

**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**

Sexagesima

Morning Prayer A

First Lesson Isa 50:4-10

*Here beginneth the fourth verse of
the fiftieth chapter of the Prophet Isaiah.*

4 The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned.

5 The Lord GOD hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back.

6 I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting.

7 For the Lord GOD will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed.

8 He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? let us stand together: who is mine adversary? let him come near to me.

9 Behold, the Lord GOD will help me; who is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up.

10 Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God.

Here endeth the First Lesson.

Second Lesson 2 Cor 12:1-12

*Here beginneth the twelfth chapter of
the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians.*

1 It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord.

2 I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven.

3 And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;)

4 How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

5 Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities.

6 For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me.

7 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

8 For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

11 I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing.

12 Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily

"I knew a man," said St. Paul, and went on with an amazing story of a deeply mystical experience, a man taken into the highest heaven, either physically or in a vision, and given supernatural knowledge of God.

"I knew a man," -- and that man, according to most commentators, was without question St. Paul himself. He is very pointedly not bragging. Such an experience did not make him better than other men. He made no use of it to establish his authority. He brought it up only to highlight something greater.

From Hymn 551:

*"Let goods and kindred go,
This mortal life also;
The body they may kill:
God's truth abideth still,
His kingdom is forever."*

And so it was that

when Nebuchanezzar looked into the furnace,
he said:

*"Did not we cast three men bound
into the midst of the fire? ...*

*Lo, I see four men loose,
walking in the midst of the fire,
and they have no hurt;*

and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God. "

We are called to unswerving obedience to our God.

He made no promise that it will be easy

-- quite the opposite, in fact --

But whatever pains come upon us,
whatever opposition, whatever disappointment,
He walks with us,
and eternal victory is sure.

Let us pray:

Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings, with thy most gracious favour, and further us with thy continual help; that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in thee, we may glorify thy holy Name, and finally, by thy mercy, obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

and also his own followers
 very soon after His passion and death,
 and the uncounted army of martyrs
 from then until now -- right now,
 in places like China and Indonesia
 and Egypt and Nigeria,
 and on and on and on. -- right now.
 Jesus' words today are not comforting,
 certainly not in the sense of soothing.
 He promised, as he did so often,
 that His Way is like carrying a cross,
 that His people would be persecuted,
 by a world that is unwilling to obey the will of God,
 persecuted in every generation
 until the end of the age.
 We don't like to hear that,
 we have trouble accepting it here and now,
 because we've had it easy for a long while.
 We've considered this to be a Christian country,
 and so it is, in part -- a progressively smaller part,
 and we've been shielded
 as few Christians have been.
 But, even in a "Christian" country,
 faith is not cheap.
 The pressure to live like everyone else
 is always present,
 usually informal here,
 but sometimes more official.
 Yes, the Lord does watch out for His people,
 but the rewards we seek (or should seek)
 are not the rewards the world seeks.
 A Christian seeks God.
 Everything else takes second place.

Yes, such things do happen.
 Some of us -- many of us, actually --
 have known those moments
 where God seems nearer,
 when He seems to speak to us individually.
 Rational as we try to be in this very scientific age,
 we, as Christians,
 need to recognize the miraculous.
 God is real.
 He truly loves His creation.
 He has not ceased being active in it.

But signs and wonders, visions and miracles,
 though real,
 are not the objective of our faith.
 Our Lord Himself was scornful of those
 who sought signs.

"Of such an one will I glory:" said the Apostle;
 the gifts of God are wonderful
 and should be celebrated,

"yet of myself I will not glory,"
 He refused to take any credit for God's free gift.
 He refused to admit that it said anything at all
 about him,
 as a person, as a leader, as an example

"but in mine infirmities. "

Wait a minute!
 Was he boasting about his weakness?
 Is that what people, especially leaders, do?
 Does that make sense?
 Well, yes, we have to accept that it does.
 After all, this is Scripture, and is written for our
 learning.

So, then, what does this amazing and
counterintuitive statement have to tell us?
What does it say about St. Paul?
What does it say about us?
What does it say about the Christian life?

"Know thyself," said a great Greek Philosopher.
It's rather easy for most of us
to identify our strong points.
It's easy to insist that, because of my talents,
I should have thus and so.
But it's rather harder for most of us
to recognize our weaknesses, our deficiencies,
those traits
which get in the way of doing what we should.
Saul of Tarsus was a proud young man,
well educated, fervent in his piety,
faithful in keeping the Law,
but incapable of being what God called him to be.
It was not until he met the Lord,
and in that awesome presence
came to realize his sin and his insufficiency
that he began the work he was intended for.
He laid aside his Hebrew name, after a great king,
and became known by his Greek name,
Paul, Paulos, meaning 'the little one'
From that day he spoke freely of his sin,
of his weakness,
and, only when he absolutely had to
did he speak of his gifts and authority.

In our lesson,
he speaks of the mysterious 'thorn in the flesh'.
Scholars have been arguing for centuries
over what that might be,

Aside from that,
they were the king's very best servants.
Here's where we come in this morning.
The king's advisors talked him into
a foolish command.
He decreed the death penalty
for any that refused to worship
that huge statue he had made,
apparently not realizing
that he would lose his best servants that way.
They refused, as subtly and politely as possible,
but they would not, could not, do as he asked.
They were cast into the fiery furnace.
The king did as he believed he must,
but the king mourned.
However, the story did not turn out as expected.
The young men did not die.

*"... Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego,
came forth of the midst of the fire."*

There's more to it, but we'll come back to that.

*"Behold, I send you forth
as sheep in the midst of wolves:
be ye therefore wise as serpents,
and harmless as doves."*

That's what Jesus said to his disciples, and to us.
Doesn't it sound as though
he had those young men in mind?
Those three, surely,
and the faithful Jews who were persecuted and killed
only decades before His time,
under Antiochus Epiphanes,

Homily

*Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego,
came forth of the midst of the fire.*

And how did they get there in the first place?

What on earth did they do

to get themselves into such a pickle?

Didn't they have sense enough

to keep out of trouble?

Well, now, that is a long story,

longer than our Old Testament lesson.

These three young men,

along with Daniel, their mentor,

had knocked themselves out

in the service of the king.

They had probably worked harder to please him
than most of their fellow Hebrews would approve of.

After all, he was the foreign king

that had conquered the homeland,

and carried the people off into exile.

Nevertheless these young men worked for him.

They worked hard,

and turned out to be more valuable to him

than most native Babylonians.

They did everything possible to please him --

except for

what their God had specifically forbidden them.

They kept kosher.

They did not eat the king's food,

because their religion forbade them.

They also did not worship the countless gods

that the people and king worshiped.

They believed and worshiped one God

and one only.

a physical affliction, perhaps in the eyes,

perhaps in the stomach,

a form of temptation, an annoying person, whatever.

All these have been claimed,

but it's not important to know.

He asked that it be taken away,

and his request was not granted.

He kept his weakness, whatever it was,

and gloried in it.

Not because it was a good thing,

but because it pointed elsewhere.

"My grace is sufficient for thee: "

was God's answer

"for my strength is made perfect in weakness."

When man's strength and goodness are not evident,
then the goodness and glory of God can be revealed.

And thus St. Paul could say of himself:

Most gladly therefore

will I rather glory in my infirmities,

that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities,

in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions,

in distresses for Christ's sake:

for when I am weak, then am I strong.

We are coming closer to Lent.

It's a time for meditating upon our sins.

Not to bash ourselves with guilt,

but to uncover them realistically in God's presence,

to allow Him, by the blood of the Cross,

to wash them in His forgiveness,

in His mercy, in His grace,

and to present ourselves, flawed as we are,

to be used in His service,

to be lifted up into His everlasting Kingdom.

Let us pray in the words of today's collect:

O Lord God, who seest that we put not our trust in any thing that we do; mercifully grant that by thy power we may be defended from all adversity; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Morning Prayer B

First Lesson Isa 30:8-21

Here beginneth the eighth verse of the thirtieth chapter of the Prophet Isaiah.

8 Now go, write it before them in a table, and note it in a book, that it may be for the time to come for ever and ever:

9 That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the LORD:

10 Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits:

11 Get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us.

12 Wherefore thus saith the Holy One of Israel, Because ye despise this word, and trust in oppression and perverseness, and stay thereon:

13 Therefore this iniquity shall be to you as a breach ready to fall, swelling out in a high wall, whose breaking cometh suddenly at an instant.

14 And he shall break it as the breaking of the potters' vessel that is broken in pieces; he shall not

20 For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.

21 And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death.

22 And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.

23 But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come.

40 He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.

41 He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward.

42 And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

24 Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king.

25 He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.

26 Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace, and spake, and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, ye servants of the most high God, come forth, and come hither. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, came forth of the midst of the fire.

Here endeth the First Lesson.

Second Lesson Matt 10:16-23, 40-42

Here beginneth the sixteenth verse of the tenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew

16 Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.

17 But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues;

18 And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles.

19 But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak.

spare: so that there shall not be found in the bursting of it a sherd to take fire from the hearth, or to take water withal out of the pit.

15 For thus saith the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel; In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength: and ye would not.

16 But ye said, No; for we will flee upon horses; therefore shall ye flee: and, We will ride upon the swift; therefore shall they that pursue you be swift.

17 One thousand shall flee at the rebuke of one; at the rebuke of five shall ye flee: till ye be left as a beacon upon the top of a mountain, and as an ensign on an hill.

18 And therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the LORD is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him.

19 For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem: thou shalt weep no more: he will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee.

20 And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers:

21 And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.

Here endeth the First Lesson.

Second Lesson Mark 4:26-34

Here beginneth the twenty-sixth verse of the fourth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Mark.

26 And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground;

27 And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how.

28 For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.

29 But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.

30 And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it?

31 It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth:

32 But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it.

33 And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it.

34 But without a parable spake he not unto them: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples.

Here endeth the Second Lesson

down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?

16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter.

17 If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king.

18 But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.

19 Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be heated.

20 And he commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace.

21 Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen, and their hats, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

22 Therefore because the king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flames of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

23 And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

7 Therefore at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and all kinds of musick, all the people, the nations, and the languages, fell down and worshipped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

8 Wherefore at that time certain Chaldeans came near, and accused the Jews.

9 They spake and said to the king Nebuchadnezzar, O king, live for ever.

10 Thou, O king, hast made a decree, that every man that shall hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, shall fall down and worship the golden image:

11 And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth, that he should be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.

12 There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; these men, O king, have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.

13 Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Then they brought these men before the king.

14 Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up?

15 Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall

Homily

*But without a parable spake he not unto them:
and when they were alone,
he expounded all things to his disciples.*

Jesus' parables have often been thought of as clever illustrations to help people understand his message more easily. That is how we use stories and examples in preaching, in teaching, and in public speaking. But that is not why He used stories. His stories held a message that was not obvious. When he spoke publicly he caused people to begin thinking, but only his disciples -- those who really wanted to hear His truth -- received the fullness of what He was saying. His parables, and indeed the rest of Scripture, are not intended to be a clear and systematic presentation of a step-by-step outline of what we should think and do. The Scripture requires explanation. Its truth has been entrusted to a Church in which He has placed scholars and teachers, and it is in the centuries of the growth of this Church that a reliable understanding of His teaching and life may be found.

That's what this strange little story of the mustard tree is all about.

Jesus emerged from seeming obscurity,
preached in a small country,
managed to attract a moderate following,
and died.

At His death only John, his mother,
and a couple of other women remained.

What was left of his band of disciples
was cowering in a locked room.

Could a seed have been much smaller than that?
From beginnings like that, by the power of God,
that little church grew, and spread,
and made its presence known
in every corner of the world,
and has become a major power
in the affairs of men.

But back up a bit.

There's another story in today's Gospel reading.

A seed is planted and grows, and
*"when the fruit is brought forth,
immediately he putteth in the sickle,
because the harvest is come."*

We talk as though it is an easy and pleasant thing
to gather in the harvest,
but is that the way it is?

A sickle is rather sharp, isn't it?

It cuts. It takes the grain away from comfort
and brings it to a place where it is threshed.

That means -- beaten --
so that the inedible parts can be removed.

Harvest time is a time of joy,

The grain that is now ready is the whole purpose
of farming.

But harvest time is also disruptive,
sometimes painful.

Evening Prayer B

First Lesson: Dan 3:1-26

Here beginneth the third chapter of the Book of Daniel.

1 Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof six cubits: he set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon.

2 Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent to gather together the princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

3 Then the princes, the governors, and captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, were gathered together unto the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

4 Then an herald cried aloud, To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages,

5 That at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up:

6 And whoso falleth not down and worshipping shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.

But, when we've done it all, we need to trust,
because we just can't know.

Jesus' disciples said, "*Master, eat.*"
But he said unto them,
I have meat to eat that ye know not of.
...My meat is to do the will of him that sent me".

There is nothing on this earth
that we can rely upon.
Nothing we have is really ours.
None of our planning is trustworthy.
But God is faithful.
We pray "Thy will be done"
It will. But will we be in accord with it?
He expects us to work,
but this is the way he says it is:

"I sent you to reap
that whereon ye bestowed no labour:
other men laboured,
and ye are entered into their labours."

Lent is coming.
Let's make it a good preparation.
May He lead us by the power of His Spirit.

O God, whose will governs all creation,
who hast promised to care for thy sheep,
and hast pledged to lead and guide us into all truth;
mercifully grant that we may hear thy voice,
and follow thy will,
both to the preparation of our own souls
and to the spreading of thy Word,
through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Look again at the mustard tree.
Its branches shelter the birds of the air.
Do those birds all belong?
Is a farmer happy about the presence of crows?
You know, the church
certainly has gathered up a lot of power,
a lot of influence, a lot of prestige,
and its branches
often shelter those of less-than-pure motives.
Much evil has been done in the name of truth,
and much continues to be done.

In our Old Testament reading,
Isaiah speaks as though it is harvest time,
as though the reaping is about to happen,
the grain about to be collected and purified,
and what is not edible about to be discarded.
That is always an appropriate thought.
In one way or another
harvesting and purifying are always going on,
and this is an especially appropriate thought
as we draw closer to Lent.

Isaiah's word to the people of his day,
and to God's people of every day,
is both simple and chilling:
"...this is a rebellious people, lying children,
children that will not hear the law of the LORD: "
Even the greatest of saints have confessed them-
selves to be sinners,
to be slow to hear the voice of God,
and even slower to obey.
It is so easy to trust in the fact that we have truth
on our side
(and we do)

and thus to rely upon the promises of God
as if they were automatically ours.
It is so very easy to become offended
when our faults are exposed and condemned,
when we are challenged with the need
for major change
in our own attitudes and actions,
and it is easy to become angry with the messenger.
to *"say to the seers, See not;
and to the prophets,
Prophesy not unto us right things,
speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits:
but we are sinners, all of us,
and we need correction, all of us,
and when we have heard God rightly,
as Isaiah said,
"...though the Lord give you the bread of adversity,
and the water of affliction,
yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner
any more,
but thine eyes shall see thy teachers:
And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying,
This is the way, walk ye in it..."*

Let us pray.

Lord, grant us the ears to hear,
and the will to obey,
that, led by thy Word, and filled with thy Spirit,
we may walk in thy Truth,
to the honor and glory of thy Name,
through Christ our Lord. Amen.

*"If the clouds be full of rain,
they empty themselves upon the earth:
and if the tree fall toward the south,
or toward the north,
in the place where the tree falleth,
there it shall be."*

What happens, happens,
and you have little control over most of it.

*He that observeth the wind shall not sow;
and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap.*

Sometimes waiting for the right moment means
you don't do what had to be done.

*"As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit,
nor how the bones do grow
in the womb of her that is with child:
even so thou knowest not the works of God
who maketh all."*

Do we know what God has planned?
Are we able to predict His actions in advance?
Will our own planning ever be sufficient?

*"In the morning sow thy seed,
and in the evening withhold not thine hand: "*

By all means, do.
If a farmer doesn't plant, nothing grows.
If he ignores the harvest, the grain rots in the field.

*"for thou knowest not whether shall prosper,
either this or that,
or whether they both shall be alike good."*

If we take Lent seriously,
 if we take fasting seriously,
 if we put effort into deepening our life of prayer,
 it gets terribly easy to take credit
 for our own "progress",
 to believe that we are making ourselves better
 in God's sight,
 and perhaps that fellow Christians
 ought to give us credit for that.

That's wrong.

In our Old Testament reading, the author
 (whether Solomon or someone else)
 makes it very clear that all our planning
 is ultimately not enough.

We believe in being practical, in saving up,
 in investing wisely,
 in making all the best preparations.

Well, yes!

All that is good and proper, even necessary, but . .

*"Cast thy bread upon the waters:" he writes,
 "for thou shalt find it after many days."*

Don't hang on to it all
 Let some of it loose, even if it looks foolish.
 Give God a chance to do something surprising.

*"Give a portion to seven, and also to eight;
 for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the
 earth. "*

Be really free about giving.
 You don't know what is going to happen.
 You don't know what surprises will come on you,
 or on the one to whom you give.

Evening Prayer A

First Lesson Eccles 11:1-6

*Here beginneth the eleventh chapter
 of the Book of Ecclesiastes.*

1 Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt
 find it after many days.

2 Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for
 thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.

3 If the clouds be full of rain, they empty them-
 selves upon the earth: and if the tree fall toward
 the south, or toward the north, in the place where
 the tree falleth, there it shall be.

4 He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he
 that regardeth the clouds shall not reap.

5 As thou knowest not what is the way of the
 spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of
 her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the
 works of God who maketh all.

6 In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening
 withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not
 whether shall prosper, either this or that, or
 whether they both shall be alike good.

Here endeth the First Lesson.

Second Lesson John 4:31-38

Here beginneth the thirty-first verse of the fourth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John.

31 In the mean while his disciples prayed him, saying, Master, eat.
 32 But he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of.
 33 Therefore said the disciples one to another, Hath any man brought him ought to eat?
 34 Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.
 35 Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.
 36 And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.
 37 And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth.
 38 I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours.

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily

Jesus famously said,
 "Take no thought for the morrow."
 St. James advised us not to say
 "Tomorrow I will do thus and so,"
 but rather to say, "God willing, I will ..."
 You may have heard people assert that
 therefore it is wrong to plan ahead,
 that we should passively wait for whatever happens.
 Is that what God really expects of us?
 Didn't Jesus also talk a lot about being practical?
 Didn't He say things like,
 "No one goes to war unless he counts the cost?"
 He had a great deal to say about planning,
 making preparations,
 doing everything we know how to do.
 St. Paul, St. James, St. Peter, and St. John,
 all of them,
 gave a lot of practical advice
 in their letters to the Church,
 and expected both thought and effort to be applied.
 We offer ourselves, our souls and bodies,
 to be used in His service.
 Christianity is hard work.
 Hebrews speaks of it as running a race.
 The Fathers of the Church wrote often of "spiritual athletes"
 And yet . . .

All that effort, all that planning,
 provides its own temptation.
 These are thoughts we need to be thinking
 as we draw near to the Great Fast of Lent.