

PRAYING WITH ALPHONSUS IN LENT

(ADAPTED FROM TERRY MORAN, *In the Spirit of St. Alphonsus*)

Environment:

- A large reproduction of the Redemptorist seal (crest)
- A live plant
- Candle
- A plate or bowl filled with unsalted almonds, at least one for each person



Gathering Hymn: Any Lenten Hymn well-known to the group

CALL TO PRAYER

Presider: The original seal designed by St. Alphonsus for the Redemptorist Congregation depicted a large eye looking at the cross. It was intended to illustrate a verse from the prophet Jeremiah, “I see a branch of the watching tree.” In the ancient Near East, the almond tree was nicknamed “the watching tree” because it was the first tree to blossom in Spring. It “watched” for the ending of winter and was alert to the signs of new life. The cross heralds the end of the long winter and announces the springtime of new life in relationship with God.

This Lent, as we prepare for the celebration of the paschal triduum, we pray for the grace of conversion. We pray for the grace to see the world and ourselves with new eyes, with eyes that see life in the midst of death, possibility in the midst of failure, the image and likeness of God in broken humanity. And so we pray:

Presider: When fear gives way to openness and growth....

All: I see a branch of the watching tree.

Presider: When old quarrels are forgotten, and enemies begin to speak to each other...

All: I see a branch of the watching tree.
Presider: When people venture out of isolation to form community...
All: I see a branch of the watching tree.
Presider: When hidden talents are discovered, and creativity flourishes...
All: I see a branch of the watching tree.
Presider: When people have the courage to begin again after failure...
All: I see a branch of the watching tree.

FIRST READING

Reader 1: Jeremiah 1: 4-12

Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,
'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
and before you were born I consecrated you;
I appointed you a prophet to the nations.'
Then I said, 'Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I
am only a boy.' But the LORD said to me,
'Do not say, "I am only a boy";
for you shall go to all to whom I send you,
and you shall speak whatever I command you.
Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you,
says the LORD.'
Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and
the LORD said to me, 'Now I have put my words in your mouth.
See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms,
to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow,
to build and to plant.'

The word of the LORD came to me, saying, 'Jeremiah, what do you
see?' And I said, 'I see a branch of an almond tree.' Then
the LORD said to me, 'You have seen well, for I am watching over
my word to perform it.'

Silence

SECOND READING

Reader 2: From *The Passion and Death of Jesus Christ*, by St. Alphonsus
Liguori.

Jesus, the high priest, by sacrificing his life for the salvation of his
beloved humanity, accomplished the work of redemption. Jesus
Christ, by dying, stripped our death of its terrors. His death makes
us worthy to enjoy the same glory that God enjoys and to hear God

say one day to us, "Enter into the joy of your Lord." ... God has more care for us than we have for ourselves. He regards our life as his own riches and our death as his own loss. O how great is our glory, that, while we live in this valley of tears, we are able to say, "We are the Lord's;" we are his possessions.

STEPS OF THE PASSION

Presider: Each afternoon, while his brothers were taking their afternoon siesta, Alphonsus would pray the Way of the Cross, which hung in the corridor outside his room. In order not to disturb his resting brothers, Alphonsus would remove his shoes and make the Stations in his bare feet. He reminds us that our devotion to the Passion of Christ should give us tender hearts, full of compassion for human weakness. Alphonsus spent many hours contemplating the Passion of Jesus. He also spent many hours in contemplation of the passion of the poor. We pray now a contemporary adaptation of the Steps of the passion of Jesus, written by St. Alphonsus.

Step 1: Loving Jesus, in the garden, your fear was so great that your sweat became like drops of blood; even in such agony, you raised your voice in prayer. Loving Jesus, enable us to be the companions of all who are afraid and suffering.

Refrain: Jesus, remember me when you come into Your Kingdom.
Jesus, remember me when you come into Your Kingdom.

Step 2: Loving Jesus, you were betrayed by the kiss of a friend, abandoned by your disciples, and taken into custody as a criminal. Loving Jesus, console all those who suffer the pains of broken relationships.

Refrain: Jesus, remember me when you come into Your Kingdom.
Jesus, remember me when you come into Your Kingdom.

Step 3: Loving Jesus, you were dragged into court on false charges, and condemned to death. Loving Jesus, give us the courage to denounce injustice. Make us mindful of those in prison, especially those condemned to die.

Refrain: Jesus, remember me when you come into Your Kingdom.
Jesus, remember me when you come into Your Kingdom.

Step 4: Loving Jesus, you were stripped of your garments and cruelly beaten. Loving Jesus, make us mindful of those who suffer want because of our indulgence; of those for whom life is cruel and harsh.

- Refrain:** Jesus, remember me when you come into Your Kingdom.
Jesus, remember me when you come into Your Kingdom.
- Step 5:** Loving Jesus, you were crowned with thorns, clothed in a purple robe, and mocked and derided by the soldiers. Loving Jesus, forgive us our persistent prejudices, our mocking of the stranger, our heartless words and cold glances.
- Refrain:** Jesus, remember me when you come into Your Kingdom.
Jesus, remember me when you come into Your Kingdom.
- Step 6:** Loving Jesus, the thief Barrabas was preferred to you, and you were condemned by Pilate to the horrible death of the cross. Loving Jesus, forgive us the suffering we have caused by our indifference, our failures to act, our closing of our eyes and ears to those who suffer.
- Refrain:** Jesus, remember me when you come into Your Kingdom.
Jesus, remember me when you come into Your Kingdom.
- Step 7:** Loving Jesus, you bore the wood of the cross, and were led to your execution like a lamb led to slaughter. Loving Jesus, make us sensitive to those for whom life is a crushing burden, and help us to relieve them in their need and lighten their load.
- Refrain:** Jesus, remember me when you come into Your Kingdom.
Jesus, remember me when you come into Your Kingdom.
- Step 8:** Loving Jesus, you were nailed on the cross between two thieves, and for three hours endured the terrible torments of the cross. Loving Jesus, make your presence felt by those who are ravaged by disease and who know in their own flesh the torments of the cross.
- Refrain:** Jesus, remember me when you come into Your Kingdom.
Jesus, remember me when you come into Your Kingdom.
- Step 9:** Loving Jesus, your side was pierced by the lance, and blood and water poured out. Loving Jesus, from your open side was born the Sacramental life of the Church. Make us always grateful for the abundance of life that flowed from your suffering and death.
- Refrain:** Jesus, remember me when you come into Your Kingdom.
Jesus, remember me when you come into Your Kingdom.
- Step 10:** Loving Jesus, you were taken down from the cross and placed into the arms of your mother. Loving Jesus, console all parents who feel themselves powerless before the sufferings of their children.

Refrain: Jesus, remember me when you come into Your Kingdom.
Jesus, remember me when you come into Your Kingdom.

Step 11: Loving Jesus, marked by your five wounds, you were anointed for death and placed in the tomb. Loving Jesus, risen from the dead, your wounds are glorious, the signs of love's triumph over death.

Refrain: Jesus, remember me when you come into Your Kingdom.
Jesus, remember me when you come into Your Kingdom.

FAITH SHARING

Presider: Calling to mind the image of the watching tree, share with the person next to you where you see new life emerging in the midst of death, in your own life, in your community, in the Church, or in the world.

CLOSING RITUAL

The Presider passes the plate/bowl of almonds around the group, inviting them to keep the almond with them throughout the Season of Lent, in their pockets or in some place where they can see it, as a reminder to see the world with new eyes, the eyes of the Redeemer.

BLESSING

Presider: AS we conclude our prayer, let us make the Sign of the Cross over one another's eyes, that we might look upon the world, one another, and ourselves with God's own mercy and compassion.