



Lent 2022



Introduction to Lenten Prayer Services

It seemed the Christmas and New Year's season was barely over and it was time for me to begin thinking about Lenten prayer services. As we know the journey of Lent is about discipleship, about more deeply participating in the life of Christ. It is a season of love, love for God, love for the needy, love for all creation. It is grounded in "springtime" and points us toward the great Easter mystery.

As I was pondering what format to use this year for readings, reflections, poems, prayers, (as I have done in the past), I happened to read an excerpt about Thomas Merton's deep connection to God, particularly through nature. How his writings had a cosmic and providential lens to them...which intrigued me and sent me to my bookshelf where I found: **Thomas Merton, A Book of Hours**. I confess that this book has been on my shelf for some time and yet I never seriously looked at it. But something caught my attention and resonated within me as I began paging through it. There seemed to be an invitation to join Merton in listening to God in the silence, and in nature. There was a sense of transcendence in his writings, poetry, and reflections...at times brutally honest and yet rooted in tenderness. He had a great love of the psalms and in *Lectio Divina*. The contemporary psalms, written by Merton, praise God from a well of gratitude and awareness and give us a way of seeing the splendors of creation and the intimacy of the human heart all at the same time.

What I have tried to do in this year's Lenten prayer services is blend one of the Scripture passages for a particular day of Lent in each of the six weeks with a psalm from Merton, followed by a reflection from him and/or from one of my favorites: Bishop Morneau. I then wrote some questions for reflection and sharing. These are simply meant to be "starters" for your sharing because who knows where the Scripture, psalm or reflection might take you?!

I do not know what your unique Lenten journey may be this year. I do know that our Provident God invites each of us to listen and to be open to the invitations God will send us. For they will surely come at any moment, anywhere, anytime. If our hearts are ready for this invasion of grace we will find new seeds of life nurturing our spirit and taking us to the depths of divine mystery.

May you discover an abundance of blessings in your springtime of Lent, 2022!!

Sister Barbara

Barbara McMullen, CDP





Ash Wednesday

Call to Prayer

Leader: Provident God, You are the prudence and the power that changes our dust and nothingness into fields and fruits;

All: enfold our lives forever in the compass of Your peaceful hills.

Song: (your selection)

Reading: Joel 2:12-18 (excerpts)

“Return to me with your whole heart, with fasting, weeping, and mourning; rend your hearts and return to the Lord, your God. God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, rich in kindness, perhaps God will leave behind a blessing. Gather the people, notify the congregation; for the Lord was stirred to concern for his land and took pity on the people.” **The word of God.**

Response: Thomas Merton, Psalm, *Book of Hours*, p. 35

The world and time are the dance of the Lord in emptiness. The silence of the spheres is the music of a wedding feast.

The more we persist in misunderstanding the phenomena of life, the more we analyze them out into strange finalities and complex purposes of our own, the more we involve ourselves in sadness, absurdity and despair.

But it does not matter much, because no despair of ours can alter the reality of things or stain the joy of the cosmic dance which is always there. Indeed, we are in the midst of it, and it is in the midst of us, for it beats in our very blood, whether we want it to or not.

Yet the fact remains that we are invited to forget ourselves on purpose, cast our awful solemnity to the winds and join in the general dance.





Ash Wednesday

Reflection: *Thomas Merton, Book of Hours*

Lent is the time of openness to all that is just as it is. It is healing time when some great and secret mercy works miracles in our woundedness, and so it is compassionate time. In this space of liberty, free of the demands of the world, all possibilities are allowed to surface and new choices become manifest in a moment of pure potential. This is the wisdom nurtured in the soil of the present moment, the near frontier of eternity.

Reflection Questions

- ◆How do I come to the dance this Lenten season?

- ◆What is the silence of the spheres calling me to let go of so I may receive the blessing of openness to all that is?

Closing Prayer:

Provident God, the prophet Joel tells us that You are gracious and merciful, slow to anger and rich in kindness. May we experience these qualities in this season of Lent and live these same qualities in our dealings with one another. May Your graces allow us and invite us to join in the dance! We ask this through Jesus, our brother, Amen





Lenten Prayer Service

Week One

Call to Prayer

Leader: Provident God, You are the prudence and the power that changes our dust and nothingness into fields and fruits;

All: enfold our lives forever in the compass of Your peaceful hills.

Song: (your selection)

Reading: Isaiah 55: 10-11 (from Tuesday of first week of Lent)

Thus says the Lord...So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; It shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it. **The word of God.**

Response: Thomas Merton, Psalm, *Book of Hours* p. 80-81

It is God's love that warms me in the sun and God's love that sends the cold rain. It is God's love that feeds me in the bread I eat and God that feeds me in his Word, Jesus, through my hunger and fasting.

It is the love of God that sends the winter days when I am cold and sick, and the hot summer when I labor, and my clothes are full of sweat; but it is God Who breathes on me with light winds off the river and in the breezes out of the woods. His love spreads the shade of the sycamore over my head.

It is God's love that speaks to me in the birds and streams; but also, behind the clamor of the city God speaks to me in His judgments, and all these things are seeds sent to me from His will.

If these seeds would take root in my liberty, and if God's will would grow from my freedom, I would become the love that God is, and my harvest would be God's glory and my own joy.

And I would grow together with thousands and millions of other freedoms into the gold of one huge field praising God, loaded with increase, loaded with wheat. And the Word would grow within me.





Lenten Prayer Service Week One

Reflection: Thomas Merton, *Book of Hours*

All Christian life is meant to be at the same profoundly contemplative and rich in active work. It is true that we are called to create a better world. But we are first called to a more immediate and exalted task: that of creating our own lives. In doing this, we act as co-workers with God. We share with one another the creative work of living in the world. And it is through our struggles that we help one another, for it is through the Word, Jesus, that we have redemption.

Reflection Questions

- ◆What word has God given to you?

- ◆How effective are the words you speak, be it in prayer or daily conversations with others?

- ◆How are you hoping to create a better world?

Closing Prayer:

Provident God, let Your Word, Jesus, dwell deep within our hearts. Open our ears to the sound of Your voice; give us strength to do what You ask of us. Help us to be Your co-creators. We ask this through Jesus, our Word and brother. Amen.





Lenten Prayer Service

Week Two

Call to Prayer

Leader: Provident God, You are the prudence and the power that changes our dust and nothingness into fields and fruits;

All: enfold our lives forever in the compass of Your peaceful hills.

Song: (your selection)

Reading: Genesis 15:5-12 (from second Sunday of Lent)

The Lord God took Abram outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars if you can. Just so, "he added, "shall your descendants be." Abram put his faith in the Lord, who credited it to him as an act of righteousness.

(from: The Message: translation of Luke on the Transfiguration)

Peter, James and John saw Jesus in his glory and the two men standing with him. Peter said to Jesus, "Master this is a great moment! Let us build three memorials"...when suddenly a light-radiant cloud enveloped them. As they found themselves buried in the cloud, they became deeply aware of God. **The word of God.**

Response: Thomas Merton, Psalm, *Book of Hours* p. 127

Today, in a moment of trial, I rediscovered Jesus, or perhaps discovered Him for the first time. I came closer than ever to fully realizing how true it is that our relations with Jesus are something utterly beyond the level of imagination and emotion.

His eyes, which are the eyes of Truth, are fixed upon my heart. Where his glance falls, there is peace: for the light of His Face, which is the Truth, produces truth wherever it shines. There too is joy; and he says to those he loves; I will fix my eyes upon you. His eyes are always on us everywhere in all times. No grace comes to us from heaven except that He looks upon our hearts.

The grace of this gaze of Christ upon my heart transfigured this day like a miracle. It seems to me that I have discovered a freedom that I never knew before in my life. I have felt that the Spirit of God was upon me, and I thought that, if I only turned my head a little, I would see a tremendous host of angels in silver armor advancing behind me through the sky, coming at last to sweep the whole world clean. It carried me along on a vivid ocean of peace.

And the whole world and the whole sky was filled with wonderful music, as it has often been for me in these days.





Lenten Prayer Service

Week Two

Reflection: Bishop Robert F. Morneau: *Not By Bread Alone*

Abram looked up into the starry sky and was told by God that his descendants would be truly numerous. Abram believed! He put his trust in the word of God. He relied on God's providential promise. Like Abram, Peter, James and John believed too. They had a faith experience that transformed their lives. Never again would they view Jesus in the same light; never again would they be able to forget the glory of the transfigured Christ.

Reflection Questions

- ◆How has your faith grown in the last several years?

- ◆What enhances and what diminishes your belief in the mystery of God?

- ◆What is God's providential promise to you?

- ◆What transformative experiences in your life have brought you to deeper places of trust and hope?

Closing Prayer:

Provident God, may we listen to You as you speak to us through Abram, Peter, James and John. Deepen our faith, deepen our hope, deepen our love. Awaken in us the cry of our heart, which is Your cry within us, that we may be transformed and co-create a world of justice, peace, and compassion. We pray in the name of Jesus, our brother. Amen.





Lenten Prayer Service

Week Three

Call to Prayer

Leader: Provident God, You are the prudence and the power that changes our dust and nothingness into fields and fruits;

All: enfold our lives forever in the compass of Your peaceful hills.

Song: (your selection)

Reading: Jeremiah 7: 23-28 (Thursday of third Week of Lent)

Thus says the Lord: This is what I command my people: Listen to my voice; then I will be Your God and you shall be my people. Walk in all the ways that I command you, so that you may prosper. **The word of God.**

Response: Thomas Merton, Psalm, *Book of Hours*, p. 57-58

Justify my soul, O God, from Your fountains fill my will with fire. Shine on my mind, "be darkness to my experience," occupy my heart with your tremendous Life. Let my eyes see nothing in the world but Your glory and let my hands touch nothing that is not for Your service.

Let my tongue taste no bread that does not strengthen me to praise Your great mercy. I will hear Your voice and I will hear all harmonies You have created, singing Your hymns to find joy in giving You glory.

Help me to go out from myself with all that I am, which is nothing, and pour out that nothingness in gratitude to You, God, who is and who will always be.

Help me to let go of my own obsession with what I think is the meaning of it all, that I might be able to hear Your call and follow You in Your mysterious, cosmic dance.





Lenten Prayer Service

Week Three

Reflection: Thomas Merton, *Book of Hours* and Bishop Robert F Morneau: *Not By Bread Alone*
In the simple fact of being attentive, learning to listen (or recovering the natural capacity to listen which cannot be learned any more than breathing) we can find ourselves engulfed in such happiness that it cannot be explained: the happiness of being at one with everything in that hidden ground of Love for which there can be no explanations.

Listening is a challenge, a most difficult art for us humans. So many voices seek our attention and elicit our commitment. But listening depends upon the texture of our hearts. Is it a texture open to the inner movements of the heart, of kindness and compassion, or have we hardened our hearts so much that we cannot truly listen?

Reflection Questions

- ◆ Why do you think listening is such a difficult task?

- ◆ What are signs of a hardened heart?

- ◆ What are signs of a graced textured heart?

- ◆ To whom or what do you listen?

Closing Prayer:

Loving and Provident God, may we always walk in Your ways. Give us hearts that are a graced texture of kindness and compassion. May we grow in peace and not neglect the silence that is printed in the center of our being. Help us to hear and really listen to Your voice, that if only for a moment, we may know that we are full of paradise without knowing it, for in You is the place of silence, the place of peace, the place of everlasting love. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.





Lenten Prayer Service

Week Four

Call to Prayer

Leader: Provident God, You are the prudence and the power that changes our dust and nothingness into fields and fruits;

All: enfold our lives forever in the compass of Your peaceful hills.

Song: (your selection)

Reading: 2: Cor 5: 17-21 (2nd reading 4th Sunday of Lent; and story of Prodigal Son)

So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

(from *The Message*) His father said, Son you don't understand. You're with me all the time, and everything that is mine is yours—but this is a wonderful time, and we had to celebrate. This brother of yours was dead, and he's alive! He was lost, and he's found!

The word of God.

Response: Thomas Merton, Psalm, *Book of Hours* p. 47

Today, Father, this blue sky lauds you. The delicate green and orange flowers of the tulip poplar tree praise you. The distant blue hills praise you, together with the sweet-smelling air that is full of brilliant light.

The bickering flycatchers praise you with the lowing cattle and the quails that whistle over there. I too, Father, praise you, with all these my brothers (and sisters), and they give voice to my own heart and to my own silence. We are all one silence, and a diversity of voices.

You have made us together, you have made us one and many, you have placed me here in the midst as witness, as awareness, and as joy. Here I am.

You have made me a kind of center, but a center that is nowhere. And yet also I am "here." To be here with the silence of Sonship in my heart is to be a center in which all things converge upon you. That is surely enough for the time being.





Lenten Prayer Service

Week Four

Reflection: Bishop Robert F. Morneau: *Not By Bread Alone*

Sin causes alienation. Reconciliation and conversion are lifelong processes. We stand in need of the presence of Christ to attain some order and harmony on this spiritual journey. Both the prodigal son and his brother sinned and stood in need of reconciliation. During Lent we are called to be both reconciled to God and agents of reconciliation. As Christ's ambassadors, we say yes to the call to heal relationships, to deal with the disorders of existence (our own and others') and to name and address the imbalances that are part of our experience. Christ will always be the lead agent, and we the co-workers in continuing the work of forgiveness and redemption.

Reflection Questions

- ◆ How do you resonate with the psalm: being one with God in the inmost center of your spirit?

- ◆ How are you a link in the "chain of light and presence?"

- ◆ What is your understanding of reconciliation?

- ◆ How is Jesus' mission of forgiveness and redemption manifested in your life?

Closing Prayer:

Forgiving and merciful God, give us the grace we need to foster the union and unity You desire. May we come to know You at the deepest center of our lives. Help us to be Your instruments of reconciliation and ambassadors of good news. May we be a link in the chain of light and presence so that together we share with others Your abundant healing. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.





Lenten Prayer Service

Week Five

Call to Prayer

Leader: Provident God, You are the prudence and the power that changes our dust and nothingness into fields and fruits;

All: enfold our lives forever in the compass of Your peaceful hills.

Song: (your selection)

Reading: John 8: 12-20 (Monday, fifth week of Lent) from The Message
Jesus addressed them: "I am the world's Light. No one who follows me stumbles around in the darkness. I provide plenty of light to live in." The Pharisees objected, "All we have is your word on this. We need more than this to go on." Jesus replied, "You're right that you only have my word. But you can depend on it being true. I know where I'm from and where I go next. You don't know where I'm from or where I'm headed. You decide according to what you can see and touch. I don't make judgments like that."

The word of God.

Response: Thomas Merton, Canticle, *Book of Hours*, p. 49

See the high birds! Is theirs's the song that flies among the wood-light, wounding the listener with such bright arrows?

More than a season will be born here, nature, in your world of gravid mirrors! The quiet air awaits one note, one light, one ray and it will be the angels' spring: one flash, one glance upon the shiny pond, and then, Asperges me! Sweet wilderness, and lo! We are redeemed!

For, like a grain of fire smoldering in the heart of every living essence God plants His undivided power—buries his thought too vast for worlds in seed and root and blade and flower, until, in the amazing shadowlights surcharging the religious silence of the spring, Creation finds the pressure of its everlasting secret too terrible to bear.

Then every way we look, lo! Rocks and trees, pastures and hills and streams and birds and firmament; and our own souls within us flash, and shower us with light, while the wild countryside, unknown, unvisited bears sheaves of clean, transforming fire.

And then, oh then the written image, schooled in sacrifice, the deep united Threeness printed in our deepest being, shot by the brilliant syllable of such an intuition turns within,

And plants that light far down into the heart of darkness and oblivion and plunges after to discover flame.





Lenten Prayer Service

Week Five

Reflection: Bishop Robert F. Morneau: *Not By Bread Alone*

There are indeed greater and lesser lights. Just ask the sun; just ask the moon. But regardless of intensity, light enables us to see and sometimes even to know, to know the face of a friend, to know the glorious colors of an autumn maple, to know who we are and where we are going. Jesus is the great light; the manifestation and presence of God in our darkened world. By being invited into his life, we become agents of light and life and, oh yes, of love too. We participate in the great struggle that confronts evil. Jesus plunged into our history bearing the divine light and shining radiantly in the darkness. And even though his death appears as a defeat, we believe in the resurrection and that Jesus is truly the light of life.

Reflection Questions

- ◆ How do you resonate with the canticle: with all of creation giving light?

- ◆ Is the sun and or the moon a symbol of grace for you?

- ◆ What role does light play in your spiritual life?

- ◆ How can we, as Providence people, help to scatter the darkness of sin in our world today?

Closing Prayer:

Provident God of Life and Light, help us to know where we are from and where we hope to go. Shine Your light within our deepest selves and help us to claim our sin, doubt and despair but not to stop there. Help us to also know Your grace, forgiveness, Your abiding love always within us. May we embrace the call to be light to others, to be Your disciples, and to be the face of Providence to all we meet. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.





Lenten Prayer Service

Week Six

Call to Prayer

Leader: Provident God, You are the prudence and the power that changes our dust and nothingness into fields and fruits;

All: enfold our lives forever in the compass of Your peaceful hills.

Song: (your selection)

Reading: Isaiah 42: 5-7 (Monday of Holy Week)

Thus says God, the Lord...I have grasped you by the hand; I formed you, and set you as a covenant of the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out prisoners from confinement, and from the dungeon, those who live in darkness.

The word of God.

Response: Thomas Merton, Psalm, *Book of Hours*, p. 103-104

Let this be my only consolation—that, wherever I am, You my Lord are loved and praised. The trees indeed love You without knowing You. Without being aware of Your presence, the tiger lilies and cornflowers proclaim that they love You.

The beautiful dark clouds ride slowly across the sky musing on You like children who do not know what they are dreaming of as they play. In the midst of them all, I know You and I know of Your Presence. In them and in me I know of the love that they do not know and, what is greater, I am abashed by the presence of Your love in me.

O kind and terrible love which You have given me and which could never be in my heart if You did not love me! In the midst of these beings that have never offended You, I am loved by You, most of all as one who has offended You. I am seen by You under the sky and my offenses have been forgotten by You.

You ask of me nothing else than to be content that I am Your child and Your friend, simply to accept Your friendship because it is YOUR friendship. This friendship is Spirit. You have called me to be repeatedly born in light, in knowledge, in unknowing, in faith, in awareness, in gratitude, in poverty, in presence, and in praise.





Lenten Prayer Service

Week Six

Reflection: Bishop Robert F. Morneau: *Not By Bread Alone*

Today we think about the ever-present reality of being grasped, created, supported, and loved by God. This was the experience of Isaiah the prophet as he tells us how God grasps us by the hand and never lets us go. Jesus' relationship with the Father was one of intense intimacy. From that relationship his mission flowed: be a light to the nations, help the blind to see, free prisoners, lead people out of darkness into the light. In this Holy Week we are invited to taste deeply the ever-present reality of God's love and mercy.

Reflection Questions

- ◆ How have you experienced the reality of being grasped, supported and loved by God?

- ◆ How do you help others believe that they, too, are created, supported, and loved by our gracious God?

- ◆ In what ways do you participate in Jesus' mission of being a light to the nations, helping the blind to see, freeing prisoners, and leading people out of darkness into light?

Closing Prayer:

Provident God, we have walked this Lenten journey with Your Son, Jesus. As we enter more deeply now into Holy Week, may our faith in You and Your work of redemption deepen and grow within us. Through the mystery of Your incarnation and the work of redemption, help us to experience Your ever abiding love. Grasp us by the hand and never let us go. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

