

A Contemplative Path through Lent.

A Carmelite Conversation, Wednesday February 3rd, 2021 via zoom

- **Thank you** for being here. I am both humbled and honored by your presence and your interest in what I might have to share with you.
- **Prayer:** *Taken from 'We bring you everything and tip it out in front of you', Wild Goose Pubs, p94.*
Lord God, we bring to you our happiness and our weariness, our disappointments and our hopes, our needs, worldly and spiritual, our friends and those we find ourselves at odds with, our families and all the strangers we pass, day in, day out, and all the billions we will neither know nor pass, the places that we most love, and the places that disturb us most profoundly, our memories and our visions of the future, our highest successes and our most miserable failures, the help we offer and the help we need. We bring you everything and tip it out in front of you.
- *And now we **pause** a while in silence, waiting for you to show us what we need to understand.*
- Lord God, light up the things we need to see, brush to one side the things we need to put out of our minds, show us the doors we need to open and the paths we need to take, and be beside us as we go so that the work we do is your work, and the roads are your roads, leading to your presence. We ask it in the name of your son, and our brother, Jesus Christ. Amen.
- **We are two weeks out from Lent** which begins on Ash Wednesday, 17th February, so there is time to prepare ourselves to walk a contemplative path through Lent. Time to think about how we might do this, and to think about some contemplative practices and ways of being that might help us along the way.
- Like many of you, I have kept more seasons of Lent than I care to remember. I have kept Lent in many different ways over the years. In the 50's and 60's it was common for Parishes to offer a Lenten Study – usually led by the Parish Priest and focused on some aspect of the paschal mystery and in particular the events of the triduum or the three days prior to the great feast of Easter.
In the 70's and into the 90's it was common for groups to gather within parishes to read a particular book together.....usually something spiritual and uplifting, but not always specifically about Lent or even preparatory to Easter. Often referred to as a Lenten Book Study, or Book Group, I recall

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years in which the books chosen had little to do with the liturgical season of Lent.

- **Perhaps we could share** some of our memories about Lents past and how we kept them?

Before I broach the subject of how we as budding contemplatives might approach Lent this year, let me say a word of two about the liturgical season of Lent.

Lent is, honestly, my favorite liturgical season. It has a way of making everything else makes better sense. It clarifies and gives so much more meaning to the Incarnation and the Triduum [Holy Thursday; Good Friday, Holy Saturday] and of course, Easter Day when embraced and entered into as an intimate journey of faith.

Each year Lent provides my humanity, both fallen and redeemed, yet another opportunity to rediscover itself and its right place in God's plan for me and for this world.

Saint Benedict has this to say about Lent:

"The life of a monk ought always to be a Lenten observance. However, since such virtue is that of few, we advise that during these days of Lent he guard his life with all purity and at the same time wash away during these holy days all the shortcomings of other times. This will then be worthily done if we restrain ourselves from all vices. Let us devote ourselves to tearful prayers, to reading and compunction of heart, and to abstinence. During these days, therefore, let us add something to the usual amount of our service, special prayers, abstinence from food and drink, that each one offer to God "with the joy of the Holy Ghost" (1 Thess. 1:6), of his own accord, something above his prescribed measure; namely, let him withdraw from his body somewhat of food, drink, sleep, speech, merriment, and with the gladness of spiritual desire await holy Easter. Let each one, however, make known to his Abbot what he offereth and let it be done with his approval and blessing; because what is done without permission of the spiritual father will be imputed to presumption and vain glory, and not to merit. Therefore, let all be done with the approval of the Abbot." [RB47]

- Lenten Observance was already a standard of practice in the life of the Church during the 6th Century. Irenaus of Lyons (c.130-c.200) wrote of such

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a season in the earliest days of the church, but back then it lasted only two or three days, not the 40 observed today. In 325, the Council of Nicaea discussed a 40-day Lenten season of fasting. It's unclear whether its original intent was just for new Christians preparing for Baptism, but it soon encompassed the whole Church. Lent is generally described as a commemoration of the 40 days that Jesus spent in the desert fasting and praying before beginning his public ministry [Matthew 4:1-11] In this season of prayer, fasting and almsgiving I am given, each year, a chance to recharge my spiritual life and to reset my relationship with God....Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

As you budding mystics well know, the best way we can do that is by embracing a contemplative way of being. The Carmelite charism, based on the lives of Elijah and Mary, Mother of Our Lord with which some of us are becoming familiar is an exemplar for us in this work.

The word Lent comes from the Middle English word for “Lengthen” or “Lengthening”, the northern hemisphere connotations of which will be obvious.

Despite the existence of many Fasting traditions as precursors to Spring and in particular Spring Festivals, such as Easter, the origins of Lent are obscure. The most likely scenario is that in the early Church there were well established practices of fasting and other spiritually related disciplines although without specific names. The liturgical season of Lent is first referred to in the documents of the Council of Nicaea in 325AD.

For Christians one of the earliest formal references is contained in the Rule of St. Benedict written in AD 516.

Traditionally there are 40 days in Lent. These are marked by fasting both from foods and festivities, and by other acts of penance.

The significance of 40 days/months/years has a strong Biblical basis.....for example:

Moses' 40 days on Mount Sinai with God [Ex 24:18]

Elijah's 40 days and nights walking to Mt. Horeb [1Kings 19:8]

God sent 40 days of rain in the great flood [Gen 7:4]

The Hebrew people wandered in the desert 40 years [Num 14.33]

Three traditional practices are usually taken up with renewed vigor during

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Lent. These are prayer [justice towards God], fasting [justice towards self], and almsgiving [justice towards neighbors].

In addition, some will take up an additional regular discipline, to bring them closer to God, to seek an experience of God. Such additional spiritual or contemplative practices might include sacred reading [lectio divina] or praying the Stations of the Cross.

- I have three suggestions that I'd like to share with you. But first let me stress that in whatever we do.....be gentle with yourself. Whatever you decide to take up as a spiritual practice for Lent
.....be strong enough to persevere if you are comfortable with it, and strong enough to let it go if you aren't.
- **The first of my suggestions is for you to engage in a daily personal time of lectio divina.** The way of personal lectio divina is a little different to the way we work together in group lectio, such as some of us might participate in on a Friday morning.
I'd like to suggest you find a quiet corner of the house for your lectio. Perhaps you might like to light a candle or place a flower on a small adjacent table. Whatever you do, o the same each day. Try to start at the same time each day. I like to take off my shoes. I have a shawl that I like to put around my shoulders. Like Pavlov's dogs, my body has learnt to come to silence and stillness when I perform these preparations.
- **Reading [Hearing the Word]:** I'd like to suggest that you might start with the Gospel of Mark – it being the Gospel for the year ahead of us and the main Gospel from which the Sunday lections will be taken from now until the beginning of Advent. Start at the beginning of Mark's Gospel and work slowly through to the end.
- I suggest that you read very slowly, savouring each and every word. A good way of doing this is to read silently, but to mouth the words as though reading aloud. The act of mouthing the words as you read them forces you to slow down.

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- While you are reading, be alert to God speaking to you from within the text. Expect to hear God's still small voice as the book of Isaiah describes it. Be alert to a word or phrase in your reading that "shimmers" for you; that stands out; that draws your attention. When that occurs, stop your reading at that point.
- **Meditatio** [*Receiving the Word*]: Put your Bible down keeping it open at the place where you stopped reading. Sit quietly and reflect on what it is that God might want to say to you out of this text. You might want to go back and read again the lines you have read. You might repeat this several times. When you feel you have heard God's voice, God's Word to you at this time, close you Bible and put it to one side.
- **Oratio** [Praying with the Word]: When you are ready, enter into a conversation with God about what you have read. In this conversation you might want to ask God to give you greater clarity about the message God has for you from your reading. You might want to give God thanks for God's gift to you of Holy Scripture.
- **Contemplatio** [Wondering at the Word]: Finally, it is time to sit quietly in God's presence and to do some "wondering" about God's Word to you at this time. It is a time to sit still and quietly in this present moment, and letting it become a "**moment of presence**". How **might your** experience of God's Word to you at this time change your life? Does it call you to do something? Does it have implications for the way you will try to live your life?
- **The time of personal lectio divina** might last a short time, or it might take you 20-30minutes to work through the four 'stages'. Not every experience of personal lectio will result in an experience of God's presence. Not every experience of personal lectio will give you a sense of God 'speaking' to you out of the text. Don't come to lectio with expectations that anything will 'happen'. The work of lectio divina is a way of praying to God, of worshipping God. There is no such thing as a 'good' or a 'bad' time of personal lectio.

A time for questions and observations.....

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Seven Mystical Affirmations.....

Recently I have been reading two classic self-help books. My reason for reading them was that they are part of some research in which I am currently engaged. The books are Julia Cameron's "*The Artist's Way*" and John Bradshaw's "*Healing the Shame that Binds You*".

Both these books have long been perennial bestsellers in the self-help market: Cameron's book is a program for releasing inner obstacles to creativity through an exploration of the relationship between art and spirituality, while Bradshaw's book offers hope particularly to those in recovery from addictive and / or inappropriate behaviour by exploring the causes of deep-seated and chronically experienced shame.

What struck me was how both authors use affirmations as a tool to encourage readers to literally "re-program" their minds away from limiting, self-defeating, and toxic ways of thinking. An affirmation is a positive statement that anyone can use to recalibrate their thoughts in such a way as to encourage healing, creativity, trust, or confidence. They follow the pattern described in a classic book from over a century ago, James Allen's "*As a Man Thinketh*", which describes how our thoughts literally direct our lives and can impact our physical and psychological health as well as our creativity and our productivity.

Thinking about this within my personal context of trying to find ways to live more contemplatively got me to reflecting on whether affirmations might have a place in the practice of contemplative spirituality.

On the surface that may seem counterintuitive. Isn't contemplation largely about silence? Why clog up silence with the noisy chatter of affirmations, never mind how positive and uplifting they might be? If the goal is to be still and know God, isn't any use of language, no matter how "affirming," somehow a retreat from the silence we so desire?

That does make sense, but it also fails to consider that silence is never purely silent: just as the brain always thinks (even when we sleep, it generates dreams), so the reality is that we are always engaged with language on some level. This is why mantras and sacred words remain so essential in any meditative or contemplative practice. Just look at the work of Dom John Main & Fr. Laurene

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Freeman who propose the use of a mantra as an aid to meditation; and the work and writing of Dom Thomas Keating and his teaching on Centering Prayer (and here I acknowledge the work of our own Kathryn Pile as she facilitates our Centering Prayer Group).

We choose a single word or a short prayer like the Jesus Prayer to engage our heart and mind, simply because of our all-too-human tendency to fill the silent chalice of the mind with “*something*” — and a sacred word or short prayer is better than the wandering, chaotic distractions the mind will come up with on its own. That mind-state many writers on spiritual matters describe as the “monkey-mind”.

For a very long time it has been the practise of Hindu Mystics and Holy men to give young or recently professed Hindu monks [sanyasis] a “word”. In 1992 the renowned Bede Griffiths visited Melbourne. I was truly blessed to have the opportunity to meet him. In that meeting Fr. Bede gave me a “Word”, or more accurately, a phrase. Composed by Fr. Bede for me lone and a phrase to be kept secret and used by me alone in my times of meditation and prayer. That “word” is my constant companion right up to the present time.

So back to affirmations. If we think of affirmations as prayers, then perhaps they do have a place in the contemplative life. Now, self-help affirmations tend to be very “I” focused: “I effortlessly maintain my perfect weight” or “I create art with joy and gratitude” or some such statement. These are good statements for helping to reorient the human mind from fear to trust — but in terms of contemplation, we need to set our sights a bit higher than just on the self.

The following spiritual affirmations originate in the work of Carl McColman, a well-regarded and authoritative writer on spiritual matters.....and incidentally one of my favourite modern authors on contemplation.

For the following affirmations, Carl McColman created three “I” affirmations and four “God” affirmations — acknowledging that God, ultimately, is the active agent in the contemplative life, and we affirm, prayerfully, God’s love for us and God’s desire to (re)form us in the Divine image and likeness.

I bring McColman’s Seven Mystical Affirmations to this conversation on The Path through Lent as a small “holy experiment.” I am suggesting that we might

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consider taking one, or a few, or all these statements and integrating it/them into our daily prayer practice during this upcoming Lent.

If you find you resist one of these statements, or even just find it hard to believe, that might be the one to work with. Just as self-help affirmations are designed to recalibrate the mind for the purpose of healing and creative growth, so these “mystical affirmations” are designed to form our hearts, minds, and souls into who God calls us to be. We can trust this call because it has been reported to us by so many of the mystics, down the ages all the way back to Biblical times. Now as we live and breathe, it is our turn to take these promises and make them real — by praying them, by trusting God, and by consenting to the action of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

These affirmations will hopefully become part of our God-experience.....an experience of God that we can carry with us into each day of Lent.

If you choose to integrate one or more of these affirmations into your daily prayer life during Lent, I would be really interested in how that works for you, let me know how it goes. I will be happy to share my own experience with you.

Seven Mystical Affirmations

1. **God loves me and all people unconditionally and fills our hearts with Divine Love. I can become a living incarnation of that joyful love.** (see Romans 5:5)
2. **I seek God’s presence in my heart and my life, trusting God’s work to heal me and to make me the serene, creative, and contemplative person God calls me to become.**
3. **Christ abides in me, and I abide in Christ. As Christ is one with God, so I am one with Christ.** (see John 10:30; John 15:4)
4. **I take delight in God, and in so doing I receive the deepest desire of my heart — which is union with God.** (see Psalm 37:4)

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5. **God dwells in my heart, the temple of the Holy Spirit: therefore, I keep silence in that sacred divine presence.** (see Habakkuk 2:20, I Corinthians 6:19)

 6. **I partake in God's Divine Nature.** (see II Peter 1:4)

 7. **God teaches me to be silent; every day I find the silence within me deeper.** (see I Thessalonians 4:11, translated literally)
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- **A time for questions or observations**

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- **Praying the Psalms as Jesus Prayed them.....**

My third suggestion for our contemplative path through Lent is to pray the Psalms as Jesus prayed them.

It used to be that praying the Psalms was something all Christians did every day. They did this privately and in church. Everyone learned to pray from the Psalms and in the process came to understand “the anatomy of the soul,” as John Calvin called it. But Praying the Psalms is a lost discipline today. Only occasionally is even one whole Psalm read or sung in church. In my Anglican tradition there are parishes that never use the book of Psalms.

In many Parishes you rarely if ever sing a Psalm of lament. The laments are the sad songs and prayers of the Bible. Without them we are likely to feel alone or guilty when we are struggling with sadness, grief, depression, or feeling abandoned by God or when we are angry with God. How are people to learn how to express their pain to God and to pray through it, trusting God if we do not expose them to the Psalms?

Why pray the Psalms? [Rhetorical question] *Because Jesus did!* If we want to pray as Jesus prayed – and, more importantly, live as Jesus lived, then praying and reading the psalms is, it seems to me, enormously important.

Psalms have been a particularly important part of the Christian tradition since the first days of the early Church. N T Wright, Anglican theologian and past bishop of Durham describes Jesus as a “Walking Psalm”.

A wonderful example of praying the Psalms is Terry Waite who in 1987 went to Iran as the emissary of the Archbishop of Canterbury to negotiate the release of English hostages held there. Terry Waite himself was arrested and spent over 5 years imprisoned in Iran four of which were in solitary confinement. Waite had with him a Bible and a Book of Common Prayer. For much of the time he prayed

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the Psalms internalising and committing many to memory. Just like Jesus must have done. Google Terry Waite for his remarkable story.

What is a Psalm? A Psalm is a poetic prayer in the Hebrew language, often intended to be sung accompanied by a string instrument. The biblical Book of Psalms is divided into five 'books' - an arbitrary and relatively modern but useful division that assists in reading and finding and working with the 150 psalms contained in the Book of Psalms - a structure not unlike the five books of the Torah. There are Psalms that re not in the Book of Psalms....for example Exodus 15, 2 Samuel 22 [Ps 18], Jonah 2 and Jeremiah's "confessions".

Many Psalms are traditionally assigned to David, but the Book of Psalms never actually makes this claim. Less than half the Psalms are attributed to David and the "of David" superscription is not indicative of his authorship. There are 11 Psalms assigned to "Korah", 12 Psalms to "Asaph" and many not assigned to any one person. There 14 Psalms in the style 'Psalms of Ascent' possibly sung on the way up to the Temple in Jerusalem.

The Psalms were probably written between 1000 and 400BC. Our present bible contains a "collection of collections." Like so much of the Hebrew Bible, it is believed that the Book of Psalms was gathered and taken into exile where they were heavily redacted and sorted....probably around the 6thC BC.

Taken together as a whole – rather than as individual Psalms - they tell a story.

Book 1 [Ps 1-41] and Book II [Ps 42-72] reflect upon the time of the Davidic Monarchy, largely comprising laments punctuated with Psalms styled as Royal Psalms [2, 18, 20, 21, 45, & 72]

Book III [Ps 73-89] engages with the collapse of the monarchy through to the exile.

Book IV [Ps 90 – 106] remembers and looks forward in hope towards God's rule.

Book V [Ps 107 – 150] imagines new possibilities of God's creative power and reign, concluding with a five-fold doxology. In fact, each of the books end with a doxology. Th doxology concluding Ps 89 the briefest, and that concluding the whole of the Book of Psalms the longest [the last five psalms].

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Psalms 1 & 2 are believed to form an introduction to the whole book. Neither has any superscription and indeed, in some manuscripts do not even carry a number. Taken together, they begin and end with a beatitude....see Ps 1 v1 and Ps 2 v12b.

Read Psalms 1 and 2

- Psalm 1 focuses upon **Torah**; not to be narrowly understood as Law (e.g., 10 commandments) but seen more broadly as the story of God's choice and provision for his people Israel. It is in this sense that the Psalms themselves are Torah and Jesus was 'a walking Psalm'.
- It portrays life as 'black and white'; there are the **righteous** and there are the **wicked**.
We will see, as we pray through the Psalms, that this binary view is questioned and qualified. The 'wicked' in Ps 1v4 become the nations and peoples who rebel against God (Ps 2v1-2).
- Psalm 2 focuses upon the **King**; very clearly affirming him as God's anointed (v2) and God's son (v7). Again, this unambiguous affirmation of the King is both celebrated (in the Royal Psalms) and questioned as we move forward.
- Thus, taken together, the two Psalms introduce us to the main **characters and voices** in the Psalms: **The Psalmist (Israel), the wicked, the king and God**. The Psalms are prayers demonstrating a vigorous dialogue often with God – sometimes protesting God's absence but always in God's presence.

- The most important way of praying the psalms is to *pray them with Jesus*. Often the Psalms reminded me of Jesus' life and words, and this makes for fruitful meditation. The Psalms help me to learn to pray with Jesus and like Jesus; they help me to become a person after God's own heart amid my daily life.

Jesus quoted from the Psalms numerous times. Clearly, he had spent a lot of time praying through the Psalms — probably, like other Jews in his day, this is how he learned to pray. Jesus *lived* the Psalms. Often, he identified his life experiences in those of the Psalmist.

In many ways Jesus Fulfilled the Psalms even though they were written many, many years before Jesus' birth and earthly life.

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There are many Messianic prophecies in the Psalms that Jesus lived out, proving that he is God's Messiah. And Jesus fulfilled *all* the Psalms in the sense that he perfectly completed the righteous and honest life of prayer that they express. For instance, Jesus is the **Man** of Psalm 1.

In his humanity Jesus relied on praying the Psalms for comfort, wisdom, and worship in many different experiences. He needed the psalms because he felt all the same basic struggles and temptations that we do.

The most moving example of Jesus praying a Psalm is when he hung on the cross, suffering for our sins, and he cried out in a loud voice the words of David from Psalm 22:1, "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). This is the only time in the gospel accounts that Jesus prayed to his Father using the formal and distant name "God." He knew how it felt to be in pain and to cry out for God and yet feel alone. He knew what it was like to long for the Father's love and feel abandoned. He endured his darkest of all Dark Nights of the Soul on the cross for the joy of reconciling us to his Father (Hebrews 12:2).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer even says that *the Psalms are the prayers of Christ*:

The Man Jesus Christ, to whom no affliction, no ill, no suffering is alien and who yet was the wholly innocent and righteous one, is praying in the Psalter through the mouth of his Church. The Psalter is the prayer book of Jesus Christ... He prayed the Psalter and now it has become his prayer book for all time... Those who pray the psalms are joining in with the prayer of Jesus Christ, their prayer reaches the ears of God. Christ has become their intercessor (*Life Together*, pp. 45-46).

Paul and Peter

The Apostle Paul also made use of the Psalms. He quoted the Psalms in his teaching (Acts 13:33), as did Peter (Acts 1:20), but apparently, he also used them regularly in prayer as he encouraged us to sing psalms together (Colossians 3:16) and to speak to one another in psalms (Ephesians 5:19). In the first century since there were so few written scrolls of the Psalms that the way people would sing and speak psalms to one another was first to memorize and meditate on them – praying the Psalms into their hearts – so that they could access them anytime.

A Person After God's Heart

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Most of the Psalms were written by David, and perhaps this is why he was singled out with the affirmation, “David... is a man after my own heart” (Acts 13:22). Indeed, the Psalms are the Bible’s book of the heart in that they express emotion honestly and reverently.

The Psalms show us how to pray out in words (spoken or written) our deepest hurts and longings, our struggles that leave us anxious or angry, our confessions of guilt, and our joyful thanks and praise so that we share all our life experiences with our God who listens and responds. We lay out whatever it is that we feel and then we put our confidence in God.

By praying the Psalms authentically with the heart of David we learn to trust the Lord and worship him in all our life circumstances – including the most painful of all, the Dark Night of the Soul, when, despite our desperate prayers in the midst of suffering, God’s face remains hidden from us.

Benedictine Monks

I have been a Benedictine Oblate for over 30 years.... That is, a member of a Benedictine Monastic community living outside the walls of the monastery but keeping the Rule of St. Benedict *insofar as my life allows*.

For years I have been visiting St. Mark’s Abbey in Camperdown, Western Victoria which is a Benedictine monastery. The monks and nuns there join thousands of others from around the world to pray from the Psalms five times per day in their daily “divine office.” Together they prayerfully chant the psalms as they keep cycling through the Psalter over and over.

As an Oblate I join my Community from wherever I am presently to say three Offices during the day and engage daily in lectio divina.

I love the slow, melodic way monastics have of chanting the Psalms and the silent spaces they give during their prayer services. When I pray with them, I enter a chorus from heaven and yet at the same time it is like it is a prayer coming up from deep inside my heart and soul.

When a verse or image from the Psalmist jumps out at me (which happens a lot!) I like to compose short little abiding prayers to help me give thanks and praise to

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God, draw close to Jesus, express love to each member of the Trinity, submit the parts of myself to God's kingdom rule, "watch and pray" to overcome temptation.

I develop these little psalms phrases into [Breath Prayers](#), breathing the words of Scripture in... and out... slowly... deeply... over... and over...

Another way I like to use the Psalms is to write my own psalm by journaling a personal prayer using the pattern of "honest faith" that the Psalmist models. For instance, in the Laments the Psalmist usually begins by venting his troubles and complaints and ends by looking to God and putting trust in his goodness. My favourite way to write in response to a Psalm is to compose a "prayer poem" to paraphrase a particular Psalm or a portion of it.

Following the Pattern of the Psalms

In the ancient pattern I have been praying the Psalms sequentially. I first learned this from Eugene Peterson by reading his book *Under the Unpredictable Plant*.

I have been going through all 150 Psalms every two months and in this way, I become familiar with and learn from all the Psalms and their types of prayer. And each day is God is in control of what Psalms I pray — it is a joy to discover God's providential provision and leading in what may seem happenstance. And when I come across a Psalm that does not relate to my own experience, I can pray that Psalm for someone else.

My rhythm of life is praying the Psalms morning, noon, and night, carrying a Psalm or verse from one prayer time to the next, which is to practice God's presence continually and in all things.

From the Psalmists I have learned that morning and evening prayer are especially important. My morning Psalms focus on themes of rising with the sun, submitting the day to God, or offering thanks and praise to my Lord. My evening Psalms focus on reflecting on the day, confessing my sins, lamenting to God about a struggle, or watching and praying in the dark.

I have found it extremely helpful to memorize a Psalm so that I can carry it with me like a "pocket lighter" or a "hand-warmer" (as Martin Luther taught) to warm my heart for prayer at any time as I go about my day.)

There are Psalms for every type of situation, emotion, and need.

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In Conclusion.....

So, there you have it. My small offering of three things that might assist you to travel a contemplative Lent in these most challenging of times.

In deciding how you might keep Lent this year, please, please be gentle with yourself. Be strong enough to persevere with what is good and what 'works for you'. But also, be strong enough to put aside those things that are less useful or are not working to improve your experience of God and your personal relationship with Jesus.

I am not suggesting for one moment you tackle all three of the suggestions I have given you. One will be sufficient and may be best. You choose and stick with it.

Finally, I recommend to you the words of Pope Francis delivered last Wednesday at his weekly Wednesday Audience of January 27th.

“The words of Sacred Scripture were not written to remain imprisoned on papyrus, parchment, or paper, but to be received by a person who prays, making them blossom in his or her heart. The Word of god goes to the heart.”

The full text of his address is available on the Vatican web site and is well worth a careful read.

Thank you.