

Project Compassion 2021

Weekly Staff Reflections

Note: The following reflections are based on the Sunday scripture readings for each week of Lent.

ASH WEDNESDAY – 17th February

Readings: Joel 2:12-18; 2 Corinthians 5:20–6:2; Matthew 6:1-6. 16-18

Repent, and believe in the Gospel! In today's readings, Joel reminds us of the gracious and merciful nature of God. As we begin our Lenten journey, we are called to reflect on our thoughts and actions. Christ invites us to renew ourselves through a transformation of our hearts. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus unpacks important virtues that we should live by so that we can experience such a transformation of the heart.

These virtues of prayer, fasting and almsgiving are at the heart of our Lenten experience. Through prayer we are drawn closer to God so that we are better able to realise our baptismal promise to live justly as Jesus teaches us. Fasting joins us in solidarity with the poor who often have no choice but to live without basic essentials. Almsgiving is a sign of our commitment to justice as we are called to acts of service. As we are faced with new and unprecedented social and environmental challenges, we are called to re-define the ways in which we pray, fast and give alms this Lent.

This year's theme for Caritas Australia's Lenten appeal, Project Compassion, is drawn from the words of St Oscar Romero, "Aspire not to have more, but to be more". Lent is a time to reflect on ourselves and the ways in which we can "be more" to positively impact the lives of others.

Each week as we hear stories from our global family, let us consider the ways in which we are called to "be more". Let us ask ourselves, how are we walking in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in our global family? How are we acting as stewards of creation in caring for our common home?

Prayer of Intercession

Loving God,

We pray that our fasting strengthens our commitment to live in solidarity, our almsgiving be an act of justice, and our prayers anchor us in love and compassion. Through living simply and loving generously, may we care for our global family and our common home.

Amen

FIRST WEEK OF LENT – Week beginning Monday 22nd February

Readings: Genesis 9:8-15; 1 Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:12-15

All three readings today remind us of the desire of God leading us to "aspire not to have more, but to be more." The rainbow in the sky, the covenant, the baptism of Jesus and his temptation in the wilderness all remind us of the salvation that God wants for us and for our world. In the Gospel Jesus proclaims: "This is the time of fulfilment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

As John baptises Jesus, his true identity as the Son of God is revealed. "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Immediately following this we are told that Jesus was driven into the wilderness for forty days. We have all experienced being in a wilderness in our lives. Sometimes there is more than one experience of wilderness in our lives where we are lost, confused and searching.

The first Project Compassion story is of Jamila, a Rohingya woman, living in the world's largest refugee camp in Bangladesh. A single mother, she fled armed conflict in Myanmar to save herself, her elderly mother and eight-month-old baby.

Thanks to the generosity of Caritas Australia's supporters and through our partnership with Caritas Bangladesh, Jamila had access to emergency food and shelter. Then, as her stay in the camp stretched on, Jamila joined the Women Friendly Spaces project where she received counselling and emotional support. She learnt about health and hygiene, and participated in a parenting program. She also learnt to sew, which enables her to fulfil her dream of supporting her now four-year old daughter and having what they need for a bright future.

Through the Women's Friendly Spaces program, Jamila has found a family to support her through times of wilderness. Project Compassion invites us to 'be more' as we continue to show our love and compassion for our global family.

How can we be more for others when they experience times of wilderness?

Prayer of Intercession

Loving God,

We pray for all refugees who are forced to flee their homeland. That we, as a global family, will respond generously to their needs and assist in developing a safe and secure future for all.

Amen

SECOND WEEK OF LENT – Week beginning Monday 1st March

Readings: Genesis 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18; Romans 8:31-34; Mark 9:2-10

The disciples in today's gospel stood in the presence of God. "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him! Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus." It was here they recognised the divinity of Jesus and hope for humanity. They saw God anew in their teacher and were transformed. We are called to see God anew. To see God's presence in our brothers and sisters on our streets, in our nation and around the world. In seeing, we, like the disciples, are called to "listen to him."

As we listen, this Lent we are called to "aspire not to have more, but to be more". To hear in a new way, to let go of those things that hold us back and to take up other things that allow us to live more simply, to show a deep and lasting respect for our global family and for the earth.

The Project Compassion story of Margret, is also a story of transformation. Margret is a teacher at a vocational school for deaf students in the Solomon Islands. She was born deaf, so she knows the challenges it poses to education and employment.

The school faced water shortages, with not enough to supply staff and students with safe water for drinking, cooking, washing and growing vegetables. Then Tropical Cyclone Harold damaged the school and its vegetable garden, amidst the threat of COVID-19.

With Caritas Australia's support, the school installed water tanks, provided cyclone-proof building materials and helped to implement COVID-19 prevention measures. The community has been transformed with enough water for its students and the capacity to cater for more and with plans to boost food security through increased agricultural production.

As we continue on our Lenten journey may we welcome the opportunity to 'be more' open to God's invitation to "listen to him".

Prayer of Intercession

Loving God,

We pray for the millions of people without access to clean water. That together, as a global family, we work hard to ensure this basic human right is upheld so families and their communities can thrive.

Amen

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT – Week beginning Monday 8th March

Readings: Exodus 20:1-17 or 20:1-3, 7-8, 12-17; 1 Corinthians 1:22-25; John 2:13-25

In today's gospel, Jesus drives the traders out of the temple saying, "Stop making my Father's house a market place!" Jesus cleanses the temple because values have gone astray. This cleansing is symbolic of reform and renewal.

We are the Church - it is through our actions and works that we are the hands and feet of Christ in our world today. Caritas Australia's annual Lenten campaign theme for this year is 'Be More', which comes from the words of St Oscar Romero "Aspire not to have more, but to be more." This is a wonderful invitation to rethink what is important to us, what renewal or reform is needed in our own lives and as a community.

Hearing of how, with some support from Caritas, communities are able to be architects of their own development, brings about a change in us. We are invited to be part of the story, of working in partnership for a better world.

One such good news story is of Oliva which is featured in Project Compassion. Oliva is a mother of four who did not have the opportunity to go to school in Tanzania and was embarrassed that she was unable to read, write or count. As an adult, her business was losing money because she couldn't add up.

Then Oliva enrolled in Caritas Australia's literacy and numeracy classes. She also set up a home classroom to teach her neighbours, for free, because they were too shy to attend larger classes.

Oliva has now graduated, attendance at her home classes is growing, her kiosk is thriving and she is helping her children with their homework. She aims to become a pastor and run for leadership in the next local election - to help her community to 'Be More.'

Access to education liberated Oliva, her family and her community. Oliva has transformed her life.

What kind of reform would Jesus call us to do today? What are the things that need renewal or could be changed in our world? How can you "Be More"?

Prayer for Intercession

We pray for the millions of adults that did not have the opportunity to receive an education. That with our support, they find new opportunities to learn and grow so they can be architects of their own development.

FOURTH WEEK OF LENT – Week beginning 15th March

Readings: 2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23; Ephesians 2:4-10; John 3:14-21

In today's Gospel reading, we heard Nicodemus's humbling encounter with Jesus. Nicodemus was asking Jesus how it is possible for one to renew themselves, or to be born again from sin. As Jesus responds, he makes numerous references to "*the light*".

Jesus invites us to "*be a light in the world, a light to others*". We are all made in the image and likeness of God and thus all possess God-given gifts that we are called to share. Christ was made man to shine a light onto the darkness in this world. By his life, God revealed the ways in which to bring about the Kingdom of

God on earth; demonstrating *how* to be a light to others so that we may attain salvation and enjoy eternal life.

We all have a responsibility to shine a light on the injustices that exist within society, and are challenged to be light that drives change.

This week, we hear the Project Compassion story of Mr Arsad, a farmer who lives in the Pandeglang District in Indonesia with his wife and three children. It was only recently, that he was able to build a toilet for his family; a common household hardware that many of us take for granted.

Mr Arsad and his family, along with millions of people globally, lack basic access to safely-managed sanitation facilities, often being exposed to dangerous conditions as well as making them highly susceptible to infectious diseases. Through a Caritas Australia supported program, Mr Arsad was able embody the quote of St Oscar Romero "*Aspire not to have more, but to be more*", by becoming involved in a community-based health development project where he learnt the skills to participate in a community-led approach to building toilets. Just as Jesus calls us to do, Mr Arsad, shared his gifts by assisting with the building of toilets for other families within his neighbourhood.

How can we, as much, or as little as we have, be the light that drives change? How can we "*Be more*", and use our gifts to make a difference in the lives of others?

Prayer of Intercession

Loving God,

We pray for the inspiration and courage to shine the light on global injustices, and to let our own light shine unto others, so that we may be agents of change who bring about the kingdom of God on earth.

Amen

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT – Week beginning Monday 22nd March

Readings: Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 5:7-9; John 12:20-30

This week's Gospel begins with people wishing to "see Jesus". Perhaps not to simply observe Jesus, but to 'see' Jesus so that they can understand.

As we continue our Lenten journey, let us think of where we see Jesus today. Do we see Jesus in the millions of people displaced around our world? Do we see Jesus in the people who don't have the basic necessities to live life to the full? Do we see Jesus in those willing to help others?

In the Project Compassion story for this week we learn of, or 'see,' Halima, a Rohingya woman living in the world's largest refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Through our support of Caritas Australia, Halima and her two children now have access to clean water and sanitation facilities within the camp, along with access to food and clothes. Halima, with the basic necessities to support her family can now look forward to the future. Through Halima's story we are able to see and hopefully understand a little more of the human experience.

Later, in the Gospel, Jesus speaks of service: "Whoever serves me must follow me". When we see Jesus in the struggle of human experience, do we serve and follow him?

We should never underestimate our acts of service and our call to "Aspire not to have more, but to be more." As one tiny seed can yield a rich harvest, our almsgiving and support of Caritas Australia is one way we can 'be more' by standing in solidarity with millions of people around the world.

Like Jesus, we, too, are made for eternal life, and are united with him as we serve. How can we stay committed to respond to what we see and continue to serve the children, women and men most vulnerable to extreme poverty and injustice?

Prayer of Intercession

Loving God,

We pray for the women, children and men displaced by conflict. That we continue to work for peace and be the welcoming face of our God to all who seek refuge.

Amen

SIXTH WEEK OF LENT – Week beginning Monday 1st April

Readings: Isaiah 50:4-7; Philippians 2:6-11; Mark 14:1—15:47 or 15:1-39

Isaiah references both speaking and listening. The servant of God is both a person who can speak boldly with a well-trained tongue and a person whose ears and heart are open for listening. If we are to heal the brokenness of our world, we all need the grace both to speak and to listen.

The Passion reminds us that Jesus is the suffering servant. Christ “emptied himself and became the servant of all.” We need this spirit if we are to bring an end to the war, violence, selfishness and injustice which divides us. We are called to be more.

We need to be able to respond to the needs of the world and its people. Jesus is such a servant – one who is connected with our life, our struggle and our world.

Within the Passion we see examples of kindness such as the woman with the alabaster jar, who saw beyond the superficial and performed one of the ‘good works’ just as we have during Project Compassion. “Leave her alone. Why are you upsetting her? What she has done for me is one of the good works.”

Veronica performed the simple service of wiping the face of Jesus and Simon assisted Jesus in carrying the cross. These are small acts in themselves but have had significant meaning over time.

Through the liturgies of Holy Week, we participate in the remembrance of Jesus’ final days. We are mindful too of the many women, men and children around the world who are most vulnerable to extreme poverty and injustice.

We have seen examples of this poverty and injustice in the Project Compassion stories which highlight the support for those in Bangladesh, Solomon Islands, Tanzania and Indonesia where we have been able to help uphold their dignity.

It is for these and thousands of others that we are called to “be more” for they are the face of the suffering Christ in our time.

Let us ask ourselves: How can I recognise the face of Christ in all? How can I truly listen and speak boldly for justice?

Prayer of Intercession

Loving God,

We pray for the women, children and men most vulnerable to extreme poverty and injustice. That we continue to be of service and work together as a global family, to ensure that all people have what they need to live a full and beautiful life.

Amen.