

Welcome

God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. Romans 5:5

Love Outpoured focuses on portions of the apostle Paul's letter to the Romans. In words that continue to speak to us today, Paul lays out foundational beliefs for a life of faith in Christian community.

The daily devotions for each day, from Ash Wednesday to the Resurrection of Our Lord / Vigil of Easter, begin with evocative images and brief scripture texts. The writers then bring their diverse voices and pastoral wisdom to the texts with quotations to ponder, reflections, and prayers.

May God's love pour out into us and through us to our neighbors, churches, communities, and all creation!



February 18 / Ash Wednesday

Romans 1:1, 7

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, . . .

To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints:
Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

To ponder

The goal of the Christian life is that for more and more seconds of each day what we think and do and say is to God's glory, that every moment is worship of the true God instead of various idolatries of our making or of our culture's.—Marva J. Dawn, *In the Beginning, God*

Starting with God

On Ash Wednesday we often ponder practices to do or habits to give up. Those are fine things. But they may cloud the fact that everything we have and all that we are come from God.

Without God, we would not be alive. Without Christ, we would not know forgiveness and eternal life. Without the Spirit, we would be alone in this world. Apart from God, nothing we know or take for granted would exist. This basic point is a fine start to Lent: All we have and know in life is a gift from God. We are not masters of the universe.

Paul grasps this at the beginning of Romans. It leads him to name God and Jesus five times in two verses. It leads him to derive his and the Romans' identity from God in Christ, who sets them apart, calls them saints, extends them grace and peace, and calls them beloved.

Too often in life we act as if everything depends on us. And we miss the point. This Ash Wednesday, more than identifying things we hope to do (or *not* do), let's acknowledge our dependence on God and embrace Christ's invitation to follow him to the cross.

Prayer

O Christ, we acknowledge our need for God, embrace your call to follow, and invite your Spirit to lead us forward. Amen.



March 21

Romans 12:6-8

We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the encourager, in encouragement; the giver, in sincerity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

To ponder

We need to give each other space so that we may both give and receive such beautiful things as ideas, openness, dignity, joy, healing, and inclusion.—Max De Pree, *Leadership Is an Art*

A mosaic of potential

What if we were all the same? Ugh, how distressing to imagine! If we were all the same, there would be so many limitations on the possibilities of the human family. If there were science without art, melody without harmony, wealth without generosity, and so on, what a limited world this would be.

God's vision from the beginning of creation has been far more expansive. God's grace allows for and encourages broad and inclusive possibilities for who we are and what we can become, together. From the get-go, God intended for us to exist side by side, harmoniously receiving and engaging the contributions that all have to offer.

Our self-centeredness often deprives us of such an expansive vision. This Lenten season of reflection is an opportunity to recenter ourselves in all the possibilities of life in Christian community. We are a mosaic of potential when we give one another space to blossom into the fullness of who God created each of us to be. Like a beautifully harmonized choir, the human community sings beautifully when each person contributes to the whole out of the abundance of gifts with which God has blessed them.

Prayer

Gracious One, thank you for the unique gifts that you have given each of us, your children. Help us to complement our siblings rather than compete with them. Amen.



March 29 / Sunday of the Passion

Romans 15:5-6

May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

To ponder

The present age isn't in need of any more Christians. We need followers of Jesus who go where Jesus would go, who try to do what Jesus did, and try to do the greater things that he said we would do.—Neichelle R. Guidry, *Curating a World*

Elusive harmony

I'm a singer who desperately wishes she could harmonize without having the notes in front of her. I admire those singers for whom harmonizing comes unbidden. I'm filled with "holy envy," as my internship supervisor used to say.

It's one thing to sing harmoniously; it's another thing to live harmoniously. There are days when I look at today's world, torn apart by violence and hatred, and I can't even imagine all of us living in harmony with one another. It seems impossible.

Jesus knew something about conflict and discord. He rode into Jerusalem to shouts of "Hosanna!" The crowds rejoiced at the coming of their king. How quickly, though, those songs of praise turned to cries for Jesus to be crucified.

On this day in the church year, when we are made so viscerally aware of humanity's fickleness, let this blessing from Paul's letter to the Romans be the lullaby whispered in your ear. Feel your worry dissipate. Nothing is impossible with God.

Jesus, the crucified king, conducts creation's choir. With his dying breath, he teaches us the song of infinite forgiveness. He silences all those forces that rebel against God, directing our days and our deeds in peace. We may not be able to hear the harmony quite yet, but it's here, because Jesus is here.

Prayer

God of surprising possibilities, we sing your praises! Lead us in the way of Jesus, that we might live in harmony with all creation. Amen.