

Lent Reflections 2023

*Some people take on some reflective readings for Lent.
You can use these as journal prompts or for reflection &
meditation.*

Week 1: February 26 – March 4

A reading from the treatise *On the Lord's Prayer* by Cyprian, Bishop and Martyr of Carthage (c. 258 CE)

The Master of peace and unity would not have each of us pray singly and severally, since when we pray we are not to pray only for ourselves. For we neither say: "My Father, who art in heaven" nor "Give me this day my bread"; nor does each one of us individually pray for our own debt to be forgiven, nor do we ask that we ourselves alone should not be led into temptation, nor that we only should be delivered from evil.

Our prayer is general and for all; and when we pray, we pray not for peace and concord, so willed that one should pray for all, even as he himself bore us all.

The three youths in the fiery furnace kept this rule of prayer, being in unison in prayer and agreeing in spirit. The authority of the Scriptures tells us this, and in teaching how they prayed it gives an example which we ought to imitate in our prayers, so that we might become like them. "Then these three," it says: "With one voice sang, glorifying and blessing God." They sang with one voice although Christ had not yet taught them to pray. Hence their words in prayer were effectual, because the Lord was gained by simple, peaceful, and spiritual praying.

We find that the apostles too prayed in this way after the Lord's ascension: "Together," we are told: "they devoted themselves: [with one accord] to constant prayer."

"This is how you are to pray," Christ said: "Our Father in heaven." This new person, born again, restored to God by grace, says first of all "Father" because this one has now become an heir. "To his own he came, yet his own did not accept him. Any who did accept him he empowered to become children of God." So any who have believed in his name and have become children of God ought now to begin to offer thanks and to declare themselves God's children, when they speak of God as their Father in heaven.

How indulgent it is of the Lord, what exuberance of condescension and goodness toward us, to permit us when praying in God's presence to address ourselves to God as Father, and to name ourselves children of God, even as Christ is Son of God – a name which none of us would have dared to reach in prayer, had he himself not allowed us so to pray.

We should therefore recollect and feel that, when we call God a Father, we ought to act like children of God, and if it comforts us to regard him as our Father, let us so act that he may be comforted in us. Let us conduct ourselves as temples of God, and God will remain in us.

Readings for the Daily Office from the Early Church.
Church Pension Fund. 1991. Pp. 130-131.

Week 2: March 5 - 11

Relationship, The Essence of Prayer

Everything Fred Rogers did was a prelude to – or an outcome of – prayer.

Volumes of books have been written on prayer, perhaps because it's sometimes easier to read about it than to actually do it. But the essence of prayer is relationship, and Fred understood that. Even when he was explaining prayer to a young girl. (I had asked him a question on her behalf about unanswered prayer), his seemingly simple explanation would enlighten even the most seasoned supplicant: "Now, you know prayer is asking for something, and sometimes you get a yes answer and sometimes you get a no answer," he carefully explained, "And just like anything else you might get angry when you get a no answer. But God respects your feelings, and God can take your anger as well as your happiness. So whatever you have to offer God through prayer – it seems to me – is a great gift. Because the thing God wants most of all is a relationship with you, yeah, even as a child – *especially* as a child. Look how Jesus loved the children who came around Him," he told her.

In another attempt to help children understand about prayer, Mister Rogers once took his television neighbors along for a visit to the Sturgis Pretzel House, founded by Julius Sturgis, in Pennsylvania's Lancaster County. The baker explained to Mister Rogers and the viewers (my then-three-year-old son and I were watching that day) how monks long ago gave pretzels as treats to children who had remembered their prayers. The dough was rolled into strips and crossed, to represent a child's arms folded in prayer (pretzel means "little arms"), and the three holes in the pretzel represented the Trinity.

Sometimes it's the simple things that remind us: dough molded into pretzels serves as a gentle reminder to pray; bread sliced into toast sticks bring back memories of the kindness of friends who are no longer here.

The Simple Faith Of Mister Rogers. Amy Hollingsworth. Thomas Nelson. 2005. Pp. 23-24.

Week 3: March 12 - 18

Love Turns The World Upside Down (Presiding Bishop Michael Curry)

There's another problem when love becomes a mere sentiment. Love the sentiment – a nice feeling that rises up inside us – becomes love the sedative. It's a sweet thing that leaves us complacent and sleepy. No, the love I'm asking you to discover inside yourself, or reconnect to, is something fierce. This love is a verb: It's an action, with force and follow-through. When we pull love out of the abstract, really put it to work, it starts to reveal its extraordinary power.

Love as an action is the only thing that has ever changed the world for the better. Love is Martin Luther King, Mahatma Gandhi, and Josie Robbins. Love is a little girl in Pakistan named Malala Yousafzai standing up to armed men who said that girls shouldn't be educated. She was rescued and taken to England, where she could have retreated to a quiet life but instead made a commitment to spend her life working to improve other women's lives.

Love is Fannie Lou Hamer, whose contribution to the civil rights movement was honored on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives in 2017, on the one hundredth anniversary of her birth. Fannie was one of twenty children. Her parents were two sharecroppers, de facto slaves. They were desperately poor. She had polio, but

walking with a limb didn't stop her from picking cotton, so much cotton, in her teens. She dropped out of school to help her aging parents pick more cotton, because that's what a sister does when the family has nineteen other siblings to feed.

In 1961, she went to a Sunflower County hospital for a minor surgery and was sterilized without her consent. Some people would have given up at that point, deciding that any society that would condone such a crime was irrevocably evil. Not Fannie – she was just getting started. Because one year later, she learned something she hadn't heard before: Black people had the right to register and vote in the United States. When she tried to do it in Ruleville, Mississippi, she failed the “literacy test”, just one of the ways Whites have prevented Blacks from exercising their rights in our recent history. After that day, she never tired in her fight to right that wrong, surviving a KKK gunshot and the police beating her in prison. And despite the treatment she experienced at the hands of Whites, she never once backed down from the vision of the civil rights movement that had as its conclusion all good people living together as brothers and sisters, sharing the same welcoming table.

Love is equally the contribution of a woman like Frances Perkins, the secretary of labor who executed much of Roosevelt's New Deal. Perkins was born to a wealthy family. She could have gone to cotillion and then partied her life away. Instead, one day in 1911, when she was a young suffragette who had recently finished her master's in political science, she was walking in New York City's Washington Square Park with a friend when they heard screams. They followed the noise and saw men and women jumping out of the windows of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory, which was on fire. Ultimately 146 workers, most of them women, lost their lives in the blaze. Forever changed, Frances put her privilege to work. She

dedicated the rest of her life to lobbying to improve the lives of working people. She became the executive secretary for the Committee of Safety of the City of New York to fight for safer working conditions. Then she went to Washington. Because Frances Perkins loved America's workers, we now have minimum wage and overtime laws, and a forty-hour workweek. She also broke ground in the White House, as our first woman cabinet member.

Love's power isn't any less when it's one individual serving another. I was stunned when I read in 2018 about the informal network of Americans who came together spontaneously in the weeks after the Trump administration's adoption of a "zero tolerance" immigration policy that led to children being separated from their parents at the border. These citizens raised money so that more than a dozen women could be released from detention. They offered their homes so these women would have a safe place to sleep each night on their journeys of thousands of miles to their children in New York. They contributed cars and their time to drive them one leg of the trip, from home to home to home. They shared clothing, food, and care. And because these good Samaritans loved their neighbors, these women were finally reunited in New York City with the children who had been stolen from them. "Listen, this is our job," Immigrant Families Together founder Meghan Finn told the *New York Times*. "This is our job because our government did something really heinous to these families, and [getting them home] isn't just about putting them on a bus."

Love is a firefighter running into a burning building risking his or her life for people he or she doesn't even know. Love is that first responder hurtling toward an emergency, a catastrophe, a disaster. Love is *someone* protesting anything that hurts or harms the children of God. Jesus said it this way, hours before his crucifixion: "No one has

greater love than this, to lay down one's own life for one's friends."

Love is a commitment to seek the good and to work for the good and welfare of others. It doesn't stop at our front door or our neighborhood, our religion or race, or our state's or our country's border. This is one great fellowship of love throughout the whole wide earth, as the hymn goes. It often calls us to step outside of what we thought our boundaries were, or what others expect of us. It calls for us to sacrifice, not because doing so feels good, but because it's the right thing to do.

Love Is The Way. Bishop Michael Curry. Avery. 2020. Pp. 19 – 23.

Week 4: March 19 - 25

A reading from a homily of John Chrysostom, Bishop of Constantinople (c. 407 CE)

Prayer and converse with God is a supreme good: it is a partnership and union with God. As the eyes of the body are enlightened when they see light, so our spirit, when it is intent on God, is illumined by his infinite light. I do not mean the prayer of outward observance but prayer from the heart, not confined to fixed times or periods but continuous throughout the day and night.

Our spirit should be quick to reach out toward God, not only when it is engaged in meditation; at other times also, when it is carrying out its duties, caring for the needy, performing works of charity, giving generously in the service of others, our spirit should long for God and call him to mind, so that these works may be seasoned with the salt of God's love, and so make a palatable offering to the Lord of the universe. Throughout the whole of our lives we

may enjoy the benefit that comes from prayer if we devote a great deal of time to it.

Prayer is the light of the spirit, true knowledge of God, meditating between God and humanity. The spirit, raised up to heaven by prayer, clings to God with the utmost tenderness; like a child crying tearfully for its mother, it craves the milk that God provides. It seeks the satisfaction of its own desires, and receives gifts outweighing the whole world of nature.

Prayer stands before God as an honored ambassador. It gives joy to the spirit, peace to the heart. I speak of prayer, not words. It is the longing for God, love too deep for words, a gift given to us only by God's grace. The apostle Paul says: "We do not know how we are to pray but the Spirit himself pleads for us with inexpressible longings."

When the Lord gives this kind of prayer to us, he gives us riches that cannot be taken away, heavenly food that satisfies the spirit. One who tastes this food is set on fire with an eternal longing for the Lord: such a person's spirit burns as in a fire of the utmost intensity.

Readings for the Daily Office from the Early Church.
Church Pension Fund. 1991. Pp. 156-157.

Week 5: March 26 – April 1

A Solution To The Problem Of Violence

Fred [Rogers]' encouraging children to turn off scary TV was only the first step, in his mind. The next step was helping these same children (and their parents) to find appropriate ways to express their feelings, especially feelings of anger that can lead to the violence that scary TV often depicts. If you asked Fred for a psychological

solution to the problem of violence, of hating your neighbor, he would sum it up in one word: *sublimation*.

A concept Fred likely learned in his graduate studies in child development, sublimation is the process by which socially unacceptable behaviors are channeled – sublimated – into more socially acceptable ways. The concept doesn't carry with it the idea that anger and violence can necessarily be eliminated, just that they can be diverted in ways that don't involve machine guns. Undesirable feelings or behaviors can be rerouted and released into excelling in sports or contributing to the arts, for example. From a very young age, Fred turned to the piano as a way to express his anger.

Fred told me that sublimation was the key to his song, “What Do You Do (with the Mad That You Feel?)”. Through its lyrics he offers ways to redirect angry feelings: pounding clay, punching a bag, pounding dough, rounding up friends for a game of tag and running fast. “The world need to learn to know what to do with negative feelings,” he told me, explaining his motivation for writing the song. “It is so easy to pick up a gun and shoot somebody. It's so much healthier – and so much more dramatic – to work out something interpersonally with somebody and to come to a resolution that means weal in both people's life.” And children weren't the only recipients of this message; Fred mentioned receiving mail from adults who told him that when they felt the urge to act out their anger in inappropriate ways, they remembered the words to his song and were able to stop themselves.

After her unacceptable paroxysm of anger in the Neighborhood of Make-Believe, Lady Elaine learned to pound and then mold clay as a way to manage her angry feelings. Fred wanted children from the earliest age (and their parents too) to know there is a way to redirect angry

feelings away from our natural inclination to turn our worlds upside down.

The Simple Faith Of Mister Rogers. Amy Hollingsworth. Thomas Nelson. 2005. Pp. 95-96.

Holy Week: April 2 - 8

Holy Thursday

On Holy Thursday Christendom commemorates the institution of the eucharist by our Lord. It happened on the night he was betrayed. Ever since then Christians have celebrated this meal despite all their divisions, though in sorrow that they cannot all celebrate it together.

Nevertheless, it is a consolation that all who call themselves Christians do celebrate it, even though their interpretation of what happens at it is not everywhere quite the same. The meaning of the sacred meal is immensely wide and diversified. We gather round a table, the altar, confessing by this very fact that we are to be united in love like a family. We know by faith that the Lord has promised to be present in such a congregation and is mysteriously there among those who share the meal. His death is proclaimed until he comes again, the death which brings us forgiveness and life, but which also takes us, who die throughout our life, into its incomprehensible mystery and melancholy.

But the meal that is celebrated is already filled with the blessed joy of eternal life which we hope for and expect. Christ unites us in the church, the community of those who believe and love, which is the body, by giving himself to us in the elements of bread and wine, the perfect signs of his body and blood. In this meal the word God speaks to us, the word of eternal love, becomes radiantly present in our

darkness. In this sacrifice Christ, who has given himself for us once and for all, is presented as the church's gift to the eternal God.

Now it is true that, from God's point of view, the liturgical celebration of this sacred meal contains what it signifies and gives what it says. Nevertheless, as far as we are concerned, it receives its ultimate truth and fulfillment only when it is celebrated as that "communion" which takes place in the daily round of our earthly life. Even in the eucharist Christ becomes our salvation rather than our judgment only if we also recognize him in the least of our brothers and sisters whom we meet in ordinary life.

We announce the death of the Lord in the mass to our salvation only if in serene faith and hope we also encounter it in its everyday form of sorrow and disappointment. This is how we must live if eucharist is to be our salvation and not our judgment. But this awesome truth contains also a blessed mystery: many may perhaps meet the Lord in their daily life by faithfully obeying the transforming voice of their conscience even though they have not yet found the holy table of the church where he celebrates his sacred meal with us.

The Great Church Year. Karl Rahner. The Crosswood Publishing Company. 1994. Pp. 144-145.