



Lent reflection for March 21, 2025

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**Psalm 39: 1-13**

*I said, 'I will guard my ways  
that I may not sin with my tongue;  
I will keep a muzzle on my mouth  
as long as the wicked are in my presence.'  
I was silent and still;  
I held my peace to no avail;  
my distress grew worse,  
my heart became hot within me.  
While I mused, the fire burned;  
then I spoke with my tongue:*

*'Lord, let me know my end,  
and what is the measure of my days;  
let me know how fleeting my life is.  
You have made my days a few handbreadths,  
and my lifetime is as nothing in your sight.  
Surely everyone stands as a mere breath. Selah  
Surely everyone goes about like a shadow.  
Surely for nothing they are in turmoil;  
they heap up, and do not know who will gather.*

*'And now, O Lord, what do I wait for?  
My hope is in you.  
Deliver me from all my transgressions.  
Do not make me the scorn of the fool.  
I am silent; I do not open my mouth,  
for it is you who have done it.  
Remove your stroke from me;  
I am worn down by the blows[a] of your hand.*

*'You chastise mortals  
in punishment for sin,  
consuming like a moth what is dear to them;  
surely everyone is a mere breath. Selah  
'Hear my prayer, O Lord,  
and give ear to my cry;  
do not hold your peace at my tears.  
For I am your passing guest,  
an alien, like all my forebears.  
Turn your gaze away from me, that I may smile again,  
before I depart and am no more.'*

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### Today's reflection if from Billy Lopez:

What do we do in a moment of perceived offense? When someone says or does something that sparks our anger, indignation, or agita, what is the right action? Do we "guard our ways" and keep silent, lest in our response we end up sinning ourselves? When is it right to speak up, to push back, and how can we discern this?

These are some of the questions with which the Psalmist seems to reckon. Faced with abuse, he chooses not to turn his anger towards his fellow mortals, who, just like him, lead lives insubstantial as "shadows," or "a mere breath." Rather, he looks to God, and prays, reasoning that his tormentors must be the Lord's instruments of "punishment for sin." And he makes a choice: "I do not open my mouth, / for it is you who have done it."

I often struggle with knowing how, or even whether, to react in challenging situations. Sometimes I hold my tongue, but unlike the Psalmist, forget to pray afterwards, or, worse, choose not to, because looking back on the interaction feels too painful. When I do let God in, it always feels better, even if sometimes I hear myself trying to rationalize my actions (or lack thereof) while talking to God. The hardest part of the prayer for me is quieting those same emotions that necessitated it, so that I might be open to what God might have to say (which may not be what I want to hear).

Those moments when I do choose to respond can be equally difficult, for how they leave me in uncertainty. Was I too harsh, or forceful, or thin-skinned, to react as I did, I'm often left wondering.

The choice, though, it would seem to me, is the thing.

I don't believe every slight or seeming transgression we face in this life is an instance of God summing our accounts, and therefore our role is to stand mute and pray for respite in the aftermath. We may spend the few handbreadths of our days here going about as shadows, heaping up worthless wealth destined only to decay in our wake, but God has granted us blood and heat, intelligence and senses by which to navigate society and discern our relationships within it. Our ultimate transience doesn't preclude or negate our experience here in this material realm, and to focus solely on where we're headed next is to ignore the mortal assignment we've taken up in being human. We feel the pain of insult and anger, yes, and what we do with it is our choice. The Psalmist stays quiet and prays for reprieve. Jesus turned the other cheek. I forget to pray, or cast about in my uncertainty of action. Even in our choosing, it seems, we know not what we do. But at least we have the choice each time.



Billy Lopez is a writer and musician. He lives in Brooklyn with his family and a few even more ridiculous animals.