

They were free to despise those  
 who did not fulfill those same external standards.  
 They felt themselves required  
 to leave suffering unrelieved,  
 just because the religious obligations  
 of the Sabbath  
 seemed to get in the way.  
 If the Law was kept, they seemed to think,  
 then love was entirely unnecessary.  
 Confusion of faces.  
 God is not like that.  
 Neither should we be.

Let us pray.

Grant us, Lord, singleness of face toward thee, and  
 toward the world around us, that we may love  
 thee. our God. with our heart, soul, and mind, that  
 we may love our neighbors as ourselves, and so  
 fulfill the Law of Christ. Open the eyes of our  
 hearts that we may know our sins, and bring us to  
 forgiveness and amendment of life. Through  
 Christ our Lord. Amen.

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## **Addresses for Morning and Evening Prayer**

**according to the  
 1943 Lectionary  
 of the  
 USA 1928 Book of Common Prayer**

**Intended for use  
 by Layreaders  
 in the absence of a priest**

**by Ed Pacht  
 Rochester NH**

## **Lent 1**

## Morning Prayer A

### First Lesson: Isa 58

*Here beginneth the fifty-eighth chapter of the Prophet Isaiah.*

1 Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.

2 Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God.

3 Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours.

4 Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high.

5 Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD?

6 Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?

7 Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house?

How many of us fail to appreciate the words of the song Frank Sinatra so often sang, "I had to do it MY way"? That is how we think. We read in Proverbs that, "*There is a way which seemeth right unto a man,*" but we read further that, "*The end thereof are the ways of death.*" We want God, but we don't. We want to do good, but not if it goes against what we really want. We show one face to God when we pray, another to men whose favor we seek, and another to those we dislike. Confusion of faces.

The Lord Jesus, as he walked this earth, saw (as we see in the second lesson) another kind of confusion of faces, a danger that we 'religious people' often face, but seldom admit that we are facing, As an old preacher said, churches are full of people who are so heavenly minded that they're no earthly good. Our Lord was constantly challenged by people who knew they were righteous, good religious people. They kept the laws. They observed all the fasts, (the Old Testament equivalent of Lent), they were faithful in worship and in study, They were a model to the people of what righteousness looked like, but their religion did not show the face of God.

God is righteous.  
 No sin survives in His presence.  
 In His holiness our unholiness is revealed,  
 and it is ugly, dangerously ugly.

But in that same Face,  
 the Face of righteous judgment,  
 he saw revealed the infinite mercy,  
 the will to forgive,  
 the overwhelming love that led the righteous Judge  
 to send His well-beloved Son  
 to live, to die, to rise,  
 to bring forgiveness, to make us worthy,  
 worthy to stand in awe and love before that Throne.

God is not confused.  
 He knows what He made us to be.  
 He made us (amazing thought!) in His own image.  
 He knows how badly we have marred and distorted  
 that image, by our thoughts, words, and deeds.  
 He knows that there is no longer any health in us,  
 yet His love is everlasting.  
 He does not desire the death of a sinner,  
 but rather everlasting life and joy.  
 He knows what he intends us to become,  
 and that is to be filled  
 with all the fullness of Christ,  
 to shine in His presence as saints  
 throughout all eternity.

God is not confused, but we are.  
 Yes, we want Him, or so we say, so we think;  
 but, just as much, often more,  
 we want our own way.

when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and  
 that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?

8 Then shall thy light break forth as the morning,  
 and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and  
 thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of  
 the LORD shall be thy reward.

9 Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer;  
 thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou  
 take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the  
 putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity;

10 And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry,  
 and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise  
 in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon day:

11 And the LORD shall guide thee continually,  
 and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy  
 bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and  
 like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.

12 And they that shall be of thee shall build the old  
 waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of  
 many generations; and thou shalt be called, The  
 repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to  
 dwell in.

13 If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath,  
 from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call  
 the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD,  
 honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine  
 own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor  
 speaking thine own words:

14 Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD;  
 and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places  
 of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of  
 Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath  
 spoken it.

*Here endeth the First Lesson.*

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## Second Lesson: Matt 6:1-18

*Here beginneth the sixth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew.*

1 Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.

2 Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

3 But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth:

4 That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.

5 And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

6 But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

7 But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

8 Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

## Homily

*"O LORD, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces.  
... O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face, ... because we have sinned against thee.  
To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses,  
though we have rebelled against him;"*

Extracts from the Prayer of Daniel in the First Lesson tonight, a prayer especially appropriate for this solemn season of Lent. Daniel, in his imagination, looked into the face of God. He saw clarity, perfection, a nature that does not change. He saw One whose every thought and every decision was both right and righteous, a face infinitely firm and infinitely stern in its judgment, a face to bring fear to the hearts of those -- of us -- who willfully disobey His commandments. He saw the One whose throne in the temple filled even the high priests with fear, with bells on their garments that could be heard as they ministered out of sight in the Holy of holies, with a rope on their ankles so they could be safely dragged out if they should cease to move.

**6: 1** And it came to pass on the second sabbath after the first, that he went through the corn fields; and his disciples plucked the ears of corn, and did eat, rubbing them in their hands.

2 And certain of the Pharisees said unto them, Why do ye that which is not lawful to do on the sabbath days?

3 And Jesus answering them said, Have ye not read so much as this, what David did, when himself was an hungred, and they which were with him;

4 How he went into the house of God, and did take and eat the shewbread, and gave also to them that were with him; which it is not lawful to eat but for the priests alone?

5 And he said unto them, That the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.

6 And it came to pass also on another sabbath, that he entered into the synagogue and taught: and there was a man whose right hand was withered.

7 And the scribes and Pharisees watched him, whether he would heal on the sabbath day; that they might find an accusation against him.

8 But he knew their thoughts, and said to the man which had the withered hand, Rise up, and stand forth in the midst. And he arose and stood forth.

9 Then said Jesus unto them, I will ask you one thing; Is it lawful on the sabbath days to do good, or to do evil? to save life, or to destroy it?

10 And looking round about upon them all, he said unto the man, Stretch forth thy hand. And he did so: and his hand was restored whole as the other.

*Here endeth the Second Lesson.*

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9 After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

10 Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

11 Give us this day our daily bread.

12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:

15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

16 Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

17 But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face;

18 That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

*Here endeth the Second Lesson.*

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## Homily

Christians are forever quoting the words in the middle of our second lesson. We call those words the "Lord's Prayer". As Anglicans, we recite those words at least once in every Prayer Book service. They are the words He Himself gave us as a model for all our praying. Have you noticed, however, that we do not recite this prayer exactly as it appears in our Bibles? If you've attended worship in Protestant churches, you have very likely stumbled as those around you said somewhat different words. They'd be saying, just as the King James Bible does, just as even Roman Catholic Bibles do: *"forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors"*, This, in fact, is exactly the way the Latin has it in the traditional Roman Mass but we say, *"forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us"*. These are words of very similar meaning. but why the difference? Somehow, in a flash of brilliance, those who translated the Prayer into English used the words that come in Our Lord's comments right after the prayer itself.

10 Neither have we obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets.

*Here endeth the First Lesson.*

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### **Second Lesson: Luke 5:33-6:10**

*Here beginneth the thirty-third verse of the fifth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke.*

33 And they said unto him, Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink?

34 And he said unto them, Can ye make the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them?

35 But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.

36 And he spake also a parable unto them; No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old; if otherwise, then both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old.

37 And no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish.

38 But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved.

39 No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better.

## Evening Prayer B

### First Lesson: Dan 9:3-10

*Here beginneth the third verse of the ninth chapter of the Book of Daniel.*

3 And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes:

4 And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments;

5 We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments:

6 Neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.

7 O LORD, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, that are near, and that are far off, through all the countries whither thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against thee.

8 O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee.

9 To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him;

*For if ye forgive men their trespasses,  
your heavenly Father will also forgive you:  
But if ye forgive not men their trespasses,  
neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

This is the only line of the prayer that Jesus seems to have needed to comment on. Not only did He teach us to ask forgiveness, but he taught us to forgive, taught us in fact to pray (if we will think closely about what we say) that we be forgiven only if we forgive, asking, in fact that our forgiveness be made to wait until we've learned to forgive.

In our choice of translation we highlight Our Lord's explanation. This is a serious and solemn thing to pray.

Our Prayer Book applies this in a very practical way. On page 85, after a discussion of the exclusion of "an open and notorious evil liver" from Communion, we read this:

*"The same order shall the Minister use with those, betwixt whom he perceiveth malice and hatred to reign;  
not suffering them to be partakers of the Lord's Table, until he know them to be reconciled.  
And if one of the parties, so at variance, be content to forgive from the bottom of his heart ... and the other party will not be persuaded to a godly unity ... the Minister ... ought to admit the penitent person to the Holy Communion, and not him that is obstinate. ..."*

This is Lent,  
 and our first order of business in this season  
 is the honest examination of our conscience,  
 the laying out of all our sins before the Lord  
 (in the presence, if it may be,  
 of one of His priests),  
 the seeking of forgiveness,  
 and of help for a change in our living.

We are pretty good at detecting  
 all the obvious sins,  
 the things we know are wrong.  
 Often we run through the Ten Commandments  
 and check off those places we seem to have failed.  
 That is a good thing, and we should be doing it,  
 but what about those sins we convince ourselves  
 to be only right, even righteous,  
 those things we consider virtuous,  
 even when Our Lord has told us otherwise.

Do we hold a grudge  
 against someone that has wronged us?  
 After all, wrong is wrong, isn't it?  
 : "I've been sinned against.  
 God hates sin, shouldn't I?"  
 "Look at what HE did!  
 How can anyone forgive THAT?"  
 "It's too much to ask. I just can't forgive."  
 But One who was absolutely innocent  
 lay against a beam as they nailed His hands to it,  
 and said.  
 "Father, forgive them."  
 Another, named Stephen,  
 as the rocks continued to pound into his flesh,  
 cried out as he died,  
 "Lay not this sin to their charge."

*but God is faithful,  
 who will not suffer you  
 to be tempted above that ye are able;  
 but will with the temptation  
 also make a way to escape,  
 that ye may be able to bear it."*

If we will ask,  
 if we will truly desire to follow Our Lord,  
 if we will attempt to take up our cross  
 and follow Him,  
 we can grow in holiness.  
 We can become saints.

As the children's hymn has it:  
*"For the saints of God are just folk like me,  
 And I mean to be one too."*

*"Blessed is the man," said Jeremiah,  
 "that trusteth in the LORD,  
 and whose hope the LORD is."*

May we be so blessed.

O God, father of all mercies, judge of all men,  
 lead us in the ways of holiness  
 show us our sins, show us thy mercy,  
 and bring us at last, by the paths thou hast chosen,  
 to the life everlasting at thy throne,  
 where thou reignest, O Father,  
 Thou and thine only begotten Son,  
 and the Holy Spirit, both now and unto all ages.  
 Amen.

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people just like us, if we'll be honest with ourselves;  
and he painted  
an absolutely frightening word-picture,  
of a desert littered with corpses.

As we heard from the prophet Jeremiah:  
*"Thus saith the LORD;  
Cursed be the man that trusteth in man,  
and maketh flesh his arm,  
and whose heart departeth from the LORD."*

and as St. Paul continued:  
*"Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth  
take heed lest he fall."*

This is Lent.  
It is time to take stock of ourselves,  
time to examine our actions,  
and our thoughts, and our intents,  
time to repent,  
to recognize how wrong we are,  
to express our deep sorrow for offending  
against what we know to be God's will,  
to ask and accept forgiveness,  
and to seek direction toward a change of life.

A certain comedian was forever proclaiming,  
"The Devil made me do it!"  
Is that true?  
There is temptation.  
Sometimes it seems very strong indeed,  
but, as St. Paul went on:  
*"There hath no temptation taken you  
but such as is common to man:*

*Forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.*

Let us pray.

Father almighty,  
who loved us enough to send thy Son;  
Jesus, who loved us enough to die for our sins;  
Holy Spirit  
whose love guides us in the right paths;  
Loving God, fill us with that same forgiving love,  
grant us grace to love those who hurt us,  
to pray for those who despise us,  
to forgive with all the fullness  
of the forgiveness that we ask of thee,  
through the same Christ Our Lord. Amen.

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## Morning Prayer B

### First Lesson: Eccles 2

*Here beginneth the second chapter  
of the Book called Ecclesiasticus*

- 1: My son, if thou come to serve the Lord, prepare thy soul for temptation.
- 2: Set thy heart aright, and constantly endure, and make not haste in time of trouble.
- 3: Cleave unto him, and depart not away, that thou mayest be increased at thy last end.
- 4: Whatsoever is brought upon thee take cheerfully, and be patient when thou art changed to a low estate.
- 5: For gold is tried in the fire, and acceptable men in the furnace of adversity.
- 6: Believe in him, and he will help thee; order thy way aright, and trust in him.
- 7: Ye that fear the Lord, wait for his mercy; and go not aside, lest ye fall.
- 8: Ye that fear the Lord, believe him; and your reward shall not fail.
- 9: Ye that fear the Lord, hope for good, and for everlasting joy and mercy.
- 10: Look at the generations of old, and see; did ever any trust in the Lord, and was confounded? or did any abide in his fear, and was forsaken? or whom did he ever despise, that called upon him?
- 11: For the Lord is full of compassion and mercy, longsuffering, and very pitiful, and forgiveth sins, and saveth in time of affliction.
- 12: Woe be to fearful hearts, and faint hands, and the sinner that goeth two ways!

## Homily

Our reading from First Corinthians is St. Paul at his most lyrical ... and his most frightening. He pictures the Children of Israel, called, adopted, and named by the Lord God, led step by step by a chosen and caring shepherd, with many signs and many wonders, on a journey toward a Promised Land. They were fed a common food provided by the Lord. They drank, in the midst of a parched and barren desert, from water that flowed from a cleft rock, a rock that followed them from place to place, and never failed. That rock, says St. Paul, was Christ, the same Christ who called Himself the Living Water. What a wonderful story! What a beautiful picture! It makes one think of the twenty-third Psalm, everyone's favorite, doesn't it?

But that's not where the Apostle stopped.

He went on:

*"But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness."*

He gave us a picture of a bunch of murmuring, complaining, squabbling people, lusting after evil things, falling into idolatry, sexual immorality, and outright rebellion --

5 But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

6 Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.

7 Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.

8 Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand.

9 Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents.

10 Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer.

11 Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.

12 Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.

13 There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

*Here endeth the Second Lesson.*

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13: Woe unto him that is fainthearted! for he believeth not; therefore shall he not be defended.

14: Woe unto you that have lost patience! and what will ye do when the Lord shall visit you?

15: They that fear the Lord will not disobey his Word; and they that love him will keep his ways.

16: They that fear the Lord will seek that which is well, pleasing unto him; and they that love him shall be filled with the law.

17: They that fear the Lord will prepare their hearts, and humble their souls in his sight,

18: Saying, We will fall into the hands of the Lord, and not into the hands of men: for as his majesty is, so is his mercy.

*Here endeth the First Lesson.*

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**Second Lesson: Romans 7:14-25**

*Here beginneth the fourteenth verse of the seventh chapter of the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans.*

14 For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.

15 For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.

16 If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good.

17 Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.

18 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.

19 For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.

20 Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.

21 I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.

22 For I delight in the law of God after the inward man:

23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

24 O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

25 I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

*Here endeth the Second Lesson.*

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10 I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.

11 As the partridge sitteth on eggs, and hatcheth them not; so he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool.

12 A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary.

13 O LORD, the hope of Israel, all that forsake thee shall be ashamed, and they that depart from me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living waters.

14 Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved: for thou art my praise.

*Here endeth the First Lesson.*

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**Second Lesson: 1 Cor 10:1-13**

*Here beginneth the tenth chapter of the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians.*

1 Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea;

2 And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea;

3 And did all eat the same spiritual meat;

4 And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.

Let us pray:

Lead us, Lord, in the paths of self-examination,  
repentance, and sorrow for our sins.  
Lead us in our fastings and prayers.  
Lead us to the knowledge of thy grace,  
the guidance of thy Holy Spirit,  
and the promise of everlasting life,  
Through Christ our Savior,  
who died and rose for our redemption. Amen.

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### **Evening Prayer A**

#### **First Lesson: Jer 17:5-14**

*Here beginneth the fifth verse of the seventeenth chapter of the Prophet Jeremiah.*

5 Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD.

6 For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited.

7 Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is.

8 For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.

9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

### **Homily**

It's Lent.

We are going to spend the next few weeks thinking about sin and temptation, about holiness and redemption.

Lent isn't pleasant.

It's not supposed to be.

What's fun about confessing our sins?

What's optimistic about admitting that we really can't be good enough?

It really is a painfully ego-bruising thing.

Just look at that pitiful second lesson from Romans, chapter seven.

Can you imagine a successful leader going on the way St. Paul did?

How many elections does a politician win by explaining,

"I'm not good enough, and I can't be."?

How many would hire a job applicant that talked that way?

Ever hear a sports star proclaim that he just isn't good enough?

But it's true.

We aren't and we can't,

and, if we're honest with ourselves, we know it.

St. Paul was honest enough and bold enough to lay his deep inner struggles right out front.

"I want to do right," he says, "but I don't.

I try hard, but not hard enough

Just when I think I'm making progress,

I fall right back into sin."

We criticize parents, preachers, leaders,  
when we catch them saying one thing  
and doing another.

"Do as I say, not as I do," we hear, and  
we take it as an example of hypocrisy,  
but isn't that

just what we catch St. Paul saying here?  
He's confessing weakness.

He's describing a life that is far short of the mark,  
and he finally lets out a pitiful wail,  
*"O wretched man that I am!  
who shall deliver me ...?"*

This man was certainly forthright  
about reminding his hearers of their sins.  
He thundered out frighteningly  
in his letters to Corinth,  
about the serious abuses in that church,  
and yet, he remained a struggling sinner.  
Is that hypocrisy?

It's been said that people who live in glass houses  
shouldn't throw stones.

Well, that's quite true, unless  
the glass is all pitted and needs to be replaced,  
and a truck loaded with prepaid new glass  
is sitting outside.

St. Paul says that he's in the same boat with us.  
We're all dreadfully flawed,  
and we can't be fixed without first being broken.  
It's just as we ourselves said a few minutes ago:

*"We have left undone those things  
which we ought to have done;*

*And we have done those things  
which we ought not to have done;  
And there is no health in us."*

We are sinners.  
That is fact number one.  
We can play cover up.  
We can pretend to be better than we are.  
That's what most of us do most of the time,  
and that is hypocrisy,  
or we can admit our struggles,  
and struggle together,  
and cry out for help.

That's our business this Lent.  
We are called upon  
to take a very close look at our sins.  
We are called upon to recognize our weakness.  
We are given an opportunity to cry out for help.  
And we are offered help.

The writer of Ecclesiasticus tells us

*"... if thou come to serve the Lord,  
prepare thy soul for temptation.  
...Believe in him, and he will help thee;  
order thy way aright, and trust in him.  
...For the Lord is full of compassion and mercy,  
longsuffering, and very pitiful,  
and forgiveth sins,  
and saveth in time of affliction."*

and St. Paul cries out,  
*"I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. "*