

HOMILETICS

I. BIBLICAL NOTES FOR HOMILIES

FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

(February 5, 1978)

First Reading: Isaiah 58; 7-10

Second Reading: First Corinthians 2:1-5

Gospel Reading: Matthew 5:13-16

First Reading: The exiles returning from Babylonia complained that their services to the Lord, especially fasting, was not being blessed as they deserved (v.5). But the Lord counters by pointing out that they limit their fasting to mere external penances, devoid of inner spirit. Let them manifest a true spirit of penance by no longer exploiting the poor, and by coming to the aid of everyone in need. Then God's friendship and abundant blessings will be experienced fully.

Gospel Reading: Jesus employs two striking metaphors to describe the responsibilities of the Christian calling: salt and light. Of the various qualities of salt, Jesus stresses seasoning. Unless it seasons (gives taste to), it is useless. A Christian must "season" his surroundings by his Christian principles and manner of life. Otherwise as a Christian he is a failure, no matter whatever be his standing or career. His life as a Christian is of no avail to others. On every Christian it is incumbent to spread the Gospel-spirit of Christ.

A light lets you see your way to reach your goal so that you do not stumble, or lose yourself in devious paths. Lamps are lit in order that people see where they are going. The Christian has the social obligation to be a light to others, so that their example and manner of life lead men to the knowledge and praise of the goodness of God, their final goal.

Second Reading: On his second missionary journey, Paul suffered a great let-down at Athens where his philosophical approach in human "wisdom" (Acts 17: 22-31) had very little success. Coming then to Corinth he put aside all further attempts at mere human argumentation, and determined to let the salvific event of Christ's

crucifixion speak for itself. Naturally speaking, a crucified Savior would be repulsive to his hearers. But there is just where the Holy Spirit showed his mighty power through signs and wonders. Many were converted, not by Paul's human "wisdom" but by the divine power at work through him.

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT (February 12, 1978)

First Reading: Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7

Second Reading: Romans 5:12-19

Gospel Reading: Matthew 4:1-11

First Reading: Already in 1950, Pius XII in "Humani Generis" declared that the language of these chapters is pictorial and does not intend to give a scientific description of the origin of man. Instead, its message is salvific:

1. Man's formation is God's doing, not chance. He became a living being by God's special activity, imparting human life (breath) to him.
2. God planned happiness for man on earth, symbolized by the image of a pleasant garden full of good things for man. The tree of life symbolized immortality and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil a certain experiential knowledge. Note that throughout the chapter man and woman are spoken of in general not by proper names.
3. The origin of sin in mankind is definitely disobedience to God's command. The serpent symbolizes an evil power inimical to God and bent on ruining man. It resorts to denying God's word and to lies. (Later revelation identifies it with the devil: Jn. 8:44; Rev. 12:9). The forbidden fruit (nowhere is there mention of an apple!) symbolizes something very attractive to the woman, who listens rather to the word of the tempter than to the word of God, commanding. Striking is the presentation of the psychology of temptation.
4. The eating of the forbidden fruit on the part of the man and woman symbolizes the accomplishment of the sinful act of the part of both man and woman. Since the language is to be taken figuratively (pictorial), opinions differ as to what exactly the disobedience consisted in. No clear revelation has been given on this point in the sources of revelation.

Gospel Reading: The historical fact of the temptation of Jesus is briefly but clearly stated in Mark, the earliest gospel (1:11). Matthew and Luke elaborate the scene into three distinct temptations. Jesus may have narrated this to his disciples and each evangelist presented the matter in accordance with his respective plan, but more likely it is a catechetical elaboration of the Early Church, setting forth Christ as the New Israel, the Model for all the People of God in their encounter with all and every temptation of Satan. Where Israel in the desert defaulted any number of times, Christ conquers invariably.

All three temptations concern abuse of power to obtain the ends of Christ's mission: 1) to obtain basic physical needs. Jesus does not fulfill his mission in this manner but by proclaiming the word that is life (JBC). Over against Israel's murmuring for food in Ex. 16:2f, Christ counters with Deut. 8:3, not by denying the need of food, but by stressing the pre-eminence of the spiritual. 2) abuse to produce a spectacular sign to convince the crowd, by presuming on God's protection. Christ counters with Deut. 6:16 over against Israel's putting God to the test in Ex. 17:7.3. 3) Abuse to use power independent of God to establish the kingdom. Jesus counters with Deut. 6:13 over against Israel's attempt to conquer Canaan on their own, in Num. 14:44f. In all these instances, the example of Jesus shows how all temptations must be overcome. One does not argue with the tempter, one does not dilly-dally. Christ was brief, resolute and determined. And he quoted the word of God.

Second Reading: It is beyond the scope of these biblical notes to give a complete exegetical explanation of this difficult and complicated passage in Paul's letter to the Romans, the chief theme of which is man's justification through Christ. Sufficient for homiletic purposes are the following remarks: Paul draws a comparison between man before Christ and man incorporated into Christ:

1. Sin (personified as an actual evil force) came into the world of man through the **disobedience** of man at the very beginning, and its consequence is Death (which includes spiritual death, separating man from God, the source of all Life).
2. Uprightness comes to man through the **obedience** of Christ, and through him all who are incorporated into Christ share new life (the Christ-life with its pledge of life eternal).
3. Under the impulse of the evil power of Sin, **all men** have sinned personally and thus reaped the wages of sin which is death. This includes also those who lived before Moses and the Mosaic Law, with its death sanctions. Hence the influence of man's sin at the beginning is **universal**.

4. Christ's salvific work far outstripped the work of Sin. He obedient even unto death, alone won for man the gift of God's favor (grace) and new life. His one salvific work affects all men and is universal in its effects. Man's disobedience led to death for all men. Christ's obedience leads to life for all (who are incorporated into him).

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT (February 19, 1978)

First Reading: Genesis 12:1-4a
Second Reading: Second Timothy 1:8b-10
Gospel Reading: Matthew 17:1-9

First Reading: In the twelfth chapter of Genesis, God begins to unfold his plan of salvation for all mankind. It is he who takes the initiative, and the man of his choice is Abram, the nomad. The Lord manifest remarkable generosity in a series of promises of which this is the first, involving both a new country for him, a multiple progeny, and a name which would be a blessing for all the nations of the earth. Truly remarkable promises and entirely gratuitous, prior to any merit of Abram, (reflecting God's action to Abram's progeny Israel). All Abram is asked to do is to accept what God offers. This however would involve deep faith and commitment to God, for it meant a leap into the unknown, leaving behind family and surroundings, and taking along a wife who was childless. Abram rose to the occasion, but his faith would still be greatly tested.

Gospel Reading: Matthew's account of the transfiguration does not differ in essentials from that of Mark and Luke, which have been explained in Bol. Ecl. Jan. 1976, 89f, and Bol. Ecl. Jan.-Feb. 1977, 99f. In short, the passage is theological in its presentation, endeavoring to describe a mystical experience of the disciples in the language and images of the Sinai-event (Ex. 19). Jesus is the new Moses, with a new revelation for man. Emphasis in on the heavenly Father's command: Listen to him (Christ).

Second Reading: Living the Gospel-message of Christ entails suffering and trial, but it is every bit worth while, because having received the call to holiness, we have been given to share God's gift of salvation. It was planned by God from all eternity, but accomplished by Christ becoming one of us. He himself destroyed death by his death, and obtained immortal life by his resurrection. The Good News (gospel) is this gratuitous work of Christ's love for man, by no means merited by any deed of man.

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT**(February 26, 1978)****First Reading: Exodus 17:3-7****Second Reading: Romans 5:1-2.5-8****Gospel Reading: John 4:42 (or: 4:5-15.19-26.39.40-42)**

First Reading: In spite of the many favors of the Lord, Israel continued to grumble and complain, doubting his loving providence. This time it was lack of drinking-water for man and beast. Again the intervening prayer of Moses saves the day. He is told to strike the rock with the staff that was instrumental for Israel's delivery through the sea. From the rock came life-sustaining water. "Massah" refers to Israel's testing the Lord, and "Meribah" to their quarreling (Horeb does not fit into the picture and seems to be a later interpolation). In reality it is Christ, the Rock, who imparts the "Living Water" that is the Spirit to the thirsting People of God.

Gospel Reading: This superb Gospel-passage has much to offer:

Jesus reveals himself to one who is a woman, immoral, and a Samaritan (despised by his fellow-Jews). He speaks to her seven times, the sacred number of the covenant, and the seventh time is the revelation of himself as Messiah (26). The woman responds six times and the seventh word she speaks is a profession of faith, not yet complete (29). There is a progression in both cases, reaching a climax, but the final climax is the revelation of Jesus as Savior of the world (42).

The theme of "living water" is deliberately provoked by Jesus by his asking for water from the well. He pursues his idea so as to take the ordinary meaning of water up to a higher plane with a supernatural meaning. He poses as the Giver of "Living Water" which he will give if asked. Indeed it is the Gift of God. This Living Water has the ability to quench one's thirst forever, because it becomes an inner fountain within a man. (Later, in 7:38f, the Living Water is explicitly shown to be the Spirit whom Jesus will give, once he is glorified).

Jesus further explains that authentic worship of God does not consist in merely externalized actions with no inner spirit, but in true internal worship with proper dispositions. The deeper meaning intended by John the Evangelist is understood if we keep in mind that in chapter two Jesus is put forth as the Living Temple, and he himself is the Truth (14:6). Only in him and with him

can all true worship of the Father be henceforth given. In this Living Temple, all worship will be given in the Spirit of Christ, which is one of love and filial piety.

The passage is also excellent to show Christ's pedagogical methods. Though the woman was immoral and hostile to begin with, Jesus found an opening by appealing to her womanly instinct to help a man in need (drink). He was willing to overlook her rather flippant answer and aroused her interest by speaking of something she needed (water that would never run out). Soon he had her asking for it. His meaning was on a higher plane, but when she humbly asked him for it, he was satisfied, and after revealing her sad state of soul, he revealed himself by the peculiar phrase: I AM, which is equivalent to the divine name: Yahweh. Note the progression in the woman: flippancy, reverence, desire, clever covering up by substituting a religious theme, implicit faith and commitment to the coming Messiah, crowned by initial faith in Jesus, and apostolic evangelization.

Second Reading: After showing that man's justification comes solely through his acceptance of Christ (faith), Paul now proceeds to show the fruits of justification. First of all, peace, as the consequence of our reconciliation with God at the present time, brought about by Christ's salvific work. But our hope for the future is to share the very glory of God in the beatific vision. This hope gives us certainty, and that certainty rests on God's love for us which he manifested 1) by pouring it out into our hearts through the Gift of the Spirit and 2) by giving up his own Son to death for us while we were still God's sinful enemies. To God alone belongs all the credit.

I. BIBLICAL NOTES FOR MARCH

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

(March 5, 1978)

First Reading: First Samuel 16: 1b.6-7.10-13a

Second Reading: Ephesians 5: 8-14

Gospel Reading: John 9: 1-41 (or: 9: 1.6-9.13-17.34-38)

First Reading: God calls whom he freely chooses, in this instance David, the youngest of all Jesse's sons, to be king of Israel. God's choice is always his own doing, also in each individual instance, and external qualities do not influence him. The disposition of the heart is what counts.

Oil was used in the rite of consecration. High priests were anointed (Ex. 29:7) as were the kings of Israel. Through it, in a certain way, the king became a sharer in God's holiness, and his person considered inviolable. Anointing with oil symbolized God's Spirit taking possession of him. Christ, the new David, was anointed not with the mere symbol but with the Spirit himself (Acts 10:28), and likewise are all who are incorporated into him in baptism. Hence the anointing with chrism. While doing so, the priest says: "as Christ was anointed priest, prophet and king, so may you live always as members of his body, sharing everlasting life".

Gospel Reading: A splendid victory, of Light over darkness. As sheer drama, this trial scene is brilliant, rich in tragic irony. Not merely is it the beggar who is rejected, but Christ the Light. In the setting, a current view is repudiated: personal ailments are not always the consequences of personal sins. Jesus gives the purpose, not the cause of the blindness; that is in order that God can manifest his wonderful works. Jesus himself is the Light of the world; he has come to give light to man, taking away his blindness, not only physical but also spiritual.

1. **The sign:** It is worked very modestly. Jesus lets the waters of Siloam (which represent him as the One Sent) cure the man, after he had anointed him (the Greek verb means that) with spittle and earth, to arouse interior sentiments of faith.

2. **The interrogations:** There are four:

a. Neighbors and acquaintances: he tells the facts without any fear, and openly confesses that Jesus cured him.

b. Pharisees who doubt: again the facts are related exactly. A division of opinion ensues, but the beggar insists: he is a prophet.

c. Parents, called in by unbelieving Pharisees. But they throw back the responsibility to the beggar, out of fear.

d. Pharisees a second time: the climax. All intention of finding out the facts is disregarded. They seek to trap the beggar by cross questioning, then by ridicule, by vilifying Jesus, and finally by intimation. The beggar stands his ground and publicly professes Jesus to be from God. Conclusion of the trial: Ejection, no matter what the witness said. In reality they are refusing to accept Christ's divine mission.

3. **The light of faith** is given by Christ to the beggar. His faith greatly contrast with the stubborn unbelief of the Pharisees, the great ones in Israel. "Son of man" is a term often used by Jesus of himself, since it was free of all political overtones, yet designated the mysterious personage of Dan. 7:13.

4. **Judgment on spiritual blindness:** Those who refuse to accept the Light remain in spiritual blindness. It is now Christ who pronounces judgment. For many, the result of Christ's divine mission is tragedy, through their own pride and willful blindness.

In the above passage, the Early Church saw the sign of Christian baptism: the Light of Christ (faith) given through anointing and water for one who had been totally blind. The beggar on trial suggests to the Christian his own situation in the world, enlightened in baptism and called upon to confess Jesus before men.

Second Reading: The Christian's life is one of light in Christ. He is to put aside all former evil habits (the darkness of unregenerated man). The fruits of light are beneficial to all. Evil deeds will stand condemned in face of this light. A section of an ancient Christian hymn refers to the Risen Christ who brings man from spiritual death to the light of life in himself.

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT (March 12, 1978)

First Reading: Ezekiel 37:12-14

Second Reading: Romans 8:8-11

Gospel Reading: John 11:1-45 (or 11:3-7,17,20-27,33-45)

First Reading: Under the figure of a resurrection from the dead, the prophet predicts Israel's return from exile to her own country. Graves symbolize their sojourn in a foreign land. Their restoration will be a proof of God's love for them. He will pour out his Spirit anew upon them, and they will flourish once more. The passage is well applied to a spiritual resurrection from the spiritual death of a life estranged from God.

Gospel Reading: Jesus raises to life one who believes in him: the seventh and last sign of the Book of Signs (Jn. 1-12). "It is a sign both of the final resurrection and of the rising from sin to grace

that takes place in a believer" (JBC). Today's liturgy emphasizes the latter aspect. Bethany is a little town not far from Jerusalem, the home of friends beloved by Jesus. (Verse 2 anticipates the narrative of the following chapter, already known to the Christian community). The sister of Martha is nowhere called Magdalen.

In a dramatic unfolding narrative, Jesus addresses six groups: the disciples, Martha, Mary, the Jews, Martha again, the Father in heaven, and finally the seventh word in a dynamic climax, the word of power to Lazarus, imparting new life. But the narrative revolves around the revelation of Jesus' person in his words: I am the Resurrection and the Life (25). His person is the cause and final end of our resurrection, and he is the source of life eternal. Thomas' bold resolve (16) contrasts with the fear of the other disciples (7.12), and Martha's magnificent profession of faith (21-27) eclipses that of her sister's.

How well the human side of Jesus stands out! Three times his love is mentioned (3.5.36), twice that he is moved by deep emotion (33.38) and once that he does not disdain to weep (35). But his divine power climaxes the entire narrative, showing him master of life and death.

Second Reading: A powerful Pauline passage for renewal in the Spirit. Paul contrasts the man of sin, led by his own selfish impulses (flesh), with the man regenerated in baptism and led by the Spirit of Christ (life in the spirit). In baptism he received the very Spirit of Christ and hence belongs to Christ, with the obligation to live like Christ lives. Yet this process is a gradual one, for there is a constant battle of spirit and flesh. Though endeavoring to live the Christ-life (his spirit lives), he is still prone to sinfulness and death in his mortal body. But the indwelling Spirit will one day conquer completely, for he is the pledge even of bodily resurrection. The Father who raised Christ from the dead will also raise all those who possess Christ's indwelling Spirit.

PALM SUNDAY OF THE LORD'S PASSION

(March 19, 1978)

First Reading: Isaiah 50:4-7

Second Reading: Philippians 2:6-11

Gospel Reading: Matthew 26:14 to 27:66 (or: 27:11-54)

First Reading: This is the third of the "Servant of Yahweh" songs. The Servant knows how to counsel and compassionate weary way-

farers, for he faithfully listens to God speaking to him. He has been called to suffer much for his people, and he meekly accepts it all, both insult (plucking out one's beard) and maltreatment. But his whole trust is in God who will eventually vindicate him. The Early Church saw this prophecy fully realized in Christ.

Gospel Reading: The longest of the passion accounts is that of Matthew, and seemingly the most used in antiquity. Some details are peculiar to this gospel: the end of Judas, the message of Pilate's wife, the splitting down of the curtain of the sanctuary, the appearance of the dead.

Second Reading: See biblical notes in Bol. Ecl., Jan.-Feb., 1977, 106f.

HOLY THURSDAY (evening mass) (March 23, 1978)

First Reading: Exodus 12:1-8.11-14

Second Reading: First Corinthians 11:23-26

Gospel Reading: John 13:1-15

For the explanation of the readings see Bol. Ecl., Feb. 1978, 165f.

Easter Vigil Midnight Mass (March 26, 1978)

First Reading: Romans 6:3-11

Gospel Reading: Matthew 28:1-10.

First Reading: See Bol. Ecl., Jan.-Feb., 1977, 107f.

Gospel Reading: Although the traditions concerning the apparitions of Jesus on Easter morning differ in several details, it is of no avail to endeavor to harmonize them, for the main message stands out clear and uncompromising: Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified, died and was buried in this tomb, has risen from the dead. Both the heavenly messengers and human witnesses testify to it. All the stress of the various apparitions is on the reality of the Resurrection, which comes from the positive evidence of both men and women, rather than on the fact of the empty tomb. The women in this passage come on an errand of love and as a reward they receive the revelation of the fact that Jesus is risen from the dead.

EASTER SUNDAY MORNING SOLEMNITY**First Reading: Acts 10:34a. 37-43****Second Reading: Colossians 3:1-4****Gospel Reading: John 20:1-9 or Luke 24:1-12**For the explanation of these readings see *Bol. Ecl.*, Feb., 1976, 166f.For Luke 24:1-12: *Boletin Ecl.*, Jan.-Feb., 1977, 108.**II. HOMILIES FOR FEBRUARY****You are the Salt of the Earth****February 5, 1978 (Fifth Sunday)**

The Human Situation: Salt is a necessary element in man's diet. It carries out several important functions in various bodily organs. Mankind has always felt the need of salt, and often gone to great trouble to obtain it. Without salt in proper amounts, the body goes into convulsions and eventually dies. Salt is also a strong preservative. Meat and fish are salted to preserve them. Great quantities of various objects are stored away in abandoned salt mines which act as excellent preservers. But the quality of salt which Jesus has in mind in this passage of the gospel is that of a condiment. Salt gives taste to food. Without it, food becomes insipid and tasteless. Then as salt it is useless, and is simply thrown out to be trampled on.

The Good News: Jesus wants his followers to be the salt of the earth. Figuratively, they are to act as salt does on food, that is, to give a Christian "flavor" to their surroundings. They are to reach out and influence others by their good example and their positive involvement. This is to be a Christian influence, learned in the school of Christ, learned by faithful pondering over the message of the Gospel, learned by faithful adherence to the guidance of the Church, which is the voice of Christ. A Christian is expected to live his Christian commitment. He will spread Christian ideas, promote Christian ideals, and affect others by his sincere Christian example of life. Then he is truly the salt that savors.

On the other hand, if a Christian has not learned the true ideals of Christ, nor bothered to go into the meaning of his Christian commitment; if he continues to give an example that is worldly, and more pagan than Christian, if he is a positive scandal to those he lives with, then he defaults in his role as a Christian, and like the salt that no longer gives savor, he deserves to be rejected. His lot is no longer among the chosen People of God, unless he repent and return to a sincere way of life. The example of a pagan may not always be his fault, but that of a fallen-away Catholic is deplorable. He may be the cause or at least the occasion for many others not finding salvation in Christ.

Christian social involvement is something that Christ expects of everyone of his followers. He wants them to be a light to others so that those who observe them may find the true way that leads to the Father and to true fulfillment in life. The entire sermon on the mount (Mt. 5-7) is an elaboration on the precept of fraternal love, how the followers of Christ are expected to carry out their role of a Christian in the many encounters of daily life with their neighbor. Anger is to be avoided, and abusive language; despising others and hatred is entirely unchristian. Adultery and divorce are not Christ's ideals. Retaliation for evil done to one should be replaced with long-suffering after the example of Christ. Love of enemies and forgiveness of injuries are genuine Christian ideals.

A program of social involvement is also given in the first reading today: "Share your bread with the hungry, shelter the oppressed, as well as the homeless, clothe the naked and do not turn your back on your own" (Is. 58:7f). Today especially, the need of social involvement is all the more demanding, given the many hungry mouths that go to be each night hungry and tired, or those shivering from the rain and cold without proper shelter. How does a Christian become the salt of the earth for these unfortunates, and the light of the world for them, so that they find joy in living once more, and realize that a loving Father is helping them through the brothers of his Son?

Christian involvement invades all fields: our work, profession, business; the home, education, politics, sports, recreation. In all fields, Christ expects his followers to show forth the principles given by his own words and deeds. St Leo the Great cried out: O Christian, recognize your dignity! Yes, the Christian dignity is great, but the corresponding responsibility is just as great. And there are many who give little thought to that responsibility.

Our Response: A Christian ought to be proud of his calling, and of the fact that the Master calls him the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Not to live up to our calling will expose us to the danger of being cast out and rejected. In how far do I influence others, and am the salt of their lives? Let us begin with ourselves: the home, the office, our profession, our job. Salt is good! But if it lose its savor, it is only good to be thrown out, said the Master.

Jesus, Model in Temptation

February 12, 1977: First Sunday of Lent

The Human Situation: In one of Luzon's provincial prisons was a prisoner accused of robbery. He had had little religious education and planned only to get out as soon as possible and perpetrate the same deeds as before. But when the seminarians from the nearby Major Seminary came weekly to offer religious instructions to the prisoners, he listened, at first to while away the monotony, but soon with evident interest. He began to take his religion serious, and was reconciled with God with the sacrament of healing. After his release, it happened that he had an easy occasion of robbery and he was strongly tempted to go back to his old ways. But the instructions given by the seminarians and the grace of the sacrament held him in check. Later, he admitted this to those in prison whom he visited.

The Good News: No man escapes temptation and trial. Even the Savior willed freely to undergo a period of temptation to show us how we are to conduct ourselves in various encounters with evil. Though Jesus was sinless and could not be tempted from within, he submitted to being tempted by agents from without.

The main aim and endeavor of Jesus was to establish the reign of God among men. His fellowmen expected that event to come about with a great show of power which would dazzle the spectators and compel them to follow him. But the will of the Father called for so such spectacular show. Jesus was to preach the Good News of the Kingdom and convince the heart of man to willingly and freely accept God's reign over him, with whatever change of mind and heart that would entail. Jesus did not intend to act indepen-

dently of the will of the Father, no matter how hard the path that lay ahead: "I always do what pleases the Father", he said (Jn. 8:29).

But after many days of fasting, the Savior, being a true man as we are, was hungry. In fact, he was famished. Satan takes advantage of the situation. How cleverly he hits at the very heart of the matter. "Do not bother about the will of the Father", he says. "Your are in dire need of food. Do not wait for God to care for your needs. Your power is unlimited. Use your power as Son of God and be independent, regardless of the Father's will". But this is not the way Jesus is determined to fulfill his mission. More important than food is carrying out the plan of God. "My food is to do the will of him who sent me", he would tell his followers later on (Jn. 4:34). In this he gives us a solid example. In all our material needs, we ought to turn to God, exercise true confidence in his fatherly love, and rely all the more on him. Need begets prayer and humble petition, buoyed up by confidence in God's goodness and providence.

Satan then has another thrust. He tempts the Master to throw aside the difficult path laid out for him of preaching to man in order to change his life. Rather let him start with something attractive, something spectacular and sensational. Let him fly down from the highest point of the Temple walls right into the midst of the crowd. How they would cheer and flock around him! Then they would surely be convinced that he came from above! True a cunning suggestion. It would bring the Savior a great crowd of followers from the very start. But this was sheer presuming on God's protection by forcing the Most High to save his life. That is not the humble way of obedience that was his life's program. Jesus rejected it with a single word of Scripture: "You are not to put God to the test". Here the Master shows all his followers the way to overcome the tempter. Be resolute, but do not swerve from the difficult path which you know to be the will of God. How often a person endeavors to reach his or her ends by presuming on God's help by putting himself in questionable situations, allowing himself evil companions or shady deals, all the while thinking himself a mature person, strong in virtue, a good Catholic, a person of repute! And how often this presumption has led to Satan's victory! Even the Lord who had all power in his hand refused to abuse it by presuming on God's help in doing some senseless action.

Finally, Satan throws off his mask. He promises universal world power in all its fullness, something that would enable Jesus to establish the kingdom at once, without any trouble, but at the terrific cost of total defection from God, by giving adoration to a mere creature. This is the bases of temptations. Yet how many make wealth and possessions or power their god which they adore and serve with all their might! How many acquire abundance of this world's goods or power by giving themselves over to the power of Satan and relinquishing all service of God their Creator and Father! Jesus angrily rejects the foul thought: "Away with you, Satan. God alone shall you serve and adore". Yet many a man has sold his soul and thrown his conscience to the wind, by giving himself up to enriching himself by totally immoral methods. Great is this temptation to obtain worldly prestige, and that is why the Savior gave us the choicest example of single-hearted service of God, obedient to his will even to death on a cross. Once that cross is carried and embraced, death itself leads to life eternal and the glory of Christ himself.

Our Response: Have in mind some ready words of scripture or short ejaculations whereby to ward off at once with determination all the wiles of the wicked one.

A Glimpse of Glory

February 19, 1978: Second Sunday of Lent.

The Human Situation: Many a college students opts for the degree of medical doctor, engineer or a similar profession. He visualizes the future as a bright one because his profession will be a very useful one, bring him a good income and make life comfortable for himself and his family. He is well aware that years of hard labor, study and research lie before him, with endless examinations, tests and various probations. But all that this is shouldered gladly with the thought of future success and reward buoying him up.

The Good News: All three evangelists place the transfiguration right after the first prediction of the passion. That prediction had evoked a very strong remonstrance from Peter, because he could not accept a suffering Messiah. Neither could the rest of the apostles. Thus the transfiguration was intended to throw light on the suffering aspect of the Savior's role. Suffer and die he would, but not on

account of any human machinations or the hard irony of fate. He willingly and freely would give himself up to sufferings and death, for that is how he was to enter into his glory. A passing glimpse of that glory was given to the three disciples on the mountain with Jesus, a glimpse of dazzling brightness wherein Jesus is a transformed figure of light and splendor.

The three witnesses to the scene are the same three which Jesus would choose later on as witnesses to his mighty struggle in the Garden of Gethsemani, where his prolonged endeavor to overcome the nausea and the horror of the imminent crucifixion cause his sweat to become like drops of blood trickling to the ground. His disciples needed to be given a glimpse of that glory, in order to be strengthened against that night when his sacred face was transformed into anguish and sorrow. Yet they were wholly unprepared for his transient glimpse of glory and it frightened them. Man is most often filled with fear when he senses that he is in the presence of the divine. In this instance, however, fear is combined with exultant joy in Peter, who a short week before had acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah of Israel. Now when he sees Jesus so transfigured, he immediately concludes that this is final. His triumph is at hand. The only thing to do is to build a dwelling place for Israel's King, glorious and splendid, as they always pictured him to come.

But this is not the glorious day of triumph. Jesus is first of all a suffering Messiah, the suffering Servant of Yahweh prophesied of old, for it is by suffering that he is to redeem the world and restore man to the friendship of God. When that hour comes with its appalling cruelty, the disciples must not lose heart or take scandal. They are to remember the foretaste they had on the mountain of the glory of their Savior and Master. First must come the suffering and death and then resurrection and glory. A glimpse of this glory is like giving a preventive medicine or injection, in order to ward off the evil effects of possible infection. Or it is like the prizes shown to those who compete in games, which will be theirs after the toll and the sweat of the game is over.

Three things stand out in today's transfiguration scene:

1. **This is God's beloved Son.** He is not just another of the prophets, or one of the kings of old. He is the very Son of God, whom the Father has sent into the world to bring it the fulness of salvation. He possesses the very glory of God, and the transfiguration anticipates the full flowering of Christ's triumph and splendor in the Resurrection.

2. **Jesus is the new Mediator.** No longer are Moses and the Law the norm for conduct for the People of God. All are now to listen to Christ. The Law has run its course. Emphasis has shifted to a person. Mankind will now be committed to the Word of God in person, who has taken on human flesh to be our exemplar and model in all things, and whose entire life is the message of the Father. It is the marvellous person of Christ that will henceforth attract men of all nations and climes to himself and to the Father. "Listen to him" the Father commands. He will tell us the way to God. Therein lies our peace and eternal salvation.

3. **Jesus is nevertheless the suffering Savior.** Therefore this glimpse is only a passing favor of God. Not yet has the time come for full glory and reward. At first the suffering of the cross and the ignominy of crucifixion awaits the Redeemer of the world. At first his followers must take up their cross and follow him to Golgotha. Only through the cross will they arrive at the crown of glory.

Our response: The Lenten period preceding Easter is meant to inspire us anew to listen carefully to Christ's gospel-message, and remodel our lives on it. It is a period of penance so that we strip ourselves again of the old selfishness and put on Christ anew. It is a preparation for a renewed life in Christ in the period of Eastertide. Our penances and prayers offered now will insure a healthier Christian life when we have risen with Christ spiritually on Easter morning.

The Savior of all Mankind

February 26, 1977: Third Sunday of Lent.

Because of its superb beauty, it is suggested that the entire gospel be read rather than shorten it. Then a brief homily suffices. For this, the biblical notes for today suffice.

II. HOMILIES FOR MARCH

LIGHT FOR THE BLIND

March 5, 1978: Fourth Sunday of Lent.

It is preferable to read the entire gospel and then comment briefly by means of the biblical notes given for this Sunday.

JESUS SOURCE OF LIFE

March 12, 1978: Fifth Sunday of Lent.

Again, it is preferable not to shorten this superb narrative, and give a brief comment with the help of the biblical notes given before.

March 19, 1978: Palm Sunday. Read the Lord's passion and death.

AT THE SERVICE OF HIS BROTHERS

March 23, 1978: Holy Thursday

With this Eucharistic celebration we have begun the Sacred Triduum which commemorates the great events at the climax of the ecclesiastical year: the institution of the Eucharist as well as of the priesthood, the passion and death of Jesus, Savior of the world, and his triumphant resurrection from the dead. Tonight in the Gospel we saw him kneeling before his disciples in the humble attitude of a slave washing their feet. Tonight in the second reading we heard him institute the Eucharist which would be our sacrificial meal till the end of time. Tonight in the first reading we saw him prefigured in the Lamb given over to immolation for the deliverance of God's People.

The Son of God, equal in all things to the Father, stands before us as the Son of Man, having put on our human nature with all its limitations. The Master, whom all obey, has become the slave in the service of his own servants. The Lord, whom all creation worships, has himself become the Lamb of sacrifice in place of all his fellowmen. The Creator of the universe, who fills the earth with all good things, himself becomes our food and drink. Who can

fathom the depth is his immense love? What human mind or angelic intelligence would ever have dreamed of what the Lord Jesus from all eternity planned to do for little man on his planet earth!

Who would put himself at the service of his fellowmen in menial labor freely and willingly if the Son of God himself had not given such an example of service and self-abasement? Who would sacrifice himself for the good of his neighbor so wholeheartedly, if Jesus had not given himself over completely to sacrifice even unto death? Who would spend day and night caring for the poor and the needy in our institutions, or in our hospitals with the sick and the aged and the retarded, if Jesus himself had not only spent his public life in utter service of all and everyone, but even given himself to be our medicine and healing in this Most Blessed Sacrament? Who of God's ministers would have the courage to mediate before God for sinful mankind, if Jesus himself had not become our High Priest, pure and undefiled, who entered into the very presence of the Most High, with his Blood poured out on Golgotha in sacrifice, to open the way of confidence to the Father for all his brothers and sisters?

But this calls for a response on our part! These are the days when we ought to encounter him in the sacrament of reconciliation and healing, by sincerely acknowledging our sins and resolving to do better in the future. These are the days when we ought to receive him worthily in Holy Communion to show our appreciation gratitude for this marvellous invention of his love. This very night we can give him some return by visiting him in the various Churches along our way, and pouring out our thanks for his many favors to ourselves and our dear ones, and asking his mighty help in the days that lie ahead, so that our renewal in our Christian commitment be sincere and lasting. These are the days when we ought to spend some longer time in prayer to mediate before God together with our High Priest for all mankind, that war and suffering be eliminated, that peace come to mankind, that those who do not as yet know the Paschal Mystery of the Savior come to its knowledge through the ministry of his priests. This Sacred Triduum is a challenge to our Christian calling, to witness to all around us that we glory in being members of the Crucified, and joyfully determine to live anew the Christ-life which has been renewed in us at this climax of the ecclesiastical year.

May the love of Christ penetrate us, and set us on fire in carrying out the good we have determined to do, in face of the eminent example of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who says to each of us: "All I ask of you is forever to remember me as loving you".

HE WAS PIERCED FOR OUR OFFENSES**March 24, 1978 (Good Friday)**

(Pointers for the seven words can be found in Bol. Ecl., Jan.-Feb., 1977, 119)

The Human Situation: The agent rang the door-bell. But when the door opened, he almost shrank back with fear, for the sight that met his eyes shocked him. A mother stood there, with three toddlers clinging to her lovingly, but the mother's features were disfigured and deformed in a very ugly manner. Her hands were crippled and gruelling to gaze at. What had happened? Mother and father some months previous had put the three little tots to bed, and as it was a quiet evening, they took a stroll down the neighboring streets. Suddenly they heard fire engines, and watched with astonishment when the fire engines went in the direction of their street. With apprehension they hastened their steps and arrived at their home only to find it ablaze. Without caring for the firemen's warning, the mother rushed into the bedroom, grabbed all three tots, covered them with blankets and made her way out of the blazing fire, only to be severely burned and disfigured for life. But the children did not mind her looks. They loved their mother who had saved their lives at such a price. She was beautiful to them,

The Good News: On the cross hangs Christ, covered with dirt and blood, disfigured and dishonored. How well the prophet depicted him: "We thought of him as one stricken, as one smitten by God and afflicted. But he was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins. By his stripes we were healed". (Is. 53:4). Despised and rejected by men, Jesus died amid the jeers and mockery of the bystanders. Those eyes that had looked so mercifully on men were now filled with blood. Those hands that had cured so many were now nailed to the cross. His sacred tongue and lips that had spoken so often of love and goodness are parched and cracked. That Sacred Heart that beat only out of love is pierced with a lance.

Yet, who caused these wounds in his hands and feet? Who pierced his sacred side? Who lashed his body with the scourage and plaited a crown of thorns for his head? It was the sin of the world, the sins of all mankind, our sins, that laid low the Lamb of God. It was our thoughtlessness and negligence that gave him such agonies. It was our lethargy and apathy that drove him to the heights of Golgotha.

But he accepted it all without a word. He was pierced for our offenses. Enlightened by faith, we see Christ our Savior, and to

us he is not an object of disgust, but as our loving Redeemer who pays the price for us that we escape eternal death; as one who obtained healing for our own wounds of spirit, by his willing and voluntary offering of himself; as the sole salvation of all mankind by his victim sacrifice on the cross. He is the Good Shepherd who preferred to lay down his life rather than let the devastating Wolf snatch away the prey. He is the Stronger One who divests the Strong One who is Satan of all his spoils, by fighting to the end though it means these wounds and these stripes. He is the silent Lamb of God who is led to slaughter silent and not opening his mouth, so that we might obtain life that never ends.

Who is not moved today by this re-enactment of the passion and death of God's Son who became our Brother to be our Sacrifice and burnt holocaust before the Most High? What hardened heart does not feel sorrow and compunction when it considers who this is that suffers such humiliation, such disfigurement, such excruciating pains? What inveterate sinner is not reconciled to God by gazing on the Crucified, who became his Brother out of sheer love for him? What sincere heart will not offer him love and compassion in face of this tragic drama enacted again today?

As we kneel to venerate the sacred Cross of Jesus, we will kiss his wounds which healed our wounds. We will beg him to forgive our fallings and sins, and to cleanse us anew in his precious Blood. We will offer the deepest sentiments of our hearts, to the One whose Heart bore the weight of guilt of the whole world, and also our own. Today we resolve to die with Christ to all that is sinful and displeasing to that Sacred Heart, in order to rise with him in the newness of the Christ-life on Easter morning.

THE TRIUMPH OF FAILURE

March 26, 1978: Easter Sunday

Almost everyone considered Jesus of Nazareth a complete failure as he hung on the cross that first Good Friday. The leaders in Israel were glad he was finally out of the way. The soldiers had laughed at him and mocked his claims. The people shook their heads in disappointment, for they had put much hope in him to deliver them from the yoke of the foreigner. Even the close disciples were disheartened and disillusioned, as is evident from the words of two of them on the way to Emmaus "We were hoping that he was the one who would set Israel free" (Lk. 24:21).

But Christ's death on the cross was Christ's magnificent triumph. If it was a failure in the eyes of men, it was the victory that vanquished Satan and death, for Christ rose again glorious and immortal, never to die anymore. His death is the glory of the Incarnate Word of God, the one and only sacrifice acceptable to the Father, the price willingly paid so that the Spirit of God would be given to the heart of man. Far from being a failure, it is the greatest achievement of mankind for all times.

Today we celebrate that triumph. Today we rejoice with our Savior for accomplishing his Paschal Mystery with such a masterly stroke. Today the Lamb of God shares the very throne of his Father amid the entire court of heaven, as they sing his victory with an eternal allelula.

But we too celebrate a triumph: It is our victory over selfishness and sin that we have put off by dying with Christ in order to let his Spirit animate us still more in a spiritual resurrection. The failure and sins of the past are swallowed up by the victory of the Lamb. His Blood has washed us clean. His resurrection means new life and energy. Even out of past failures God can draw good. Past mistakes are often humble stepping stones to a life of true holiness in Christ.

A striking illustration how God turns all things to good is the following true happening: Twenty-three year old Ronnie, heavy-muscled and vigorous, had no goal or ambition in life. He had little interest in the many jobs he had had, and still less in people. On the last day at a saw-mill chipper, he inadvertently turned on the wrong switch. At once he found himself being thrown toward the chipper-blades, and he succeeded in extricating himself only with an extreme struggle, but not before both legs were amputated by the blades, below the groin. Rushed to the hospital, it took intense care and nine months before he was fitted out with artificial legs but he lived. Ronnie is a completely changed man. Now he wants to be with people and work with them, and he looks at his fellowmen with the greatest interest. He has become a vocational counselor, especially for the handicapped. What seemed to be the greatest trial and failure in his life turned out to be his greatest asset.

Easter brings new life and new ambition to the heart that has cast off the old self and let Christ be renewed in it. The possibilities to do good to others are manifold. The members of Christ's Body who are in dire need are legion. Our Easter mood is one of joy and vigor, with Alleluia, praise the Lord, in our hearts. The Lamb has unfurled the banner of victory. We follow him to fight the good fight.