

LENT DEVOTIONAL

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LENTEN DEVOTIONAL MARCH 16, 2024

SCRIPTURE

MARK 9:14-29

14 When they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and some scribes arguing with them. 15 When the whole crowd saw him, they were immediately overcome with awe, and they ran forward to greet him. 16 He asked them, "What are you arguing about with them?" 17 Someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought you my son; he has a spirit that makes him unable to speak; 18 and whenever it seizes him, it dashes him down; and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid; and I asked your disciples to cast it out, but they could not do so." 19 He answered them, "You faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him to me." 20 And they brought the boy to him. When the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. 21 Jesus asked the father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. 22 It has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us." 23 Jesus said to him, "If you are able! - All things can be done for the one who believes." 24 Immediately the father of the child cried out, "I believe; help my unbelief!" 25 When Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You spirit that keeps this boy from speaking and hearing, I command

you, come out of him, and never enter him again!" 26 After crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, "He is dead." 27 But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he was able to stand. 28 When he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" 29 He said to them, "This kind can come out only through prayer."

DEVOTION

The Rev. Dr. Graham D. S. Deans '06

It's remarkable how frequently great occasions are so swiftly followed by great challenges that drive us almost to despair. Today's post-Transfiguration narrative is a case in point—for after scaling the heights, we plunge to the depths, as we are confronted with a situation where failure loomed large. Back to reality with a bump!

Our Lord's disciples found themselves unable to heal a young man who was clearly deeply disturbed—psychologically, physically, and spiritually—and his father was at his wits' end. His faith was being challenged by circumstances that he could not control; and we feel for him. The disciples had tried to help, but had failed to cure the boy's distressing and self-destructive behaviour (which was attributed to demon-possession); and their confidence must have been at a pretty low ebb. Even Jesus was exasperated by their failure. So he had to take charge of the situation himself.

The curse of failure affects all who are called to ministry—for none of us is ever omni-competent. We need to have the grace and the humility to accept that we don't have all the answers to life's deepest and most challenging questions—but like the disciples, we do know someone who does.

The causes of failure are many and varied. But pressure, stress, pastoral inexperience, lack of spiritual perception and wisdom, and sometimes, even over-confidence in one's own abilities are surely significant. The necessary qualities to enable us to exercise an effective ministry may take a lifetime to develop properly.

The same goes for the cure for failure: it does not come instantaneously, but results from the discipline of lifelong learning from the Master—whose strategy for overcoming failure may be summarised by the exhortation: "If at first you don't succeed, pray, pray, pray again!"¹

PRAYER

Almighty and eternal God,
whose Spirit helps us in our weakness,
and guides us in our prayers;
give us the grace and humility
to learn of him who was gentle and lowly of heart;
that we may find rest for our souls
in accordance with our Saviour's promise,
and thus be enabled to minister effectively
in his name. Amen.

¹ From Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (2001), 265.

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