

## Sunday, Feb 11, 2018

SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

### Walk into the desert

Fans of Maria Muldaur recall the song “Midnight at the Oasis” and its incongruous line about sneaking off to a desert frolic amid the cacti. Ouch! A better reason to head out to the desert is to drink from the still and empty silence. It’s one of those thin places where the veil between you and God becomes rapidly transparent. But you don’t need arid terrain to meet your Maker. Find some local still space and visit there often.

TODAY’S READINGS: Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46; 1 Corinthians 10:31—11:1; Mark 1:40-45 (77). “[Jesus] remained outside in deserted places, and people kept coming to him from everywhere.”

## Monday, Feb 12, 2018

### Time to go to trial

Everyone experiences difficulties at some point in their lives. No matter how fortunate a person may be, going a lifetime without adversity is next to impossible. The early church from time to time went through trials of a different sort: hostility, persecution, and the general tension of living in a world that did not share its beliefs. These days there is still friction between a life of faith and an increasingly skeptical world. The response of some is to condemn that world rather than engage it. On this score, however, contemporary Christians can learn from the first ones, who saw in trials the opportunity to grow in virtue and develop their faith.

TODAY’S READINGS: James 1:1-11; Mark 8:11-13 (335). “Consider it all joy, my brothers and sisters, when you encounter various trials.”

## Tuesday, Feb 13, 2018

### Rise up in faith

As any baker can tell you, a small amount of leaven—yeast—goes a long way, working its effect on a much larger mass of dough. For this reason Jews of Jesus’ age saw the fermentation process brought on by leaven as a metaphor for a corrupting influence, something that in excess was in danger of overflowing its container. Jesus warned his disciples to be on guard against the “leaven” of leaders—religious or political—who sought to manipulate the people by exercising authority beyond proper boundaries. Jesus had a healthy skepticism about authority not grounded in humility and respect. And that’s a wise attitude, history teaches us.

TODAY’S READINGS: James 1:12-18; Mark 8:14-21 (336). “Guard against the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.”

## Wednesday, Feb 14, 2018

ASH WEDNESDAY; DAY OF FAST AND ABSTINENCE

### A day for lovers of mercy and kindness

From the time many of us were kids, our Lenten practice began with giving something up. This is the core of an ancient tradition of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving. In the words of fifth-century Doctor of the church Peter Chrysologus: “When you fast, see the fasting of others. If you want God to know you are hungry, know that another is hungry. If you hope for mercy, show mercy. If you look for kindness, show kindness. If you want to receive,

give. . . . Let us use fasting to make up for what we have lost by despising others.”

TODAY’S READINGS: Joel 2:12-18; 2 Corinthians 5:20—6:2; Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18 (219). “And when you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites who show others they are fasting.”

## Thursday, Feb 15, 2018

THURSDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

### Discernment is a gift

Some multiple-choice questions require no research whatsoever. When Moses sets life and death before the people and asks them to choose, the right answer is not obscure. When he likewise offers them blessings and curses, we know for sure which we would prefer. So why does human history so often swerve into the “death and curses” lane anyway? Because these options don’t always come with truthful labels. Death-dealing situations arrive disguised as necessary evils, and curse-laden choices are sugarcoated with false promises. Discerning the true nature of things requires the Holy Spirit’s guidance.

TODAY’S READINGS: Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Luke 9:22-25 (220). “Today I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses.”

## Friday, Feb 16, 2018

FRIDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY; DAY OF FAST AND ABSTINENCE

### Be fast to offer assistance

Lent is just getting under way, a good time to carefully consider one of its key traditions: *fasting*. What can fasting mean in our health-conscious culture? The fasting of Lent is not about eating less for its own sake. In the Book of Isaiah, God addresses the mistake of settling for the outward trappings of penance. “Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free?” We’re encouraged to fast by sharing our bread with the hungry and bringing the homeless into our own homes. Now that’s some serious fasting!

TODAY’S READINGS: Isaiah 58:1-9a; Matthew 9:14-15 (221). “Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?”

## Saturday, Feb 17, 2018

SATURDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY; MEMORIAL OF THE SEVEN HOLY FOUNDERS OF THE SERVITE ORDER, RELIGIOUS

### How can I be of service?

Imagine if seven of the leading citizens of New York, London, or Paris suddenly left it all behind and headed to the hills to dedicate their lives to God. That is how the Servite Order was founded in 13th-century Florence, a city flourishing with culture, trade, and political and religious intrigue. In 1240 seven noblemen of the city decided to withdraw from urban life to a solitary place for prayer and service of God. In their monastery they led a life of prayer, work, and silence while in the active apostolate they engaged in parish work, teaching, preaching, and other ministries. God calls all of us to service and prayer; at the end of the day, these are the actions that ennoble us all. How will you serve?

TODAY’S READINGS: Isaiah 58:9b-14; Luke 5:27-32 (222). “Those who are healthy do not need a physician, but the sick do.”

Invest just five minutes a day, and your faith will deepen and grow—a day at a time



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