

## **The Sunday Missive – March 13, 2022**

### **The Second Sunday in Lent**

#### **Hymn 484 Praise the Lord through every nation**

Praise the Lord through every nation;  
His holy arm hath wrought salvation;  
Exalt him on his Father's throne.  
Praise your King, ye Christian legions,  
Who now prepares in heavenly regions  
Unfailing mansions for his own: with voice and minstrelsy  
Extol his majesty: Allelujah!  
His praise shall sound all nature round,  
And hymns on every tongue abound.

Jesus, Lord, our Captain glorious,  
O'er sin, and death, and hell victorious,  
Wisdom and might to thee belong:  
We confess, proclaim, adore thee;  
We bow the knee, we fall before thee;  
Thy love henceforth shall be our song.  
The cross meanwhile we bear,  
The crown ere long to wear: Allelujah!  
Thy reign extend world without end;  
Let praise from all to thee ascend.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GZfzeonjJcc>

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

## **Genesis 15:1-18**

After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great."

But Abram said, "O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir." But the word of the Lord came to him, "This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir." He brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Then he said to him, "I am the Lord who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess." But he said, "O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." He brought him all these and cut them in two, laying each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him. Then the Lord said to Abram, "Know this for certain, that your offspring shall be aliens in a land that is not theirs, and shall be slaves there, and they shall be oppressed for four hundred years; but I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. As for yourself, you shall go to your ancestors in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates.

## **Psalm 27**

The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear\* ***The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?***

When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh\* ***My adversaries and foes shall stumble and fall.***

Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear\* ***Though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident.***

One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after\* ***To live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.***

For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble\* ***He will conceal me under the cover of his tent.***

Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me\* ***I will offer sacrifices with shouts of joy.***

Do not hide your face from me O Lord\* ***Do not turn your servant away in anger.***

Do not cast me off, do not forsake me\* ***O God of my salvation!***

I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living\* ***Wait for the Lord and be strong, let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!***

## **Philippians 3:14 - 4:1**

I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you. Only let us hold fast to what we have attained.

Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

### **Hymn 455 O Love of God, how strong and true**

O love of God, how strong and true, eternal and yet ever new;  
Uncomprehended and unbought,  
Beyond all knowledge and all thought.

O wide-embracing, wondrous Love, we read thee in the sky above;  
We read thee in the earth below,  
In seas that swell and streams that flow.

We read thee best in him who came  
To bear for us the cross of shame,  
Sent by the Father from on high,  
Our life to live, our death to die.

We read thy power to bless and save  
E'en in the darkness of the grave;  
Still more in resurrection light  
We read the fullness of thy might.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e4eykxPI0C0>

### **Luke 13:31-35**

At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." He said to them, "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.' Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

### **You Do Not Have To Be Good – Lent 2C**

"You do not have to be good. You do not have to walk on your knees for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting. You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves. Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine. Meanwhile the world goes on. Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain are moving across the landscapes, over the prairies and the deep trees, the mountains and the rivers. Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air, are heading home again. Whoever you are, no matter how lonely, the world offers itself to your

imagination, calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting -- over and over announcing your place in the family of things.”

Reading the work of the late Mary Oliver is one of life’s great pleasures. In *Wild Geese*, she tells us about life well-lived and how for each of us love means something different. But while love is different for everyone, it is also very much the same, and binds us all together. At the place where we are assured or in doubt about whether or not we will be satisfied, safe, excited and well enough repaid, we are all the same. “Let the soft animal of your body love what it loves” and “Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.” The poet captures in a few short phrases the exact point of confluence of the current of hope and anguish that make up the rivers that run through all of us.

I come from Missouri. I grew up not far from both the Mississippi and Missouri rivers that come together just above Saint Louis in an awesome flow of fast, wide, deep, brown water. The sight of these two enormous, powerful forces mixing together to form the lower Mississippi is humbling and enthralling; we would often go down to the levee and just look at the river, especially at night. There was a strange and compelling combination of excitement, and comfort one could have just by watching the water. There was excitement at being so close to a thing so strong and unstoppable. The comfort had something to do with the timelessness and immeasurability of the river; we could be as safely insignificant as we wanted to in the presence of such a vast cosmic being. T.S. Eliot, who came from Saint Louis, called the river “a strong brown god.”

We can be aware of the confluence of our emotions. The rivers of hope and despair surge together in each of us from moment to moment as we encounter the circumstances, the people, places and things of our lives. The waters mix, and we become a combination of our faith and our fears. Mary Oliver is reminding us that, if we share our fears, our moments, days, even years of

doubt and pain with each other, we will indeed be set free to love what we love, and love it well.

For Sister Prejean, author of *Dead Men Walking*, a chronicle of her work with Death Row inmates, love meant specific and measurable acts. She wanted to 'walk the walk.' Her awareness of her own and society's revulsion by death row inmates was the river that brought her meaning. Loving society's enemies became for her an actual life's work, rather than an occasional and idealistic impulse. In accompanying them to their executions, she said, "I wanted my face to carry the love that tells them and every one of us is worth more than our most terrible acts." This is not a debate about the wretchedness of the death penalty, nor is it a debate about the possibility of repentance for unspeakable acts. It is a living example of someone who rides down the river of Jesus' bidding, borne by her own humanity, a mixture of faith and fear.

Saint Paul also tells us what Mary Oliver does, saying, 'Imitate us! We are the ones who live in expectation of salvation. Our humiliation will be transformed from an earthly body to a glorious one, if only we will stand firm in love. And what is our humiliation? "Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine." For each of us, it is different, but we all have it.

The psalmist is talking about this too, when we sing, "Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries, for false witnesses have risen against me, and they are breathing out violence." Every time we act on the fear and despair that flows through each of us, it is we who bear the false witness, against our own hope and faith, against our soft bodies, against our better selves. Again and again God tells us we don't have to do this. We don't have to do this, and we are forgiven when we inevitably do. Again and again, we hear the covenant renewed: 'Your descendants will be as numerous as the stars!' Again and again, like Abram, the sun goes down, a deep sleep falls upon us, and a deep and terrifying darkness descends.' As the old prayer goes:

Blessing, light, and glory surround us  
and scatter the darkness of the long and lonely night, for we know  
the divine Spirit dwells in us.

What does God do about this penchant of ours for returning to darkness, despair and shame? Why doesn't God just part these waters for us, like he did for the Hebrew slaves and Moses? Jesus is so frustrated with his people: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings? Yet you were not willing." But this is our nature. We are both spiritual and animal. The spirit is indeed willing, but the flesh is often even more willing – to do whatever it feels like doing.

So time and again we want saving. We are not saved once and for all from the enemy within, the assailants all around. Time after time the power of the Spirit comes and fills us with new hope, even in the face of our despair, with new humblings even in the face of our overweening pride. Then for a moment we are willing. We are honest enough to share our stories of despair, and this humility carries the day. It enables us to be the people we want to be, if only for brief moments, and love freely without counting the cost or the payback.

Perfection is for Jesus Christ alone, who has the inside track, the DNA, the nature of perfection. For the rest of us, the examples of not just people like Saint Paul and Sister Prejean, but anybody who, if only for a day or two, behaves the way we would like to behave – these examples can be our nurture, our hope for lives well-lived. We don't have to be good, but we do have to share our fears; we do have to let ourselves love.

However well we succeed at setting aside our stuff-worship, whatever the vast or tiny measure of our works of charity, no matter how many times we have to get honest and start over, we

can be sure that the current of hope will continue to run through us. The way to live life well is to know full well how much we all have in common and then share our unique selves with others as creatively as we can. Be ye sure that God will forgive the gap between what we are and what we would be. We can know that our sometimes fleeting desire to stop living for and by ourselves is God's will, who will provide the power of hopefulness and the glory of right action.

Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air, are heading home again. Whoever you are, no matter how lonely, the world offers itself to your imagination, calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting -- over and over announcing your place in the family of things."

### **Hymn 495 Hail, thou once despised Jesus**

Hail, thou once despised Jesus! Hail, thou Galilean King!  
Thou didst suffer to release us; thou didst free salvation bring.  
Hail, thou universal Savior, bearer of our sin and shame!  
By thy merit we find favor: life is given through thy Name.

Paschal Lamb, by God appointed, all our sins on thee were laid:  
By almighty love anointed, thou hast full atonement made.  
All thy people are forgiven through the virtue of thy blood:  
Opened is the gate of heaven, reconciled are we with God.

Jesus, hail! enthroned in glory, there for ever to abide;  
All the heavenly hosts adore thee, seated at thy Father's side.  
There for sinners thou art pleading;  
There thou dost our place prepare;  
Ever for us interceding, till in glory we appear.

Worship, honor, power, and blessing thou art worthy to receive;  
Highest praises, without ceasing, right it is for us to give.  
Help, ye bright angelic spirits, all your noblest anthems raise;  
Help to sing our Savior's merits, help to chant Emmanuel's praise!

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3t46Qmnp\\_N4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3t46Qmnp_N4)

## **Song for Future Books**

The book is made of glass and I look  
through it and see more books.

Many glass books.

Is someone speaking?

A muffled voice is telling me  
to make soup which I think  
means I am loved.

What other kind of cup  
fills itself?

Can there be a cup of cup?

A cup of itself?

Outside a black squirrel has wiggled  
to the end  
of a very skinny branch.

When the squirrel breathes  
the whole tree shakes,

as if the squirrel were the soul  
of the tree.

Have you ever felt like  
such a tree?

Not sayin'

I have.

Joanna Fuhrman