

# ***Ten minutes a day through Lent***

A reading from *Hebrews*  
a short reflection  
ideas how to pray  
for each day

**Sixth week  
30 March-4 April**

**Monday 30 March**

**A faith that reaches beyond the grave**

**Hebrews 11:17-31**

*By faith Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac. He who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son, of whom he had been told, "It is through Isaac that descendants shall be named for you." He considered the fact that God is able even to raise someone from the dead--and figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. By faith Isaac invoked blessings for the future on Jacob and Esau. By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, "bowing in worship over the top of his staff." By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave instructions about his burial.*

*By faith Moses was hidden by his parents for three months after his birth, because they saw that the child was beautiful; and they were not afraid of the king's edict. By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called a son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered abuse suffered for the Christ to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, unafraid of the king's anger; for he persevered as though he saw him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel. By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land, but when the Egyptians attempted to do so they were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace.*

**Comment** What the heroes of faith have in common is that they act in accordance with their commitment to God, looking beyond, past the things of which humans can feel certain. *Hebrews* points out that for many of them their action, taken in faith, involved believing in the importance of something that would lie beyond their earthly life span.

One of the most striking examples in this mighty catalogue is Abraham. He became convinced, we know not how, that God demanded the sacrifice of Isaac. Abraham was willing to trust God and his commitment to him, putting at risk Isaac, the miracle answer to Abraham's live-long longings, the key to the promise that his descendants would become a great people. All these heroes of faith look beyond the here-and-now to the divine reality. They see the power of God reaching beyond the human limit of death.

**Tuesday 31 March**

**The ultimate goal of faith**

**Hebrews 11:32-12:2**

*And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets--who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented--of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.*

*Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect.*

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.*

**Comment** Hebrews has a message: the power of faith in Jesus Christ. Chapter 11 is given over to this amazing catalogue of the achievements of the great men and women of Israel, the heroes of faith. These people, often ordinary, reached out beyond what common sense would have told them was possible. They staked their lives on their belief in God and his purposes - which they would not live to see fulfilled. The references become ever briefer, until we end up with nameless, humble people who live, not in palaces, but in holes in the ground.

What they reached for was never seen, until the one who reached farthest beyond himself, Jesus, through his resurrection revealed the ultimate purpose of God. That purpose is our eternal redemption.

So let us, in faith, commit to following after Jesus, casting all other baggage to the winds.

Wednesday 1 April

## Do not lose heart

### Hebrews 12:3-13

*Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And you have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as children-- "My child, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, or lose heart when you are punished by him; for the Lord disciplines those whom he loves, and chastises every child whom he accepts."*

*Endure trials for the sake of discipline. God is treating you as children; for what child is there whom a parent does not discipline? If you do not have that discipline in which all children share, then you are illegitimate and not his children. Moreover, we had human parents to discipline us, and we respected them. Should we not be even more willing to be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share his holiness. Now, discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.*

*Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.*

### Comment

It is one thing to make the commitment of faith, to take the decision to follow Jesus; but it is another thing to keep going. We know that circumstances can challenge us. One such is being alone. We are often sustained in our commitments by those around us. Sometimes it is nothing more than the sense that "if I stop now, they will think that I am a quitter". At other times it is the encouragement that others bring us.

Feeling alone, not seeing and meeting with the familiar faces, is real for many of us as we live under the lock-down. *Hebrews* may have been thinking of more direct obstacles to faith. Persecution came often to early Christians. But whatever it is, *Hebrews* urges us to tough it out and we will come out the other side, having learned that we can cope.

If being alone discourages us, we are not the first. So if we feel isolated, depressed or anxious, we can lift the phone, or send an e-mail: and we can join others in praying. It will help us keep straight on the path.

**Thursday 2 April**

**Keep straight (1) Never forget the unique value of being a Christian  
Hebrews 12:14-end**

*Pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble, and through it many become defiled. See to it that no one becomes like Esau, an immoral and godless person, who sold his birthright for a single meal. You know that later, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, even though he sought the blessing with tears.*

*You have not come to something that can be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that not another word be spoken to them. (For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even an animal touches the mountain, it shall be stoned to death.") Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear." ) But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.*

*See that you do not refuse the one who is speaking; for if they did not escape when they refused the one who warned them on earth, how much less will we escape if we reject the one who warns from heaven! At that time his voice shook the earth; but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven." This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of what is shaken-- that is, created things-- so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe; for indeed our God is a consuming fire.*

**Comment** His main argument complete, *Hebrews* is now rounding up with encouragement. Yesterday closed with a call to keep straight on the path. Keeping straight is *Hebrews* closing theme and it is framed by "peace": Today, Christians are urged to keep peace with one another; and the closing benediction on Saturday will invoke God's peace. The rest is a reminder, with examples and illustrations: don't treat lightly God's gift. Choose the joyous heavenly city of Mount Zion, made accessible by Jesus, rather than the terrifying mountain of the Old

Testament covenant. Hold fast to the unshakeable gospel of truth, for yes, everything else will be shaken and sifted and will not endure.

### Friday 3 April

#### Keep straight (2) Live lovingly and rejoice in it

#### **Hebrews 13:1-16**

*Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.*

*Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured. Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge fornicators and adulterers.*

*Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you." So we can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid.*

*What can anyone do to me?"*

*Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings; for it is well for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by regulations about food, which have not benefited those who observe them. We have an altar from which those who officiate in the tent have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood. Let us then go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come. Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.*

**Comment** We Christians need to be constantly reminded of what we should know: that Christians are called to live in love with one another and to show that love in our care for others. That lifestyle of love is part of what *Hebrews* means by "keeping straight".

The Christian lifestyle is not that of the crowd, so we may have to put up with some abuse. Well, so did Jesus. Why should we expect to be different? But keeping straight gives us something to look forward to. So let's keep straight - and carry on doing good.



**Saturday 4 April**

**Keeping straight (3) Enjoying God's peace**  
**Hebrews 13:17-end**

*Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls and will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with sighing-- for that would be harmful to you.*

*Pray for us; we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things. I urge you all the more to do this, so that I may be restored to you very soon.*

*Now may the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make you complete in everything good so that you may do his will, working among us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.*

*I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been set free; and if he comes in time, he will be with me when I see you. Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy send you greetings. Grace be with all of you.*

**Comment** We may have noticed in our reading how frequently *Hebrews* cites scripture. His hearers would have been familiar with these words. Using them enables him to show that what he says is not entirely new. He is really helping them put together what they already know. That makes his words easier for them to receive.

Scripture is the experience of God's people down the centuries, sifted and tested. It has been retained, not because it gives instant answers, but because it has been found to help us in discerning good paths. One of the indirect messages of *Hebrews* could be the value of getting to know scripture. It has proven to be a rich resource over many generations.

We may raise an eyebrow when *Hebrews* apologises for being so brief. But that may serve to remind us that, in the things that really matter, it is worth taking the time and trouble to make a serious investment.

Keeping straight, living in love, is an expression of peace. *Hebrews* rounds off with a beautiful benediction, frequently used in church. It is one to retain and learn.

So may we be kept in God's peace - with all that it implies.

### One Prayer

Pick up one thought from the reading and bring it before God as a short prayer.

It need not be complicated. God understands what we try to say to him.

### One Thought

Think about the issues raised by the reading. What could it mean for me? Is this the way the world is, or the way the world might be? Carry the thought with you through the day and try to remember it before you go to sleep.

### One Thank-you

Find something in the reading that you can thank God for. Try to be explicit, however little it may seem. Then thank God for it, just as you would thank someone who gave you a gift.

### Sum it up

*Most merciful God,  
who by the death and  
resurrection of your Son Jesus  
Christ delivered and saved the  
world:  
grant that by faith in him who  
suffered on the cross  
we may triumph in the power of  
his victory;  
through Jesus Christ your Son  
our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever .*

*Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name;  
your kingdom come;  
your will be done  
on earth, as it is in heaven.*

*Give us today our daily bread.*

*Forgive us our sins,  
as we forgive those who sin  
against us.*

*Lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.*

*For yours is the kingdom and the  
power and the glory forever.*

DMW