

Lent 2015

Introduction

We know that Lent means springtime, the season of renewal, and “lente” from the Latin, means slowness. This holy season calls us to slow down and take stock of ourselves and our spiritual lives. It is the “acceptable time” to consider this God of love both in our own lives individually and in our society and its needs. It’s not about just ashes for one day, but about living in love for all days...about the way we interact with others, embrace diversity, and see the possibility of goodness in all creation and creatures surrounding us.

We are followers of Jesus who strive to integrate Jesus’ values into our own, who strive to live the beatitudes in our daily life. We are sinners, yes, but also we are Provident people redeemed, beloved and on the journey to wholeness. This God who is for us offers us the season of Lent as an opportunity for growth, for going deeper, for seeing possibilities of newness, for living in hope. As we hear in the Scriptures, “Now is the acceptable time” to draw nearer to our Provident God who makes all things, even our redemption, possible.

Sisters and Associates of our Women of Providence in Collaboration will be using the Scripture readings from Ash Wednesday, all the Sundays of Lent, and Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday for their reflections. They will use a Providence lens as they reflect on these Scriptures.

So, look in the mirror on Ash Wednesday, see the ashes and remember that you are dust, stardust, and allow the cosmic journey to begin again in you!

*Barbara McMullen, CDP
Executive Director, WPC*



*Lent 2015
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Ash Wednesday 2015

PROVIDENTIAL “ambassadors for Christ”

Just recently in Edmonton one of our very old, but actively live theatres, the ROXY, burned to the ground, to rubble and ashes. The people of the Edmonton theatre company and many others have become “ambassadors” for renewing and rebuilding this landmark in a very uniquely historical area of our city.

As we begin our Lenten journey with ashes, I am reminded of how I am being called to be a public ambassador for our Christianity. Wearing the ashes is one way to begin, but then I have to reflect more seriously on how I am going to bring to life the message of God’s self-sacrificial love for each one of us. What service of loving Providence am I witnessing to the immigrant women with whom I teach ESL? These immigrant women have sacrificed much in their lives and for their families to find hope in a new country.

As a Sister of Providence how am I being called to witness Hope in our Provident God? In this Year of Consecrated Life, how am I being called to gratefully reflect what a gift this life has been? Where and in what ways am I being called to live our present reality with the passion and joy of the gospel? The Lenten journey reminds each one of us to trust in our Provident God and to become “ambassadors of Hope for the future”, for “now is the acceptable time”.

*Jeannette Filthaut SP
Sister of Providence of
St. Vincent de Paul (Edmonton, AB)*



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Lent 2015

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

I love our football team, the Seahawks. I have to admit, however, after the score at half time was: Packers – 19 Seahawks – 0, I was tempted to give up and turn off the TV. By some miracle the Hawks scored enough points in five minutes to go into overtime, and ultimately win the game. Quarterback Russell Wilson was asked after the game what happened and he replied, “Each time we got in the huddle we told one another “Never doubt” and that positive energy saved the game”.

As I see Jesus this first Sunday of Lent being tempted so severely I wonder what He did to endure this struggle. For sure, I know He prayed. As I begin my Lenten journey I am tempted to look at all the negative things that are happening in our world. Violence, abuse, terrorism, and greed seem to be controlling our everyday existence.

I see our sisters getting older, fewer young women choosing this way of life, and the needs of the poor getting greater. Each year, as Lent approaches, I try to think of what I can do to live more closely the call of the Gospel. Today I am tempted to wonder, “What good can my Lenten efforts do?”

During my prayer time the answer is becoming clearer.... Providence has provided, and will continue to provide, all that we need. I have to tell myself over and over “NEVER DOUBT” and believe that miracles can happen. Our Foundresses began with so little, but with much faith and prayer the vocations came, and works flourished. Today the needs are very different but our sisters continue to do what they can to meet the needs of the less fortunate; physically, mentally and spiritually. I tell myself NEVER DOUBT, the needs of the poor will be met. Miraculously people will come forth and carry on the charism of our communities. My prayer can make a difference.

Rather than being depressed I begin my Lent with much joy and anticipation knowing that God is in charge. If a “Never Doubt” mantra of a football team can bring such positive results, surely my trust and confidence in Divine Providence can bring about even greater miracles for myself and those for whom I pray.

*Virginia Miller, SP
Seattle, WA*



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Lent 2015

A reflection on Mark 9:2-10

Peter, James and John must have been terribly confused. Only six days earlier Jesus had spoken to them of His upcoming suffering, persecution, and death. Their belief and understanding that He should be glorious and victorious as their Messiah must have been shattered. And Jesus, in taking them up the mountain, and being transfigured before them, had to be overwhelming to them. I wonder if they realized they were seeing Him in His Glory, as the Son of God? The presence of Moses and Elijah conversing with Christ, and hearing the voice of God claiming Him as His Son, though probably frightening, was surely a great reassurance to them. This Gospel affirms that our journey to glory is through the Cross.

This Gospel calls us to reflect on the mountains in our lives up which Christ leads us; dealing with our confusion in recognizing His presence and, sometimes, who He is; and our call as His disciples to "Listen to Him". We sometimes feel we have been stranded on an insurmountable "mountain" of pain, confusion, and doubt and never realize we have been led up that mountain to experience our own transformation in faith. Christ is present in His glory...listen to Him!

Our commitment to God's providence, His divine care and direction, is ever present in our journey through the struggles and joys of life's events and situations; it sharpens our senses and makes visible His presence. Let us believe without confusion or fear that "...it is good for us to be here" embraced by the love we have experienced in the Cross.

As believers, and through our Baptism, we too are "transfigured" by the power of the Holy Spirit into children of God, images of Christ, who in our abandonment to the will of God, choose the cross of Christ as our path to glory. This Gospel reveals the necessity of Christ's suffering as a fulfillment of prophecies, and calls us to find, in the providence of our commitment to follow Him, our own path to glory. As so fittingly stated in our Providence mission statement, "... we nurture in ourselves and in others a trust and confidence in God's faithful presence. We further commit ourselves to making God's providence more visible in our world."

*Sylvia Resha, CDP Associate
Nashville, TN*



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Lent 2015

"Deliver us from the silence that gives consent to abuse, war and evil. Grant us the desire, and the courage, to risk speaking and acting for the common good." (Taken from the Sisters of Providence of St. Mary-of-the-Woods, IN, Litany of Nonviolence)

If the gospel story tells us anything about Jesus' life it is that he can't be accused of the "silence that gives consent." His words and actions were clearly ones to bring attention to the upside down world where the Temple scribes and priests wielded the same abuse as the civic authorities. Whether it was turning over the tables, criticizing behavior and tending to the needs of the lepers, Jesus gave expression to his life of integrity, truth-telling and love. It was Providence at work. Jesus, like us, believed in what was not yet, but believed in the possibilities of what ought to be for the sake of the common good.

In Matthew's (MT:21-12-16) version of the same story it is the children's reaction that tells the tale. The children got it. They understood the significance of the action that day in the temple. Think of their joy to finally see an adult speaking out against the injustices that they and their parents had to endure and would be punished if they did what Jesus did. It's no wonder they jumped with delight. However, not so the scribes and the temple priests. And, we know the rest of the story.

Unfortunately 2,000 years later Jesus' experience of triumphalism, self-righteous attitudes and restrictive laws are still in full plume. Today it is the Palestinians who have lived on the land for centuries continuing to pay the price. Recently an 8th Day Staff member returned from a delegation to Israel's West Bank. She told the story of accompanying children going to school in Hebron and routinely being stopped at the military check points where the armed Israeli soldiers harass them for official papers before letting them pass.

This particular day, when the school children were stopped, several of them began throwing rocks at the tin barricades that to their squealing delight made loud pings for all to notice. Not to be upstaged by children the soldiers responded by shooting off canisters of tear gas at the crowd scattering them and all those watching. The children's act surely comes from the belief and hope that what ought to be but is not here yet, is still a possibility.

Provident God of all possibilities give us "the courage to risk speaking and acting for the common good" to the many local and global injustices. From Ferguson to Palestine our voice of hope, truth and resistance needs to be heard. May It Be So!

*Kathleen Desautels, SP
Chicago, IL*



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Lent 2015

**For by grace you have been saved
through faith, and this is not from you;
it is the gift of God...**

Ephesians 2:8

Some years ago, I was at the deathbed of one of our loveliest sisters. I was saddened and perplexed as she struggled to let go of whatever in her past burdened her and allow herself to fall into the merciful, embracing arms of our Provident God.

Most of us grew up in a time when we were led to believe that we had to earn our salvation. I don't remember any lessons on "the gift of faith"—a gift that cannot be earned, no matter what we do. I don't remember being taught that salvation was an unearned gift. I was brought up just at the end of the days when Protestants flung at us that by "faith alone are we saved" and we tossed back "faith without works is dead"! We sent those words from Romans (5:1-11) and James (2) back and forth over the net that divided us for five hundred years, never even thinking that these words from Ephesians held the fuller answer.

And now, our God is so immense that our little idiocies are basically of no account. Realizing that we are all saved through faith by grace, all that is left is for us is to allow our egos (because of which we somehow think that we can broker our salvation!) to deconstruct (as Eckhart Tolle says in *A New Earth*) and let God continue to arrange for our salvation. Once that hurdle has been cleared, it is amazing how things change. People whom I disdained or scoffed at are suddenly beacons of salvation for us all! The poor have so much to offer that I look for opportunities to simply hang around them! My "enemies" are not outside of myself; rather, they are my own demons which demonize others who reflect my own frailties!

We are more than halfway through Lent. By now, our grand plans for "improvement" have come to naught. And, of course, we haven't "done enough"! Shall we wallow in our failures? Shall we fear the consequences once more? Or shall we go back to Ephesians 2:4-10 and cast ourselves on the mercy of God. The author of this letter says that this is all it will take for us to realize and accept our salvation. Let's not wait for a "deathbed conversion"; rather let's embrace the mercy of God every single day. Easter means that we are being saved right now—no matter how messy we are! When we live from the mentality that God's generous, unending grace is saving us all along, the world blooms with the Providence of God!

*"All the way to heaven is heaven,
because Jesus said, "I am the way."*

—St. Catherine of Sienna

*Mary Diane Langford, CDP
Congregation of Divine Providence of San Antonio*



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Lent 2015

Readings for the Fifth Sunday:

Jeremiah 31:31-34, Hebrews 5:7-9, John 12:20-33

The readings for this Sunday direct our attention to the gift of time, the work of Providence in time. New epiphanies are always introduced by a special time. Jeremiah introduces the promise of the New Covenant of God with the house of Israel: "The days are coming says the Lord." The reading from Hebrews begins with "In the days when he was in the flesh," and in the gospel, Jesus responds to the disciples who present the request from the Greeks who want to see him: "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." The Church in her wisdom invites us during this time of Lent to enter into the sacred hour of Jesus, the providential moments that glorify him, that bring life only through suffering and death on the cross.

We are the people of the new covenant with God's law written in our hearts through Baptism, when all sins are forgiven and we are recreated. We find ourselves accompanying the Elect as they prepare themselves for Christian initiation. They bring all of

the already baptized into the time of Providence who has called them in this time to profess faith in Jesus Christ, to turn from the darkness of evil to the light of resurrection, to new hope and vision.

God's providential heart desires all people to know him. Christ promises that there will be a time when all who follow and serve him will be where he is, will be his presence through the power that comes from him being lifted up, drawing everyone to himself. We see this promise fulfilled when we witness the depth of faith in people who endure tremendous suffering and yet continue to believe in the promise of the crucified Christ who cries and suffers with them.

We live in this providential time when our strongest efforts toward relieving human misery seem like seeds so tiny that they will never bear fruit. Yet we also live in this providential time when we walk with people who after having been excluded now enter new places like St. Juan Diego, where our feet tread timidly knowing that we, the lowly ones, are summoned to embrace this providential moment to become evangelizers in our own land.

The power of the New Covenant beating within our hearts gives us the strength to continue learning obedience through suffering that comes as we strive to bring unity in diversity, collaboration instead of coercion, and meal-sharing around the table. Here the voiceless can articulate their needs as well as their commitment to become providence by participating in bringing about the kingdom. Yes, many more times are yet coming for men and women of providence to believe that to receive true life, we must first let go, to slowly lose all that we thought was life in order to receive eternal life in the already and not yet.

Are we ready?

*Guadalupe Ramirez, MCDP
San Antonio, TX*



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Palm Sunday 2015

Crowds gathered when they heard the news that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. Jesus had sent two disciples to the village and told them they would find a tethered donkey. "Untie it and bring it back," said Jesus. They brought the donkey to Jesus and they threw their cloaks across its back for his comfort. Traditionally, entering the city on a donkey symbolizes an arrival in peace. Many others came and spread their cloaks and palm branches along the road. As he entered the city, hundreds gathered around Jesus, in front or in back of him and cried out, "Blessed is the One who comes in the name of our God."

The disciples walked with Jesus, throughout the coming days not understanding the events of the entire week, until after Jesus was glorified. The week was amazing and confounding. Jesus attempted to prepare his followers for his leaving. He shared the great supper with the disciples, which continues to nourish us with His living, life giving presence. Friday, a very dark day, followed by shock, puzzlement and grief. Then Easter Sunday, resurrection, Alleluias!

For most of us it is often in hindsight that we allow the Spirit to reveal the true meaning and impact of

an event. A disappointment, a defeat, even death of family or friends may eventually lead us to paths and results beyond far better than what we had imagined. However, our personal lenten sacrifices and times of reflection serve no purpose unless we are able to focus on our heart's deepest longing--unity with Christ.

We are seemingly recovering from a serious economic downturn. In hindsight we recognize it has also resulted in raising our national conscience--individuals, our churches, and many helping organizations have discovered new and creative ways to reach out to those in need.

As a Chaplain Intern, at the end of each quarter, our CPE supervisor would begin the closing celebration, "Today we are going to do what we came to do. We came in order to leave." A simple statement and yet it spoke to me a personal and spiritual message. It was true for Jesus and it is for each of us. We have come in order to leave. Alleluia!

WPC Sisters and Associates, as we begin Holy Week, our concerns are many and we are, as Providence women and men, joining with others speaking out about war, uncontrollable violence and death, and we are showing up in different places, for immigration, prison reform, global health, and religious freedom. We are daring to live our charism in this evolving world. In everything that we do, the love of Christ impels us to respond to the cry of the poor and the vulnerable. Blessings for all, as we journey together through this most sacred week.

*Suzanna Harland, PA Liaison
Mother Joseph Province*

"It is easy to love God in all that was beautiful. The lessons of deeper knowledge though, instructed me to embrace God in all things."
--St. Francis of Assisi



*Palm Sunday 2015
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Holy Thursday 2015

"It was night"--John 13:30

The Gospel of John tells us the time that the mysteries of Holy Thursday unfold. "It was night" (John 13:30). No description, no further embellishment is needed. Those three simple words set the mood. Darkness!

But in the upper room – light! Light from the cooking fire, light from small oil lamps, and the Light. The Light that has come into the world to expel the darkness. Night, a time of mystery, but in this upper room the Mystery unfolds.

The ancient ritual of Passover is celebrated commemorating the liberation from the dark night of slavery, persecution and fear. On this night, at this ritual meal, the betrayer betrays and goes out into the night, into the darkness.

Jesus knows His hour has come to return to the Father and the devastating effect it will have on his followers, whom He tenderly loves. The unconditional love of our Providential God surrounds them as they gather in the upper room. Jesus, the Light, that has come into the world to expel the darkness promises to always be with them.

On this night He gives us His Body and Blood in the Eucharist to deepen within us the power of the Spirit. In washing their feet He is telling us to care for one another, for the immigrant and refugee, the abandoned child, a lonely neighbor, anyone in need, and to let our love be His. "As I have done for you, you should also do".

His message is one of love, hope and promise. "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." "Whoever eats this bread will have eternal life."

*Margaret McCleary, SP
Holyoke, MA*



*Holy Thursday 2015
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Good Friday 2015

**"Father, into your hands
I commend my spirit."**

Psalm 31

On Wednesday of Holy Week a year ago, I arrived at the hospital to stay with my youngest sister, who was battling cancer and the devastating side-effects of chemotherapy. Marie was beginning her final journey home to God, though all of us still had hopes she would be able to make it through just one more hospital stay. I knew she was walking with Christ during this Holy Week in the most intimate of ways. Marie had received the Sacrament of the Sick that morning and told me that she felt a heavy hand on her right shoulder. At first I thought her body was hurting, but then she said quietly and confidently, "I know it's God's hand and it feels good." As the days passed, it became clearer this "heavy hand" was the hand of God's loving Providence leading her through the most important journey she would ever make in this life.

On Holy Thursday, I decided that I would stay with her in the evening instead of going to the Mass of the Lord's Supper. As I sat with her quietly, the words

and music of the Taize hymn kept playing in my mind, "Stay with me, remain here with me. Watch and pray. Watch and pray." I felt Marie's hospital room was the modern Gethsemane that evening.

On Good Friday, she and I agreed that I would go to the Celebration of the Lord's Passion at a nearby parish. She wanted me to bring her presence to the service. I made it to the church just as the service was beginning. There were at least 5000 people there, many spilling out the main doors. I managed to make my way into the back of the church and as the youth group carried a massive cross down the center aisle, I suddenly felt as if I ought to be with Marie in her hospital room – she was going through her suffering and agony of Good Friday and Christ was with her – but Christ was also here in the Assembly. There was a moment of indecision, and then I felt God's hand on my shoulder saying, "I am taking care of her. Don't be afraid."

As I listened to the reading of the Passion, I imagined that God had a heavy hand on Jesus' shoulder too, as God guided Jesus to his passion and death. My heart was heavy with grief about Marie, and the only consolation was knowing that Jesus had suffered and died for her first, and was now strengthening her in her moment of suffering and death. She was not alone – the same hand that had guided Jesus was on Marie's shoulder guiding her to new life. I left the service that Friday afternoon grateful that my faith had been strengthened as I heard 5000 strong singing with full voice, "And I will raise you up, and I will raise you up, and I will raise you up on the last day."

Marie died on Easter Tuesday, still feeling our Provident God's comforting and steadying hand on her shoulder, as she entered into the new life of Christ's Resurrection. I have come to believe that her experience of God's hand on her shoulder is our assurance that God is with us in the sufferings and deaths that we and all people in our world experience. We are not alone – the hand of our Provident God is on our shoulders guiding us and bringing us through death to new life in the Risen Christ.

*Dianne Heinrich, CDP
San Antonio, Texas*



*Good Friday 2015
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Holy Saturday 2015

Holy Saturday: Entombment

At the end of his life, Jesus is swaddled a second time and laid in a tomb. We know from the Apostles' Creed that during entombment, he descended into hell to bring out the souls of the just who had died before atonement (at-one-ment). Jesus was doing the work he had agreed to do. But no one saw him.

The time between death and resurrection is a time of great interior activity for Jesus – it was hidden from others. The same is true for one's spiritual journey. Hidden from others are the arduous efforts to re-member and embrace a long-forgotten aspect of the True Self. It is solitary, hellish work to face the shadow side of ourselves. But it is necessary in order to recognize and love the full sum of who we are, warts and all, as God already does.

During entombment we unbind ourselves, taking the wraps off those old wounds that keep us captive to the past. Descending into hell, we bring into new life those parts of ourselves that have been hidden by pain, fear, and lies, thus emerging into the Easter garden.

Just like a butterfly's efforts to emerge from the cocoon, ours is a solitary struggle. The larvae, ensconced safely inside the cocoon, slowly changes from a rather ugly worm-like creature that wiggles and crawls to one that takes flight on gossamer wings, swooping and darting among garden flowers. In a science experiment, it was discovered that when a researcher slit a cocoon to allow the butterfly easier access to freedom, the butterfly died. It seems that the very act of inner struggle, beatings its wings against the cocoon to release itself, strengthened the butterfly for flight.

The same is true for our spiritual journey. There are no short cuts. No one can do the inner work for us. The rigors of entombment and atonement are private and personal. The only evidence that remains are the burial clothes left behind in the tomb.

*Karen Ander Francis, ACDP
Melbourne, KY*



*Holy Saturday 2015
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Easter Sunday 2015

He is Risen...

He is Risen indeed!

"Mary of Magdala came to the tomb...saw the stone removed. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciples whom Jesus loved...who saw and believed. For they did not yet understand the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead." (John 20:1-9) This is the image that speaks to me in the Gospel reading.

Mary Magdala's relationship with Jesus gave her the courage to go to the tomb while it was still dark. Her contemplative stance enlivened her with renewed energy, wisdom and vision to be a prophetic voice to the disciples. The Risen Jesus calls all to a new way of being, with a deeper intentional way of seeing, listening and believing.

Believing in our calling "we can accept God's invitations to co-create more abundant life." (Mary Christine Morkovsky, CDP)

Believing in our charism we have the "ability and willingness to be in line with the action of God's Spirit making all things new." (Luisa M. Saffiotti)

Believing in who we are empowers us to be the transforming presence in our world so in need of healing, reconciliation and hope.

Editha Ben, SP

St. Mary-of-the-Woods, IN



*Easter Sunday 2015
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