

Lent 2024, Week 3 Reflection

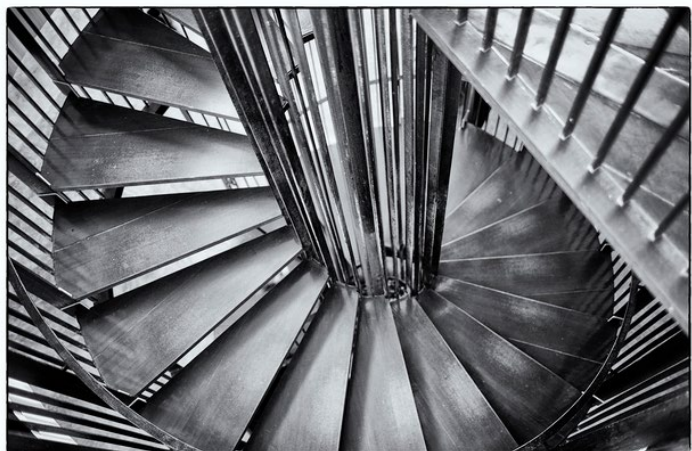
THE PARADOX OF GROWTH

Welcome to the Third Week of the Lenten audio retreat, presented by Jesuit Connections, a program of the Office of Ignatian Spirituality. Last week, we pondered “Love in Parenthood.” Now, we invite you to intentionally pause the busyness of ordinary life: get still, breathe deeply, and listen closely as we explore “The Paradox of Growth.” This week’s reflection was written by Kate Flores, a 2023 alum of the Contemplative Leaders in Action program in Baltimore...

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“When I was a child, I used to talk as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I put aside childish things.” -1 Corinthians 13:11

Reading—and re-reading—the Bible passages for this Sunday made me think of the quote above from St. Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. Specifically, I keep recalling one of the first times when I paid attention to that passage, which was at my fifth grade graduation Mass from the Catholic elementary school I attended. As 10- and 11-year-olds who knew no better, we giggled when a female classmate first read it during our graduation rehearsal. “She said she was a man!” we whispered among ourselves. As a young adult in 2023, I grimace at that memory for many reasons—including the reason why one of the fifth grade teachers chided us: It wasn’t respectful of the Mass for us to giggle like that, it wasn’t respectful of our classmate, and it wasn’t respectful of the ultimate message of St. Paul.



“The growth of understanding follows an ascending spiral rather than a straight line.” by weesen is licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0.

Truly, learning how to understand God properly is as gradual and transformative as the growth from childhood to adulthood. With apologies to St. Paul, I think I get it—the operative word being “think.” For, despite accepting most of the time that, yes, I’m a solidly “real” adult as a Millennial, I’m still humbled when I’m reminded that I really am like a child in many ways when it comes to understanding God. The more I realize this, I recognize the paradox. God both wants us to grow in our relationships with God and others, but also accepts that we’re going to be childlike compared to the expanse and awesomeness (in the true sense of the word) of God’s very being.

You might be wondering: Why did I bring up 1 Corinthians 13:11 in the first place? When I ponder the readings for this Sunday, I’m struck by two parallels with the Corinthians text. First, there is the gradual unveiling of what it means to love God—and be loved by God—that took place from the time of Moses to the time of Jesus. Second, there is the personal, ongoing evolution of my understanding of who God is and what God’s love and mercy truly entail. The Ten Commandments remind me of the absolute “dos” and “don’ts” that I learned as a child



when it comes to basic concepts of life, such as: “Don’t put your hand on the stove.” “Say ‘please’ and ‘thank you.’” Over time, we learn the basic “whys” in more detail: that putting your hand on the stove can hurt you, and that pleasantries are kind. With more time, we learn additional details of those “whys”: how a stove operates and the science of pain, or the principles of human dignity and respect.

In preparing this reflection on these readings collectively, I re-read them multiple times. Different words stood out to me at different times. The first time: all the “You shalls” and “You shall nots.” The second time: The delineations between “Jews” and “Greeks” (and how *both* groups’ shortcomings were called out). The third time: Jesus’s fury at the Temple. The fourth time: Both the responsorial Psalm’s refrain—“Lord, you have the words of everlasting life”—and how Jesus understood human nature.

As I write this reflection, I remember the life milestones that I and those close to me have recently celebrated. I’m often struck by how we’re all solidly “adults,” yet I find myself becoming increasingly aware of my limitations and how I often still feel like a child who’s looking for “the adult in the room.” I also find myself revisiting words from Scripture or rote prayers that I first learned as an actual child and finding that I’m still, metaphorically, a child looking for the goodness of God and the comfort and certainty that God brings. There are days when realizing this about myself is comforting—and days when it’s not.

But God’s words have everlasting life, and Jesus understands our human nature. That can be enough for me to cling on to on those tough days. I pray the same for you, as we all continue to journey through life.

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We are so glad you took the time to ponder the “Paradox of Growth” with us! Join us next week as we contemplate the theme: “A Saving Love, A Saving Presence.”

Reflection questions:

- *As you go through the readings for this Sunday, what are the words that stand out to you the first time? A second time? A third time?*
 - *What are concepts about God, or relating to God, that have evolved for you over time?*
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Opening & Closing Prayers

Awaken Me by Joyce Rupp

Risen One,
Come, meet me in the garden of my life.
Lure me into elation.
Revive my silent hope.
Coax my dormant dreams.
Raise up my neglected gratitude.
Entice my tired enthusiasm.
Give life to my faltering relationships.
Roll back the stone of my indifference.
Unwrap the deadness in my spiritual life.
Impart heartiness in my work.
Risen One,
Send me forth as a disciple of your unwavering love,
a messenger of your unlimited joy.
Resurrected One,
may I become ever more convinced
that your presence lives on,
and on, and on, and on.
Awaken me!
Awaken me!

In the Hands of God by Pedro Arrupe, SJ

More than ever I find myself in the hands of God.
This is what I have wanted all my life from my youth.
But now there is a difference;
the initiative is entirely with God.
It is indeed a profound spiritual experience
to know and feel myself so totally in God's hands.