wearing their Red Sox hats and Fenway Park sweatshirts. They all looked excited about going to the game. I thought to myself, “Don’t these people remember that the team last season was in last place in the division and that they suffered the greatest collapse in baseball history—Why are they happy?” Answer: Because it was opening day. It was a new start. Last year’s record had been wiped out.

In the Gospel of John, there is the story of the woman caught in adultery. There are two sins in that story—adultery as well as an evil plot to trap Christ, giving the people a “reason” to put Him to death. Jesus, with His mercy and kindness, lets them all go. So here is my question. What is the difference between the men who were plotting the death of the Son of God and the woman caught in adultery? The men leave very unhappy because their trap is foiled. They leave and will continue to find a way to plot against Christ and put Him to death. They experience no change, and their horrible past stays with them. The woman, however, goes away very happy because she gets a new start in

life, a new beginning. Her past sins are wiped away forever.

Everyone is happy on opening day. We who follow Christ are in a perpetual state of absolute happiness because we live in a kingdom where every day is a new start. We all have bad days, regrets, past records, embarrassing moments. With Christ, old stats are removed. The past is erased, making way for a new start.

March 19, 2024

Problems Are Temporary, Joy Is Lasting

“She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins”

- Matthew 1:21

Just before my ordination, I met with the pastor of St. Catherine of Siena in Norwood, where I would celebrate my first Mass. He gave me valuable advice. He said, “When I was first made pastor I wanted to make a difference. I saw that the pews looked a bit tired and needed to be freshened up with a coat of varnish. To save the parish money, I bought a few gallons of spar varnish, I called on some volunteers and together we got the job done. Now, every professional knows that you can’t varnish over old shellac because it will not stick properly. About a month later, everyone left the church with varnish chips all over their clothes. It was a disaster,” he reported. “We had to hire professionals to sand the pews and re-varnish them. That same week, the sound system in the hall failed. That was not so bad, but it happened in the middle of bingo. Naturally, that was my fault. The next week the boiler stopped working on the coldest day of the year and it was Sunday morning. My whole life evolved around solving difficulties. My days were spent worrying about, listening to,

and trying to resolve problems. The Church was no longer a source of joy. It was a source of struggles. I had forgotten what the Church represented: the presence of God.” The Church will always be a source of joy if I remember the presence of God. It is not about the problems; it is about who you are with.

The angel Gabriel told Mary that she would give birth to the Savior of the world. That is the greatest news the world ever received. Immediately after the angel left, there were problems. First, she was pregnant out of wedlock. There was talk of divorce. They went to Bethlehem to have the baby, and there was no place for them. After the birth, a powerful king wanted to have her child killed, so they had to flee to Egypt for an undetermined period of time. Yet, all that time, Mary and Joseph were living there with God. Their story shows the world that it is not about the problems; it is about who you are with.

March 20, 2024

Decisions Are Made In The Waiting Room

“Nebuchadnezzar exclaimed, ‘Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who sent his angel to deliver the servants who trusted in him.’”

- Daniel 28

Do you remember the three young men in Daniel? They were standing before the great Babylonian King, Nebuchadnezzar, and he said, “If you do not worship me or my statues I will have you thrown into the red hot furnace.” The three young men said, “We are not going to worship any other god but our God.” The king was so livid that he ordered the oven to be heated seven times more. Think about that for a moment. It takes time to heat an oven seven times. If the furnace were a thousand

degrees, it would have taken some time to heat it to seven thousand degrees. So there they are, the three young men in the waiting room. I wonder what they would be thinking about while they were waiting. I know what I would be thinking. “Do I really want to die a horrible death today?”. Perhaps they would be thinking about that new dream home they will never have, or a career cut short. Maybe they were thinking about what will happen to their mom and dad when they get the terrible news of their death. These thoughts could make them doubt because in the waiting room, they could still back out. It is in the waiting room where most people fold and cave into the pressure.

But not our three young men. They are thinking about the greatness of God. Their thoughts are on little David standing in front of the giant Goliath. David is about to show the whole world how great God is. Their thoughts are on Joseph, who was sold into slavery by his jealous brothers and thrown in jail; it was there that he had a dream that saved the nations. He, too, showed the world how great God is. The three young men thought, ‘Now it is our turn.’ After the three young men were thrown into the now white-hot furnace, the door was shut. The bad guys, the king, and his minions, gathered around the window to see the three bodies incinerate before their eyes. They want to witness evil and its moment of victory. They look inside the oven and see the three walking around and praising God. They see God at His finest moment. God did not just save the men on the inside of the furnace. He also saved the bad guys on the outside. The king and his men said, ‘Blessed be the God of the three young men.’ It is in the darkest moments that God shines the greatest.

March 21, 2024

If Your Name Was a Verb, What Would It Be?

“You are not yet fifty years old and you have seen Abraham?” Jesus said to them, ‘Amen, amen, I say to you, before Abraham came to be, I AM.’”

- John 8:58

When God appeared to Moses, Moses wanted to know God’s name. God answered, “I am.” The name is fascinating because it is a verb. No one has a verb for a name. If my name were a verb, I would like it to be “eat pizza.” Of course, that is not very original because everyone eats pizza. I should pick a verb that makes me different from others. So my name could be “reads ancient dead languages.” That is something that makes me different as well as a bit strange.

Let’s go back to God. You would think God would have picked a verb that would have made Himself different from everyone else, but He didn’t. He picked a verb that anyone could have. Anyone can say, “I am.” And that is the point. God did not pick a name to show how He is different. He picked a name to show us that He is like us. God can say, “I know what it is like to be born, to have a mother, to bleed, and to suffer. I know what it is to be a servant, a shepherd, a king, a carpenter.” God is like us, and He wants us to know that.

March 22, 2024

Lost In The Woods Without A Compass

“Sing to the LORD, praise the LORD, For he has rescued the life of the poor from the power of the wicked!”- Jeremiah 20:13

Years ago, my father went on a hunting trip with his buddies. One of the younger and inexperienced hunters got lost and panicked in the deep woods of Maine. It is scary to be lost in the woods at night. My father could barely hear the lost man's frightful, high-pitched voice over the static of the walky-talky. Once my father got him to calm down, he told him that he would fire a shot and he should walk ten paces toward the direction of the sound and stop. After taking the steps, my father instructed him to get back on the walky-talky. If he were out of range, then he would be able to retrace his steps and start again. When the lost man called my father back, he told him that he would fire his rifle again. Once again, he took another ten paces toward the sound. Eventually, he brought the young man into camp. When my father came home, he told us the story. I remembered how impressed I was with the way Dad helped the man.

We get lost sometimes in life. It happens. And when it does, we know what to do. We stop and listen to the sound. We listen to the sound of the Lord's voice. He may say, “Just pray the Our Father. I will pray it and walk my ten steps. Then I stop and listen again for the sound of his voice. I may hear Him say. “Do unto others as you would have them do to you.” That is what I will do this day, and I will take my ten steps. Then, I will stop and listen to His voice again. This time, I may hear His advice

to give a cup of cold water to a little one. I will do that. I will be generous to someone who cannot repay me and take my ten steps. I stop and listen again. This time, it may be turning the other cheek. So today, when I am ignored or insulted, which can happen a thousand times a day, I will not retaliate. I stop, listen, and take my steps.

March 23, 2024

There Are Some Things Only God Can Do

“Jesus answered them, ‘I have shown you many good works from my Father. For which of these are you trying to stone me?’”- John 10:31-42.

Walking on water, raising dead people, expelling demons, multiplying bread and fish, and providing water in a desert are all actions of God. But there are other things as well, such as creating everything that we see. Every sunset, every bird that flies, and all the trees in the forest were not made with human hands. We are surrounded all day with things that only God can do. My first iPhone lasted for less than two months. I got water on it while fishing. Yet, a rock outside my window was there before the last ice age. Speaking of rocks, the psalm today at Mass calls God “My Rock.” This implies that God saves. A rock saves by providing shade in a desert or a shield against the enemies’ arrows. We see God’s works every day, yet the effects of familiarity often dull the fresh, inspired eyes. But for those who see, they are in a constant state of absolute amazement. What set of eyes do you have?

Palm Sunday

He Saved Me As Well

“But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead.”

- Mark 15:11

Pilate is having a conversation with the crowd. Pilate asked the crowd, “Whom shall I release to you?”

The crowd shouted, “Barabbas, Barabbas.”

Pilate asked, “What should I do with Jesus your Christ?”

And the crowd shouted back, “Crucify him, Crucify him.”

Then Pilate inquired, “But what evil has he done?”

They shouted all the louder, “Crucify him.”

About 1000 yards away, at the fortress of Antonia, Barabbas was in a jail cell. From the distance, he heard the crowd call out his name, “Barabbas.”

Then, he heard them cry out, “Crucify him, crucify him. Moments later, he heard the soldiers approaching his cell in lock-step, the fumbling of the keys, the cell door opening, and the shackles released from his limbs. He is helped to his feet.

At that moment, he braced himself for the unimaginable torture. Instead, the Roman soldiers said to him, “Barabbas, you are free to go.” He would not have believed what he just heard.

So he asked, “How is that possible?”

The soldier would have responded, “Someone else will bear your cross.”

“Who?”

“Jesus, your King.”

Notice that the day Jesus died on the Cross is a happy ending... for the bad guys. Barabbas was released from prison, a thief was promised paradise, the centurion saw God, and all those responsible for the death of Jesus were forgiven. It is a happy ending for bad guys. That is what redemption means. That is what reconciliation means: a happy ending for the bad guys.

Monday of Holy Week

Suffering Servant: Spirit

“Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased, Upon whom I have put my Spirit.”

- Isaiah 42:1

For the next three days, we will look at three characteristics of the Suffering Servant from the Book of Isaiah. What is the first thing that comes to mind when you know you will suffer? Fear, anxiety, dread, hopelessness, discouragement, disappointment, or punishment. The first thing that comes to mind for the Suffering Servant is opportunity. When we go to work, there are typically three types of people. The first group is bosses. They know everything, micromanage, and like to take all of the credit.

Then you have the whiners who complain and have a reason not to like the other co-workers. Finally, you have happy people. They are happy because they love their job and the people who work with them. They are slow to anger, patient, kind, generous, and appreciative of you. So here is my question: which of the three do you prefer for the job?

Christ offers the world happy people: ourselves. We are patient, kind, slow to anger, and rich in kindness. The reason why we are happy is because we have been given God's Spirit.

Here is my question: how do people know that we are happy? How will they know we are merciful, slow to anger, generous, and kind? Suffering allows us to show the world God's Spirit. Suffering gives us a reason to be patient, a reason to be slow in anger, and a reason to be generous—a reason to be kind. Suffering can transform the world because the world can see God's spirit in us.

Tuesday of Holy Week

Suffering Servant: Ears

“Though I thought I had toiled in vain, and for nothing, uselessly, spent my strength, Yet my reward is with the LORD, my recompense is with my God.”

-Isaiah 49:4

Fr. Greg Staab, OMV had a very rare terminal illness. At one stage of his illness, his body was so weak that it was hard for him to do his work, such as Mass, confessions, and holy hours. So I brought him to the doctor. We were hoping for a more potent medicine, or maybe we would learn of a vitamin supplement. Perhaps a kale diet. Anything that would give his body a bit more strength to do his work. The doctor told him that his

body was now beyond the help of medication and vitamin supplements. We needed to focus on a new goal. We needed to look for ways to keep him comfortable. We needed to be connected to hospice, a hospital bed, professional services, and care needs.

During his decline, he was no longer able to hold his Divine Office or see the pages. The only way he could pray was if one of us said the prayers out loud, and he could hear. This is the highest form of prayer.

Let me explain. I was having a difficult day. A publisher rejected my book offer, and a homeless guy was giving me problems in the church. I was working hard and getting nothing done. It was time for midday prayer in the office. And the psalm I was reading said to rejoice in the Lord. I didn't say the words. I heard the words. I heard God telling me, "Peter, rejoice. I said I can do that." I did. Let me tell you how I did it. I left my troubled-filled world, and I looked out the window and saw a bird fly by. That does not seem to be a big deal. But think about it. The most brilliant scientist could not take a heart, put some veins together, attach feathers and a pair of wings, and have it fly like this bird. No one could do what God can do. God makes you rejoice. When you notice God, you rejoice.

Wednesday of Holy Week

Suffering Servant: Well-Trained Tongue

*"The Lord GOD has given me a well trained tongue,
That I might know how to speak to the weary a word
that will rouse them."- Isaiah 50:4*

The tongue is very small. Small things can have significant

effects such as a rudder can steer a large ship, or a match can destroy a forest. So too, a lie can destroy a marriage or a career.

What happens to your body when someone insults you, embarrasses you in front of your friends, or takes credit for your good work? The first bodily instinct is the tongue. It is very quick. Correct me if I am wrong, but typically, trash talk always generates regret—“Oh, I shouldn’t have said that.” This is called an untrained tongue. Untrained tongues hurt people. They put down, discourage, tap energy, and depress. Note a well-trained tongue. It lifts people up, encourages, and inspires.

So the question is, how do you get a well-trained tongue? You have to put the other person before yourself.

I was driving yesterday, and the road went from a two-lane to one-lane. The way the cars funnel into one lane is called a zipper. You allow the car just ahead to go in front, and then it is your turn. So I gave space for the car in front of me, and it was my turn, but the lady behind me pulled up beside me and inched a bit ahead of me. The first reaction I had was to say something that I would have regretted. Instead, I thought, “Well, maybe she is a nurse caring for patients during this very difficult pandemic. Maybe she was the nice lady who helped me with my credit card problem; maybe she brought the groceries to her mother, and then she had to go back and cook for her family. That’s okay. Go ahead of me.” Christ died because he put all of us before Himself. That is why He has a well-trained tongue.

You know the damage an untrained tongue can cause. Now, imagine the good that can come from a well-trained tongue.

Triduum: Holy Thursday

Remember the Meaning of the Passover

*“I have given you a model to follow,
so that as I have done for you, you should also do.”
- John 13:15*

In ancient times, sheep and lambs were kept inside the gate during the winter months. There was a practical reason for this. There was nothing to eat outside of the gate because it was winter. The first sign of spring was the watercress. As soon as the watercress shot out of the ground, the first thing they did was open the gates and let the lambs and sheep out because there was some food to eat. Naturally, everyone was really happy, so they threw a party (a good excuse for a party since they didn't have a Super Bowl back then.) Just try to guess what was on the menu. That's right: lamb chops and watercress.

Many years later, God wanted another party for the Israelites living in Egypt. The Israelites asked God, “What's the occasion?” God answered, “This is not about the freeing of the lambs. This time, it is about the freeing of the people from the slavery of Egypt.” Naturally, the food on the menu for this feast was, again, lamb and watercress or bitter herbs.

Many years later, Jesus gave a banquet for his disciples, and if you asked Him what was the occasion for this feast, He would have said, “This is not about the freeing of the lambs or the freeing of the people from slavery. This time, it is about the freeing of the people from death. Predictably, the food for this feast is, again, lamb—the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

One day, I visited my mother. It was a memorable visit. I was in her room watching Judge Judy with her. She turned to me and said, "Peter, I had a dream that I died." I said, "What was it like?" She said, "It was terrible." I left for home that night and never really thought about that dream. Four days later, my mother died. Looking back, I realize my mother had a premonition. I will remember forever what she said about death. Death is our enemy, and we can never forget that. We have a solid reason why we need the "hovering" protection of God. When we gather at Mass, we are not commemorating what God did for us in the past but what He is going to do for us in the future. Remember the meaning of Passover; remember the Pascha: that is, the freeing of the people from death. And so, let the celebration begin.

Triduum: Good Friday

Jesus Can Make A Happy Ending Out Of All Stories

"When Jesus had taken the wine, he said, 'It is finished.'" - John 19:30

A couple wanted to get their marriage blessed in the church. It was a chapel ceremony where family and friends had gathered. It was time for the husband and wife to exchange their vows when their youngest boy, about 1 and a half years old, started to cry uncontrollably. Donna, the wife, said to her husband, "You better hold him." Then, she also left the sanctuary to get her pocketbook. She found a lollypop and gave it to the little guy, which seemed to be the ticket to silence. Once I had the bride and groom's full attention, the lollypop suddenly fell out of the boy's mouth and landed on my shoe. Instantaneously, all three of us adults standing before the altar thought it would be a good idea to pick up the lollypop from my shoe. Simultaneously, we bent down to pick the lollypop off my shoe, and, needless to say,

we all bopped heads. The videographer thought it was so funny that he said he would enter it in America's Funniest Videos.

After the ceremony, the dad told me, "Sorry, Father, that was a disaster." I turned to him and replied, "I have blessed many couples at their weddings, but you are the only one who came before the altar of God, vowed your love to your wife, and held the proof of that love in your arms. There has not been a more profound and more beautiful wedding than yours." He stated, "Father, you are right."

We can look at the story of the Passion of Jesus and say it was a total disaster on many levels. Yet, it is the only story that I know of that has a happy ending for so many people. Look at what happened to all the bad guys on Good Friday. One was released from prison, a thief was promised paradise, the murderers were all forgiven, and a Roman centurion saw God. Redemption always means that the sinner wins because God wins us back.

Easter

Be Dedicated To What Death Can Never Take Away

"He said to them, 'Do not be amazed! You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified. He has been raised; he is not here.'"- Mark 16:6

On the mountain of success you will never reach the top because there will always be something else to grab on to. As you are climbing, you look up and notice that someone is on the top. That would be King Solomon. God gave him all wisdom and knowledge. He had everything. So you see him standing at the top, and you shout to him, asking what the view is like at the top, because you will never know.

He tells you: “Vapor of vapor, all things are vapor.” Vapor is a substance that will completely disappear before your very eyes. So here is my question. What would cause Solomon’s money, power, and knowledge to disappear before his eyes like vapor? Answer: death. Solomon wrote a book, Ecclesiastes, to tell us what it is like to die. He is not happy, and he is not ashamed to tell us. “What good is spending my whole life in toil and labor to gain all that you work for and then lose it all to death?” As I said, he is not happy.

One thousand years later, another king and another son of David died. This time, He rises. This is exciting for us because, for the first time ever, someone can tell us what it is like to die. We expect that Jesus would go on a rant like King Solomon, but he does not. When Jesus rises, He hangs out in the garden. He visits his friends to get something to eat. In the morning, He is making breakfast with a charcoal fire, telling his friends where to cast the net for a catch. He gives Peter a promotion, making him the first Pope. Jesus gives them God’s Spirit and power to forgive sin. Jesus is a man who seems to be very happy. The reason that He is happy is because He did not lose anything when he died. Nothing turned to vapor. Death was not able to take away the one crucial thing He valued—God, His Father. And that is why He is happy.

On Easter, we celebrate Christ’s Resurrection. We think, finally, someone can tell us what it is like to die. But Jesus did not come back to tell us what death is like. He came to tell us how to live, and it is this. Do not spend your whole life climbing the mountain of success because death will take it all away. Dedicate your life, work hard, and labor for the one thing which death will never take away: the love of God.

Conclusion

We have journeyed together for forty days. Paul said in one of his letters that we were buried with Christ so we can rise with Him.

I plant hundreds of tulips every year. In the fall, I put the tulip bulb in the ground, and that is basically it. The bulbs sit in the ground all winter, freezing to death, and then one day in the spring, they all sprout at the same time. They grow up side by side, and on the very same day, they all blossom into beautiful tulips. It is amazing. On the same day! How do they do that? What, do they text message each other?

This is a good way to look at Easter Season, we all rise together after being buried with Christ. What a sight that must be for God to see.

Enjoy the Easter Season.

-Fr. Peter Grover, OMV

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