

A Homily for Quinquagesima Sunday, delivered on 15 February 2026 at St. Matthew's Anglican Catholic Church, Newport Beach, CA, by Dcn. Andrew Masters

+ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.+

By my count, Jesus foretells his death over a dozen times between the four Gospels. It seems to be a thing Jesus is constantly bringing up to his disciples. Perhaps even his most talked about subject. The sheer frequency of this topic conveys its enormous importance to Jesus' identity. The placement of these predictions within Jesus' own ministry also conveys the inseparability of Jesus' sacrifice with his divinity and messiahship. Jesus did not start out his ministry predicting his own death. Saints Matthew, Mark, and Luke all agree that the first time Jesus foretells his death is sandwiched between St. Peter's famous declaration of Jesus as the Christ and the revelation of Jesus' divinity at the Transfiguration. This suggests that the Good Friday sacrifice is a defining feature of what it means for Jesus to be God and Messiah. All three of these things, God, Messiah, and Sacrifice must exist together or not at all. Indeed, St. Peter's objections to the cross, St. Peter's desire to have a Messiah without Good Friday are declared demonic. That Jesus, by his very nature, must die as a sacrifice for us is the last and most difficult Epiphany the church gives before Lent begins.

The Body of Christ on the cross is the manifestation of the Love of God. It is a sacrament, physical and brutal that points to the eternal reality of God's love for us. And in today's gospel Jesus tells his disciples again that he must make this sacrifice and today he begins his final journey to Jerusalem. The disciples are perhaps not surprised by this journey to Jerusalem; it is about that time of year to make ready for the Passover feast. But Jesus' destination is not one of geography; Jesus' real journey is to Good Friday and to the cross.

This Journey changed the disciples. They left Galilee that day not realizing that, if they ever returned, it would be in passing to other destinations as apostles and bishops of the church, ministering that same Good Friday sacrifice as the Eucharist to the members of the newly founded church. The trip to Good Friday was not an easy trip for them. The disciples were each confronted with their own sin along the way. Save one exception, they all betrayed our Lord and abandoned him. And of those who betrayed him, save one exception, they all repented and were each ministered to in different ways by Jesus after Easter. Their betrayal was the outward symbol of their inward sinfulness. It was a revelatory moment for them, a moment redeemed by Our Lord when it led to their repentance. This repentance and changed life prepared them for their future ministry, the same ministry we have inherited from them.

The church offers to each of us a similar journey if we choose it. Lent is an opportunity to travel with Our Lord to Good Friday. A Lenten fast, when decided upon thoughtfully and prayerfully will lead us to similar revelations. A fast that is too easy will not reveal very much to us. Saying no to TV, when we never watched TV anyway won't say very much to us when we continue to not watch TV in Lent. A fast that is earnestly followed but sometimes failed will provide us with those moments of revelation about where God wants us to grow. This is necessary, we must be

shown where to grow so that we can grow. This is a painful process, but it is not the pains of death, instead it is the birth pains of new life coming forth.

There is a trend now-a-days to approach Lent with the mindset that “addition is better than subtraction.” This is when, instead of giving anything up for Lent, we will add virtuous disciplines to our everyday routines. Things like increasing our exercise, eating healthier, or reading more as the way to approach Lent. These virtuous exercises are all very well and good, and by all means include these if you feel led, but... this is more of a New Year’s resolution or a self-improvement project instead of a fast. Fasting necessarily means taking something away, fasting means saying no to good and enjoyable things in our lives. Traditionally, fasting meant not eating any food. This is the type of fast that Our Lord practiced for forty days in preparation for the beginning of his ministry. I am often asked why giving up food is so integral to fasting. It is my conviction that there is a mystical relationship between food and the health of our souls. Sin entered the world through food when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit. It is through the food of the Eucharist that our souls are healed. “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” In a fast, we are meant to replace food with prayer. Please do not misunderstand me. I am not saying to give up eating every day of Lent, but having some component of our fast that curtails types of food or amounts of food can lead to a powerful season of spiritual growth.

And of course, not everyone is able to fast from food for various reasons. There are other things to fast from, we are the most distracted culture in history and so a fast from electronics, social media, the news, and other various forms of entertainment is also encouraged. There is always some good thing in our life that we can resolve to say no to for forty days.

Prayer and fasting are often mentioned together in the Bible. During a fast we must increase our habits of prayer to gain that connection with God. Fasting without prayer is just an act of the will, sort of like climbing Mount Everest. Why would anyone do it? Because it’s there. That is all well and good, many people like to climb mountains, but Lent and, indeed, fasting is not about self-achievement for the sake of one’s self. Fasting is not about making ourselves more efficient, more productive, more anything. Lent is about our relationship with God, and prayer keeps us focused on God. Lent is a time to reexamine our individual rules of prayer, and just like stretching ourselves with the fasting aspect of Lent, we should also strive to grow our rule of prayer. There are many types of prayer: there is formal prayer like the daily offices where every prayer is already written down, there is an informal conversational style prayer where we take time to tell God what’s on our hearts, there is contemplative prayer where we sit still and listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Usually, we are strong in one and weaker in others. Lent is a good time to focus on the forms of prayer where we are weaker and take time to practice or improve in those areas.

*In the Lenten season of prayer and fasting we realize that Lent is really only about our own individual selves in the sense that we are deepening our capacity to love God and love others better. The goal of the Lent is to receive God's love and to then use that love as motivation for our actions in service to others.*

In today's epistle, St. Paul reminds us just how important love is to our actions. Without God's love, all human actions are essentially meaningless and futile. It has been this way since Adam ate the fruit. However, when our actions are motivated by love, then all of a sudden our actions are overflowing with meaning and importance that carries with it eternal significance; St. Paul reiterates what has already been taught by Jesus, that our actions must be inspired by love for them to be worthy. We cannot give what we do not yet have. The love of God that comes to us through prayer and fasting gives animation to our actions toward others. So now it becomes clear that Lent really is about loving God and Neighbors better than we did before. This divine love, which is part of the very being of God, is what motivated Jesus to lead his disciples to the Cross on Good Friday. And if we are to participate in that same Divine Love of God, we will have to go with Jesus to Jerusalem and to Good Friday.

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