



ST. RAYMOND DE PEÑAFORT

April 4, 2021

Easter Reflections

Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you. When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." John 20:19-21

Dear Sisters and Brothers of the Saint Raymond Community:

As we celebrate the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ, our Easter celebration coincides with the anniversary of the pandemic which has impacted all of our lives in so many ways over the past year. Our prayers are especially fervent in this Easter season, that we will see the power of our risen Lord leading us out of the pandemic, and raising up our parish community to new life.

All of the encounters of the disciples with the risen Jesus in the Bible are moments of sending. Jesus assures the disciples that, even though they have participated in his execution, they do not need to fear God's judgment. Rather, the very struggles of their lives, that led them to turn away from Jesus, are now transformed into the capacity to understand the needs and struggles of others as missionary disciples of Jesus. They are sent out as witnesses to the love and mercy of Jesus.

In the gospels, Jesus always appears to groups of disciples. He calls them together, to form a community of witnesses that will be the seed of a new kind of human communal life. The witness of their shared life will draw others in, as they see the power of human relationships lived under the influence of God's grace.

Jesus' call goes out across time to us: *Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.* As we hear of the progress of Renew My Church throughout the Archdiocese of Chicago, we know that the coming year will present us with the challenges of renewal. Pope Francis encourages us: "In your heart you know that it is not the same to live without Jesus; what you have come to realize, what has helped you to live and given you hope, is what you also need to communicate to others. Our falling short of perfection should be no excuse, mission is a constant stimulus not to remain mired in mediocrity, but to continue growing. The witness of faith that each Christian is called to offer leads us to say with St. Paul: *Not that I have already obtained this, or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.* (Philippians 3:12-13)

Amid the challenges of the pandemic, the generosity of the St. Raymond community has never weakened. With gratitude for this unfailing commitment on the part of so many, we can look forward with hope that we have the resources that we need to move forward. Let us also pray that the Lord will make clear to each one of us, as a new Easter season begins, how we need to grow by moving out of our comfort zones, and offering our personal gifts to contribute to new vision and new growth in our community.

May the power of the risen Jesus touch your life and the lives of all in your families.

Peace Be With You,
Fr. Scott



ST. RAYMOND DE PEÑAFORT

March 28, 2021

Palm Sunday

TIME TO CHANGE, TIME TO CONTEMPLATE

Reflections

by: Daniel Vallejo

*"Jesus... emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human form;
and found human in appearance, he humbled himself,
becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross".* (Phil 2:7-8)

With these words, the letter to the Philippians introduces us to the mystery of the entrance of the Lord to the temple, which it's the solemn celebration called *Palm Sunday*. This action of the entrance of the Lord to the temple is not a simple requirement to fulfill all the mysteries announced by the prophets in 2 Kings 9:13, where the King is welcoming everyone into his temple as a sign of loyalty and power among his people. For us as Christians, this entrance of Jesus, who is God, to the temple, to restore our broken relationship with the Father taking human flesh to redeem our impurity, represents a call to exalt the merciful action of God. **But How do we as *Christians* answer the merciful action of the Lord?** The question is not as simple as it looks. Because one of the main intentions of Jesus is not only to exalt; he is being a paradoxical king, which means he is coming to penetrate the heart of the people with simplicity.

For this reason, this entrance of Jesus is directed to our reality and our bodies, which are at the highest level the house of the Holy Spirit, like a holy temple where we received the sacraments. This Palm Sunday is a commemoration of the presence of the Lord in us, in our humanity. **Palm Sunday is the *acceptance* of the Lord**, who is taking down off the Cross, and given to us as the example of Joseph of Arimathea, to be laid in our hearts.

Precisely, Christ's being laid into the tomb, his public life, and his Resurrection are the mysteries celebrated during Holy Week. It is always a temptation to reduce this major week to a period of rest. In a certain way, it can be a period like that, but the difference resides in our capacity for resilience to hear the mysteries of the Lord and apply his heavenly actions in our own experience.

In other words, Holy Week is about our self-acceptance of our mistakes, an opportunity to seek for resolutions, and a chance to open our ears and hearts to experience the **Lord's *compassion***. How does a Catholic believer experience this compassion of the Lord? It is only possible through the serious experience of the sacraments, an experience which is going to be different than any other years, even if your experience of Holy Week is from home, you are going to be called to put yourselves in a mode of reflection, having the disposition to be with Christ as the disciples did.

DO NOT be afraid to have a different experience of the Holy presence of the Lord during these coming Holy Days, because it is not a repetition of something that happened two thousand years ago. You are going to actualize and reinforce your connection to the Lord in a time of uncertainty and pain. **I wish you all a wonderful day of *reflection***; and don't forget, all are welcome to experience the Mystery of the Cross and the Resurrection of the Lord. May God Bless you all!



ST. RAYMOND DE PEÑAFORT

March 28, 2021

Palm Sunday

GOD'S LOVE FOR US

Reflections

by: Anthony Onu

Holy Week is the week of our salvation. The Church comes together to celebrate the Lord's Paschal Mystery, his passion, death, resurrection, and ascension. For it was to accomplish this mystery that Christ entered his own City of Jerusalem, which we commemorate on Palm Sunday. Christ entered Jerusalem for our salvation, not for his own glory. Christ came to restore the broken relationship between God and humanity, which is interrupted by sin. Whose initiative is it to restore this broken relationship? It is a divine initiative to restore the relationship. God descended to us to restore us to Himself. What a great love that He emptied Himself for our sake! Holy Week begins with the triumphant chanting that accompanies Christ's entrance to Jerusalem:

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," an acclamation of His divine Sonship found in the writings of the Prophets. A messiah who will give himself totally and completely for others through his suffering that is seen in the sacred Triduum.

The Sacred Triduum comprises Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. These three days are essential in our salvation history. They assist us in recalling the gift of Christ to us. At the Last Supper on Holy Thursday, Jesus gave us Himself in the Eucharist as the perfect gift. He instituted the priesthood so that this perfect gift of Himself will be celebrated among us for all ages. Christ nourishes us with his body and blood in our Christian pilgrimage back to heaven. He did not abandon us but remains ever-present with us in the Eucharist. ***Scripture says, "He loved his own in the world, and he loved them to the end" (John 13:1).*** His presence in the Eucharist becomes for us a sign of hope and comfort, where our heavy hearts are given rest. It becomes a place where our yearning for meaning is satisfied, and we ourselves are transformed, a sign of perfect gift to our human soul.

On Good Friday, Christ gave Himself upon the cross for us. On that sacred evening, he mounted the wood of the cross; his crucified humanity become for us a magnitude of his divine love and mercy and the redemption of our own suffering. He commended His Spirit to the Father so that we could be restored to the Father. On the cross, he accomplished his mission which enables us to say, ***"We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, for by your holy cross you have redeemed the world!"*** What a gift from Christ to us. We revere and adore that Holy Cross on which hung the salvation of the world. Our salvation came through suffering. In His affliction, he accomplished his mission. When we associate our suffering with that of Christ on the cross, we will share in the victory that comes with it, namely the redemption of the world. We have endured a lot of suffering in the last couple of months because of the pandemic. In navigating the pandemic, we remain consistent in our faith, drawing our hope in that of Christ's suffering. We look at the cross, which is the visible reality of God's mercy to us.

On Holy Saturday, we wait in joyful hope for the resurrection of the crucified Christ. Our anticipation of the risen Christ is not in vain. We see the overcoming of life over death, light over darkness, joy over sadness. The resurrection of Christ becomes for us a hope in the life to come. Suffering does not have the final say in our lives because the joy that awaits us is greater than our present pain. When we hope in the crucified and risen Christ, He will transform our present situations for our own good. God's plan for us is for good. He created us out of his love for us and will not be happy to see us in perpetual suffering. Holy Week teaches us that in every dark tunnel, there is a light at the end. ***The joy of Easter is an explicit example of such a light.*** Let us remain thankful to God for the gift of himself to us in the Eucharist, his suffering, in affirming our faith in Him through his resurrection and allowing us to share in his Paschal Mystery through our own Baptism.



ST. RAYMOND DE PEÑAFORT

Lent

March 21, 2021

Reflections

RCIA in the Lenten Season

The anticipation is building, are we there yet? How much longer? We have all experienced the feeling. The waiting is so hard and you hope the final result meets or exceeds expectations. I hope that everyone has had a meaningful Lenten journey thus far and the anticipation is building to share the joy of Easter. This applies even more for our RCIA catechumens and candidates during Lent. What started as a curiosity is now close to fulfillment. This time of year, you hear the letters RCIA quite a bit. What do these letters mean and why is the Lenten season so important?

The RCIA is the process by which adults become members of the Catholic Church. It is a journey of prayer and discernment of sharing and growing in faith. It's a journey that requires the support of godparents, sponsors, the parish RCIA team, and entire parish communities.

There are basically two types of people in RCIA: those who have never been baptized, known as catechumens, and those who have been baptized in another Christian tradition, known as candidates. What they share in common is the desire to be in full communion with the CATHOLIC church.

Briefly the stages of the RCIA process consist of;

- **Inquiry:** Usually a time ask questions, test the "waters" of the Catholic faith. No commitments or promises are made.
- **Catechumenate:** This word comes from the Greek meaning "a person seeking instruction." During this time, we explore and discuss the beliefs of the Church and we talk about having a sponsor accompany you on your journey.
- **Purification & Enlightenment:** This period occurs during Lent. This is a time of deeper spiritual and prayerful time leading up to the Easter Vigil where the catechumenates and candidates complete their preparation by receiving their sacraments.
- **Mystagogy:** This is the post Easter period usually lasting up to Pentecost. This is a time to reflect on their sacraments and begin living out your faith.

Lent is a very special time for RCIA, beginning with the Sunday after Ash Wednesday, when the catechumens participate in Rite of Sending and the candidates in the Call to Continuing Conversion. This is a time when we as a community affirm them and send them to the Bishop in the Rite of Election where they are now the "Elect." The third through fifth Sundays of Lent they participate in the "Scrutinies" at different masses, so that the community has the opportunity to meet and affirm them. Each week the Elect are called forward to give witness to their commitment to their faith. There is a blessing, usually a laying of hands, so that they may experience the affirmation of the community. Also, they are presented with The Apostles Creed, the statements of our faith, The Lord's prayer, and the Beatitudes. This year, Melissa, Brad, and Jim will complete their preparation journey at the Easter Vigil.

As we share this significant moment in their lives, we can think of the milestones we all experience. We all have milestones, no two of us are alike, however, there are certain milestones shared by many of us. Certain points that signify a new stage in our lives: our first day of school, getting our drivers license, our first crush, graduating from school, our wedding, the birth of our children, the death of someone close to us. You get the picture. With each moment we accumulate stuff. Then the time comes to downsize or get rid of things. But



what? Letting go of things can be hard. We put it away for the next generation then they determine what to do with it. The time comes to get rid of things to downsize.

"Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit."

This quote from our gospel today reminds us that we do not only accumulate material things during our journey through life, but we accumulate so much more. Resentments. Prejudices. Fears. Egos. A sense of entitlement (or on the other end of the spectrum, an unhealthy lack of self-worth). Selfishness. Apathy toward the needs of others. Feelings of despair or helplessness. Cynicism. Sometimes, even hatred. Again --- you get the picture. These things pile up over a lifetime.

All stuff we don't need. In fact, it's more than that -- because the list I just gave is in many ways more dangerous than the accumulation of material things. For these are the feelings, attitudes, and ways of looking at the world that weigh us down, truly keep us from being the person God created us to be, keep us from being

. . . a grain of wheat.

My friends, the journey in which we find ourselves is not a quest to see what we can "get" out of life. It's really all about what we can "give" to this life and what we can "put into it."

And so, let's use the remainder of this Lent to downsize whatever needs to go and start letting God take away whatever is just taking up space --- thereby allowing God to fill us with which only he can give.

May we all be able to downsize, and by doing so, produce much fruit for each other as we move forward out of this pandemic and repair the many other areas facing our society our world.

May we all experience the blessings and fruit that Melissa, Brad, and Jim have to offer to our faith community and the greater community. It is such a joy for myself and the other RCIA team members to witness and share in the faith journeys of our catechumens and candidates year after year. We gain new insights and perspectives into our own faith. That is why we continue to journey with the RCIA ministry.

"The grains of wheat producing much fruit."

Peace for a blessed Easter,
Deacon Dave

Please keep
Melissa, Brad, and
Jim in your prayers
these coming
weeks.





ST. RAYMOND DE PEÑAFORT

Lent

March 14, 2021

Reflections

You are good.

You are loved.

You are enough.

Understanding what true love is is very complicated. In our daily lives we use the word love to express our feelings for a range of things: I love my sunglasses, I love your shirt, I love that new show on Netflix, I love my spouse. The word love has a wide range of meanings.

In Greek, there are four different words for love: storge, philia, eros, and agape.

Storge is familial love- the love and affection one has for family

Philia is the love of friendship- the type of love one would have for friends and our neighbor

Eros is passion- the type of love one would have for a spouse

Agape is the highest form of love- the type of love that is sacrificial for the good of the other

Agape is used to describe God's love. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). The same God who created all of creation became man out of love for each of us. He became man to remind us of our inherent dignity and worth. Jesus came to shower us with a love that is compassionate, merciful, and unconditional. His death on the cross is an act of sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins. Pope Francis reminds us that "we are the recipients of a love that has no equal on earth."

Our lived experiences definitely have an impact on how we love and receive love. Perhaps we have been hurt in the past or we have experienced a heartbreak. Or perhaps we have never heard someone tell us they love us. Oftentimes those experiences make us believe that we are not worthy of love from our families or a significant other. But Jesus reminds us that we are loved...we are good...and we are enough despite the things we believe about ourselves or the things we have done.

As we continue our journey through Lent, take some time to reflect on the relationships you have with your family, your friends, your spouse and with Jesus. How can you remind others of God's love for them? How can you remind them of the love you have for them?

Take some time to reflect on your relationship with Jesus. Spend some time in prayer and silence. Allow Him to speak to your heart and remind you that:

You are good.

You are loved.

You are enough.

Let us continue to pray for each other as we continue our Lenten journey.

In Christ,
Diana Arizmendi



ST. RAYMOND DE PEÑAFORT

Lent

March 7, 2021

Reflections

This may take time...

"Love is patient..." the start of one of the most well-known passages from 1 Corinthians 13. We have heard this verse applied to our relationship with others, but do we ever pause to consider how it also applies to our relationship with ourselves?

As we continue our Lenten journey this year (a year in which most of us may feel that we have sacrificed so much already), let us remember to be patient with ourselves. Without patience, there is the temptation to throw in the towel and give up, "Oh well, there goes another failed Lent!" Well, dear one, we are about halfway through Lent 2021, so we still have time.

While this may be obvious for some, it is with hope to also reach and to form others who are not familiar with the hallmarks of Lent:

Prayer

a conversation with God (check out Ways to Pray on our website)

Fasting

shifting the focus away from something, and onto your faith and spirituality instead (for example, spending less time on social media, and filling that time in prayer, reading the Bible or book on spirituality)

Almsgiving

No, the Church is not out for your money – this is freely giving something (such as money or food) to help relieve the poor or those who are struggling

How can we be patient with ourselves (and teach our children to be patient with themselves) this Lent, and beyond? Let's change our internal dialogue: when we stumble, instead of saying, "This is too hard," replace those words with, "This may take time."

Pope Francis offered a Lenten prayer to encourage us to fast from something negative, and feast on the fruit instead. I would like to add to the Pope's prayer, and echo the reflections from Sister Valerie Kulbacki (2/14/21) and Deacon John Lorbach (2/28/21). We are called to love... to love our neighbor... to do all things with love.

Whether you have had a fruitful Lent thus far, or you are just trying to keep your daily schedule and tasks in order (without spilling coffee all over your table), try to replace the word "love" with **your name** in 1 Corinthians 13:4-6:

__ is patient,	__ is not rude,
__ is kind.	__ does not seek their own interests,
__ is not jealous,	__ is not quick-tempered,
__ is not pompous,	__ does not brood over injury,
__ is not inflated,	__ does not rejoice over wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.

Lent is not a race, a competition, or a test, but it is also not a small task. Shifting our daily habits and practices add up, and will have a huge impact in the long run. Be patient with yourself, and watch those little gains add up.

My prayers continue with you and yours, St. Raymond Parish Family! You are loved.

In Christ,

Cheryl Haluczak | Director of Formation for Children & Sacraments



ST. RAYMOND DE PEÑAFORT

Lent

February 28, 2021

Reflections

Dear Friends of St Raymond,

Receiving bad news is hard to hear. We have trouble listening to what is being said. We have difficulty comprehending the full message. It is for this reason that it is good advice to have an advocate be present when receiving a major diagnosis from the doctor, a third party who is able to take in the complete message on our behalf.

But what if, today, we were given a glimpse of what our lives will look like once this dreaded pandemic is over? Would such an experience have an impact of how we live now? Imagine if we could see that we will be fortunate to be counted among the survivors, and hopefully not carrying with us long-haul symptoms, mental-health problems, or the effects of months in isolation. Would we take that long-awaited sigh of relief knowing that, for us, life will go on? Would we now perhaps begin to take some risks? Would we now avoid the vaccine, or leave the face covering behind, since we already experienced that glimpse?

Three from the inner circle of the Apostles are privileged to accompany Jesus to the mountaintop where they, Peter, James, and John, experience a glimpse of the resurrection, when suddenly, Jesus is transfigured in front of their eyes and his clothes became dazzling white. Then Elijah appeared to them along with Moses, and they were conversing with Jesus.

Now, given the gift of fast-forwarding to the resurrection, it is no wonder that Peter wanted to cling to this special moment, especially when we remember that he and the other apostles were so conflicted when Jesus told them that they must continue the journey to Jerusalem, where the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

Peter is focused only on the destination, he is avoiding the journey to Jerusalem, the journey to the cross and he is avoiding the mission. And just as Peter tries to hold tight to this moment, the cloud descends. Being in the cloud disorients. The gray mist casts a mystical shadow over the entire land. Our sense of sound becomes critical as our range of vision diminishes. Our movements slows because we cannot see very far in front of us and have no idea what might emerge around us. In the dark, with the ability to navigate removed, all we can do, like Peter, James, and John, is listen.

Then from the cloud comes a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" Listen, says the voice. Listen: when Jesus tells those who are hurting, "Blessed are you...", then challenges those of us who are not poor or hungry or grieving, to know that they, are rooted and planted in the love of God. Listen: when Jesus calls us to love—even our enemies. Listen: when Jesus tells us to pick up our cross and follow him and to not hold tight to our lives, but to lose our lives, by giving them away to others in love and in service.

This Lent, we too, have been given a glimpse of the glory of the resurrection that lies ahead for us. But first, we must listen to Jesus as we pick up our cross and follow him to Jerusalem. On this journey, may we continue the mission as we leave behind a path filled with compassion and kindness to all who are hurting.

God bless,
Deacon John Lorbach



ST. RAYMOND DE PEÑAFORT

Lent

February 21, 2021

Reflections

WELCOME TO LENT!

It is often said that Lent is a PENITENTIAL season.

This does not mean it is PENAL (from Latin poena = punishment), but rather a time of REPENTANCE (from Latin pentire = to regret).

Lent is a time to face the things we regret doing or not doing and to set out in a new direction. Lent is a time to make sure we are claiming our true identity as Christians. Lent is a time to make sure that we are living as fully as we can in the power of Christ. Lent is a time of realigning priorities in (the) light of the gospel.

Colossians 2:9 - 3:11

***You have been given fullness in Christ**, who is head over every power and authority...having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead...Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules? Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch! These are all destined to perish with use because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, with their false humility and harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual desire...Since you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God...So do not lie to one another, since **you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self**, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*

LENT IS A TIME TO ASK OURSELVES AND REFLECT ON SERIOUS QUESTIONS:

1. Is my identity centered in God's love for me as a unique person or in what other people think of me?
2. Am I moving beyond the old self formed and limited by my past experiences and relationships? How are fear and anger holding me back from growing in my relationships with God and others?
3. How can I make space for God in my life?
4. What can I put in place of the practices that control me or that have failed to give me joy or peace (checking my phone /watching television/going shopping)?
5. How can I make space in my life for giving to others?
6. What is one positive thing that I want to do to realign my priorities?

LENTEN SCRIPTURE STUDY

To help us learn more about our history and identity as People of God, Fr. Scott will be offering a series of Lenten reflections on the covenants. The covenants give form and structure to the Bible and to all the Sunday reading for Lent and the Easter Vigil. The reflection series will begin on Sunday, February 21, 2021 and continue for the next 6 weeks. The podcast can be found on the website (<https://st-raymond.org>). You are invited to carve out some time to listen and learn more about who we are as Church.



ST. RAYMOND DE PEÑAFORT

Lent

February 14, 2021

Reflections

Dear St. Raymond Parish Family,

This week we mark two important days in our lives as loving and faith-filled people. Today we celebrate Valentine's Day and just three days later, on Wednesday February 17th, we begin the sacred Lenten Season with the observance of Ash Wednesday. Yes, Lent is early this year! It may seem strange to have such contrasting days so close together, but perhaps this offers us an opportunity to link these days together in an effort to deepen our relationships with God and others. As we all know, Valentine's Day has long been designated as a time to show the special people in our lives just how important they are to us. We have this day to let those we love know how much grace, beauty, and happiness they bring into our lives. We may do so with flowers, cards, candy, or a festive meal. In the cold and snow of this winter and as we are still navigating life under the shadow of the coronavirus, we need days such as this to lift our spirits. At the same time, this week we begin the sacred Season of Lent with its hallmarks of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. During these forty days we are invited to reflect deeply on where we need to turn away from those habits or practices that are hurtful to ourselves and others. Admittedly this is difficult. It's hard to really look inside ourselves and be open to seeing where we may have been wrong, where we may have hurt or distanced ourselves from others or made choices that are damaging to our relationships. We have the gift of this Lenten Season to turn back to God and to others with all our hearts. So perhaps it's no accident that Valentine's Day and Ash Wednesday fall in the same week. To assist us in our Lenten journey this year I would like to offer the following prayer that comes to us from St. Francis of Assisi. When he was struggling with the realization that he needed to change the direction of his life, he knelt before the cross in the church of San Damiano and prayed:

Most high and glorious God,
bring light to the darkness of my heart.
Give me right faith, certain hope,
and perfect charity.
Lord, give me insight and wisdom
that I may know your holy and true will.

I believe that Francis prayed these words often, especially as he grew in love and appreciation of the Passion of Christ. He came to such a deep love of the Passion that he wanted to surround himself with the cross always and chose to clothe himself and his followers in a habit made in the shape of a cross.

May this Lent 2021 be a time when we too grow in love and appreciation of the Passion of Christ and also deepen our love and appreciation for the important people in our lives. Happy Valentine's Day, and may this be a peaceful, blessed, and grace-filled Lent for all of us.

Sr. Valerie Kulbacki
Director of Care Ministries