

2015 UST Lent Reflection Series

Individual and Social Sin

A World of Beauty and Life Becomes a World of Darkness

[adapted from Maureen Conroy, Giving the Retreat in Everyday Life]

In your outer senses and imagination, look at, smell, touch, taste, listen to the pollution of the world – noise pollution, sight pollution, chemical and waste pollution that has affected our earth...the land, the ocean, the sky.

Imagine yourself standing at a busy street corner, and look into the faces of those passing by. The world is far from being filled with persons who love God, love others, and long for the Kingdom. Many feel empty, unhappy, and lost as they rush through life seeking mostly comforts, money, importance, to be loved or admired at any cost, power over others or just to have a good time.

Many become unfaithful in marriage, neglect God, disregard law and authority, cheat or steal, practice discrimination, drink too much, endlessly criticize but do precious little about it.

Even many good people live just for themselves and what they can get out of life – or get away with – forgetting: we are called to be lovers, stewards, and givers of life to others.

Some prefer sex or romance to love. Some escape tensions or boredom with drugs, erotic behavior, or violent entertainment. Many are unwilling to reach out to others, or commit themselves to anyone or anything.

And so we see: tensions and strife – racial, class, marriage, and personal; injustice and crimes, violence and wars, poverty and divorce, insecurity and discouragement, feelings of powerlessness and guilt, low self-esteem and insensitivity to the needs of others, and even to their most basic rights. Nature is damaged, love grows stale, and even life is held cheap.

I am part of this dark world. I have been affected by the darkness and have contributed to it. What particular areas of darkness affect me? How have I contributed to the world's darkness, either by what I do or do not do? How do I feel as I ponder the darkness of the world.

Imagine Jesus our Lord present before you on the cross and being to speak with him, asking how it is that though he is the Creator, He has stooped to become human, and to pass from eternal life to death here in time, that thus He might die for our sins. Listen to Him. Share with Him any thoughts or feelings that come to your mind, and listen again.

Romans 7:18-25a

“I can will what is right, but I cannot do it...Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Contemplate the words of Romans, considering this commentary on the section: “Perhaps more fundamental, is a contrast between a human being struggling with sin unaided by God and a human being turning to God and ultimately helped by him (through the Spirit) in the same contest.”

Romans 5:6-21

“At the appointed time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for us.”

“It is precisely in this that God proves God’s love for us: that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

“For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled by the death of God’s Son, it is all the more certain that we who have been reconciled will be saved by his life.”

“The gift is not like the offense. For if by the offense of one person all died, much more did the grace of God and the gracious gift of Jesus Christ abound for all.”

Ponder these rich words of God’s saving love. Look at Jesus on the Cross. Notice his desire to free us from darkness and to bring us into light. See the grace of reconciliation enter into the sinful places in the world.

Luke 7:36-50

Contemplate the story of the woman washing the feet of Jesus with her tears and perfuming them with oil. Let your senses enter into your prayer, seeing the encounter between Jesus and her, smelling the perfume, listening to what Jesus says to her and to Simon.

Notice the tenderness in the woman and in Jesus in contrast to the hardness in Simon the Pharisee. Notice Jesus’ total acceptance of her, even though she is considered a great sinner.

Ponder his words: “Her many sins are forgiven because of her great love. Little is forgiven the one whose love is small.”

What does Jesus's acceptance of the woman say about Jesus' relationship with me? Speak with Jesus about what his acts and words mean to you.

Luke 15:11-24

“How can God love me? I'm full of faults, and don't pray very much.” Such thoughts or feelings of guilt or unworthiness can be obstacles to God's desire for intimacy. The sooner we let God love us as we are, the better.

Contemplate the story of the Prodigal Son, letting your senses enter your prayer. Be with the son as he realizes the error of his ways and considers returning to his father. What does he feel as he proceeds toward home?

Notice the father as the son returns – his welcome and his love. Watch the encounter between the father and the son. Then let the father turn to you. Speak what you need to him and let him speak to you of his love and acceptance of you, with all your warts and moles and weaknesses.