

Monday of the Second Week of Lent
Day 11: God Bless the Whole World – No Exceptions

For reflection: I got stuck on Bishop Katharine's title. I can't stop thinking, truth be told, about all the people I wouldn't really *want* God to bless. A former boss whose humiliating tirade drove me to tears. A priest who made my grief harder to bear. The kindergarten teacher who was intimidated by the parents of a boy who bullied my child. They're little, you know – these petty reasons I secretly wish God would use as reasons to refuse to bless people.

But maybe these little reasons are where I need to start. Because if I can't forgive people who slighted and wronged me years ago, what does it say about the way I'm living now? It could be that I am so wrapped up in my tiny universe that I'm delaying, or diminishing, God's use of me to be a blessing.

Nearly five centuries ago, Teresa of Avila wrote:

Christ has no body now on earth but yours,

no hands but yours,

no feet but yours,

Yours are the eyes through which to look out

Christ's compassion to the world

Yours are the feet with which he is to go about

doing good;

Yours are the hands with which he is to bless now.

...Which means there really isn't time to stew over times when I was treated poorly. God has much better uses for my time in mind, and Jesus needs my help.

***Suggestion for Prayer:** Here's a prayer attributed to Teresa of Avila. Try praying it for yourself: O my God, source of all mercy, I acknowledge Your sovereign power. While recalling the wasted years that are past, I believe that You, Lord, can in an instant turn this loss to gain. Miserable as I am, yet I firmly believe that You can do all things. Please restore to me the time lost, giving me Your grace, both now and in the future. Amen.*

Tuesday of the Second Week of Lent
Day 12: Doing Is Believing

For reflection: The older I get, the more I think life is about building healthy habits. Maybe that's because what I eat and how much I exercise seem to matter more the older I get. But when I think of going to the gym as a way of putting down a layer of physical strength in my day, it helps motivate me to get there. Prayer is like that too. Starting the day with morning prayer and ending it with compline feels like I'm putting down a layer of spiritual strength.

Bishop Katharine's essay inspires me to think beyond habits of self-care and disciplined prayer. She challenges us to use our gifts – from intelligence to training to creativity to money – for ministry that preserves God's creation. And how do we get in the habit of using our gifts? Simply by sharing them. And like any habit, the more we do it, the easier it gets.

Suggestion for Prayer: *What good habits do you want to develop in your life? What layers of habit in terms of your ministry, self-care, and prayer life do you want to add to your day and to your life? Pray about the kind the person God has made you to be. Then make a list of habits that that seem to be worth cultivating to bring you closer to the person God has made you to be. Practice one of those habits today. Practice another one tomorrow. Practicing one habit each day will help you layer them so that the habits become— well, habitual.*

**Wednesday of the Second Week of Lent
Day 13: A Cup of Starbucks**

For reflection: The eight United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – which range from cutting extreme poverty in half to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS to providing universal primary education, all by the target date of 2015 – form a blueprint that all the world's countries and all the world's leading development institutions have agreed to. The MDGs have inspired unprecedented efforts to meet the needs of the world's poorest, and have been endorsed by the Episcopal Church since the 2003 General Convention.

And the MDGs aren't just about the government and the church fixing problems. They're about my responsibility to fix problems, too. For every \$100 I earn, can I set aside \$7, or the cost of about two cups of coffee at Starbucks? Can I give up a night at

the movies, or a lunch with my friends at the office, and stash away that money for the poorest of the poor?

Can I understand – *really* understand – what Jesus meant when he said, “Whatever you did for the least of mine, you did for me”? And can I live those words out today?

***Suggestion for Prayer:** One form of prayer is acting in the world for the good of the world. So figure out how much money you earn each week. Then give .07 percent of that to the MDGs. Maybe giving up a daily latte or newspaper is all it will take to make the world a better place. Try it for one week. Each time you give up a luxury, say a prayer of thanksgiving for one way God has blessed your life.*

**Thursday of the Second Week of Lent
Day 14: Sharing the Wealth**

***For reflection:** “Have you enjoyed everything God gave you to enjoy?” At first glance, that’s a very non-Lenten question to find in Bishop Katharine’s essay. And yet there it is, straight from the venerable rabbinic tradition, which puts the question in the mouth of no lesser luminary than Moses himself: Have you enjoyed everything God gave you to enjoy? The dazzling beauty of snow—even when you have to shovel it? The delighted squeals of finger-painting preschoolers – even when you have to scrub their artwork off your walls and drapes? A job that gives you a chance to make a difference – even when your office mate gets on your nerves?*

Maybe enjoyment needs to be cultivated. It isn't always easy to see the blessings in the challenge. So let your Lenten question be: "Where's the blessing here?" and resolve to find the blessing before you face the challenge. When seeking blessings becomes a habit, we can answer, "Have you enjoyed everything there is to enjoy?" with a resounding "Yes!" Even better, we've savored the gift of our life.

***Suggestion for Prayer:** Today, ask God, "Where's the blessing?" Ask this question each time an obstacle gets in your way and each time somebody gets on your nerves. And keep asking until you're in the habit of finding the blessings God has given you to enjoy.*

Friday of the Second Week of Lent
Day 15: Ready for Grace

For reflection: I had a good giggle over Bishop Katharine's description of teenagers – their clothes, their hair, their hormones. And I started to wonder what teenagers find funny, and threatening, and irritating about adults. Maybe they think it's baffling, or even hypocritical, when we throw on an old sweatshirt when nobody's looking, and dress to the nines when we've got someone to impress. Maybe our quest for "natural-looking" hair – aided by dyes, highlights, and a vast array of expensive styling products – seems as ridiculous to them as their neon spikes seem to us. Maybe teenagers shake their heads at our long phone conversations as we tsk-tsk over their instant messaging with half a dozen pals simultaneously.

But no matter what our perspective , we're called to know one another, even to see the Christ in one another. For a nonsmoker like me, it's hard to get to know the person behind a lit cigarette. Lots of us resist knowing people whose skin is a different shade, whose accent is unlike our own, whose bank accounts are smaller than ours – or whose bank accounts put ours to shame. Too often, we surround ourselves with people who remind us of ourselves.

I think it has a lot to do with fear. But we needn't be alone with our fear. The same one who craves for us to see Him in others—even others with purple hair— longs to give us the courage we need to open our eyes and hearts.

***Suggestion for Prayer:** Christ issues a standing invitation to ask Him for the courage to see Him in others. Take Him up on it. Today, pay attention to the way you respond to people who are different from you—in their appearance, their political persuasion, even their personality. Maybe you don't like them, or agree with them, or even want to be around them. Stop and say a silent prayer asking for the courage to see Christ in them anyway.*

Saturday of the Second Week of Lent
Day 16: Walking on Water

For reflection: What would it mean, to borrow Bishop Katharine's phrase, "to borrow a fearlessly holy life"? To never fear being the person God has made you to be? To never hesitate to embrace God's challenges? To never fail to see the Christ in others?

I think it's all about cultivating the habit of prayer so that it's our first response rather than our last resort. Lent is a perfect time to cultivate that habit.

When things go wrong in my life, I often catch myself praying only when nothing else seems to have worked. I'm like the woman in the V-8 commercial who knocks herself in the head when she realizes she could have snacked on a vegetable drink instead of a chocolate bar. "Wow!" she exclaims. "I coulda had a V-8!" In TV world, the best choice was the last thought. May we who live in the real world with very real challenges and opportunities learn to go to God first. Now that will be something to exclaim about!

***Suggestion for Prayer:** Just for today, promise God, and yourself, that every time anxiety crosses your soul, you will say a prayer. Does this seem to be a habit worth cultivating? If so, try it for another few hours, or few days. And notice any peace that crosses your soul because of it.*