

Hear Us, Good Lord

Lenten Meditations from
Washington National Cathedral

FORWARD MOVEMENT
Cincinnati, Ohio

Introduction

The Great Litany is one of the richest liturgical offerings of the church. At Washington National Cathedral, this intercessory prayer is chanted in procession throughout the nave, side aisles, and transepts of our sacred space during Lent each year. To hear these ancient prayer petitions chanted by a solo voice followed by the sung responses of all gathered in that vast space is quite poignant and impactful.

The Great Litany was first used as early as the fifth century in Rome, later modified by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, and first published in English in 1544. Although the litany's use and language have evolved over the centuries, our need for repentance, forgiveness, and amendment of life remain unchanged.

This book is a collection of meditations written by cathedral staff, lay and clergy, and friends of the cathedral. The authors are a diverse group, as you will see from the short biographies at the end of the book. We hope you will find that our diversity brings new perspectives and epiphanies to you in your own spiritual journey. This book also marks our second book collaboration with our friends at Forward Movement. We were delighted to partner with them for Lent 2022 with *The Pilgrim Way of Lent: Reflections from Washington National Cathedral*. Forward Movement has spiritually nurtured generations of Christians since 1935, and we are once again honored to partner with them in this spiritual offering.

As you read and reflect upon each petition, meditation, and prayer in this book, we hope your spiritual journey will be deepened and enriched. These ancient petitions have accompanied Christians on their pilgrimage of faith for more than 500 years. We join a great cloud of witnesses as we too walk the way of Jesus.

May God bless and keep you.

**THE VERY REV. RANDOLPH MARSHALL HOLLERITH
DEAN OF WASHINGTON NATIONAL CATHEDRAL**



Ash Wednesday

Ash Wednesday _____

O God the Father, Creator of heaven and earth,

Have mercy upon us.



The story of creation in the book of Genesis does not contain many facts, but it is full of truth. The world was not created in seven days and the cosmology of our ancestors, who wrote the creation story, is far from what we know now about our world and the nature of the universe. Yet, the story of creation is a sacred story, full of poetry, that tells us some very important truths about the world and our place in it. The first and most important truth is that our God, who created the heavens and the earth, made everything good. Repeatedly throughout the seven days of creation—whether God was separating the dry land from the sea, creating the sun and the moon, or bringing forth plants, animals, and human beings—Genesis tells us that everything God made was good. In this sense, a great truth of our faith is that you and I and everything on this planet and in our universe was created to be good. We were made in love by the God of love and that can only be good.

At the same time, Genesis tells us a second truth, that sin is a fundamental reality of our world. Something happened, and we turned away from God's goodness. Adam and Eve, the snake,

and the apple are not historical facts, but the story of the fall is deeply true. We live in a world that is awash in sin, and sin is separation. We are separated from God. We are separated from creation. We are separated from one another; we are separated from our best selves. Sin is that which breaks apart all these relationships, and while it is sin that separates, it is love that reconciles and reunites.

Ash Wednesday is when we own up to the reality of sin in our world and in our selves. We acknowledge that we do not live as God our creator intended. We repent of our broken relationships with God, the world, each other, and ourselves. And we are reminded of our complete dependence on the God who created us from the dust of the earth. As we begin the Lenten journey, let us consciously turn away from the sin that drives us apart and commit ourselves to the love of God that, as Saint Paul reminds us in his letter to the Ephesians, seeks to gather together in one all things in Christ, both in heaven and on earth.

—RANDOLPH MARSHALL HOLLERITH



Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

—The Book of Common Prayer, p.264

Thursday after Ash Wednesday ____

O, God the Son, Redeemer of the world,

Have mercy upon us.



I wonder how to pray the Great Litany as a daily spiritual practice during Lent. The whole litany is long and wordy, written as a call-and-response prayer. But a short rubric at the beginning of the liturgical text offers the perfect advice about how to engage with this profound prayer: “to be said or sung, kneeling, standing, or in procession” (The Book of Common Prayer, p. 148).

I wonder how transformative it would be to pray this litany in daily procession, while walking to work or school or during a hiking session or a family walk around the neighborhood. I wonder what new understanding of the world around us would come as a result of walking while praying: “O, God the Son, Redeemer of the world, have mercy upon us.” How would it be to engage with the world in that way while intentionally seeing and walking around?

The idea would be to walk while “reading” our reality in need of God the Son’s redemption. Our neighbors’ lives, institutions, and local businesses, creation, visitors, and strangers wandering outdoors, our whole small world...all brought up in our prayer,

being seen mercifully by Christ, our Redeemer. Such a daily pilgrimage using the Great Litany could be a perfect spiritual exercise during this Lent.

Maybe this could be an opportunity to notice in new ways how God the Son reveals God's self in the brokenness and intricacies of our own small world in which we live. Everything needs Christ's redemptive love experienced in full at the cross. From there, the world is more than sin, deception, and chaos. From the redemptive experience of the cross, Christ transforms what is broken into wholeness, bringing all what we are and all our realities to God. Redemption is liberation, salvation, and communion—all made possible by Christ, our Lord. Which areas of your life are in need of redemption? Which areas of your world are screaming for Christ's redemption right now? Name them while wandering, using the words of this litany and your own words.

I can imagine this type of prayer could transform not only our world but also ourselves, opening our eyes, awakening our bodies, and connecting our souls with the divine.

I wonder while wandering.

—YOIMEL GONZÁLEZ HERNÁNDEZ



*You have given all to me.
To you, Lord, I return it.
Everything is yours; do with it what you will.
Give me only your love and your grace,
that is enough for me. Amen.*

—Saint Ignatius of Loyola

Friday after Ash Wednesday _____

O God the Holy Ghost, Sanctifier of the faithful,

Have mercy upon us.



“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.”

—John 16:12-13a (English Standard Version)

Many Christians are nervous when talking about the Holy Spirit. Most anyone can take a stab at describing God the Father (think Creator) and God the Son (Jesus), but God the Holy Spirit is elusive and vague—like wind, a breath, a flame, a descending dove.

If the Trinity is the church’s shorthand for the myriad ways we can and do experience God, then God the Father is that collection of attributes and actions that reveal God’s almost-parental love for and plan for all of creation. God the Son is what happened when God chose to reveal God’s self dramatically in the life of one finite human being, when God gave up all the prerogatives of being God to experience what it’s like to be one of us.

What then are we to make of the Holy Spirit? It's hard to define the Holy Spirit, and that is as it should be, because the Holy Spirit is the part of God that won't be tied down, confined to anyone's definition, or neatly tied up in a package. The Holy Spirit is the "wild side" of God—the often-surprising actions taken by the Living God to be in relationship with us.

At the Last Supper, Jesus spends part of his last precious bit of time with the disciples to tell them to expect the Holy Spirit. He admits to them that his work isn't finished with them. And why? They are simply unable to bear all that he wants to teach and impart to them. God's solution to that incompleteness is the Holy Spirit, which will, over time (lots of time), teach us everything God wants us to know. The Holy Spirit will lead us into all the truth, sanctifying us, making us more like God, day by day.

If they could have borne it, wouldn't the disciples have learned from Jesus that enslaving another human being is always wrong? If the culture could have even imagined such a thing, wouldn't Jesus have told them about respecting the dignity of every human being, starting with the valuing of women? If the disciples could have grasped the complexity of human sexuality, wouldn't Jesus have taught them about LGBT, gender-nonconforming, and queer people, and God's love for them? But since they could not bear it, that sanctification would become the future work of the Holy Spirit.

What truth is the Holy Spirit wanting to teach you this Lent? Buckle up! It might be a wild ride!

GENE ROBINSON



O Holy Spirit God, blow into my life like a fresh wind, stay as close as my breath, set my heart afire with your love for others, and give me the peace of a descending dove. Open me up to whatever truth you want to lead me into today. Give me the courage to embrace your wild Spirit in my life, to your honor and glory. Amen.

SAMPLE

Saturday after Ash Wednesday _____

O holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity, one God,

Have mercy upon us.



“How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.” These much-quoted opening words from Sonnet 43, written by Elizabeth Barrett Browning to her husband Robert Browning, are the words that come to my mind when I think of the Trinity. Just as they signal a love poem in which Elizabeth expresses the breadth and depth of her love for her husband, they suggest for us a love dance in which God reveals the fullness and steadfastness of God’s love for us. To speak of God as Trinity is to express the ways in which our one God loves us. How does God love us? Let me count the ways.

God loves us as a creator—breathing us into life as God’s very children. God loves us as a Savior—freeing us from the sins that betray and alienate us from the sacredness of our very creation. God loves us as an advocate—forever guiding us in the way of truth and peace that is God’s promise to us all. Hence, we have traditionally proclaimed our one God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Essentially, to proclaim God as Trinity is to recognize the ways in which God is loving us into loving, thereby calling us into loving relationship with ourselves, with one another, and with God.

The creating love of God calls us into a life-enhancing relationship with all that God has created and breathed into life. Hence, we are called to guard and protect the sacredness of the earth and all that is therein. This begins with affirming the sacred breath of every single human being, including ourselves. We violate our very sacred breath any time that we use it to violate the sacred breath of another. The saving love of God calls us into relationships that free ourselves and others from the systems, structures, -isms, and ways of being that prevent us or any of God's creation from thriving and growing into the fullness of who and what it was created to be. The advocating love of God beckons us to partner with God in making the truth and justice that is God's heaven real on earth.

The proclamation of God as “holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity, one God,” is about nothing less than the ways in which God is loving us into the love dance that is God.

KELLY BROWN DOUGLAS



Almighty and everlasting God, you have given to us your servants grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of your divine Majesty to worship the Unity: Keep us steadfast in this faith and worship, and bring us at last to see you in your one and eternal glory, O Father; who with the Son and the Holy Spirit live and reign, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

—The Book of Common Prayer, p.228

Sunday

Remember not, Lord Christ, our offenses, nor the offenses of our forefathers; neither reward us according to our sins.

Spare us, good Lord, spare thy people, whom thou hast redeemed with thy most precious blood, and by thy mercy preserve us for ever.

Spare us, good Lord.



Sin is a messy business. We all sin. And we all try to go forth and sin no more. And yet, we sin again. It is a vicious cycle. The good news is, for there is always good news in our faith, we can be forgiven, and we can, with God's help, change—if we want to change.

When I was growing up, I always hated the parable of the prodigal son. I thought it was horribly unfair, and I couldn't think of any parents I knew who would throw a party for their child after they had behaved in that way. It just didn't seem realistic to me. As someone who followed the rules to the letter of the law and related to the other son, this story annoyed me to no end, and quite frankly, it didn't even seem true or believable. And then, I became an adult, a parent, a priest, and a teacher,

and the parable came to light in a whole new way. I understood the desperate love of a parent for a child who had gone astray. What wouldn't a parent do to bring their child home? What sin would they not forgive? How much singing and rejoicing would there be when the child asks for forgiveness and repents of their sins? Yes, kill the fatted calf. It is time to celebrate, for my child was lost and now they are found.

At the age of 60, I find that the story of the prodigal son is now one of my favorite biblical narratives. I see the parable as analogous to the love God has for each one of us. Like the father in the story, there is no sin that cannot be forgiven by our Lord. This story is God's promise to us that there will be no keeping score of our offenses nor rewarding us according to our misdeeds. God will instead run to meet us, embrace us with a love that has no end, and lead us to the heavenly banquet that awaits us. Thanks be to God. Thanks be to God that this love has no bounds, that there is no sin that can separate us from our Lord.

MELISSA HOLLERITH



Lord, I commit my failures as well as my successes into your hands, and I bring for your healing the people and the situations, the wrongs and the hurts of the past. Give me courage, strength, and generosity to let go and move on, leaving the past behind me and living the present to the full. Lead me always to be positive as I entrust the past to your mercy, the present to your love, and the future to your providence.

—Attributed to Saint Augustine of Hippo, 354-430

Monday

From all evil and wickedness; from sin;
from the crafts and assaults of the devil;
and from everlasting damnation,

Good Lord, deliver us.



Every year, Lent opens with a comfortable reliability. The gospel appointed for the first Sunday always recounts Jesus's temptation in the wilderness. Equally as reliable is my own forty-day struggle with the great tempter. No, this is not a testimony of battle with the Evil One. It is the same uninspired question I ask each year: is evil a real thing, an actuality, or the absence of good? Mark's Gospel describes evil as a being and confidently names it "the devil."

We generally ignore the devil. For many, the concept is a dangerous relic. From the serpent in Eden to the apocalyptic dragon, the names and images of Satan have long been used to frighten, control, and subjugate. The caricatured rendering of a red-horned man-beast has dampened our modern reactions even further. For many, the devil is not a meaningful aspect of their faith. However, this view diminishes our understanding of evil and the ways in which we can recognize and reject it.

In early medieval depictions of the temptation of Jesus, the face of the devil is often obscured or hidden. This year as I prepared for Lent, I admitted that my obsession with putting a face on the devil was a distraction born out of childhood fascination. It took me from the difficult work of the forty days. I spent too much time and energy attempting to give life to or put a face on something (or someone) to blame for a world roiled by ecological destruction, devastating pandemics, crushing socioeconomic inequities, and a fraying social fabric.

The story of salvation recounts our best efforts to accept God's love as well as our pitiful failures. Our shortcomings constantly struggle against our intention to lead lives that add to the world's degree of hope and joy as revealed in the gospels. Time and again, we are charmed into pleasant indifference, into an apathetic, narcissistic blandness.

Should we "reclaim" the devil then? Perhaps. I don't know. If we understand the devil as a fantastical character, he/she/it is conveniently dismissed as something only the most literal employ. Cast as "other," the devil has little to do with us. However, there is no outside devil that cannot be found inside us all. We may not know the temptation of being offered inestimable power as Jesus was, but we know the everyday failings of our pride, vanity, and hypocrisy. Likewise, we have all experienced the shameful inclination to envy, judge, and gossip. We have looked away from those in need. We have let anger or apathy direct our actions.

This season, let us begin Lent afresh, committing to the work ahead. As every year, we are invited to take Jesus's same journey

into the desert of our souls. The familiar scene looks different: if the devil must have a face, it is mine.

Thanks be to God.

TORRENCE N. THOMAS



Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

—The Book of Common Prayer, p. 218