

Sunday 18 February 2024

The First Sunday of Lent



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Sermon © Revd Dr Paul Monk.

Liturgy and prayers of intercession © 2000 The Archbishops' Council.

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The liturgy assumes the service is Eucharistic. The prayers of consecration appear at the end.

The hymns are YouTube links. To hear the hymns please click on the links.

To see service transcripts from previous weeks, please visit the page,

<http://www.medlockhead.co.uk/resources/index.htm>

Introduction and welcome

HYMN 1 [In these days of Lenten journey](#) (click on this link to hear the hymn)

The Welcome

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

All Amen.

The Lord be with you

All And also with you.

The Preparation

**All Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

Our Lord Jesus Christ said:

The first commandment is this:

‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, with all your mind,
and with all your strength.’

And the second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’

There is no other commandment greater than these.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

All Amen. Lord, have mercy.

The sacrifice of God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart God will not despise. Let us come to the Lord, who is full of compassion, and confess our sins in penitence and faith, firmly resolved to keep God’s commandments and to live in love and peace with all.

All **Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against you
and against our neighbour
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We are truly sorry
and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
who died for us,
forgive us all that is past
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life
to the glory of your name.
Amen.**

Almighty God,
who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you,
pardon and deliver you from all your sins,
confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,
and keep you in life eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

It is usual to omit the Gloria during Lent.

The Collect for the First Sunday of Lent

Almighty God,
whose Son Jesus Christ fasted forty days in the wilderness,
and was tempted as we are, yet without sin:
give us grace to discipline ourselves in obedience to your Spirit;
and, as you know our weakness,
so may we know your power to save;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

All **Amen.**

First reading

A reading from the First Book of Moses called Genesis

God said to Noah and to his sons with him, 'As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.

God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.' God said to Noah, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.'

Genesis 9:8-17

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

Second reading

A reading from the Second Letter of St Peter

Who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil.

For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water.

And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him. *1 Peter 3:13–22*

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

HYMN 2 Amazing love

[\(please click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

Gospel reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark

All Glory to you O Lord.

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.’ And immediately the Spirit drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.’ *Mark 1:9–15*

This is the Gospel of the Lord

All Praise to you O Christ.

Sermon

It’s been a week of near misses. I’ve nearly been mown down by a fast car several times this week. In just about every case, the driver was talking or texting on a mobile phone, or talking to their passenger in so animated a way they simply did not notice what they’re doing. They’re dangerous because they’re distracted.

In many churches, they cover the crosses and paintings during Lent with, in effect, cloth pockets. They do so because, although beautiful and possibly meaningful, they might act as a distraction during times of worship.

Sometimes, a distraction can be quite pleasant. When I was a teacher, I sought as many distractions as possible when marking or invigilating an exam. Most teachers do. But when driving it's so dangerous it can be lethal.

We can be just as dangerous when praying when distracted. Apparently, one year I managed to advise the congregation on Ash Wednesday they should not give up Lent for chocolate—I should have concentrated more. But it's easy to succumb to distractions in our spiritual life. If we are in a funny mood, the sound of a fly buzzing around the room can come between us and God and imperil our growth into Christlikeness. We need to continually drag our attention back to God. That's why, for example, we generally close our eyes when praying—while the surroundings here are beautiful, they can be simply too beautiful. We sometime have to sacrifice the good in order to achieve the better.

Jesus, being human, will have experienced the same problem. That's why, as soon as he was baptised, the Holy Spirit of God propelled him into the desert. This way, he would avoid many of the huge number of distractions in his hometown with its colours and smells, sounds and sensations. By contrast, the desert was a lonely place, shunned by just about everyone. Even the animals generally avoided the desert. The only people in the desert were the ultra-religious, like John the Baptist and the strange monastic sect at the Dead Sea, of whom we think he may once have been a member. And they went there to avoid distractions too.

So if even Jesus needed to avoid distractions in prayer, then so do we. When we become Christians, the Holy Spirit will have entered deep into our soul in just the same way that he entered Jesus at his baptism. Possibly not with the same potency, because we are all sinful in a way that he was not. But he still enters us. And he will seek to propel us into the desert too.

My geography is poor, I know; but even I know there aren't many deserts around here. No matter. What happens is that God invites us to inhabit an *internal* desert—the desert of the heart. It's a sanctuary where we can go to meet with him alone, without distraction and without impediment.

At first, many of us will find even the concept difficult, and certainly the methods will need quite a lot of practise. It can seem very artificial. We will probably benefit from turning down the lights and, as far as we can, making the house or room as quiet as possible. Some people drive to a secluded spot, turn off both the engine and the radio, and enter God's presence wherever they are when they stop. Others go to a retreat house. There are several nearby. But these are merely means to an end. The end is to spend *uninterrupted* time with God—indeed, just 'wasting time with God' is one of my favourite definitions of prayer.

So far so good. But even experienced prayers are *distracted*, and often. All monks

and nuns, people for whom prayer is their everything, get distracted while praying. So what should we do? Initially, we will grow very impatient with ourselves. But try to remember that each time we find our mind has moved sideways, we are to gently bring it back into the loving presence of God. In fact, the more often we have to do so, the more often we please God with our conscious attempt to find him.

And, given time and practice and not a little determination, we genuinely do find the desert of the heart, and find that it becomes almost a real place. It becomes a spiritual bolt hole, a relief and a release. Its importance will grow almost exponentially as we discover the possibilities. We will then enter it with increasing ease, even in a crowded space or busy train. It becomes a place of refreshment and delight. We can dip in and out.

Curiously, loving the sensation of God in prayer can itself be a distraction, as we want him for personal pleasure. That will not do.

But God does not give this privilege to those who will squander it. God gives it to those who will use it for him. Notice the way that Jesus went into the desert for forty days to grow in prayer and awareness of God. Similarly, St Paul went to the deserts of Arabia for two long years. He relates it in Galatians 2. Many, many of the holiest men and women went into a real desert or a self-imposed desert such as a monastery, but when ready, God gently calls them back into the world to share what they have found, their skills of prayer and communication. Their experiences of God achieved through prayer without distraction are as important to theology as original research is to science.

Jesus and St Paul both came back from the desert to proclaim the love of God for everyone. Our readiness to tell people of God's love adds authenticity to any claims of experiencing God. What we gain is for general delight, not just personal gain.

If cars continue to aim themselves at me, I won't need the desert of the heart to avoid distractions in prayer because I will be in the undiluted presence of God! But until that time, the nearest I will get to experiencing the loving presence of God is prayer. But that prayer will be difficult without learning to still the eternal noises of my life and the inner noises of my turmoil. I must flee to the desert—a prayer desert: internal but nevertheless holy and filled with God. I need him, and so do you.

The Creed

Do you believe and trust in God the Father,
the source of all being and life,
the one for whom we exist?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son,
who took our human nature,
died for us and rose again?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit,
who gives life to the people of God
and makes Christ known in the world?

All We believe and trust in him.

This is the faith of the Church.

All This is our faith.

**We believe and trust in one God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.**

Amen.

Prayers of intercession

With confidence and trust let us pray to the Father.

For the one holy catholic and apostolic Church ...

let us pray to the Father.

Lord of compassion,

All in your mercy hear us.

For the mission of the Church,
that in faithful witness it may preach the gospel
to the ends of the earth,
let us pray to the Father.

Lord of compassion,

All in your mercy hear us.

For those preparing for baptism [and confirmation] ...
and for their teachers and sponsors,
let us pray to the Father.

Lord of compassion,

All in your mercy hear us.

For peace in the world ...
that a spirit of respect and reconciliation may grow
among nations and peoples,
let us pray to the Father.

Lord of compassion,

All in your mercy hear us.

For the poor, the persecuted, the sick, and all who suffer ...
for refugees, prisoners, and all in danger;
that they may be relieved and protected,
let us pray to the Father.

Lord of compassion,

All in your mercy hear us.

For those whom we have injured or offended,
let us pray to the Father.

Lord of compassion,

All in your mercy hear us.

For grace to amend our lives and to further the reign of God,
let us pray to the Father.

Lord of compassion,

All in your mercy hear us.

In communion with all those who have walked in the way of holiness ...
let us pray to the Father.

Lord of compassion,

All in your mercy hear us.

God our Father,
in your love and goodness
you have taught us to come close to you in penitence
with prayer, fasting and generosity;
accept our Lenten discipline,
and when we fall by our weakness,
raise us up by your unfailing mercy;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

Merciful Father,

All accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.

The peace

Since we are justified by faith,
we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,
who has given us access to his grace.

The peace of the Lord be always with you,

All And also with you.

HYMN 3 [Attende Domine \(Gregorian Chant\)](#) (click on this link to hear the hymn)
[What wondrous love is this](#) (click on this link to hear the hymn)

The liturgy of the Communion Service appears below.

The Dismissal

Christ give you grace to grow in holiness,
to deny yourselves, take up your cross, and follow him;
and the blessing of God the Almighty:
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
be with you now and remain with you always.

All Amen.

HYMN 4 [Forty days and forty nights](#) (click on this link to hear the hymn)

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

All In the name of Christ. Amen.

The Liturgy of the Sacrament

Eucharistic Prayer (prayer E)

The Lord be with you

All and also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

All We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All It is right to give thanks and praise.

Father, you made the world and love your creation.
You gave your Son Jesus Christ to be our Saviour.
His dying and rising have set us free from sin and death.
And so we gladly thank you,
with saints and angels praising you, and saying,

**All Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

We praise and bless you, loving Father,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord;
and as we obey his command,
send your Holy Spirit,
that broken bread and wine outpoured
may be for us the body and blood of your dear Son.

On the night before he died he had supper with his friends
and, taking bread, he praised you.
He broke the bread, gave it to them and said:
Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;
do this in remembrance of me.

When supper was ended he took the cup of wine.
Again he praised you, gave it to them and said:
Drink this, all of you;
this is my blood of the new covenant,
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

So, Father, we remember all that Jesus did,
in him we plead with confidence his sacrifice made once for all upon the cross.

Bringing before you the bread of life and cup of salvation,
we proclaim his death and resurrection
until he comes in glory.

Great is the mystery of faith:

All Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.

Lord of all life,
help us to work together for that day
when your kingdom comes
and justice and mercy will be seen in all the earth.

Look with favour on your people,
gather us in your loving arms
and bring us with all the saints
to feast at your table in heaven.

Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all honour and glory are yours, O loving Father,
for ever and ever.

All Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

All **Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**

Breaking of the Bread

We break this bread to share in the body of Christ.

All **Though we are many, we are one body,
because we all share in one bread.**

All **Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
grant us peace.**

Draw near with faith.

Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ
which he gave for you,
and his blood which he shed for you.

Eat and drink in remembrance that he died for you,
and feed on him in your hearts
by faith with thanksgiving.

All We do not presume
to come to this your table, merciful Lord,
trusting in our own righteousness,
but in your manifold and great mercies.
We are not worthy
so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table.
But you are the same Lord
whose nature is always to have mercy.
Grant us therefore, gracious Lord,
so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ
and to drink his blood,
that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body
and our souls washed through his most precious blood,
and that we may evermore dwell in him,
and he in us.
Amen.

Communion is distributed.

Prayer after Communion

Lord God,
you have renewed us with the living bread from heaven;
by it you nourish our faith,
increase our hope,
and strengthen our love:
teach us always to hunger for him who is the true and living bread,
and enable us to live by every word
that proceeds from out of your mouth;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen

All Almighty God,
we thank you for feeding us
with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.
Through him we offer you our souls and bodies
to be a living sacrifice.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit
to live and work
to your praise and glory.
Amen.