



FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

March 17, 2024

St. James Catholic Church

*3909 Harrison * Kansas City, Missouri 64110*

Reflection from Joan DeMerchant

“...This journey is Our Destiny.”

Yes, Kansas City is celebrating St. Patrick’s Day; the evenings are now longer and brighter; buds and blossoms are everywhere; and Easter is just a heartbeat away. We need to wait a minute, though...today’s readings remind us that we have to get through some suffering before we break out the Hallelujahs.

Lent calls us to penitence and change, but as we move toward Holy Week and Easter, we’re confronted with the reality that we can’t really get anywhere without actual suffering. We say it’s part of life, and it is. As people of faith, we explore it through another lens.

There isn’t a person here who hasn’t lived through...or isn’t living through suffering. We can see and hear it from one another when we gather as a community. We see it in aging and wounded bodies and shoulders bent from painful worries about ourselves and our loved ones. We hear about it in the issues we’re trying to faithfully address. St. James is in the heart of where suffering can be found. We’re “down and dirty” in it, as some would say...close to a lot of poverty and pain and always at the edge of existence in a church system that seems to favor economic stability and membership statistics. We can’t watch the news without being bombarded with the lack of affordable health or child care, homelessness, Covid’s aftermath, the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, thousands seeking entry at the border, or holding onto democracy amid the rise of autocracy, etc. Suffering touches everything from the personal to the universal.

Who is this God who demands such suffering? I ask myself that sometimes. And what’s the point? The God of the Old Testament sounds like one tough God. Many writers—including today’s Jeremiah—experienced God as forgiving, but only after demanding discipline and suffering from the people. Jesus himself tells us in the Gospel that God calls him to suffer, and that he does so for us.

There are different perspectives on the meaning of this. I’m still not always sure who this God is. The only perspective that makes any sense is that suffering means something if endured for the sake of others...whether that’s my suffering, yours, or Jesus’. And whether it calls us to ease the burden of one another in whatever way we can. 39th and Troost is sacred because of the suffering people who interact here, and that includes us. We can’t solve everything...can’t be in Ukraine or Gaza or Haiti or El Paso or Washington. But we can be with and for one another wherever we are in our pain. We’re told that Easter is coming. It’s a long journey, whose end we cannot see. We will be pondering this again next year. We will suffer through this together. And God—whoever that is—will be with us.