

THOSE THREE SUNDAYS

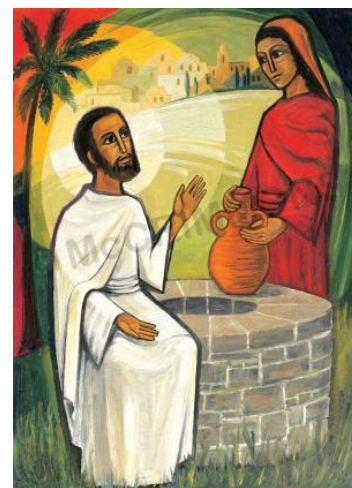
Lent is the season during which the Elect - those who will be initiated into the Christian Community at Easter - prepare more intensely for this important event. From the Rite of Election on the First Sunday of Lent they move through the Period of Purification and Enlightenment. 'This is a period of more intense spiritual preparation, consisting more in interior reflection than in catechetical instruction, and is intended to purify the minds and hearts of the elect as they search their own consciences and do penance' (RCIA 126). Public celebrations take place for the **Scrutinies** (3rd, 4th and 5th Sundays of Lent) and the **Presentations** of the Creed (3rd Week of Lent) and the Lord's Prayer (5th Week of Lent) usually in the context of the celebration of the Eucharist, after the Homily. These rites enrich both the lives of the catechumens and the community into which they will be initiated. Even if there is no one for initiation it is possible to draw out for the community some precious ideas for reflection inspired by the Gospel of each of the three Sundays and the Scrutinies/Presentations.

3rd Sunday of Lent (12 March 2023)

'If only you knew what God is offering'.

The Gospel (John 4:5-42) tells the story of the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well of Sychar. Among the many rich phrases is the following - 'If only you knew what God is offering'. If we spend time with this short extract it can become for us an invitation to explore our relationship with Jesus, the source of nourishment, renewal and healing. An Intercession for the Elect from the 1st Scrutiny could be adapted for all.

That, like the woman of Samaria, we may review our lives before Christ and acknowledge our sins, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, hear our prayer. (>140)



This Sunday could also mark the beginning of a journey to the fountain of healing - the Parish Celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation - that would take place **ideally** before Holy Week. An announcement is made or flyer passed out or tweet sent. The Presentation of the Creed to the Elect takes place during the following week. For those who are not journeying with individuals in their own community, the Sunday Creed could be broken into three sections using the musical refrain **Credo, Credo, Credo. Amen** (Lourdes music by Jean-Paul Lécot).

Ronan McDonagh's 'Song of the soul that is glad to know God' from his Centenary Mass of St. John of the Cross (1991) is very fitting for this celebration. The text by Pamela Stotter has this refrain:

I will give you living water, no more shall you thirst

I will give you living water springing up within you.

(see also *Wondrous Encounters – Scripture for Lent* by Richard Rohr)

4th Sunday of Lent (19 March 2023) - I only know that I was blind and now I can see

We are offered another healing encounter in the Gospel story of Jesus and the man born blind (John 9:1-41). There are many verses that would lead to reflection – try this one and see where it leads you. - I only know that I was blind and now I can see.

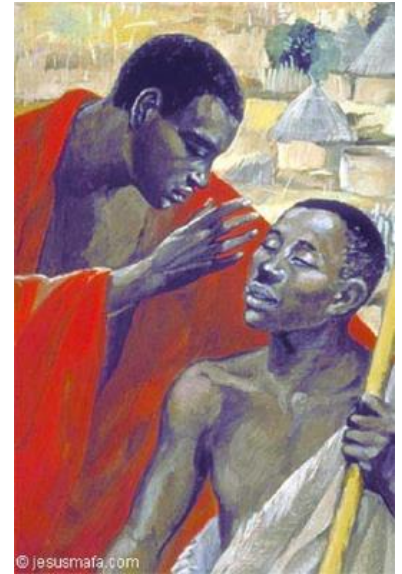
The song *Amazing Grace* (Spiritual) comes to mind as does *Open My Eyes* (Jesse Manibusan). They are linked to the core Gospel message.

An Intercession for the Elect from the 2nd Scrutiny could be adapted for all.

That God may dispel darkness and be the light that shines in the hearts of all,
let us pray to the Lord: Lord, hear our prayer. (>140)

An adaptation of the Prayer of Exorcism would be useful:

That God may free us from the false values that surround and blind us and set us firmly as children of the light forever, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, hear our prayer.
(>140)



Jesus was a great storyteller – what do you think of this one from Ramadan 2016?

GAZA CITY, Gaza - The month of Ramadan in Gaza is seen as a time of unity where neighbours come together regardless of religion or class.

The renewed sense of community is clear for all to see, with people going out of their way to help one another. But few can speak of a bond as close as that of Kamal Tarazi, a 55-year-old Christian and his blind neighbour, 45-year-old Hatem Khries.

During the holy month, Tarazi has taken Khries to the al-Burno mosque five times a day, every day, so that the blind man can pray. Tarazi then waits for the prayers to finish so that he can take his neighbour safely home. The first prayer is at dawn and the last one after dusk, but Tarazi says he does not mind the gruelling routine.

“We are never separated - everyone knows I am Christian and he is a Muslim and they are amazed at how deep our friendship is,” he added. The bond has grown so close that even throughout the rest of the year, Tarazi goes to the mosque with Khries on Friday, and Khries goes to church with Tarazi on Sundays.

Tarazi takes his friend shopping so that he does not miss out on walking the same old streets of al-Zawya market where he used to walk before the accident in which he lost his sight. It is here that Khries says the smell of the spices and the sounds of stall-holders and shoppers helps to bring the hustle and bustle of Gaza to life even if he can no longer see it happening around him.

Ramadan 2023 begins on 22 March

5th Sunday of Lent (26 March 2023)

'I know that he will rise again at the resurrection on the last day'

The Gospel for this Sunday (John 11:1-45) brings us into the world of the particular friends of Jesus – Mary, Martha and Lazarus. Sit with this passage and see where it might lead you. Jesus in this story pours out his humanity in the tears he weeps for the death of his friend. His presence evokes a profession of faith in the resurrection of the dead from Martha. This Sunday might be a day to be sensitive to those who are bereaved and acknowledge them in the intercessions. This passage is about resurrection and also about freedom – 'Unbind him, let him go free'. We can make a link again with the celebration of the Parish Penitential Service and that call to freedom from what chains us down at the moment – another tweet.

An Intercession for the Elect from the 3rd Scrutiny could be adapted for all.

That we may be freed from sin and grow in the holiness that leads to eternal life, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, hear our prayer. (>140)

An adaptation of the Prayer of Exorcism would be useful:

That God may free us from the power of the spirit of evil, so that we may bear witness to our life in the risen Christ which we renew at Easter. let us pray to the Lord: Lord, hear our prayer. (>140)

There is a sung version of this Gospel with a lively refrain that builds up throughout: *'Take the stone away, come out, come out. Take the stone away, come out'*.

It can be very powerful and can also be used also even if the Gospel text is recited.

In the 5th Week, the Elect are presented with the Lord's Prayer. This Sunday the Our Father might be sung by all on one note so as not to exclude anyone or actions may accompany it or sign language if it is appropriate. Encourage people to listen and be aware of each other so as to recite the prayer in unison (community v individualism)

Conclusion

Notice the progression in the selected passages over the three Sundays – 'If only you **knew**... I only **know**... **I know**.' Observe the journey from possibility, through doubt to certainty. If this can be picked up artistically by way of image or on a slide it might be another seed planted.

