

## Welcome to our Sacred Space Retreat for Lent 2006



You need to plan today's retreat, combining the freedom of your own style with certain essentials for a meeting with God – or rather for alerting yourself to God who is present to you all the time.

**Freedom:** You will pray wherever suits you best: maybe walking outside, maybe sitting, standing or kneeling in your room, maybe in a church or chapel.

**Space:** Moses found holy ground on a deserted mountainside. It may not be so easy for you. Find a place where you will be present to God, and God to you, and where others will not distract you.

**Solitude:** Turn off your mobile phone, radio and TV, in order to create an affective solitude. Leave off your public person, the mask you wear in your social life. Today you face the Lord naked; he sees your heart and loves you as you are. Cut off anything which would break that link with God. Set up a new, slow rhythm. Seek solitude to see things as they are. What are the little things that busyness has magnified unduly? What are the big things I find too little time for? Today is not for doing but for *being*: make no effort to achieve, get things done, gather or possess. Waste time creatively. You are not alone. Each sensation is God's caress. Each breath is saying 'Yes' to God.

**A Lenten Retreat:** We normally understand Lent as a time, first of all, to reflect on our lives and to become aware of the areas in our life which are less than satisfactory in terms of spiritual growth and our growth as persons and our relationship with God.

It is a time of penitence – of expressing sorrow to God, and to those whom we have hurt in some way, perhaps doing some acts of self-denial and celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation in a meaningful way.

It is also a time when we reflect in a special way on what God has done for us and how he has shown his love for us through the life – and especially through the sufferings and death of his Son Jesus Christ.

All of this is combined in the three Scripture passages suggested for our prayer on this day. Of course, if there are other Scripture texts which you would find more meaningful for Lent (and there are endless possibilities), please feel perfectly free to use them. The important thing is, in the words of St Ignatius Loyola, "to find fruit" for oneself at this particular time.

**Time:** Make yourself a timetable for the day.

Here is a suggestion, to be adapted to suit your circumstances:

## SUGGESTED TIMETABLE

- 10.30a.m.      **Session 1: Scripture: Last Judgement: *A guide for life***  
  
Playback
- 11.10 a.m.      Midmorning Break
- 11.30 a.m.      **Session 2: Scripture: The Prodigal Son: *The God who calls us***  
  
Playback
- 1.00 p.m.      Mid-day break
- 2.30 p.m.      **Session 3: Scripture: Jesus' last will and testament – *Being a person for others.***  
  
Review of the Day

### First Session

#### Passage from Scripture: Matthew 25:31-46

**Read** the passage **very slowly**, maybe more than once.

**Pause** and slow down in God's presence. Hear Jesus speak to ME in the passage. *Be still and know that I am God.*

#### **The Judgment of the Nations** (Matthew 24:3; 25:31-46)

When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Jesus privately.

He said to them:

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.

Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?'

And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'

Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.'

Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?'

Then he will answer them 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

### **Reflection:**

It might seem strange to begin a retreat with the Last Judgement. But unless we have a vision of the end, it is difficult to know where we should be going. If we were to draw up our own idea of how God would be likely to evaluate our life, I imagine it might be very different from what we have here in the Gospel. We would probably expect him to go through the Ten Commandments and our observance of religious duties (the Eucharist, the Sacrament of Reconciliation). We would surely expect him to question us on our sexual behaviour or our faithfulness to other obligations.

But Jesus mentions none of these things. The only question he apparently is going to ask and therefore the only thing we need to be concerned about is: How did I show a caring love for those around me, especially those who were in need or were suffering in some way (even gaolbirds)? Is this concern the centre of my life? What are my main concerns, what do I spend most of my day worrying about? Which come first in my life – people or things? And what things? And which people and what kinds of people? The life that Jesus asks us to live is simple in the extreme – and at the same time very challenging.

**Petition:** After praying on the passage,  
I will ask for what I most deeply want

**Playback:** After this prayer, reflect on it: How was that simple exercise for me? How did it go? What was it like? Consoling? Frustrating? Dry? Did anything stand out for me? Was I moved, lifted or depressed, disturbed or encouraged, by anything? Am I drawn back to an aspect of what I was praying about? What, if anything, altered or changed in me? Reflect on this for a moment. Would one word, or perhaps an image, describe the experience? Perhaps I could write down the word or image.

## **Second session**

### **Passage from Scripture: Luke 15:1-2, 11-32**

**Read** the passage **very slowly**, maybe more than once.

**Pause** and slow down in God's presence. Hear Jesus speak to ME as he tells the parable. Spend time with each of the main characters in the story. (Many find Rembrandt's picture of this scene very helpful.)

### **The Parable of the Prodigal and his Brother** (Luke 15:1-2, 11-32)

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to Jesus. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."' So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe – the best one – and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was

dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

"Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father; 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice: because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found'."

## **Reflection:**

There are three principal people in the story – the younger son, the elder son, the father. Which one most resembles me?

The younger son behaves abominably and with total self-centredness. In asking his father for his inheritance while his father is still living is almost like saying that he can't wait for his father to die to get his share of the money. And then, when he does get the money, he goes off to spend it on pure pleasure, not to say debauchery. Then he ends up with nothing. It would be difficult to imagine a Jew brought so low that he would gladly eat the pigs' swill, not to mention spending his day in their company. This is a picture of any one of us who, in spite of all the blessings God has showered on us, use them selfishly for ourselves. Even in our religious practices, we can be very self-centred.

Where do I stand right now in this regard? There is a link here with the first reading. Now is a time for me to "come to my senses" and go back to the Father I have abandoned so often.

In sharing this parable with others, I often find that most people (especially religiously inclined people) tend to identify with the elder son. On the face of it, he is a good boy. He stays at home, he works on the farm, he always does what his father asks him to do. And yet... When his father welcomes the younger brother back, he refuses to go into his father's house. He cannot forgive his brother; he sits in judgement on him. He represents the Pharisees at the beginning of the passage. But many of us, too, can very easily see ourselves in the elder brother as we, too, constantly criticise and judge others.

Lastly, there is the father, who represents God, the Father of Jesus. He lets the younger son go away, leaves him his freedom. He makes no effort to drag him back. But he waits day after day for the change of heart. And, once the son turns back, he is embraced and there is a huge celebration for his return. "My son was

dead and has come to life again.” That is the God that Jesus preaches; it is not the God of the Pharisees, of the elder son. It is the God who acts through Jesus eating and drinking with sinners and tax collectors.

Which of these three most resembles me? What will I do this Lent to bring about reconciliation and healing with those I have hurt and with those I think have hurt me?

**Petition:** After praying on the passage,  
I will ask for what I most deeply want

**Playback:** After this prayer, reflect on it, as above.

### **Third session**

**Passage from Scripture: John 13, 15 and 1 Corinthians 11**

**Read** the passage **very slowly**, maybe more than once.

**Pause** and slow down in God’s presence. Hear Jesus speak to ME in the passage. *Be still and know that I am God.*

**Jesus’ last will and testament: being people for others**

**A**, “I give you a new commandment that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another.” (John 13:34-35)

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” (John 15:12-13)

**B**, “The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

**C**, Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him.

And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his

hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." "For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord – and you are right, for that is what I am. If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But it is to fulfil the scripture, 'The one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.' I tell you this now, before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am he. Very truly, I tell you, whoever receives one whom I send receives me; and whoever receives me receives him who sent me." (John 13:1-20)

## **Reflection:**

These three sets of readings all belong to the Last Supper. They set the scene and give meaning to what is going to happen on the following day, Good Friday, when God manifests his unutterable love for us in a most extraordinary way.

A, Jesus gives us his "new" commandment – that we love one another with the same love that he showed for us, with the greatest love possible, where one is prepared, if necessary, even to give one's life, as Jesus himself is going to do. Not only is this a 'new' commandment, in a way it is the only commandment we have to follow. "By this will all know that you are my disciples, that you have love one for another." By implication then, anyone who lives a life of love and caring for brothers and sisters is a disciple of Christ. Elsewhere we read in the First Letter of John: "Whoever loves, knows God." Because "God is love". Again, we are back to the first passage of our retreat.

B, The sharing of the bread and the cup in the Eucharist is also a commandment. "Do this in memory of me." The Eucharist, called in the New Testament, the "breaking of bread" is a celebration of Christ's love for us through his suffering and death on the Cross but also a celebration that we, too, are now members of

that Body, where Christ is truly present in us. So it is both a celebration that we are a community in Christ and a stimulus for us to live lives of love.

C, Finally, we read where Jesus gets down on his knees and washes the feet of his disciples. Here, too, there is a commandment: “If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.” What we have here is the message of service, which is absolutely central to our Christian living. Serving here is not primarily an act of humility. It is love in action. Jesus washes his disciples feet as a brother to a brother, even though he is also Master and Lord. There are different callings within the community but no one pulls rank. Each one is called to serve his brothers and sisters in a way that is unique to each one.

The three passages are closely linked – there can be no Eucharist without love of those around us; there can be love that is not expressed in active service. The three commandments point in the same direction – discipleship means unconditional love for every single person. When we walk that way, it is the Way of Jesus and it makes us in the image of our God.

**Petition:** After praying on the passage,  
I will ask for what I most deeply want

### **Review of the Day:**

At the end of the day, reflect on the three sessions.

See what you would like to retain from the day, in the shape of an image, or phrase, or resolution.

Ease yourself slowly back into the routine of daily living.