Weekly Reflections

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(Based on the Sunday Scripture readings throughout Lent)









CARITAS AUSTRALIA PROJECT COMPASSION

Unite Against Poverty this Lent

2027

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Ash Wednesday

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Joel 2:12-18 | Ps 51:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 14 and 17. R. v.3 | 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2 | Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

There is an Anglican priest who works near the Caritas office in Melbourne. On Ash Wednesday every year, he and some parishioners stand at the entrance of Parliament Station, where thousands of people arrive for work. They offer to put ashes on the foreheads of the commuters. They have a small brochure to explain the symbolism of what they are doing.

It is beautiful to watch this taking place. I have never noticed anyone refuse the offer, even if they are a bit bemused. Mostly they smile. Some people are clearly reminded of something from the distant past. Perhaps they received ashes when they were at school and have drifted away from religion. Others have no clue what is going on but are open to something a bit out of the ordinary.

It is good to hear that we will return to dust. Especially when the thing at the front of our mind is returning to the office, or the car or the shops. Ash Wednesday puts us in touch with the bigger picture. This is a great way to start our Lenten journey towards Easter.

It does this by drawing us inwards. Each year, the Gospel reminds us of the private places we meet God or, we should say, God waits for us. ‘Go to your private room and, when you have shut the door, pray to your Father who is in that secret place.’ The word ‘secret’ occurs six times in a short passage. It lets us know that God is great at hide and seek. He always finds us.

At the same time, Ash Wednesday draws us outwards. St Paul reminds us that ‘we are ambassadors for Christ.’ We are God’s ‘fellow workers.’ In other words, now is the time to reach out to others.

The First Reading and the Psalm both speak of God’s compassion. God ‘is all tenderness and compassion’. We are called to reflect that compassion to others, especially those most in need, however far away they may seem to be. That is why every Lent we listen to stories from Caritas Australia and support Project Compassion to the best of our ability. We answer the summons to be God’s compassion in the world as we Unite Against Poverty. We can pray the words of the Psalm, ‘with a spirit of fervour sustain me.’



Yeshareg and her family inside their home in their village in Ethiopia. Photo: Peter Caton/Caritas Australia.

Prayer

We pray for all who are trying to rise from the ashes in their lives. May our support for Project Compassion remind us that now is the time to turn to the Lord with all our hearts as we *Unite Against Poverty*.

Amen

First Sunday of Lent

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Genesis 9:8-15 | Ps 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9 R. v.10 | 1 Peter 3:18-22 | Mark1:12-15

There used to be a show on TV called Great Temptation. Contestants would answer questions and each correct answer earned money. They then had the choice of cashing in for a prize or holding out in the hope of something better, maybe even a car. It was a form of gambling, I suppose, although it was all fairly innocuous.

Often people think of temptation as a form of gambling. You might be tempted to sleep in, gambling that your boss might not notice you arriving later for work. You might be tempted to eat a second piece of chocolate cake with cream, gambling that you won't feel sick later. You might be tempted to keep a special purchase secret from your husband or wife, gambling they won't look at the credit card statement.

For Christians, temptation means something else. Every year, the Sunday after Ash Wednesday, the First Sunday of Lent, presents us with one of the stories of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. This year, it comes from Mark's Gospel. Mark's storytelling tends to cut to the raw essentials.

The combination of temptation and the wilderness is significant. The wilderness is traditionally a place without the regular comforts of life. Those who venture there do so without the usual things that indicate our social identity such as family, possessions or position. It is a place that is full of emptiness, as it were, which asks us two basic questions. Who do you think you are? Who does God call you to be? Temptation refers to a lure to become someone other than your true self. Jesus had to sort things out. So do we.

During Lent, we prepare to celebrate Easter by returning to the very essence of who we are and who God is in our life. One great way to do this is by tuning in to the stories that Project Compassion, organised by Caritas Australia, offers us during this season. This year, those stories will touch upon water shortage, disability, food scarcity and emergency relief in four separate countries. There is no doubt that millions of people desperately need the help we provide through Project Compassion. We can also send a message to ourselves that we care for God's family around the world. Helping others is a good way to find peace with oneself and a closer connection with God.

Let us all Unite Against Poverty this Lent.

UNITE AGAINST POVERTY this Lent

Prayer

We pray for all those around the world who are vulnerable to the impact of poverty, violence, and climate change. May our generosity towards Project Compassion be a measure of our commitment to global change as we Unite Against Poverty.

Amen

Second Sunday of Lent

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Genesis 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18 | Ps 116:10, 15, 16-17, 18-19 R. v.9 | Romans 8:31b-34 | Mark 9:2-10

When Jesus took his closest friends to the top of a high mountain, they experienced something quite extraordinary. The transfiguration gave them a glimpse of what it meant for Jesus to be the son of God. It is hardly surprising that Peter said, 'it is wonderful for us to be here.' The Gospel also tells us that Jesus' friends were frightened, and this is also easy to understand. They were overwhelmed. Nevertheless, it's not long before Jesus reminds them that he is destined to die. His friends must come down from the mountain and walk with Jesus through all the ordinary days and weeks that lie ahead.

We can all say 'it is wonderful for us to be here' no matter where that happens to be. Life is full of wonder. That doesn't mean it is always easy. We live in the arms of a very deep mystery. God's love enfolds us.

Throughout Lent, we are called to support Project Compassion, an initiative of Caritas Australia. Project Compassion gives thanks for more than 60 years of partnership with some of the most marginalised communities in the world. With your help, we have walked alongside literally millions of people in dozens of countries. Caritas Australia believes that the world can be transfigured to become more like the Kingdom of God of which Jesus spoke. We can encounter people whom others choose to ignore. When we do so, we discover that here, too, are children of God. We are asked to listen to them.

This week, Project Compassion presents the story of Patricia, a 14-year-old girl living in Malaita in the Solomon Islands. Lack of access to water is a common issue across the Solomon Islands with more than 1 in 4 people without access to basic drinking water. Before clean water was available in her community, Patricia spent up to two hours a day walking to collect water in a dangerous and hilly rainforest, often leaving her too tired for homework and schooling.

Thanks to your support of Project Compassion, the Common Home Project, implemented by the Catholic Diocese of Auki, has installed water taps outside her family's house. Patricia's life has become easier and her well-being improved. She now has more time to help her family, play with friends, and support her younger siblings. Although her schooling has been interrupted, she plans to return and continue her education in 2027 with the hope of one day becoming a teacher, like her father.

Jesus' friends felt overwhelmed, but he showed them a way forward. We can also feel that the needs of the world are enormous, but if we *Unite Against Poverty*, we can make a huge impact.



Patricia washing her hands using a new water system that was installed just outside her family house in Malaita province, Solomon Islands. Photo: Caritas Australia

Prayer

We pray in Lent for the work of Project Compassion. May we Unite Against Poverty to ensure more people have clean water. May the world be transfigured by our faith and love.

Amen

Third Sunday of Lent

Exodus 20:1-17 | Ps 19:8, 9, 10,11. R. John 6:68 | 1 Corinthians 1:22-25 | John 2:13-25

Listening and respect go hand in hand. One of the most important ways we uphold the dignity of others is by helping them to find their voice. Those who listen carefully to others are often the ones best able to listen to God.

Today's readings ask us to listen in deep ways. In the first reading, God sets some clear expectations for our behaviour. They are all based around respect, both for the Lord and for each other. Respect needs boundaries and the Ten Commandments mirror that belief. At the same time, God reminds us 'I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the house of slavery.' In other words, these are not random rules. They are designed to protect our freedom. Disregarding them sends us back into captivity.

In the Gospel, Jesus is annoyed by people who think they know everything, but who have not properly understood the basic lesson about justice and reverence. 'Stop turning my father's house into a market.' They have learnt the Law, as it is known, but have not properly listened to it. Finally, St Paul speaks about wisdom. 'God's weakness is human strength.' This is another invitation to listen: inviting us into a mystery, almost using riddles to get us to think outside the box.

This week, Project Compassion, organised by Caritas Australia, presents the challenge of listening to people who have difficulty hearing.

Reaksmey, a 23-year-old from Kampot, Cambodia, has faced a life shaped by loss and isolation. After his mother passed away when he was just 15 days old and his father moved away to live with his new family, he was raised by his two aunts. Being deaf, Reaksmey struggled to communicate with others and spent most of his time at home caring for livestock. He eventually dropped out of school after grade six due to discrimination from his classmates. With support from Epic Arts, he received a bicycle and began attending the Epic Arts Centre, where he learnt sign language for the first time. Through dance and art, he found ways to express himself and connect with others. Now working at the Epic Arts Café, Reaksmey earns an income and helps contribute to his family's expenses.

Like so many of the people encountered by Caritas, Reaksmey has experienced a lot of disrespect, including exclusion. As we Unite Against Poverty this Lent, may our respect for God's way flow into our respect for all people.



Reaksmey standing outside the kitchen at Epic Arts café. Photo: Caritas Australia

Prayer

For people who suffer exclusion due to disability. May we support the work of Caritas Australia and Project Compassion as we Unite Against Poverty this Lent.

Amen

Fourth Sunday of Lent

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2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23 | Ps 137:1-2, 3, 4-5, 6. R. v.6 | Ephesians 2:4-10 | John 3:14-21

We have all lived through a great deal of change. Even young people have seen plenty. Artificial Intelligence is developing rapidly and so are electric cars. Older people can remember having a phone plugged into a socket that you couldn't carry around with you. Sometimes we have discussions about the good old days. They are often tinged with nostalgia for things we miss and gratitude for improvements. We no longer need to buy film for our cameras or change typewriter ribbons. Climate change is deeply troubling. Many medical improvements are inspiring.

Change can certainly be frightening. It can also be an occasion of great hope. Jesus seems to have understood this. Nicodemus comes across as a character who is looking for change in his life, but he is nervous about it, so he comes to see Jesus under cover of dark. Earlier in the chapter, Jesus uses the image of being born again. Of starting all over again. It is a dramatic description of change.

Jesus says that the light has come into the world and that people prefer the same old darkness. They are set in their ways.

Every Lent, through Project Compassion, Caritas Australia asks us to help bring light into the world and to make positive change.

This week, we can think about Yeshareg, a 30-yearold mother of two from south-western Ethiopia. She once faced constant hunger, low income and food insecurity. Some days her family ate only one meal, and basic necessities like soap were out of reach. Through Caritas Ethiopia's CLEAR project, Yeshareg joined a women's savings and potato farming group, gaining skills in growing vegetables and managing income. She now harvests and sells potatoes, earns money for her children's school supplies and contributes to a community savings fund. With additional income from raising sheep, she can provide three meals a day and build a brighter future for her family.

Today, the letter to the Ephesians reminds us that every person is 'God's work of art.' God is the artist who never signs off on a painting but is always trying to make it better. Perhaps we can see the world in the same way as we Unite Against Poverty.



Yeshareg cultivating sweet potatoes in her garden in her village. Photo: Peter Caton/Caritas Australia

Prayer

We pray for all people who lack the necessities of a dignified life. May our support of Project Compassion help to bring light into the world.

Amen

Fifth Sunday of Lent

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Jeremiah 31:31-34 | Ps 51:3-4, 12-13, 14-15. R. v.12 | Hebrews 5:7-9 | John 12:20-33

Today's Gospel shows Jesus in deep anguish. These words come just before the moment in John's Gospel when he gathers with his friends and washes the feet of those closest to him.

There was a lot on his mind and in his heart. He is almost debating with his Father. He wonders if he should ask 'Father, save me from this hour?' Immediately, he answers himself, 'But it was for this very reason that I have come to this hour.'

We are so used to seeing people in anguish in the news that perhaps we can become blasé. No sooner has one tragedy moved out of the headlines than another replaces it.

Last year, there was a terrible earthquake in Venezuela, a country which had enough to contend with already. Caritas Australia knows well that an event may be in the news for a few days. It takes years for a community to recover and rebuild. Project Compassion enables us to support those afflicted by disasters over the long haul. Our partners operate from values of faithfulness.

On March 8 last year, a Maronite priest working with Caritas in southern Lebanon was killed in the service of his community. Fr Pierre Rahi had been warned that the tanks which had come over the border, and which had already injured members of his community, were still in the area. He insisted on going to their aid at the risk of his own life. He joined a long list of Caritas workers who have given their lives for the work of the Gospel. Love can be dangerous.

Fr Pierre said: 'We are forced to stay despite the danger. When we defend our land, we do so peacefully. None of us carry weapons. All of us carry peace and goodness and love.'

His witness inspires us all. Today our reading from the prophet Jeremiah recalls that the Lord says, 'deep within our hearts I will implant my law.' Even if the surface of our lives is preoccupied with many things, we know deep down that we are called to stand with those most in need. The Gospel says, 'unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains a single grain.'

This year as we Unite Against Poverty for Project Compassion, let us try to be faithful to God's call, even when it is challenging.



The Caritas team packing emergency supplies to displaced people. Photo: Caritas Venezuela

Prayer

Let us pray for humanitarian workers around the world. May their vision and courage find support in our commitment to Project Compassion as we *Unite Against Poverty*.

Amen

Palm Sunday

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Isaiah 50: 4–7 | Ps 22: 8–9, 17–18, 19–20, 23–24 | Philippians 2: 6-11 | Mark 14:1-15:47

This year, we will hear the Passion narrative from the Gospel of St Mark. It is a most extraordinary account: brutal, frank and unsparing. Mark recounts an horrific series of events with unblinking faith. The Gospel does not need to sugarcoat the story nor gloss over the sad failure of Jesus' friends.

Every Lent, Project Compassion, organised by Caritas Australia, asks us to look at the world with our eyes wide open. It is not easy to do this as sometimes it is easier to look away, especially when the world seems broken and divided. We are called to see the world through God's eyes, which are full of tenderness and compassion. We too are asked to be rich in mercy and Unite Against Poverty.

Today we begin the journey of Holy Week. In this day and age, it takes a special commitment to make time to be present to Jesus in his suffering and death. The world doesn't pause as perhaps once it did. Like Simon of Cyrene, we are called to help carry the cross in our own time and place.

One way to experience this week is to take a single phrase for each day. Perhaps we could write them down and look at them at different moments of the day: cleaning our teeth, having our coffee, walking the dog.

UNITE ♥ AGAINST POVERTY this Lent



Reaksmey painting as part of an art class held at the Epic Arts centre. Photo: Caritas Australia

Prayer

We pray that the mystery of the death of Jesus will deepen within our hearts. May we be ready to take up the cross in our time, especially as we support those who experience injustice throughout the world through Project Compassion.

Amen

Palm Sunday (cont.)

Isaiah 50: 4–7 | Ps 22: 8–9, 17–18, 19–20, 23–24 | Philippians 2: 6-11 | Mark 14:1-15:47

The words of Scripture do need time to sink their roots into our being. Choose your own phrases but remember, a few words may be better than too many:

Sunday: *I tell you solemnly, one of you is about to betray me, one of you eating with me.*

Monday: *Take and eat*

Tuesday: *I tell you solemnly, this day, this very night, before the cock crows twice you will have disowned me three times.*

Wednesday: *My soul is sorrowful to the point of death. Wait here and keep awake.*

Thursday: *But he was silent and made no answer at all.*

Friday: *My God, my God, why have you abandoned me.*

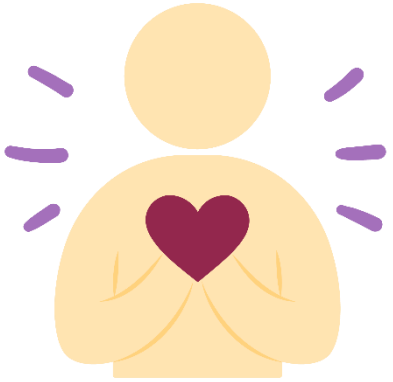
Saturday: *In truth this man was a son of God.*

Thank you for journeying with Project Compassion this Lent. May we all gather to celebrate the life of the risen Lord at Easter when we pray:

May the light of Christ,

Rising in glory,

Dispel the darkness of our minds and hearts.





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