

## Grace Notes for Friday, February 19, 2021

Dear Friends,

As we look to the Lectionary reading for Saturday, I am struck by how beautifully the first reading sets out a plan for Lent:



Thus says the LORD:

If you remove from your midst oppression, false accusation and malicious speech; if you bestow your bread on the hungry and satisfy the afflicted; then light shall rise for you in the darkness, and the gloom shall become for you like midday; then the LORD will guide you always and give you plenty even on the parched land. He will renew your strength, and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring whose water never fails. The ancient ruins shall be rebuilt for your sake, and the foundations from ages past you shall raise up; "Repairer of the breach," they shall call you, "Restorer of ruined homesteads."

If you hold back your foot on the sabbath from following your own pursuits on my holy day; if you call the sabbath a delight, and the LORD's holy day honourable; if you honour it by not following your ways, seeking your own interests, or speaking with malice then you shall delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; I will nourish you with the heritage of Jacob, your father, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken. **Is 58:9b-14** (NABRE)

*I am particularly drawn to the reminder of the honour due the sabbath, which for us is a Holy Day of Obligation, based on the Third Commandment (CCC2168-2173)*

*I have been watching a series of lectures from the Shalom Hartman Institute and, from one by Marc Brettler and Amy-Jill Levine, learned of the Jewish interpretation*



*which supports that Sabbath is a reminder of Eden and we have that taste. They also talked of a Midrash or textual interpretation that, after Adam's sin our fingernails and toenails are all that is left of our original form; observant Jews will look at their nails in the light of the Sabbath candle to be reminded that a little of Eden is left in us.<sup>1</sup>*

*As we begin our Lenten journey, it is worth remembering that, for some of our community, this may be a very significant part of theirs. For those following the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA), this is the Sunday when they may proceed from the time of Enquiry – Pre-Catechumenate – to being inscribed in the Book of*

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/484254/jewish/Why-Look-at-Our-Fingernails-at-Havdalah.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/484254/jewish/Why-Look-at-Our-Fingernails-at-Havdalah.htm) )

the Elect as Catechumens. The RCIA is a process, not a programme, and one's movement through the stages will be guided by one's own development, the aim being to receive the sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist) at the Easter Vigil.<sup>2</sup> The Pre-Catechumenate is intended never to take less than one year and may take several.

In Lent, the traditional period of Purification and Enlightenment, catechumens, now called Candidates, experience a number of Rites, among them Scrutinies and



exorcisms, the presentation of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer. During this time they are dismissed with a blessing from Mass after the homily to continue learning with a catechist. This reflects the early Christian practice of never allowing someone who was not initiated to be present for the Eucharist. For those who were baptised as infants and received First Communion as a young child, it may be

difficult to understand how this experience deepens the longing to be able to join everyone else at the Lord's Table. Many parish members find their own faith enriched as they accompany the Catechumens and Candidates, and some will sponsor (be the godparent to) those who choose this journey to the baptismal font.

We all can benefit from the Scrutinies as we witness Candidates being ritually questioned about their commitment to faith. In the early Church there was an element of danger and trust as the faithful feared being betrayed to those who would punish them even to death for being Christians. We are aware that some catechumens were martyred, giving rise to our understanding of the Baptism of Desire, also known as the Baptism of Blood.<sup>3</sup>



May your Lenten journey be fruitful and faith-filled! With every blessing,

*Gillian*

---

<sup>2</sup> I am a convert and remember being told by the priest in charge of our group: "Be sure this is something you really want to do; there are enough half [baked] (he used another word...) Catholics in the Church and we don't need any more. As I was already baptised, my preparation was for Reception into Full Communion and Confirmation.

<sup>3</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church §1281