

It's spring, and the first blooms of flowers are showing their face
in our front yards.

Those flowers and this morning's warmth are welcome signs
of the good news that spring is here.

There are hints of good news in the scriptures today, too,
but as in our gardens, we might need to do a little raking
to see where those blossoms are appearing.

Remember these words from today's second lesson?

*God, who is rich in mercy,
because of the great love he had for us,
even when we were dead in our transgressions,
brought us to life with Christ, raised us up with him,
and seated us with him in the heavens...*

This God did for us - this God DOES for us -
*even while we were dead in our transgressions,
even while we are dead in our sins...*

And that's good news, especially:

- for any of us who believe we've committed some sin God won't forgive;
- or for any of us who find ourselves committing the same
sins over and over again;
- or for any of us who find it hard to believe in and accept God's mercy;
- or for any of us who find it impossible to forgive ourselves...

The good news is that God's mercy and pardon and forgiveness
do not wait or depend on us, or our contrition,
or on anything we do or say,
but rather, *even when we are dead in our sins,*
the grace of God is saving us, raising us up,
and seating us with Christ in the heavens...

In fact, it is the grace of God that calls us to be contrite,
that calls us to regret our sins and acknowledge them,
precisely so that the Lord can bathe and cleanse us in the mercy and peace
he so much wants to share with us.

It's all grace, it's all gift: we can do nothing to earn or merit
the peace God offers us in Jesus...

At Mass during the season of Lent,
I've been using the Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation.
Listen to some of its phrases and see how clearly they reflect

what St. Paul writes to us today:

- *You never cease to call us to a new and more abundant life...*
- *You are always ready to forgive...*
- *You invite us to trust in your mercy...*
- *Time and time again we broke your covenant*
– but you did not abandon us,
instead, through Jesus, you bound yourself even more closely
to the human family...
- *When we were lost and could not find the way,*
you loved us more than ever...

And Jesus echoes this same theme in the gospel today:

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son
so that everyone who believes in him might not perish
but might have eternal life.
God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world,
but so that the world might be saved through him.

Lent is a season to come out of the darkness of sin
to be bathed in the healing, saving light of Jesus.
Lent is a time to allow our thirst for mercy
to be quenched by the cool waters of Christ's saving peace.
Lent is a time for God to bring us to life in Christ,
even though we may be dead in our sins,
a time for God to raise us up with his Son who came not to condemn us
but so that we might live.

We need not wait for Easter for such peace.
It is here for us every time we gather at the Lord's altar
where Jesus, who came that we might have life,
offers us his life in the bread and cup of the Eucharist.
Once again, from the Eucharistic Prayer:
We do this in memory of Jesus Christ,
our Passover and our lasting peace.
Here we celebrate his death and resurrection
and look for the coming of that day when he will return
to give us the fullness of joy.

- *Rev. Austin Fleming*