

'THREE PRAYERFUL EXERCISES FOR LOVING OUR NEIGHBOUR IN LENT'
7th Sunday Ordinary Time Year A ~ 23rd February 2020



WE ARE CALLED TO LOVE OUR NEIGHBOUR

We come gathered before God today, only a few days before the beginning of Lent. As we think about our Lenten journey to come, we remember that we are called to love our neighbour.

In identifying our neighbours, we begin with four possible Lenten intentions.

FOUR PRAYER INTENTIONS

- **HEALTH**

The spread of the coronavirus is a concern for all of us. And the issue of transparency in recording and reporting its spread is crucial. We pray that each nation acts responsibly and openly in its efforts to face this challenge. **We pray during Lent that we respond as a nation to the changes needed.**

- **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

The recent shocking reminder of domestic violence with the murder of a mother and children should be of great concern. We pray as a nation, that we **openly admit the enormous prevalence** of domestic violence in Australia, that we **acknowledge important work already being done** in prevention, education, protection and support, and that we **work together urgently** for immediate change across our families, communities, church and faith communities, sporting clubs, agencies, political parties, media, hobby groups, and all sectors of our Australian community. **We pray during Lent that we respond as a nation to the changes needed.**

- **CHANGES DUE TO RECENT BUSHFIRES**

The recently announced bushfire Royal Commission offers an opportunity to us to hear of the pain and suffering of people and the biodiversity of our land. We pray that we are open to listening to each other. **We pray during Lent that we respond as a nation to the changes needed.**

- **PERSONAL INTENTION**

We add a personal intention from this past week.

We pray during Lent that we respond to the changes needed.

One of the hardest things in life is to love your enemy.

No surprise to say that we can't do it alone.

It is through the love of God that we can try,

even if we are not aware, that it is God's love that is enabling us.

Some won't admit that it is God's love that is enabling us.

Let us draw on the Holy Spirit to guide us.

OLD TESTAMENT

In Exodus 21:23-25, Leviticus 24:19-21 and Deuteronomy 19:21

we have *"the eye for an eye"* passages.

People who are determined to be violent and vengeful, might quote them

as they try to manipulate the Bible to justify themselves.

Today's 1st Reading is from Leviticus 19:1-2. 17-18.

Not hating but speaking up.

Lev 19:17-18,

"You shall not hate anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbour, or you will incur guilt yourself.

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord."

FIRST EXERCISE - WHO IS OUR NEIGHBOUR?

Today's Gospel of Matthew 5:38-48 includes Matthew 5:44,

"But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you".

Our neighbour includes our enemy.

- Let us pause and pray for those who persecute us.

In the New Testament we have incredibly challenging examples of loving your enemy.

In Luke 10:25-37, the 'Parable of the Good Samaritan'

is the response of Jesus to the question *"Who is my neighbour?"*

Jesus chose a Samaritan, a traditional foe, an historical enemy as a model of love.

- Let us pray the passage slowly.
- Imagine that we are the person on the road injured.
Pray to God about what feelings we experience and what thoughts we have.
- Then begin again and imagine ourselves the Good Samaritan.
Pray to God about what feelings we experience and what thoughts we have.
- Then begin again and imagine ourselves as the ones who turn away from someone in need.
Pray to God about what feelings we experience and what thoughts we have.

- Let us now sit with God in silence and see where God leads us.

In Luke 23:34, Jesus, crucified on the cross, suffering brutality, derision and intense pain, says

“Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”

He forgives the vested interests wanting him dead, he forgives the Romans and the Jewish leaders.

- Imagine Jesus on the cross, forgiving people.
Imagine Jesus forgiving us.
Pray to God about the change within us as God forgives us.

We conclude by saying aloud, the following verse the Golden Rule. Matthew 7:12

“In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.”

SECOND EXERCISE - PAUL’S INSIGHTS IN HIS LETTER TO THE ROMANS

St Paul knew first-hand what it was, to be forgiven by God and people in his life.

He had thought of Christians as an enemy.

He had actively sought out and persecuted Christians,

Then he hears God’s call, repents and becomes a Christian.

Being loved by God, he converts.

Let us reflect on some of Paul’s statements in his letter to the Romans.

During the week ahead, you are invited to select a different quote each time that you pray from St Paul’s letter to the community in Rome.

Romans 5:10,

“For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having being reconciled, will we be saved by his life.”

Romans 8:35,

“Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?”

Romans 8:37

“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”

Romans 12:14

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.”

Romans 12:17

“Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all”.

Romans 12:21

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Romans 13:8-10

*“Owe no one anything, except to love one another,
for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ...
Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.”*

Read the quote several times, slowly with a break of a few seconds each time.

Then be still with God and listen.

We go back over the biblical passages above,

picturing people and groups in our minds as we ponder the passages.

And we do this, with God.

We continue to grow in love, justice and peace, mercy and truth.

THIRD EXERCISE – REFLECTION UNDER FIVE HEADINGS

You are invited to draw up a sheet of paper, with five headings –

1. MY NEIGHBOUR
2. THOSE I LOVE
3. MY ENEMY
4. THOSE TO WHOM I AM INDIFFERENT
5. INSIGHTS OF JESUS

You might remember when we did this three years ago.

Think about who we would name in each column.

Not asking ourselves to write their names, as someone else might accidentally find it.

Take this to prayer now and again, and pray for them.

And we open ourselves to the insights of Jesus.

Over time, prayer and reflection and action, we discover more people as our neighbours and we pray that we love more.

We conclude by saying together a quote from today’s Gospel Matthew 5:44:

*“But I say to you,
Love your enemies
and pray for those who persecute you”.*

We prepare for *Ash Wednesday* this week

and our sacred journey through the season of Lent.

Let us pray.

Fr Gerry

[Readings: <https://universalis.com/Australia/20200223/mass.htm>]