

Catholic

UPDATE

© 2021 LIGUORI
PUBLICATIONS,
A REDEMPTORIST
MINISTRY.
ONE LIGUORI DRIVE
LIGUORI, MO
63057-9999
800-325-9521
LIGUORI.ORG
PHOTOCOPYING
PROHIBITED.

C2102A

FEBRUARY 2021

Lent Day by Day: Seeing the Face of God in Others

REVEREND PAUL TURNER

Our spiritual life requires upkeep. Without regular maintenance, things will fall into disarray. Lent is a tune-up for the soul. It's time to get rid of what is broken, discover habits that cause problems, and identify parts of our spiritual life that need to be rebuilt. Let us maintain the health of our soul and rise anew on Easter!

ASH WEDNESDAY Overlooking Mistakes

As Lent begins, we don't ignore our sins. Let us pray that God will forgive them in love, looking beyond our faults to see a heart of repentance.

*But you have mercy on all, because you can do all things
For you love all things that are
and loathe nothing that you have made (Wisdom 11:23-24).*

THURSDAY Cast Your Cares Upon God

An illness—or any misfortune—can make or break our spirituality. We can choose to complain or cast our cares upon God and ask for mercy.

*I will grieve and complain, / and my prayer will be heard. / He
will redeem my soul in peace / from those who war against me
(Psalm 55:18-19).*

FRIDAY The Lord, Our Helper

If we have stopped attending Mass, the most important change we can make in our life is to once again take part in it weekly. When we make room for the Eucharist, we'll think differently, relationships will improve, and we'll encounter people who support us. Both the priest and the penitent rely on the Lord for help.

*Hear, O LORD, have mercy on me;
LORD, be my helper (Psalm 30:11).*

SATURDAY Generous Love

Marisol was desperate. Her husband had abandoned her and their five children—two with special needs. She couldn't find a job. Our parish deacon helped facilitate the family's needs for food, housing, and medication. Most importantly, he provided compassion. The lesson for Marisol and us is that when things go wrong, we must open our eyes to what's already there.

*Answer me, LORD, in your generous love;
in your great mercy turn to me (Psalm 69:17).*



First Week of Lent

SUNDAY Distress and Honor

Paul's life changed forever when he broke his hip at age eighty-one. Even after surgery, he struggled to walk. Paul had always cared for others. Now, people returned the favor, caring for him. God takes care of the least of us. Often when we see people who are infirmed, we see only the present and not the past.

*He will call upon me and I will answer; / I will be with him
in distress; / I will deliver him and give him honor
(Psalm 91:15-16).*

MONDAY Eyes on the Lord

When I played baseball, this mantra rang in my ears: "Keep your eye on the ball." I tried, but I couldn't hit that hurtling sphere well. A good batter focuses on the ball, and it seems the rest of his body knows what to do. In our spiritual life, we may feel we "strike out" when we pray or strive to make a moral choice, but if we keep our eyes fixed on God, he will guide us.

*Yes, like the eyes of servants / on the hand of
their masters... / so our eyes are on the LORD our
God, / till we are shown favor (Psalm 123:2).*

TUESDAY Through All Generations

A ceramic pitcher that my mom gave me was one of the few possessions my great-grandmother brought with her when she immigrated. Even though it drips, I use it for milk. I wonder: Did Great-grandma bring milk to the breakfast table in it? Like her pitcher, her values of hard work and devotion to faith and family have been passed down through the generations.

*Before the mountains were born, / the earth and the world
brought forth, / from eternity to eternity you are God
(Psalm 90:2).*

WEDNESDAY Mercy Ages Old

Abe's wife stood beside him as a pillar of strength, prayer, and hope as he suffered with a terminal illness. Her compassion never waned. Throughout Lent, we strive to become more loving. Sometimes it's hard to share our compassion repeatedly. Yet God's mercy never dies.

Remember your compassion and your mercy, O LORD, / for they are ages old. / Do not let my enemies gloat over me. / Redeem Israel, O God, / from all its distress! (Psalm 25:6, 2, 22).

THURSDAY Understanding Silence

God is intuitive. It doesn't matter if we pray in silence or hum, God reads our hearts. During Lent, we take on penance, sacrifice for others, and spend time in prayer. Even when we lack words, God will attend to our needs.

Give ear to my words, O LORD; / understand my sighing. / Attend to the sound of my cry, / my king and my God! (Psalm 5:2-3).

FRIDAY Suffering and Sin

When I came to anoint Esther, who was dying at age ninety-one, she asked: "Is God punishing me?" We often link suffering to sin, death to punishment. Suffering and death may feel like punishment, but they are not. Pray that you'll follow God's path.

Bring me out of my distress.

Look upon my affliction and suffering; take away all my sins (Psalm 25:17-18).

SATURDAY God's Refreshing Law

In my parish, a family must be registered for one year before they can celebrate a *quinceañera* in our church. This cultural celebration of a girl's fifteenth birthday should be, foremost, a celebration of faith, like baptism or first Communion. To some, our policy seems harsh, but rules can invite a more sincere connection between the rituals we enact and the lives we lead.

The law of the LORD is perfect, / refreshing the soul.

The decree of the LORD is trustworthy (Psalm 19:8-9).

Second Week of Lent

SUNDAY Seeking God's Face

In biblical times, being in someone's presence meant being able to see his or her face. During Lent, God shows his face to us in many ways, including through people. We experience great longing when God's face seems hidden from us. But it never is.

"Come," says my heart, "seek his face"; your face, LORD, do I seek!

Do not hide your face from me (Psalm 27:8-9).

MONDAY Level Ground

Parishioners visiting a church built in the 1920s were generally required to climb stairs to reach the front door. Today, the same church would likely be built on level ground. Consider that the steps emphasize the cross we carry, while level ground signifies the resurrection Christ promises.

But I walk in my integrity; / redeem me, be gracious to me! / My foot stands on level ground; / in assemblies I will bless the LORD (Psalm 26:11-12).

TUESDAY Give Light

Kevin, born blind, could relate to the story of the blind man in John's Gospel. When he shops, clerks often ask his friends, "What does he want?" Kevin wonders, "Do they think I can't hear or speak?" When we see people with disabilities, we may experience a disability of our own: bad judgment. Without the light of charity, we can create more difficulties for those who already have difficulties.

Give light to my eyes lest I sleep in death, lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed" (Psalm 13:4-5).

WEDNESDAY Come Quickly

When she fell at the nursing home, Lucy had the presence of mind to press the alarm button she wore. The nursing staff came quickly to her aid. God's presence is like an alarm. When we fall, let us remember that God is ready to help us up. True, sounding the alarm may threaten our comfort zone or move us down a different path than what we thought was best. Still, ask for help, press the button.

Do not forsake me, O LORD; my God, be not far from me! (Psalm 38:22).

THURSDAY Wicked Path

Carlos killed a man he never intended to harm. After being kicked out of a bar, he returned after it closed and retaliated by shooting out the second-floor windows, killing a man. He drove away, unaware he had killed someone. Everyone gets tempted, but with God's help, we can follow the ancient path of charity.

God, know my heart.... / See if there is a wicked path in me; / lead me along an ancient path (Psalm 139:23-24).

FRIDAY The Net

Héctor, an illegal immigrant, had a wife and two children and wanted to be legal. A man who offered to help him actually only helped himself to Héctor's money. Héctor was deported when he couldn't produce papers. Sometimes we make bad choices. Like animals getting snared in a hunter's net, our desperation makes us easy prey. We must cry out to God for justice.

In you, LORD, I take refuge.

Free me from the net they have set for me (Psalm 31:2, 5).

SATURDAY Slow to Anger

"We don't need a pavilion!" shouted an enraged Gustav to his priest. He had once been able to park close and walk to his pew in about fifty steps. Nearly ninety, Gustav didn't walk easily, and his wife, Betty, also had difficulty with the remodeled church—thus his anger. Unlike Gustav, God is slow to anger, but that doesn't mean God sees things as we do. God considers everyone's problems and is patient with us.

The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in mercy (Psalm 145:8).



Third Week of Lent

SUNDAY Your Own Soil

The Israelites lived many generations in lands not their own, but prophets foresaw a day when they would return to their home. The elect, those chosen for baptism, model the yearning we all feel for our own land that Christ has prepared for us. Lenten disciplines help us prepare for the journey to our true home.

I will take you away from among the nations, gather you from all the lands, and bring you back to your own soil (Ezekiel 36:24).

MONDAY The Lord's Courts

When the Israelites made their pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem, they sang with hearts filled with anticipation of what they would experience upon entering God's holy presence. We come to church because we yearn for the place where we find justice, song, and peace.

My heart and flesh cry out / for the living God (Psalm 84:3).

TUESDAY Apple of Your Eye

Mary announced she wanted to change careers. Her husband, Steve, replied, "Whatever you want is OK—as long as it includes me!" That doesn't always happen. Sometimes people can't accept change or give the support a partner needs. May we always include God in our future.

Turn your ear to me; hear my speech. / Keep me as the apple of your eye; / hide me in the shadow of your wings (Psalm 17:6, 8).

WEDNESDAY Steady My Feet

My aunt, ninety-six, had been the fastest nun in the convent. She wasn't racing; there was a lot to do. Now she had a walker that slowed her. Walking unassisted gives us a sense of freedom. We may wish that the persons standing near would go away, but God may be steadying us with their help.

Steady my feet in accord with your promise; do not let iniquity lead me (Psalm 119:133).

THURSDAY God Listens

Juana, a bright, giving member of our parish, was accepted to the school of her dreams. Then the university revoked her admission because she had no proof of citizenship. Juana had qualified to receive protection under Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). The community defended her. Soon the university corrected its mistake and welcomed Juana. Not all wrongs are righted. But if we network with God, our cry will be heard.

If ever you wrong them and they cry out to me, I will surely listen to their cry (Exodus 22:22).

FRIDAY One True God

The First Commandment still applies to us. Anything that is the center of our lives can become a false god. We can learn what our priorities are by tracking how we spend our time and money. We should give up false gods that take our talents and treasures away from what the true God wants from us.

None among the gods can equal you.... / For you are great and do wondrous deeds; / and you alone are God (Psalm 86:8, 10).

SATURDAY Pardon

I ask "why" a lot when I'm driving. Sometimes I even get angry because others' actions cause momentary inconveniences. *Are they deliberately trying to make my drive less pleasant?* In reality, they may be dodging debris or looking for an exit. If I can understand why someone does something, it makes me more forgiving. Let us pray that God looks on our actions this way.

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits (Psalm 103:2, King James Bible).

Fourth Week of Lent

SUNDAY Rejoice You Who Mourn

When Jerusalem was ransacked by Babylon, the people went into exile, and their city was destroyed. But when invited to rebuild their homeland, they had new purpose. They spread God's word through a message of hope. After a horrifying experience, people may invite others to see the world as they do. It can open eyes.

Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad because of her, / all you who love her.... / Rejoice with her in her joy, all you who mourn over her (Isaiah 66:10).

MONDAY Misery and Rejoicing

Tom, who runs a social service agency, makes home visits to assess the needs of clients. At Liza's house, he saw her misery and wanted to relieve her distress. Seeing the misery of others should move us to take action. We hope God responds similarly to us.

I trust in the LORD. / I will rejoice and be glad in your mercy, / once you have seen my misery / [and] gotten to know the distress of my soul (Psalm 31:7-8).

TUESDAY Eat Without Cost

A friend and I went to brunch. After sipping coffee and catching up, we asked to order brunch. "We don't serve brunch anymore," said the owner. Surprised, we requested our bill. "That's OK, no charge for the coffee." It isn't often you get something for nothing, but when you do it makes you want to give back. A sign of Lenten charity is giving freely to others.

All you who are thirsty, / come to the water! / You who have no money, / come, buy grain and eat (Isaiah 55:1).

WEDNESDAY Time for Deliverance

Lety's gas would be shut off if she didn't pay her bill. She had other problems, but despite her distress she remained a giver. She cared and cooked for many neighborhood kids after school while their parents worked. Without gas to cook, she improvised, fixing salads and cold cuts for the kids. Lety shared the little she had with others. God watches our actions as we await answers to prayers.

God, in your abundant kindness, answer me with your sure deliverance (Psalm 69:14).



THURSDAY Seek Out the Lord

When we see a crowd of people, we see just that—a crowd. But God sees each person. I invite you to look at others the way God sees them. Throughout this Lent, in addition to practicing sacrifice and prayer, it is customary to practice charity. If we seek the face of God, we can find it in many people.

Let hearts that seek the LORD rejoice! / Seek out the LORD and his might; / constantly seek his face (Psalm 105:3–4).

FRIDAY The Words of My Mouth

Some people's lips "go longer" than our ears. After a while, our minds may wander. We run the hazard of missing something important. When people state a real concern, we need to be ready to reply. When they talk long, we have to listen slow. It's hard. When we pray, we also may say a lot. If God doesn't seem to respond to everything we say, we need to remember how much we demand of God's ears.

O God hear my prayer.

Listen to the words of my mouth (Psalm 54:4).

SATURDAY Torrents of Destruction

When my canoe capsized, I swallowed water but found the surface and a fresh supply of oxygen! I then understood how dangerous a seemingly lazy river can be. In moments of great need, it can feel like we're drowning in rivers of worry. When we receive an answer to our prayers, sweet breath returns to our lungs. In the calm, we owe God thanks.

*The cords of death encompassed me;
the torrents of destruction terrified me....*

From his temple he heard my voice (Psalm 18:5, 7).

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT A Faithless People

I've become more convinced that faith is a natural part of human life. We each have a body, a mind, and a spirit. You could call those who don't believe, turn away from the Church, or delight in egoism "a faithless people." But whether we see it or not, all people yearn for God because God made us that way.

Grant me justice, O God; / defend me from a faithless people; / from the deceitful and unjust rescue me (Psalm 43:1).

Holy Week

PALM SUNDAY Hosanna!

Hosanna comes from the same Aramaic word as *Jesus*, which means "Savior." On Palm Sunday, the crowds gathered in Jerusalem, shouting, "Hosanna," communicating their need for a Savior. Those same people turned against Jesus a few days later. Yet he did not abandon them. He saved them. We cry out to God, who can offer us forgiveness and a new start.

Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, [even] the king of Israel (John 12:13).



HOLY THURSDAY Boast in the Cross

A cantor in a wheelchair sang in church at the Easter Vigil. Preparing to intone the "Alleluia," she inched her chair to the cantor stand, grabbed its sides, and hoisted herself up. She said, "I have good news: 'Alleluia!'" Then she sang the Easter message! Sometimes the people who carry the cross also hold the resurrection. During Holy Week, we never behold the crucifixion without seeing its destination. The cross radiates courage and resurrection.

But may I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me (Galatians 6:14).

GOOD FRIDAY Abandoned

I agreed to preside at the funeral Mass for a woman with no family who passed away in a nursing home. Our choir and daily Mass attendees joined in the prayers. But at the graveside, there was only the funeral director and me. I thought: *How can you live eighty-nine years and no one mourns your death?* At times we may feel abandoned. Even Jesus recited a prayer of abandonment on the cross. But our Maker continually watches over us. The community of believers is ready to embrace us.

My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? (Psalm 22:2).

HOLY SATURDAY Secure

When my father died, I felt it was my responsibility to comfort everyone. But after the burial, I let my guard down and cried. On Holy Saturday, we commemorate the day Jesus lay in the tomb. Perhaps the disciples cried. Perhaps they shut off their emotions. Perhaps they didn't feel secure. But soon they experienced the mystery that had long been concealed like a body in the belly of the earth.

*In peace I will lie down and fall asleep,
for you alone, LORD, make me secure (Psalm 4:9).*

EASTER SUNDAY Glory and Power

We celebrate the resurrection of Christ on Easter and profess the belief that he offers us a share in his resurrection. We have all struggled with losing someone special. Yet somehow, we receive the Spirit and strength we need to remain faithful to our path. In spite of our sorrow and because of it, we praise the glory and power of God. That is the way of Christians.

The Lord has truly been raised.

To him be glory and power forever [and ever]. Amen (Luke 24:34; Revelation 1:6).

.....
Reverend Paul Turner is pastor of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Kansas City, Missouri. A priest of the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, he holds a doctorate in sacred theology from Sant'Anselmo in Rome.