

Lectionary reflections for February and into Lent that encourage Lenten Fast for Peace

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany, February 4th

In 1 Corinthians, Paul notes that, “though I am free with respect to all,” he has found a better way than to exploit that freedom, instead becoming “a slave to all.” While we acknowledge the difficulty of that language, and the violence that slavery has wrought among us to this day, what would it mean to subject our rights – including one’s constitutional right to bear arms – to the service of others, including the diminishment of the prevalence of guns in our communities, and their contribution to gun violence? What would it mean (particularly for white people like me) to look into ways give up the privileges that accompany someone’s race, gender, religion, or other status?

Last Sunday after the Epiphany, February 11th

This Sunday’s Collect asks for that we be “strengthened to bear our Cross,” the self-giving, violence-denying, difficult-but-worth-it way of the Cross being the way to Christ’s glory. What will we lay down in order to take up the Cross?

Ash Wednesday, February 14th

The reading from Isaiah 58:1-12 lends itself to instituting a fast from all kinds of violence. It may be heard to hint at reparations. It anticipates through the fast of righteousness, justice, and peace the restoration of safer and stronger communities:

Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight
and to strike with a wicked fist.
Such fasting as you do today
will not make your voice heard on high. ...

Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke? ...

Then ...
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to live in.

Lent 1, February 18th

The message of nonviolence continues into Lent. While not explicit in today's readings, the background to the flood that began the story of Noah is that "the earth was filled with violence" (Genesis 6:11b), and the covenant we read this Sunday is introduced by a passage in which God affirms the value of the lifeblood of every living creature, and especially of the human made in God's own image.

Lent 2, February 25th

Today we read the passage from Mark 8 in which the taking up of one's cross involves the laying aside of one's life for the sake of the gospel (Mark 8:31-38). If there were to be a brave time to call for a fast from weapons, this may be it: "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life?" (Mark 8:35-37)

Lent 3, March 3rd

Continuing the theme of the Way of the Cross, the reading from Exodus begins with the admonishment not to make any idol above God. Perhaps this may include the "soft" idols of personal security, as well as any philosophy or politics that might supersede our adherence to the Gospel. As Paul notes, to the world the message of the Cross is foolishness; in the midst of the world's noise it is for us to remember that "for us who are being saved it is the power of God."

Lent 4, March 10th

We move from the Ten Commandments and their admonition against idols to the story of the bronze serpent in Numbers, referenced also in the Gospel. But God did not instruct the people of the covenant to make an idol of the snake that bit them. The bronze serpent was not an idol, but an icon of futility; an emblem of the impotence of evil in the sight of a gracious God. The bronze serpent was not an antidote to the poisonous snakes, any more than a small arms race is the answer to gun violence. Rather, it is the living God who saves, the resurrected Christ who brings new life, who will not allow the deadly things to have the final word.

Lent 5, March 17th

Perhaps this is a good time to review and take stock of what has changed in us since Lent began. The Psalms speak of conversion, a clean heart, a cleansing way, the renewal of a right spirit

within. In the Gospel, Jesus speaks of the way in which a grain of wheat is transformed by its burial and breaking open into in a new source of life. We read this in the foreshadowing of his death on the Cross, and the story of the empty tomb; but what in us has died during this Lenten fast, and what is it that waits to bear fresh fruit?