



Conversations
With
Our
Awesome

God

Bishop Bill Ray

Overview of the Book

Suggestions for conducting these studies.		Web Page
www.grassroots.com.au/Lent2022.htm		
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Additional “Going Further” material available on line for these studies at www.grassroots.com.au/Lent2022.htm



To help your group get quickly, there is a suggested outline members could fill out at www.grassroots.com.au/Lent2022.htm and this would form a care basis for the group during the Lent Studies. There is also a Leaders Guide.

Produced by Grassroots Resources Australia - PO Box 484 Brighton SA 5048
Telephone - 0409 441 246
E: info@grassroots.com.au W: www.grassroots.com.au

INTRODUCTION

The theme is, Let us pray (and we will focus on a different aspect of ministry each week).

When I was young, back in the 1960's, I asked the parish clergy person, why the prayer at the start of the service was called a "Collect". His instant answer was, "A Collect, collects the thoughts of the Scripture readings for that particular Sunday". He then went on to say "these thoughts and themes are offered to God in prayer". In A Prayer Book for Australia, and in some other more current prayer books, the term "Collect" has been replaced with the "Prayer of the Day".

The six studies offered here are based on the Prayer of the Day for each Sunday in Lent, for Year C or the Year of Luke.

The Prayer of the Day or Collect, has a particular structure. There are five basic sections:

1. Invocation or addressing God
2. Acknowledging a Divine attribute
3. Petition for our need
4. Desired result or further petition
5. Conclusion with mediation through Jesus Christ.

To highlight this structure let us look at the Prayer of the Day for the First Sunday of Lent.

Addressing God:

O saving God,

Acknowledging a divine attribute:

who led your people through the wilderness
and brought them to the promised land:

Petition for our need:

So guide us that; following our Saviour,
we may walk through the wilderness of this world
and be brought to the glory of the world which is to come;



Conclusion indicating mediation of Jesus Christ:

through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Each week will commence with some ‘On Board Time”, followed by a short section on a Lenten spiritual discipline, then a litany. A brief commentary, based on the petition or petitions in the Prayer of the Day and two Scripture passages with a brief commentary. Hopefully this will stimulate thought, prayer and discussion. Eight questions are provided. These are the starting point for discussion. The task is not to get through all eight questions, but to use a selection of them to stimulate discussion. Other discussion points may arise. If that is the case, and the group agrees, run with it.

Getting Organised:

Some groups will meet at a different home each week. Be clear as to the day and date and the address where you are meeting.

We meet on, at

(Date) (Address)

..... at

..... at.....

..... at.....

..... at

If there is to be morning tea, afternoon tea or supper (the requirements vary from State or Territory due to COVID) the arrangements are:

Week One Week Two
Week Three Week Four
Week Five. Week Six

Conduct of Group:

While someone will facilitate the group, each group member has a responsibility to make sure the group functions well. Every group should be based on T.I.M.- Task - Individual needs and Maintenance.

The Task:

We all have a responsibility to read the material before hand, think about the questions so that we can make a contribution to the discussion (without hogging it). As stated, it is important we are clear as to whom is providing hospitality, if appropriate, and within the COVID 19 guidelines for your area.

Individual Needs:

We all come with different thoughts and feelings in our minds and hearts. It is important that we care for each individual in the group without smothering the person or prying inappropriately.

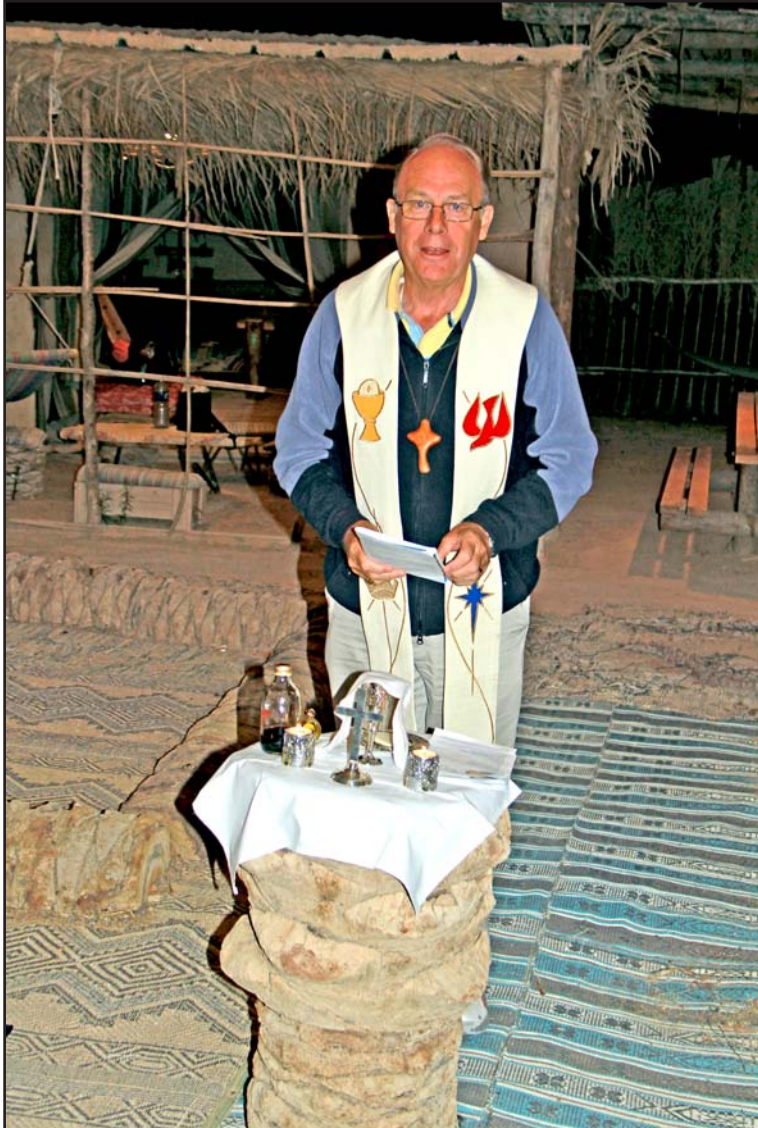
Maintenance:

Someone, such as the facilitator, should check on each group member to see how they are travelling with the study. A number of groups make sure the first session proceeds well and assume that the other sessions will automatically go well. This is not always the case. It is important to make sure each session processes effectively and benefits group members. Also, it is important to recall that the Study is but one of several Lenten activities that people may be involved in during Lent. These other practices or activities can also inform our studies. It has been said that, the curriculum is not just the study book, we bring our faith journey to date and life experiences to each session.

Some thought as you begin your Lenten journey:

A few years ago when I was leaving an Ash Wednesday service, the celebrant said with a smile on his face, "May you have a holy and miserable Lent." A cheeky comment, yes, but "holy" yes. "Holy" basically means to set apart focused on God. May each of us set time aside this Lent to focus on our walk in faith with Jesus Christ. We all need a mirror to reflect back on. May our mirror be the Scriptures. I am sure, like me, you will see yourself as a "work in progress" with our Lord.

So may your Lent be a holy and blessed one. I pray this study will enable you to continue your growth in faith with Jesus Christ, so that at Easter you can say or sign with joy, “Christ the Lord is Risen. He is Risen indeed”



Bishop Bill celebrating the eucharist at a Bedouin camp in Israel



Theme: Let us pray as we walk through the wilderness with Christ.

Let's Kick Start

(Please use the questions as you see fit.)

1. Welcome and introduce ourselves and share your expectations in regard to this study.
2. One aspect I wish to address in my faith journey this Lent is
3. COVID 19 has been with us for two years now. How are you coping, especially with different requirements in each State and Territory as well as overseas?
4. Share any thoughts of a particular Lenten discipline that you may take up this Lent?

Making the most of Lent - a point to consider:

Fasting - from Luke 4:2&3

"Where for forty days he [Jesus] was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days".

In Matthew 6:16-18

"And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. ..."

Fasting has been a long held Lenten discipline. People fast for different reasons and in different ways. Some give up a meal once a week so that they can spend that time (including preparation of the meal) in prayer and give the money they did not spend on the meal to feed those less fortunate or some other cause.

Others give up chocolate or alcohol or some other food they really enjoy, for the same purpose. They use the time to pray and the money saved is given to a worthy cause.

Lent

Others spend Lent striving to give up negative behaviours such as procrastination, apathy, envy, jealousy, laziness, indifference, negative thoughts, cynicism, holding grudges, judging yourself, making excuses and/or shopping for things you do not need.

You need to be very deliberate and plan carefully so that you actually give up one or more of these behaviours.



For health reasons some people should not fast at all in terms of food and fluids. If you are fasting it is important to remain hydrated. However, you could fast from any of the behaviours listed above.



Reflect for a few minutes on the photographs giving thanks for the times God sustained you when you were in the wilderness and times when you enjoyed the abundance of God's harvest.

Gentle instrumental music could be played whilst group is in reflection. Select a track that last 3-4 minutes.



Monastery in Jericho wilderness

The Litany:

God all loving and all caring,

We come before you with hesitant steps and uncertain motives

Our hearts are parched from wandering in a desert of sin

We want to sweep out the corners where sin has accumulated

And uncover the places where we have strayed from your truth

Our hearts are parched from wandering in a desert of sin

We ask for courage to open our eyes and unstop our ears

That we may be aware of all that distracts us from a whole hearted commitment to Christ

Our hearts are parched from wandering in a desert of sin

We want to see ourselves as you do and live our lives as you intended

Expose in us the empty and barren places where we have not allowed you to enter

Our hearts are parched from wandering in a desert of sin

Reveal to us our half-hearted struggles

Where we have been indifferent to the pain and suffering of others

Our hearts are parched from wandering in a desert of sin

Create in us a clean heart O God and put a right Spirit within us

Nurture the faint stirrings of new life where your spirit has taken root and begun to grow

Our hearts are parched from wandering in a desert of sin

We long for your healing light to transform us, for you alone can make us whole

In your mercy shine upon us O God and make our path clear before us.

Amen.



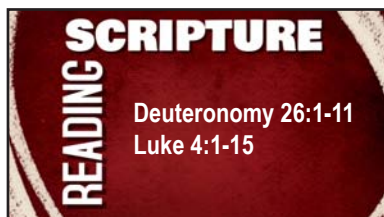
**Concluding with the Prayer of the Day
for Lent 1.**

O saving God,
who led your people through the wilderness
and brought them to the promised land:
so guide us that, following our Saviour,

we may walk through the wilderness of this world
and be brought to the glory of the world which is to come;
through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

The theme for this week from the Prayer for Lent One:

*“we may walk through the wilderness of this world
and be brought to the glory of the world which is to come”*



Readings are read by different
members of the group

Commentary :- [Pre-read the following before the study session, and for a refresher, one of the group reads this at the study.](#)

The petition in the Prayer for the First Sunday of Lent this year is:

*“we may walk through the wilderness of this world
and be brought to the glory of the world which is to come;”*

Many have found the experience of living with the COVID 19 lockdowns and restrictions similar to what they understand as living in the wilderness. Extroverts have struggled because they were not able to “get out there”. At the same time others blossomed because they could enjoy the time, to themselves. They were able to get that writing done, that work of art completed, the painting of that room achieved and the garden has never looked so great. In some States and Territories there have been short periods of lockdowns while for other States and Territories there have been quite lengthy lockdown periods. Living with COVID 19 has changed people. Some have had to make a range of adjustments and for others it has deepened their wilderness experience.

While we agree that each one of us is created in the image of God, each of us has responded differently to how we live out our faith during these times. Four years ago none of us would have thought that many of us would be worshipping online, week by

week. Many Christians would not have entertained the thought of receiving the sacrament in one kind only - the bread.

COVID 19 is not the only reason some people are living in the wilderness of this world. Some people often feel very isolated, very lonely. This is despite the fact that we have so much digital technology and can connect people instantly. Despite the technology, individuality is part of life today. I am a public transport user. While I moan about the “older trains”, the backs of the seats only come up to the shoulders and you can look around as see the other commuters. You have a real sense that we are in this together. Whereas, with the new trains the backs of the seats include a high head rest. You are in your “little public transport box”, not able to see well ahead or behind you. Others may feel in the wilderness and by themselves because their loved ones are half way across the world, friends have moved interstate or you just could not visit them due to health regulations. Life is hectic for others and frenetic for some, so much so, that they do not have time to spend with others in a relaxed and meaningful way.

Tragically, there are many ladies who are in the wilderness because they are subject to Gender Base Violence (GBV) and other forms of abuse. Others who face mental health issues find themselves in the wilderness. There will be people in our groups who are suffering. Each Christian and each community of faith must seek to reach out to those experiencing wilderness situations.

As well as being in the wilderness, people find ourselves being tempted. We have just commenced the season of Lent. People use the season of Lent in various ways. Whether we “take on a particular discipline” or “give up food or alcohol” or do both, we face temptation. The question is how do we address temptation in our lives.

Jesus gives us a very clear example. In the Lucan account Jesus is lead by the Spirit into the wilderness and tempted by the devil on three occasions. On each occasion, Jesus responds to the temptation before him, by quoting from Scripture, in fact from the book of Deuteronomy. The devil, knowing that Jesus had not eaten for forty days commanded Jesus to turn stones into bread. Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 8:3, “One does not live by bread alone”. The devil then tempted Jesus with the kingdoms of the world and Jesus replies using Deuteronomy 6:13, “worship the Lord your God and serve only him”. The devil then takes Jesus to the top of the Temple and challenges him to throw himself down, but Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:16, “do not put the Lord your God to the test”.

It is important that we know the Scriptures. When we face temptations and the challenges in life, we need to draw on of the Word of God.

Jesus found himself in the wilderness for forty days, a considerable period of time. When we turn to the Deuteronomy reading we are reminded that the Israelites had journeyed in the wilderness for forty years, an even greater period. In Egypt, they had been treated harshly, but the Lord heard their cry and saw their afflictions. God brought the people to a land of milk and honey. To produce milk you require grass and to produce honey you need bees and bees need flowers. The image is one of prosperity, the opposite to a dry and harsh wilderness the Israelites had faced. The Deuteronomy reading is set in the harvest time and the people were instructed to take some of the first fruits to the priest and give thanks that Israel is now a great and populous nation.

The Lord heard their cry. The Lord also hears our cries. The Lord was with them and the Lord is with us. Some may ask the question, "Where is God?" But the question for the Christian is "Where am I in relation to God?"

As we commence our Lenten journey this year, it is important to remember that "Lent is not a ritual. It is time given to think seriously about who Jesus is for us and to renew our faith from the inside out". (1) Historically, Lent was a period for preparing the Catechumens, those seeking baptism at Easter.

Today Lent has several foci. It gives us an opportunity to prepare ourselves to renew our baptismal vows at the Easter Vigil. The Church in her wisdom, gives us Lent to attend to our spiritual growth, read that book, spend a quiet time with God each day and/or focus on art or music to nurture our souls. Lent also gives us an opportunity to reflect and focus on the significance and importance of Holy Week as well as entering into the message of Good Friday and Easter. We give thanks that Christ died for us and rose from the dead conquering for us, sin and death and opening up the gate of eternal life.

So the petition from the Prayer for the First Sunday of Lent, Year C, "may we journey through our wilderness of this world and brought to the glory of the world which is to come" is relevant for each of us. Let us journey confidently through our wilderness times and as we face temptation and come to know the glory of the world to come.

Discussion Questions:

(Please make a selection. You will not be able to consider all questions in a session.)



If a topic arises that leads the group in a different direction, feel free to address the group's need(s).

1. How have you adjusted to receiving Communion in one kind, the bread only?
2. Have you had a period of wilderness as you have sought to live out your faith? If you are comfortable please share the insights you have gained.
3. What are some of the ways you address temptation? As parents and grandparents, what advice do we give to our children as they grow up and face temptation?
4. News bulletins often report GBV (Gender Base Violence) and other abuses that people have faced. What can we as individual Christians and as churches do to help those suffer from GBV and the associated mental health issues.
5. Some writers have suggested that we need to recapture Lent. In what ways is Lent a gift from the Church for our spiritual growth. Are there areas we need to recapture?
6. It has been said that living the Christian faith is counter cultural to the world's way. What challenges does this present to individual Christians and the Church at large?

Follow up for next week: Meeting location, refreshments etc.

- Consider inviting one other person to join the group and follow this up during the coming week.

Close by praying together the Collect for the Sunday.

O saving God,
who led your people through the wilderness
and brought them to the promised land:
so guide us that, following our Saviour,
we may walk through the wilderness of this world
and be brought to the glory of the world which is to come;
through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**