

Lenten readings explored

Lent is a season of joy.

Come again? "Repentance is a season of joy," claims Father Peter Feldmeier, PhD. And in the 95 pages of *Not by Bread Alone: Reflections for Lent 2003* he delves into the riches found in the lectionary readings for the weekdays and Sundays of Lent.

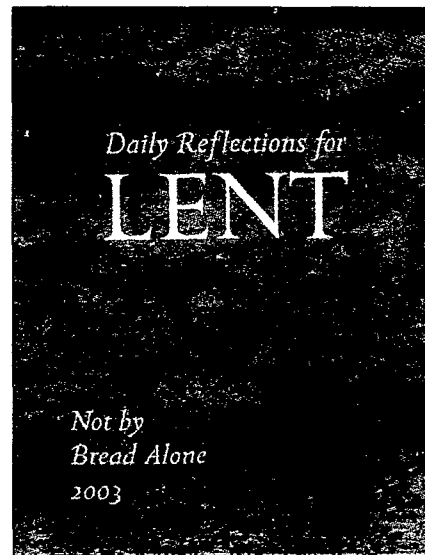
His thesis is that we will only be truly joyful when we are united with God, and so he examines the ways that we are led to this joyful union through the traditional Lenten practices of fasting, almsgiving and prayer.

Each reflection lists the Scripture readings for the day and provides a brief quotation from one of them, followed by Father Feldmeier's comments. These take various forms: contemporary anecdotes, textual analysis, practical advice and personal musings. There is something here to appeal to all levels of readers.

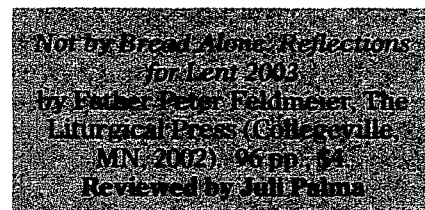
The author then provides two or three questions which he labels "Meditation" followed by a brief prayer for the day. These latter sections are his weakness. Some of the questions are linked to the reflections only very loosely, or raise a theological point that may confuse the less well-versed reader.

For example, Father Feldmeier's reflection on Luke 9:24, "Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it," uses the symbolic death in baptism, the paschal mystery, phrases such as "a new lease on life" and "God wants to remake us." However, the meditation poses the question: How do I understand the call to conversion?

I had to look hard at the reflection to find the connection between conversion and the terms listed above. I think the author was writing here for an audience of his students of spirituality at Saint Paul Seminary of Divinity. Yet many of the prayers at the end use phrasing that is most appropriate to children or



Not by
Bread Alone
2003



teenagers: "I thank you Lord for eating with me. And by your Eucharist you even feed me at your table."

This unevenness in diction and tone is much less apparent when one is not reading a whole week's reflections in one day, so it is a minor stumbling block. Overall, I find the author to sound like a spiritual director who is also a personal friend: sometimes challenging, but always encouraging, loving and willing to admit to his own struggles.

In fact, I liked the book immediately when the Ash Wednesday reflection opened with "Aren't you tired of yourself?"

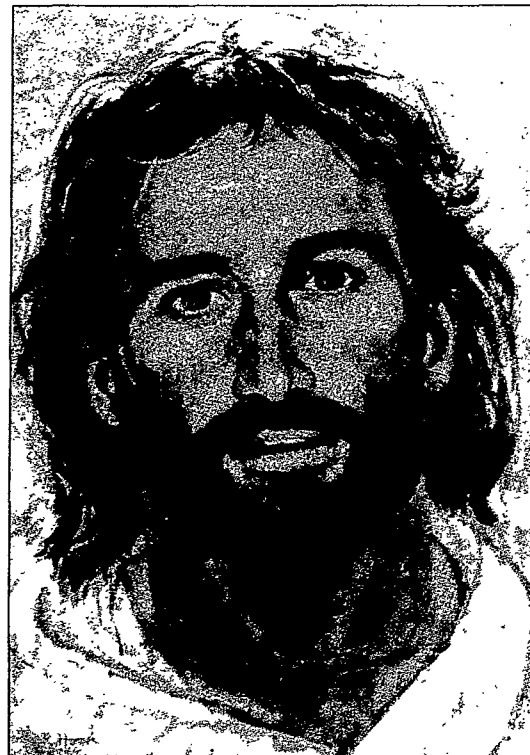
This is the refrain that Father Feldmeier returns to time and again. Our joyful union with God is only possible when we get out of the way. He encourages the reader to see with God's eyes, to come ever closer to God's love by following Jesus. The prayers beg to have one's life "transformed into the Life of the Spirit."

But he is very aware of the daily demands of life. His meditations and prayers abound with references to "my very ordinary life," "clutter," "competitive world," "life's trivia." One of his stories concerns a traveler who visited a renowned holy man to speak with him of "great and lofty things." But, he learned that "the essence of holiness ... came in the common struggle to purify one's self in God's grace — nothing more."

If a reader can't take the time each day to examine and reflect upon the readings, the pages on the Sundays of Lent provide ample material for the whole week. They read like well-crafted homilies, and the meditation questions are the best of the group. The prayers that follow the Sunday reflections would serve well as mantras for the weekdays.

Don't pass up this opportunity to discover the joys of the Lenten season. Set aside a time each day for the reading and reflection. It can put you on the path to a closer relationship with God, and, as Father Feldmeier says, it's a journey worth taking.

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**"Who do
you say
that
I AM?"**

Theme 2003

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**SSJ
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DEEPENING YOUR PRAYER:
Lenten Retreat with Fr. John Mergenhagen

Friday, March 7 (7:00) :
Sunday, March 9 (3:00 p.m.)

GOD IS LIFE, LIGHT, LOVE:
A Lenten Renewal Experience
Mary Louise Heffernan, SSJ
Thursday March 6, 13, 20, 27
1:30 - 3:00 p.m. or 7:30 - 9:00 p.m.

PRAYER FOR PEACE
Spend Some Time in the Quiet
Wednesday, March 5, 12, 19, 26, April 2
1:30 - 3:30 p.m. Time for personal prayer
with communal service at 3:00 p.m.

For information and reservations call Karen, 336-4370