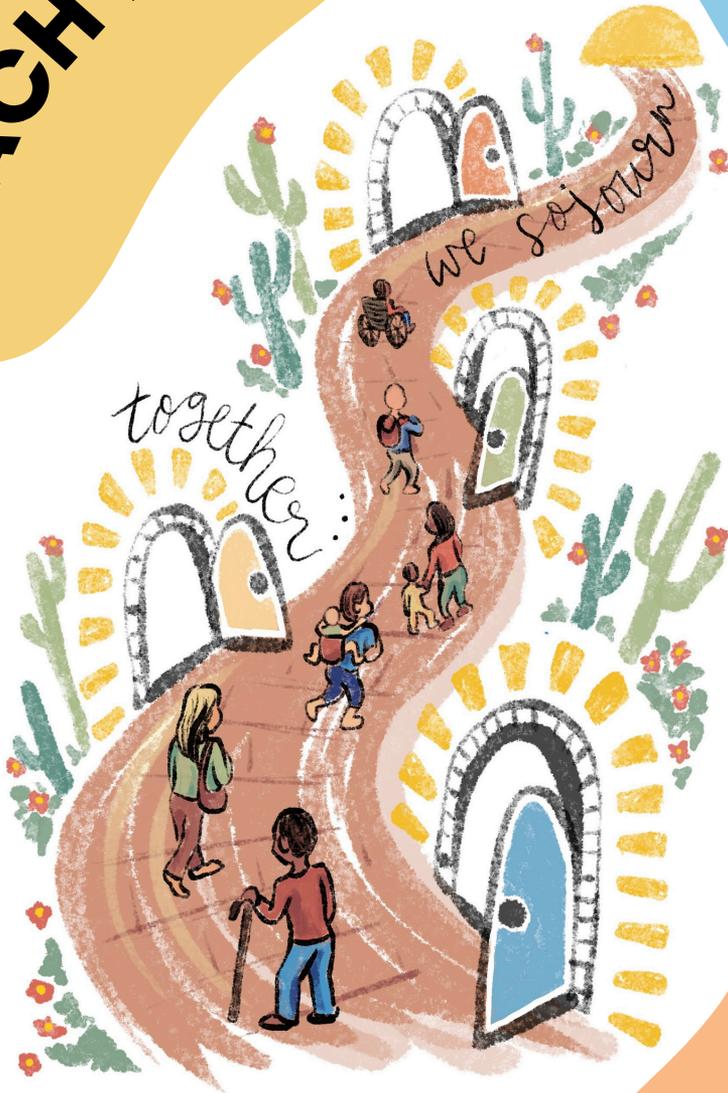


TEACH ME YOUR WAYS



LENTEN REFLECTIONS
For College Students and Sojourners

UNIVERSITY OF PROVIDENCE
Office for Mission Integration



TEACH ME YOUR WAYS

Gentle Reader,

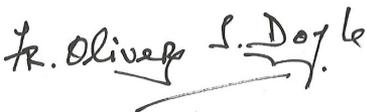
When I was young, Ash Wednesday, like New Years Day, inspired dread mingled with anticipated disappointment. Dread because of the expectations of faith and society to give up something, improve myself and become a better Oliver. Disappointment because of the learned futility of such commitments, from previous Lenten failures.

I no longer consider Lent as a time to 'give up something.' Now, I view Lent as an invitation to reconnect with those parts of my spirit that have slipped their moorings.

But before I can reconnect, I must survey the damage done by the choppy waters of life. Surveying requires taking time to reflect, by pointing the inner light of attention towards the many threads I try to weave as the rich tapestry of self. Threads of relationships that nurture my heart and those that are strained and worn thin with friction. Threads that are loose and frayed from neglected dreams and those that brightly radiate dreams fulfilled. They are all there, the beautiful and the ugly, the bright and the faded, the thick and thin. Reflecting on each one always leads my focus, to the ultimate weaver, God.

I am delighted that our Mission and Ministry team, especially A.J. Hoy and Roy Lanham have called into life this source for our Lenten reflection. It is a great gift to have them and the many other contributors as fellow travelers on my Lenten journey. Thank you.

May our reflection prompt us to pray, fast, and do some good so that our souls are once again steadfastly moored in the fullness of God's grace filled presence.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Oliver J. Doyle". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Fr. Oliver
President of the University of Providence

TEACH ME YOUR WAYS

Lenten Reflections for College Students and Sojourners

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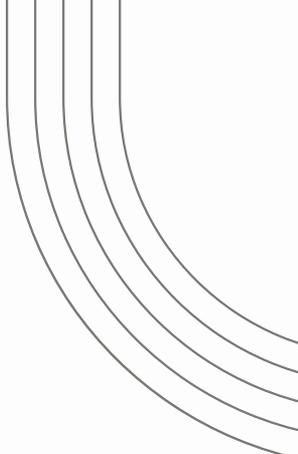


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The Week of Ash Wednesday

REFLECTIONS BY

A.J. HOY, M.T.S.

Vice President for Mission Integration

& ROY LANHAM, M.A.

Director of Campus Ministry



Ash Wednesday

- **FIRST READING: JOEL 2:12-18**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 51:3-4, 5-6AB, 12-13, 14 & 17**
- **SECOND READING: 2 CORINTHIANS 5:20—6:2**
- **GOSPEL: MATTHEW 6:1-6, 16-18**

I'm fairly certain that you know the feeling of admitting that you have done something wrong. Perhaps you broke some social norm, or one of God's laws, or you may have even hurt someone. Whatever you did that required you to admit wrongdoing, you are not alone, and your situation is not unique. One of the earliest known character traits of humanity is moral failure. It's no coincidence that Sacred Scripture depicts the first humans as having sinned and thus "fallen" from a state of grace. Biblical authors do not detail generations upon generations of perfect people only for the line to fall away from God with one horrible generation. From nearly the beginning, humans were not perfect in their intentions, choices, actions, or in their execution of their own moral agency. Though it may sound cynical, you likely know that people (you and I included) do not always make the best or most just decisions and that our world is simply soaked with the stuff of sin.

Today marks the beginning of a decently lengthy journey towards a common liturgical end, the Feast of all Feasts, Easter. So important is this coming feast of joy and redemption that as a church we will spend the next 40 days in collective prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Our Gospel today uses Jesus' direct teaching to lay out the specifics of each of these practices. Above all, Lent is a time of preparation. I recall as a child thinking that during Lent, God wanted me to hate myself and all that was wrong with me. When I was a child, I thought as a child. I'm happy to tell you that that's not what Lent is.

On this day we mark ourselves as sinners, people who have failed, with signs of ashes just as generations have done for centuries before us. But we do not do this for purposes of self-loathing or to degrade ourselves in the presence of God. Ash Wednesday calls us to look around at the world and realize that we are not yet in the Kingdom of God. I use "kingdom" here because our eternal life with God will image the Trinity, our God who is in eternal relationship, our God who is kin. We have not yet attained salvation from our failings and so we do not yet dwell as kin to one another. Indeed, sin and moral failure still permeate the human experience.

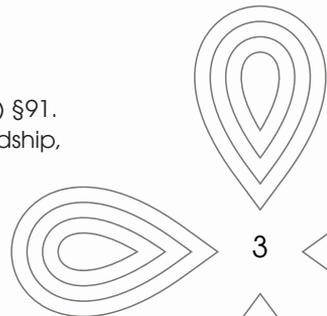
While we beg for God’s mercy as today’s Responsorial Psalm states, we can only do that once we realize that we need it because we are not perfect like God is. Nothing about this calls us toward depression, self-hatred, or despair. Today, we are simply called to take stock of how far we still must travel on this way of salvation.

This resource is structured so that it can accompany you on our collective way of salvation. In reading it and praying with it, you are joining hundreds of others on this journey, collectively taking one step at a time closer to our shared end, the salvation of God. As you begin, it is important that you realize that you are not alone. As Pope Francis is fond of writing, “Everything is connected” (1), and “No one is saved alone; we can only be saved together.” (2) This resource serves to help you be in community with others and to walk with others toward God, all the while engaging in prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

As we begin this season of preparation and shared reflection in and through this resource, I ask that you keep three things in mind. First, you are loved, and you are good. Even though you may fail from time to time, you (and every person you encounter) are far more than the worst thing you (or they) have ever done. As we have already established, every human has failed. Secondly, we’re not there yet. This is not yet the Kingdom of God, but that does not mean we should stop trying. Throughout Lent, we are called to acknowledge our sins so that we can get back to building up the Kingdom of God. Our mission is to continue the work of Jesus, and we can only do that if we realize that our work is not yet complete. Finally, you are not alone. We beg of God’s mercy together, we worship together, we fast together. Lent is a communal exercise precisely because no person is an island, and no one is saved alone. If you desire to walk the path of salvation, you are going to have company. Let’s get started.

- When was the last time I admitted that I was wrong? Did I do anything to fix what I had done?
- Do I ever find myself tempted to do something that I know may hurt someone or break a rule or law? What is pulling me toward that?
- Who can I walk with during this Lenten journey? Take a moment to write down the names of one or two people.

(1) Francis. *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home*, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015) §91.
(2) Francis. *Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship*, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2020) §32.



Thursday after Ash Wednesday

- **FIRST READING: DEUTERONOMY 30:15-20**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 1:1-2, 3, 4 AND 6**
- **GOSPEL: LUKE 9:22-25**

As a child, entering the Lenten season meant there were three things my parents made sure we did: give up something, pray extra prayers, and put money in the Rice Bowl sitting on our kitchen table. Prayer, we understood. We would go to Stations of the Cross on Friday evenings, and we would offer extra prayers at night before bed. Self-denial and almsgiving were different animals. Our giving up something like chocolate or sweets was easy because my folks did not purchase any during Lent, and we only had soda pop on special occasions. We did not think about giving up things like gossip or lying or some other vice.

Putting money in the Rice Bowl was hard. As kids we only received a dime for our allowance each week, and we had to give 5 cents to the Sunday collection. This left us with only a precious nickel. Why should some kid halfway around the world get my nickel or even a penny? Why not send them the lima beans we all hated to eat at dinner? No such luck.

The truth is I didn't understand the Lord's words in today's Gospel about self-denial. Even as I aged and paid attention to the readings, I did not make the connection until I realized the disciplines of Lent are about conversion and preparing us to make our "yes" to the Lord, to be willing to live a life in freedom for him.

- What disciplines are you choosing to do this Lent? Take a moment to write them down. Are they leading you to bring about lasting change for Christ? Do they help you take up your cross and follow the Lord? If not, make a new list.
- How can your practices of Lent lead you to make a difference in the lives of others who are in need? Place a Rice Bowl on your desk or table as a reminder that we are called to live our life for the other.



Friday after Ash Wednesday

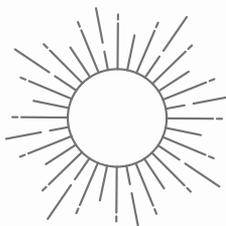
- **FIRST READING: ISAIAH 58: 1-9A**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 51:3-4, 5- 6AB, 18-19**
- **GOSPEL: MATTHEW 9:14-15**

Isaiah speaks out today for justice. He is not looking for any half measure. If we are thinking about easing into Lent, Isaiah makes it clear that it is time to jump into the deep end of the pool. He sets forth a list that, if we would choose to do even one of them, it could be the best Lent ever. I wonder what keeps us from embracing such a far-reaching vision. It seems too easy to get comfortable in living our faith. It just happens. Clarence Jordan, the co-founder of Koinonia Farms in Americus, Georgia, believes in Isaiah's disturbed peace: "One wonders why Christians today get off so easily. Is it because unchristian Americans are that much better than unchristian Romans, or is our light so dim that the tormentor can't see it?"(1)

Lent gives us the chance to allow our light to "break forth like the dawn." We can be beacons sharing the light of Christ to all, and yet, we hesitate. What keeps us from going all in? Sin for sure. Believing we are not worthy to be a conduit for God's grace is a close second. However, God does not want our sense of false humility, but rather "a heart contrite and humbled."

So today is a good day to see what might be possible if we allow our peace to be disturbed. Most of us will not be called to start a Koinonia Farm, but all of us are called to live our faith on the margins.

- Clarence Jordan adds this question to end of the above quote: "what are the things we do that are worth persecuting?" That is, do we live our faith so others would know that we see those who are marginalized in our society as worthy of God's love?
- Look at the passage from Isaiah. Take one thing from the list and plan to make that part of your almsgiving this Lent. What will it be for you?



(1) Joyce Hollyday, Clarence Jordan: Essential Writings (Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY: 2003) 84.

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

- **FIRST READING: ISAIAH 58:9B-14**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 86:1-2, 3-4, 5-6**
- **GOSPEL: LUKE 5:27-32**

Whenever I meet a pre-med or medical student, I immediately address them as “doctor.” I go on to speak to them about some pain I have or a health concern I am dealing with at the time. An odd thing occurs. 100% of them inform me that they are not able to give me any medical advice, free or otherwise. Imagine my disappointment. In today’s Gospel, Jesus likens himself to a physician. The passage from Isaiah also provides a reference to God renewing our strength and we will “be like a watered garden, like a spring whose water never fails.”

When the Sisters of Providence made the journey to the United States, wherever they settled, their ministry included healing people. It was part and parcel of their ministry. As we see in today’s reading, healing is more than just a physical cure. It is about restoration. Jesus meets Levi where he is, and by inviting him into a life of faith, he is restored. He is made whole. He becomes part of the community again. Furthermore, this coming into faith does not stay self-contained. Others are drawn to Jesus because Levi throws him a banquet.

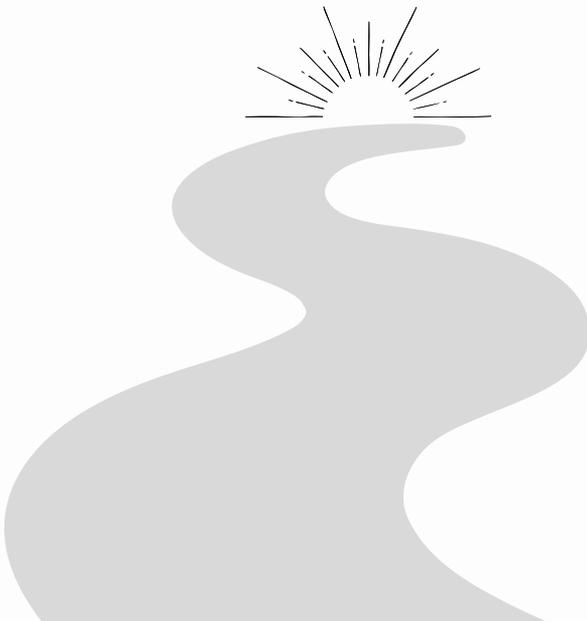
We need to think of ourselves as healers, as restorers. Helping people to become part of the community again is about ending division. It is about breaking down the barriers that separate us from one another. It is about hearing each other’s story and realizing we are all made in God’s image and likeness.

- Who in your life could you invite to share a meal, and in so doing, meet them where they are and come to know their story?
- The Sisters of Providence embraced the healing ministry of Christ. This was born out of their lives being centered on prayer. Do you know the Providence Prayer? Learn it this week and pray it each day of Lent.

The First Week of Lent

REFLECTIONS BY
KELLY QUICK, ED.D.

Professor of Exercise Science



First Sunday of Lent

- **FIRST READING: DEUTERONOMY 26:4-10**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 91:1-2, 10-11, 12-13, 14-15**
- **SECOND READING: ROMANS 10:8-13**
- **GOSPEL: LUKE 4:1-13**

Who didn't do maze puzzles as a child? Maybe you still do. It's said that doing puzzles is good for keeping our brains healthy and that they are an enjoyable way to pass the time. The goal of the maze is the same for everyone: create a singular path from the beginning of the maze to the end. As you look from above, you draw your path, and even though you can see the entire maze, it's still quite easy to hit a dead-end. So, you backtrack and take another route. Maybe you've done a corn maze where it's a little harder to navigate without the bird's eye view. The goal is the same, but the fun might turn more easily into frustration at encountering dead-ends repeatedly. "Did I go this way before? Surely not! I successfully navigated this last weekend...why is it so difficult now? My friends said it was easy and fun!"

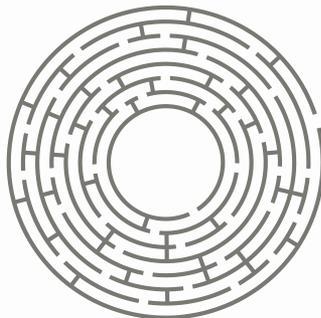
Our lives are like these corn mazes. We all have an entrance point, and we'll all have an exit point. Some people seem to encounter fewer barriers as they get through, while others can't seem to find a clear path for long at all. God sees our corn maze of life like it's a paper maze. God sees it from beginning to end, all at once. And as God sees it, God is with us as we go. We cannot forget that Jesus walked through his own maze of life, sometimes smoothly, sometimes encountering what appeared to be insurmountable barriers.

The authors of Scripture acknowledge the times they encountered barriers as individuals and as a people of God. They praised and gave thanks for the times in which, out of his love, God provided a way out. They understood without a shadow of a doubt (most of the time!) that God loved them and out of this relational love, guided them. This guidance took many forms like a pillar of fire, stone tablets of commandments given to Moses, and the life of Christ.

Our ancient ancestors also understood, perhaps better than we do, that God’s protective love isn’t a force field against problems. For them, they got hauled off to Babylon. For us, the Holocaust still happened. Climate change is real, devastating, and progressive. Good people we know, and love, die too soon. You failed a class you really, really worked hard in. You played an excellent game, but the team still lost. How do we still praise God for God’s protection and still feel like we can rely on God’s word when these things happen? “God...you promised to help us, so do it!!!”

When people fell, when the disobedience happened, it didn’t happen because God forced our ancestors to eat the forbidden fruit. They made a choice. God knew what they had done yet still sought them out in the garden. Consequences followed, but God’s love remained. God’s protection continued throughout biblical history, too. God’s protection continues with us in the same way...on God’s terms...for God’s purposes...and still as a product of God’s unrelenting love for us. Our response should mirror those who are in the great cloud of witnesses, praising God for who God is, relational love for us. Through obedience to God, we act out of love for God and our fellows, one day at a time.

- Consider times when it was easy for you to praise God for God’s working in your life. Compare that to times when it was difficult for you to find God in a situation. What is the difference in those situations, and how do these differences relate to the nature of God?
- How do you respond to difficulties you encounter? What are your immediate reactions? Your later reactions? How do your reactions compare to the ones we find in today’s readings?
- What would it take for you to fully trust in God’s protection while you are encountering difficulties?



Monday of the First Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: LEVITICUS 19:1-2, 11-18**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 19:8, 9, 10, 15**
- **GOSPEL: MATTHEW 25:31-46**

Colonel John "Hannibal" Smith of the A-Team frequently said, "I love it when a plan comes together!" So did Austin Capobianco and John P. Hansen, two die-hard New York Yankee baseball fans who planned, if they ever got the chance, to interfere with an opposing outfielder trying to catch a Yankee player's hit. They got their chance to put their plan into action on October 29, 2024, during Game 4 of the World Series. They pulled a Yankee-hit ball out of the glove of the outfielder, with one man grabbing the player and the other man grabbing the ball. Mission accomplished. Or...so they thought... These fans were not only ejected from Game 4 of the World Series; they were banned from Game 5. And since then, they have been banned from every major league baseball event for the rest of their lives. (1)

All actions have consequences, some immediate, some delayed. Some consequences we never know. Godly actions are pleasing to God. Being of service according to God's commands is one of the ways we maintain our relationship with God, a way to experience God. We allow God to work through us to perform these godly actions. This is how we experience salvation in the here and now. In biblical times spiritual consequences were sometimes referred to as judgments. God clearly expects us to be people of action, righteous action, as God defines righteousness. Today's readings define some of these expected actions, expected of God's people for God's people. But not only do our good actions benefit our spiritual siblings; they are equally done for the benefit of God. And with the just judgments of God, our actions also have consequences for ourselves.

- What can you do to recognize that God works through your actions when you are in alignment with God's purposes?
- How can you be certain your actions will be pleasing to God?
- How do today's readings shape your willingness to help others?

(1) Patrick Andres, Sports Illustrated, "Yankees Fans Who Interfered With Play During World Series Banned From All MLB Events" (January 10, 2025).

Tuesday of the First Week of Lent

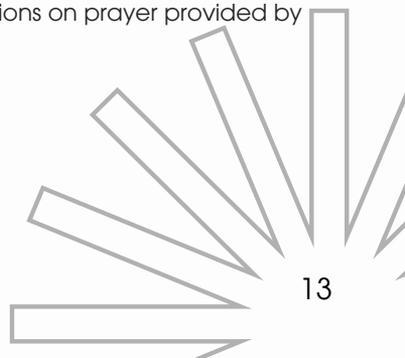
- **FIRST READING: ISAIAH 55:10-11**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 34:4-5, 6-7, 16-17, 18-19**
- **GOSPEL: MATTHEW 6:7-15**

I'm a busy woman. Making lessons, creating quizzes and homework—grading said quizzes and homework—and let's not forget meetings! Students must study for these quizzes and complete that homework. Hopefully you engage in campus clubs, and you may participate in athletics. It's probably hard to find anyone associated with college who isn't busy. Few of us have time to waste. Thus, I appreciate clear directions. Don't make me guess what you want me to do. Tell me directly.

In today's reading Jesus' disciples are getting clear directions on prayer. The Gospel of Luke says the disciples asked for this direction since John taught this to his disciples. Maybe they asked, not because they were busy, not because they wanted to keep up with the "Johnses", but because they wanted the most authentic relationship with God they could get. And as usual, Jesus delivered! The Lord's Prayer is iconic in its content and widely utilized, especially because of its emphasis on forgiveness. I think the prayer is more than a treatise on forgiveness. It's our request for God's Kingdom to be the same here and now as it is in heaven: forgiving others and being forgiven is only one manifestation of God's perfect kingdom. We absolutely need forgiveness for what we do, think, and say that results from our self-centered sinfulness. Forgiveness restores our relationships with our spiritual siblings, ourselves, and with our God. We must also remember that our faith is more than a route to personal spiritual achievement.

Our faith in and with God is a tool God uses to accomplish God's will so that it gets done on Earth as it is in heaven as closely as possible. God's will is God's purpose, and it will always be achieved. Align your prayers with God's will, and your prayers will always be answered.

- What do you think your role is in bringing the kingdom of heaven to Earth? Why would God entrust that job to you?
- How does your prayer life reflect the instructions on prayer provided by Jesus?



Wednesday of the First Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: JONAH 3:1-10**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 51:3-4, 12-13, 18-19**
- **GOSPEL: LUKE 11:29-32**

Reflection by

ASHLEY ROSARIO RAMOS

B.S. in Forensic Biology, A.S. in Criminal Justice,
Minors in Philosophy and Chemistry | Class of 2027

In today's readings, we are reminded of the power of repentance and the infinite mercy of God. As Christians, we strive for perfection, seeking to eradicate sin by exemplifying the teachings of Jesus as we go about our lives. However, the temptations of the world haunt the faithful to break and tear us apart, causing many to lose themselves and fall into sinfulness. Whether the sin is minuscule or gigantic, God's infinite mercy remains for us, waiting for our repentance. This transformative power of repentance awaits us all, but the action must be ours to take, with our willingness to recognize our failures as God's children being key.

Jonah's mission to Ninevah reveals God's desire to offer even the most sinful people an opportunity for redemption. Despite the wickedness of the Ninevites, upon hearing Jonah's call they promptly respond with prayer and fasting. Immediately humbling themselves, they recognize the harm of their sinful and wicked ways. This instant and profound willingness to seek repentance is something we, as Christians, should strive for, as our sinful ways can cause damage not only to ourselves but to those around us. Bowing in humility before our Creator is perhaps the most powerful position we can assume. For our humility can result in mercy from our God and inspire change not only in ourselves but also in others. Like Nineveh, we are not beyond the reach of God's mercy.

In this Lenten season, Jonah's story challenges us to reflect on our own need for repentance. Let us embrace this time of grace to seek God's forgiveness, trusting in his unfailing love and allowing his mercy to bring renewal and hope.

- In what areas of your life have you strayed from God's will? How can you better exemplify the preaching of Jesus?
- Is there an area of your life in which you routinely fall into sin? How can this be mitigated through teachings and prayer?

Thursday of the First Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: ESTHER C: 12, 14-16, 23-25**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 138: 1-2, 7-8**
- **GOSPEL: MATTHEW 7: 7-12**

Fear, or the feeling of fear, is a powerful force in our lives. It is frequently a foundational component of self-destruction. It can paralyze us, distort our perceptions and realities, and trigger us to react in ways we often regret. Fear is clearly part of the human condition, yet it is also something we rarely admit to others or even to ourselves. I'll bet while reading this, you've thought about a time in which fear controlled you, a time you haven't shared with others. Fear can be linked to shame, another common part of the human condition we don't like to talk about. But God knows us and loves us. God is aware of the things we have done, thought, or said, of which we are ashamed and afraid we can't make right. God is aware that these are manifestations of our sinful nature, yet these are what he came to save us from!

Today's readings are only a fraction of Scripture pointing to why God repeatedly says, "Fear not!" Instead, like Esther, when we are afraid, we are to ask God for courage. The psalmist praised God for the emboldenment he received from God. And Jesus promises in Matthew that whoever asks something of God receives "good gifts" from God (of course, there are caveats to this; God isn't Santa). God's forgiveness from the sins that bring us shame and/or fear is a gift, one which God has made very clear is given to us each and every time we ask. We have forgiveness; this is a gift as part of our salvation. Thanks be to God!

- How frequently do you turn to God when you are afraid or experiencing shame? What influences you to turn or not turn to God in these situations?
- In today's readings, both Esther and the psalmist had no issues asking God for help. What motivated them to believe God would help them? How can this information influence your ability to ask God for help?

Friday of the First Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: EZEKIEL 18:21-28**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 130**
- **GOSPEL: MATTHEW 5:20-26**

Step 10 out of any 12 Step Recovery program will read, “(We) (c)ontinued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.” The creators of these recovery groups understood the absolute need to be free of spiritual and temporal entanglements in order to live lives of sobriety, serenity, and service. These programs strongly suggest taking personal responsibility for what Scripture calls sin. Members, when and if prudent, seek out those of whom they have harmed and ask for forgiveness, even making restitution if required. By the time someone has completed the 12th step, they should understand how their past way of being is unacceptable because of the harm they have caused themselves and others, and they should have made their decision to live life differently going forward. Scripture calls this “repentance.”

Today’s readings support this spiritual path as well. The psalmist points to the role repentance plays in our capacity to serve God, but wickedness blocks this capacity. The passage in Ezekiel points to personal responsibility, in that we are responsible for our actions, and the passage in Matthew encourages us to get our affairs in order promptly. Collectively, the readings encourage all people, not just those in recovery, to pursue righteousness on an ongoing basis. We always have the ability to start over if we don’t have the best track record in righteous actions.

Repentance is open to all. We may need to repent/start over/promptly admit we’re wrong seventy times seven times per day! God knows this and wants us to seek God’s face, receive this life-giving forgiveness, and move forward into the salvation God makes available to us, whenever, wherever. Amen!

- What prevents you from promptly admitting you are wrong? What from today’s reflection and readings may help you to improve in this area?
- How do you understand the relationship between repentance and being able to serve? How has this understanding changed after you have studied today’s readings?

Saturday of the First Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: DEUTERONOMY 26:16-19**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 119:1-2, 4-5, 7-8**
- **GOSPEL: MATTHEW 5:43-48**

As I write today's reflection, I use my process: I find and write out the Scriptures in the translation I understand. Deuteronomy is about covenant relationship with God. Got it. The Psalm declares we are blessed when we are obedient to God...cha-ching! Now to Matthew...Chapter 5 is the Sermon on the Mount, so this will be good: "...love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." My enthusiasm tanks...I was doing good until that verse. But when reading today's passages collectively, a fuller picture appears; this happens when reading and understanding Scripture in its larger context instead of cherry-picking verses. The covenant in the New Testament is not the same as the one in the Old. God's relationship status for everyone is "available," not just for certain people. God wants to love ALL God's children, and all means all, including those we'd rather not include.

When I was younger, I realized people are people first; whatever hierarchical relationship that existed came later. My teachers were people first, then my teachers. If they weren't my teachers, they'd still be the same people in terms of their hopes, dreams, likes and dislikes. The same is true for our enemies and those who persecute us: they are people with goals, family, and favorite flavors of ice cream, just like us. We all have equal access to God, and God wishes all to have a loving relationship with God, free from the encumbrances of sin. Jesus came to save the lost and heal the sick, and our enemies are just as lost and sick as we are. It's each person's choice how to respond to God's invitation to life abundant, and as those who claim him as Savior and Lord, we're called to love all our neighbors and live obedient lives, regardless of what we think about our neighbors.

- What role does obedience to God play in your own life, especially when it comes to difficult teachings like loving your enemies?
- How can understanding that our enemies are "people first" with their own hopes, dreams, and struggles help shift your perspective on forgiveness and love for them?
- How does reading Scripture in its larger context affect your understanding of its message, particularly when it challenges your personal preferences or beliefs?

The Second Week of Lent

REFLECTIONS BY
MATTHEW PIETROPAOLI

Associate Professor of Philosophy



Second Sunday of Lent

- **FIRST READING: GENESIS 15:5-12, 17-18**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 27:1, 7-8, 8-9, 13-14**
- **SECOND READING: PHILIPPIANS 3:17—4:1**
- **GOSPEL: LUKE 9:28B-36**

The readings from today are undeniably strange. We read about the cutting of animals in half in the first passage, worship of the stomach in the second, and the enigmatic and terrifying cloud that encompasses the apostles in the gospel reading. It is hard, if not impossible, to make clear sense of such texts.

But maybe that's the whole point, or at least a main point. After all, what is apparent in the readings is that Scripture is not prone to quick and clear comprehension. St. Thomas Aquinas posited that "because human intelligence is not equal to (God) . . . (God) surpasses our intelligence and is unknown to us: wherefore man reaches the highest point of his knowledge about God when he knows. . . that that which is God transcends whatsoever he conceives of him." (1) In knowing God, one knows that there always is more to God, an unending infinity that surpasses any concept about him. As Karl Rahner stated: "the concept of 'God' is not a grasp of God by which a person masters the mystery; but it is a means by which one lets oneself be grasped by the mystery which is present yet ever distant." (2)

That term mystery requires further reflection. The French philosopher Gabriel Marcel argued that a true mystery is only ever lived and experienced, never solved and overcome.

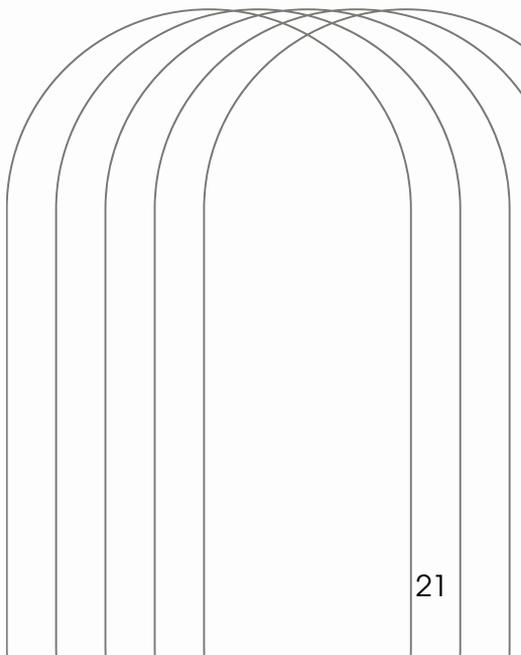
(1) St. Thomas Aquinas, *On the Power of God*, trans. the English Dominican Fathers, (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1952), q. 7, a. 5.

(2) Karl Rahner, as quoted in Elizabeth Johnson, *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God*, (New York, NY: Continuum Press, 2007), 36.

A mystery, thus understood, is not a baffling problem that we must work to figure out and resolve. It is not akin at all to the mysteries of crime novels, shows, or podcasts. Rather, a mystery is a transcendent reality—perhaps the Transcendent Reality—which ever exceeds our grasp, and which overwhelms any and all attempts to master and control it.

Hence, today’s readings pose to us the following challenge: to what extent can we be comfortable in the face of an overwhelming mystery? To what extent can we patiently, faithfully, trustfully, and humbly be with a transcendent reality that is beyond our comprehension? The temptation is either to run away from the overbearing mystery that overshadows us, or else, on the other hand, try to reconfigure it such that we feel it can become solvable, controllable, comprehensible. But today’s readings invite us to go deeper than that quick either/or and instead have sufficient faith and courage to face and be drawn into the transcendent and terrifyingly incomprehensible mystery that unfolds for us and all around us. In short, we are being asked to turn toward and into the mystery, even though it will disrupt us, disorient us, confuse us, and ultimately overwhelm us.

- What would it look like to let someone else be a profound mystery, transcendent of how you have come to understand them? How might you have the ability to be with someone you thought you knew in such a way that the mysterious depths of who they are can be present?
- What might be something about your idea of God that could limit your encounter with his infinite mystery?



Monday of the Second Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: 1 PETER 4:7B-11**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 96:1-2A, 2B-3, 7-8B, 10**
- **GOSPEL: LUKE 5:1-11**

The readings for today's memorial for St. Patrick mention "glory" often. For instance, in the first passage, we read "that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong glory . . . forever." (1) In the Psalm we see "give to the LORD the glory due his name!" (2)

Moreover, a particular presentation of the Breastplate of St. Patrick prayer invites us toward further reflection on that same glory and our participation in it. I refer here to Terrence Malick's film *To the Wonder*, (3) specifically the scene where the character, Fr. Quintana, recites these lines of St. Patrick's prayer: "Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left." (4)

Fr. Quintana, in the film, then adds words from a prayer by Saint John Henry Newman. The relevant part of that prayer is below, words which speak for themselves as we close today's reflection on God's glory and our participation in it:

Dear Jesus, help us to spread your fragrance everywhere we go. Flood our souls with your spirit and life. Penetrate and possess our whole being, so utterly, that our lives may only be a radiance of yours. Shine through us, and be so in us, that every soul we come in contact with may feel your presence in our soul. Let them look up and see no longer us but only Jesus. (5)

- How does it feel to really ponder the possibility of God's spirit and life flooding your soul? Do you feel confused, excited, peaceful, anxious, afraid, unworthy, unwilling, etc.?
- What might that feeling tell you about yourself and your Lenten journey?

(1) 1 Peter 4:11.

(2) Psalm 96: 8.

(3) *To the Wonder*, directed by Terrence Mallick (2012; New York, NY: Magnolia Home Entertainment, 2013), DVD.

(4) "St. Patrick's Breastplate," Our Catholic Prayers, <https://www.ourcatholicprayers.com/st-patricks-breastplate.html>.

(5) "Prayer by John Henry Newman," St. Margaret Mary Catholic Church, <https://www.smmomaha.org/faithful-citizenship-resources/all-prayers/827-prayer-by-cardinal-newman>.

Tuesday of the Second Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: ISAIAH 1:10, 16-20**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 50:8-9, 16BC-17, 21 AND 23**
- **GOSPEL: MATTHEW 23:1-12**

Today's readings clearly confront us with the issue of hypocrisy. The most direct instance is in the Gospel where Christ condemns the Pharisees "because they preach but they do not practice." (1) Like much of Scripture, such words are directed to us as well. We, too, are being asked to ponder our own possible hypocrisy.

Yet that task is daunting. It is very hard to acknowledge that, in my life of faith, I may be inauthentic and posing. Or that some of my religious practices might be mere posturing rather than a real expression of my trust in and response to God. Despite the fact that most of us can succumb to hypocrisy, it is nonetheless quite difficult to be honest about that, especially with ourselves. We feel ourselves to be frauds and cannot summon the courage to be forthright about our hypocrisy.

Perhaps, therefore, we should ponder these words from Isaiah in today's readings: "Though your sins be like scarlet, they may become white as snow." (2) One such sin is the aforementioned sin of hypocrisy. But that sin, that "scarlet" stain on our souls, can itself be redeemed through the immeasurable mercy of God. Yes, we are more than likely guilty of hypocrisy, but also, and more importantly, God's "mercy is from age to age, toward those who fear him." (3) Thus, perhaps we can begin to ponder honestly our own hypocrisy, while resting in the abundance of God's gratuitous mercy.

- Keeping in mind and heart the unfathomable depth of God's mercy, what particular sort of hypocrisy do you recognize in yourself?
- Can you honestly acknowledge and sit with that specific hypocrisy, doing so in the trust of God's infinite mercy?

(1) Matthew, 23: 3.

(2) Isaiah, 1:18.

(3) Psalm 103: 17.

Solemnity of Saint Joseph, Husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary

- **FIRST READING: 2 SAMUEL 7:4-5A, 12-14A, 16**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 89:2-3, 4-5, 27 AND 29**
- **SECOND READING: ROMANS 4:13, 16-18, 22**
- **GOSPEL: MATTHEW 1:16, 18-21, 24**

Reflection by

CASSIDY OWEN

B.S. in Criminal Justice | Class of 2028

Today we celebrate Saint Joseph, the husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Today's readings reveal strong themes of faith, courage, and, most of all, trust in God throughout Saint Joseph's life and his lineage. The first reading foreshadows the coming of Jesus, a descendant of David. Jesus embodies God's past and present faithfulness as well as his future kingdom that will be everlasting. In examining God's promise to David, we see both God's faithfulness to David and David's faithfulness to God. Jesus fulfills God's promise to David. Moreover, God kept his promise to David even after David sinned. This should give us courage to stay true to the Lord and to remember his faithfulness even when we fail, just as David did! The second reading concerns not just God's promises but more so the importance of always having faith despite our circumstances.

The Gospel reading depicts Saint Joseph's faithfulness, a familiar trait we recognize from his ancestor. In his story, Joseph learns that his betrothed is expecting a child that is not his. Filled with shame, his first reaction is a plan to divorce his betrothed, Mary, quietly. Wouldn't you be caught off guard? Then, an angel of the Lord appears and tells him, to not be afraid. For Joseph, it took great courage and faith in God to not be afraid in carrying out what God told him to do. This is a dynamic moment for Joseph. In no way was the uncertainty of this situation easy, but because Joseph trusted God, he obeyed and persevered. Just like Joseph we should walk in faith and have trust in God's promises regardless of our uncertainty of the situation.

- Saint Joseph was faced with an uncertain situation filled with confusion, but he continued trusting in God's plan. Can you think of a time in your life when you struggled to understand a particular event? Is there a current situation in which you know trusting God will help you get through it?
- How do you respond when faced with setbacks and challenges? What can you start doing on a daily basis to build habits of trust and courage in your life?

Thursday of the Second Week of Lent

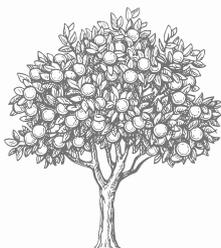
- **FIRST READING: JEREMIAH 17:5-10**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 1:1-2, 3, 4 AND 6**
- **GOSPEL: LUKE 16:19-31**

Today's readings are striking: we read of lifeless plants in a volcanic desert, a healthy tree near abundant water, and a wealthy man, after death, suffering "torment" for failing to share with his impoverished neighbor the "good" he had "received." (1) How can we combine the organic metaphors with the image of the afterlife in the Gospel?

One immediate point is that a healthy tree "yields its fruit in due season." (2) An expression of such health is the tree's ability to share itself; the seeds within such fruit might bring forth new life. On the other hand, a dying tree produces no fruit and ends up like "chaff which the wind drives away." (3)

The latter is precisely the situation of the rich man in the gospel passage. Gifted with abundant resources, he nonetheless closed in on himself, unwilling to share with Lazarus, a man "covered with sores, who would gladly have eaten his fill of the scraps that fell from the rich man's table." (4) Thus, the rich man renders himself akin to a "barren bush in the desert that enjoys no change of season, but stands in a lava waste." (5) In terms borrowed from psychologist Erick Erickson, the rich man failed to practice "generativity" and instead became trapped in a self-imposed wasteland of "stagnation." (6)

- Fruitful generativity implies giving fully of oneself. What is something in you that pushes back against the possibility of such generativity and opts instead for stagnation?
- What would it look like, even if only momentarily, to overcome such stagnation? Could you do so today? This week? How?



(1) Luke 16: 23.

(2) Psalm 1: 3.

(3) Psalm 1: 4.

(4) Luke 16: 21.

(5) Jeremiah 17: 6.

(6) Charles Slater, "Generativity Versus Stagnation: An Elaboration of Erikson's Adult Stage of Human Development," *Journal of Adult Development* 10:1 (2003): 53-65.

Friday of the Second Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: GENESIS 37:3-4, 12-13A, 17B-28A**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 105:16-17, 18-19, 20-21**
- **GOSPEL: MATTHEW 21:33-43, 45-46**

Today's readings center around the following metaphor: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; by the Lord has this been done, and it is wonderful in our eyes." (1) To speak more on wonder, according to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, philosophical wonder is "the parent of adoration." Sam Keen posited that wonder brings us "to the threshold of experience of the holy." (2) Now ponder the phrase "lost in wonder." To sink into wonder is to be drawn in an ever-deepening way into the overwhelming and infinite mystery of God. Moreover, and per the metaphor above, such a beholding in wonder focuses on what is rejected. To come toward God in wonder might involve gazing about what we often disregard. What falls outside the scope of normal attention might become a portal to something "wonderful in our eyes."

Today is the first day of spring. And with spring comes the return of the utterly ordinary and common flowers, whose very ordinariness and commonality render them off our proverbial radar screens. For precisely that reason, then, we might feel called to attend to a flower—i.e., stretch toward it—deeply, quietly, and contemplatively, bearing in mind the poetic wisdom of William Wordsworth: "To me the meanest flower that blows can give. Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears." (3) ("Meanest" here means lowliest.) Mary Oliver's poem "Praying" states much the same: "It could be weeds in a vacant lot . . . just pay attention, then patch a few words together . . . this is . . . the doorway into thanks, and a silence in which another voice may speak." (4)

- Spend some time today outside, free from distractions. Let yourself be drawn toward some sign of spring (e.g., the green grass, the budding of a flower). Sit for a time with that organic being. Quietly, slowly, patiently, and contemplatively pay attention to it. Be present in the manner. "Patch a few words together" in gratitude. See what happens.

(1) Matthew 21: 42.

(2) Sam Keen, *Apology for Wonder*, (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1973),

(3) William Wordsworth, "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood" in *Immortal Poems of the English language: British and American Poetry from Chaucer's Time to the Present Day*, ed. Oscar Williams, (New York: Washington Square Press, 1952), 266.

(4) Mary Oliver, "Praying," in *Devotions: The Selected Poems of Mary Oliver* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2017), 131.

Saturday of the Second Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: MICAH 7:14-15, 18-20**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 103:1-2, 3-4, 9-10, 11-12**
- **GOSPEL: LUKE 15:1-3, 11-32**

The gospel reading today, the famous story of the prodigal son, invites reflection on the issue of identity. Identity, in this manner, involves the question, “Who am I?” One response is to list our accomplishments, possessions, achievements, etc. What we have and what we have done becomes a way to define ourselves. The weight of the question moves us to formulate ready and clear answers. The strange thing about today’s story, however, is that it is only through loss—the loss of money, status, family, etc.—that the son returns to his identity as the beloved of his father. He comes back to himself by losing what he tried to make of himself.

What is even more interesting is that the son’s identity is co-relative to his father. His arrival back to himself, as it were, comes about when he ceases to try to establish himself fully apart from and in distinction to his father. Returning to his father is also his return to himself: “He was lost and has been found.”⁽¹⁾

Those lines are famously revised in the song “Amazing Grace:” “I once was lost but now am found.”⁽²⁾ Grace, therefore, brings us back to God the Father and, simultaneously, to ourselves as his beloved children. I am most fully myself when I rest in my being only ever a child of God.

- The son in today’s gospel reading had to admit his fall and failure to allow grace to move him back to his father and himself. What failure or fall could you confess to so as to allow grace to move you back to yourself?
- Could some aspect of how you have tried to build up your sense of self inhibit that flow of grace? What would it mean to surrender that in order to be moved back to yourself?

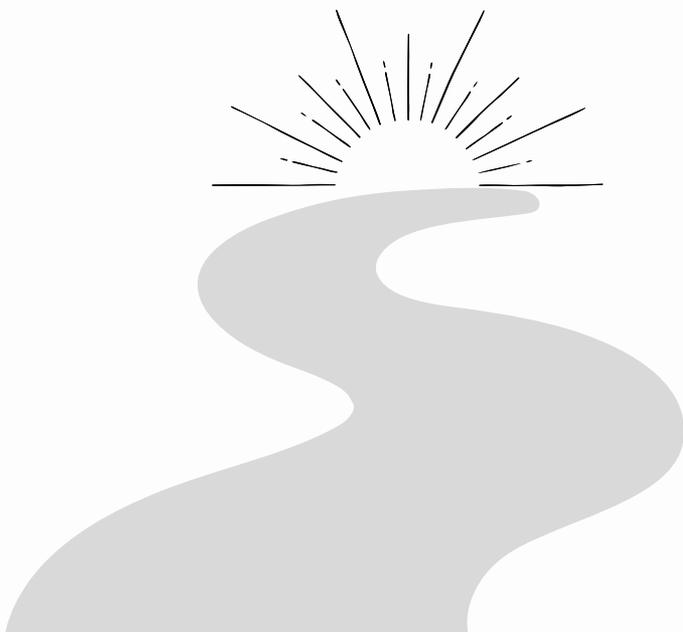


(1) Luke 15: 24

(2) John Newton, “Amazing Grace”.

The Third Week of Lent

REFLECTIONS BY
ROY LANHAM
Director of Campus Ministry



Third Sunday of Lent

- **FIRST READING: EXODUS 3:1-8A, 13-15**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 103:1-2, 3-4, 6-7, 8, 11**
- **SECOND READING: 1 CORINTHIANS 10:1-6, 10-12**
- **GOSPEL: LUKE 13: 1-9**

When visiting with family and friends in their homes, many times there is either an implicit or a very explicit expectation that you will remove your shoes upon crossing the threshold. My first thought is to ask myself a question: Do I have a hole in one of my socks? I am certain I am not thinking about standing on holy ground. I also believe the hosts are not thinking about the sacredness of our encounter. They are thinking about whether I am about to track whatever I might have stepped in onto their recently shampooed carpet.

Moses encountered God in a way he never could have imagined. He was about to be sent on a journey he was perhaps not ready to start. Yet the first steps God invited him to take were on holy ground. The journey that led him to this moment prepared him to see something new, to embrace a relationship that would stretch him beyond his wildest imagination. And it all started on holy ground. We are well into our own Lenten journey. Has it all been in preparation to encounter the Lord in a way we never could have imagined? Have the first two weeks of Lent drawn us to this moment where the Lord now invites us to go deeper, to take the next step along the way? It begins with our own recognition that we are on sacred ground.

One of my spiritual directors used to always take off his shoes when we would meet because he believed the space where we spent time together was holy. I found it odd, but I "played along." A strange thing happened, though. I came to believe he was right. The space between us was, indeed, sacred. It was a reminder that the path we share with one another is holy. A shift begins to happen to us when we think this way. We begin to see the time spent with a friend as sharing holy ground or the moment of sitting in the quiet of a chapel or watching a sunrise as sacred. We recognize the giving of ourselves in service to our neighbor or to those in need as evoking wonder. Maybe we do need to walk around barefoot.

God's grace is at work transforming us in this season of renewal. When God called Moses by name, he was willing to step onto holy ground, and in doing so, he entered into a relationship with God, a God who wanted Moses to be able to name God. We are asked to open ourselves up to this as well.

- At the end of the day, recall the moments when you knew you were on holy ground. Why did they feel sacred? In those moments what is God inviting you to embrace?
- Who would you like to share a sacred moment with this week? Plan to call/text them to set up a time to meet.



Monday of the Third Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: 2 KINGS 5:1-15AB**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 42:2, 3; 43:3,4**
- **GOSPEL: LUKE 4:24-30**

Today we hear a story about our friend, Naaman. A wonderful story of humility, courage, trust and wonder. Like Moses, Naaman is invited to take a journey. He doesn't encounter a burning bush, but rather a young girl from Israel. He embarks on his journey because a slave girl shares her conviction of God's healing power through a prophet. He wasn't Jewish. He was a warrior of the enemy. And yet, his desire to be healed is so deep, he is willing to step onto the path that brings him to an encounter with God and begin to understand what letting go entails.

College is a time to answer questions like who am I? Where am I going? How am I going to get there? What companions will I take on the journey? Who or what does God desire me to become? These questions find their answers because we are willing to step onto the path. We are willing to hear the voice of God, even if it comes unexpectedly. We are willing to put trust, courage, humility, and wonder in our knapsack and pull them out as needed. God longs for our healing. God wants us to come to the river's edge and to plunge ourselves deep into the waters. In doing so, we will emerge cleansed of our sins, ready to say like Naaman, "Now I know that there is no God on earth, except the (Lord)."(1)

- What in your life needs to be healed? Invite the Lord to cleanse you by seeking forgiveness and reconciliation. Avail yourself to the Sacrament of Reconciliation in this season of Lent.
- Who or what does God desire you to become? Take some time to write your thoughts down. Where might the answer lead you?



(1) 2 Kings 5:15b

Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord

- **FIRST READING: ISAIAH 7:10-14; 8:10**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 40: 7-8A, 8B-9, 10, 11**
- **SECOND READING: HEBREWS 10:4-10**
- **GOSPEL: LUKE 1:26-38**

Another day, another story about someone being invited to take a journey. And oh, what a journey it is! St. Basil from the fourth century said, "Annunciations are frequent; incarnations are rare." If Mary had not made her "yes" to Gabriel, she would have been just another Jewish girl of tender age who lived her life out in faithfulness to her family and God. However, we know that is not how her story goes. She was willing to ponder what the angel said and made her YES not knowing where the road would take her. She had the courage to make the incarnation possible. She had made her faith her own. In doing so, she was able to give her whole self to God's invitation.

St. Basil in his writing was not saying Gabriel had a list of Jewish girls who had already said no before he found Mary. Rather, his words are directed towards all of us who know of her "yes." His words show us what is lacking in many of us, the courage to say "yes." As we journey through Lent, there are opportunities each day to make our "yes" to our Lord. Each and every day the Lord is inviting us. Dare I say, we hear the call, we see the angel, but we do not have the courage to make our "yes." Why is that? What is holding us back?

Part of the answer lies in our own desire to be "full of grace." God is not stingy in giving grace. Mary stood totally open to God at work in her life. God longs for us to do the same and give our whole life over to the Redeemer. God wants us to ponder with our hearts the mystery unfolding through us in our witness to the Word made flesh.

- Mary's assent to God initiates the whole story of salvation in Luke's Gospel. Where do you see yourself in this story? How does your "yes" add to God's saving work in the world?
- We are at the mid-point of Lent. Look at the disciplines you embraced on Ash Wednesday to carry with you throughout Lent. How are you doing? If you are lacking in one area, redouble your efforts as you continue to walk the way.



Wednesday of the Third Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: DEUTERONOMY 4:1, 5-9**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 147:12-13, 15-16, 19-20**
- **GOSPEL: MATTHEW 5:17-19**

Reflection by
LAURA ZIETZKE

B.S. in Exercise Science | Class of 2027

I remember when I was young thinking about the make-believe angel and devil on my shoulders, helping me decide to either follow the rules or not. Being the second oldest of five kids, I'd usually choose not to follow the rules to see how many of my parents' buttons I could push or how many of my siblings I could irritate. Although I found humor in doing this, I eventually grew up and began to think of God's Word rather than what I thought was amusing. This brought me to the commands and laws the Lord has made for us and how I may have overlooked some of them that have been set. All of us are only human and may find ourselves prioritizing our wants over our needs and personal responsibilities, even if it means breaking the commandments. I am sure many of us have found ourselves thinking of the laws but still choose our wants and desires, even when we know we are in the wrong.

This season of Lent, it is important to remember the commands and the laws that God has set for us and how important they are in our daily lives. In the gospel today, Jesus tells his disciples that whoever chooses to keep the commandments will be declared greatest in Heaven. Even in the times we find ourselves straying, it is crucial that we open our hearts and remember the way God intended for us to live, and the expectations God has placed for us. Understanding the commandments and laws which have been set for us builds the foundation of our lives. This season is a great opportunity to reflect on times when we chose our wants rather than God's commandments and how we can live a life serving the Lord rather than ourselves.

- When were some instances that you chose your desires over God's commandments?
- How can you put aside your wants in order to follow God's laws and commands?



Thursday of the Third Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: JEREMIAH 7:23-28**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9**
- **GOSPEL: LUKE 11:14-23**

Blessed Benedetta Bianchi Porro once wrote, “for those who believe, everything is a sign.” In first-century Palestine, folks believed miracles and wonders were possible. No one doubted Jesus was working great wonders. Even his enemies looked to trap him by seeing if he would cure someone on the Sabbath. In fact, there were many miracle-workers. “So for the contemporaries of Jesus, the question concerning his miracles was not whether he could do amazing things, but what was the meaning of the things he did.”⁽¹⁾ Jesus spoke in parables and worked miracles in obedience to the Father.

It seems human nature is to not allow ourselves to bend our will to another’s. Those in authority must have some hidden agenda in wanting our acquiescence. And even when we are amazed by what someone does, like casting out demons, we question their legitimacy. Jesus must have been so very frustrated at this point in his ministry. He does good and even his goodness is seen as subversive to the ways of God. Luke is not just writing about present-day opponents of Jesus. He is warning his Christian readers as well. We are to take heed and recognize the hand of God in our own lives. The Lord wants us to gather with him. God longs for us to be of one heart with him. Anything less is division, and we will be overcome by sin and hardness of heart.

- The psalmist today invites us to not have hardness of heart. Name an area in your life where you have shut out God’s love and take the step to allow the Lord to cast it out.
- What do you think of the words of Blessed Benedetta? Do you believe everything in your life, as well as in the lives of others, can be a sign of God’s love and mercy? How so?



(1) Christopher McMahon. *Understanding Jesus: Christology from Emmaus to Today* (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2013) 57

Friday of the Third Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: HOSEA 14:2-10**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 81:6C-8A, 8BC-9, 10-11AB**
- **GOSPEL: MARK 12:28-34**

The theme of our Lenten guide reaches out to us today in the conversation Jesus has with a Jewish scribe. In the Jewish tradition, there are 613 laws/commands. While many of us have memorized the first ten commandments, Moses did not spend forty days and nights on Mt. Sinai just to have God engrave the ten on two tablets. God gave him many other commands for the people to follow. So, there would be an ongoing debate on which are the most important of the laws.

The scribe who approaches Jesus is impressed with how Jesus had been handling the debate he was having with those who were trying to trip him up (cf.: Mark 12:13-27). And so, he asks the question, "which is the first of all the commandments?" Without hesitation Jesus answers with the Shema prayer. Shema means "to hear" in Hebrew. This is a prayer every Jewish person of faith would pray every morning and evening. It starts with the words, "Hear, O Israel."

Along with the first, Jesus gives us the second most important: love your neighbor. The scribe embraces Jesus' words with understanding. He gets it. Do we?

Bishop Robert Barron writes, "Perfect love casts out all fear, so when you surrender to God you say, 'Lord, I want what you want.'"⁽¹⁾ We are walking on the way, we are wanting Jesus to teach us his ways, and here today we have the answer. Why is the struggle to stay on the path so difficult when the Lord desires nothing more than for you to love God with your whole heart and your neighbor as yourself? Allow the Lord to cast out your fears and surrender your will to God.

- Take a page from our Jewish brothers and sisters today and add the Shema prayer into your prayer discipline. Cf: Deuteronomy 6:4-5.
- Are you trying to figure out what God wants you to do but are afraid you will make the wrong decision? How do you handle that sort of fear?

(1) Bishop Robert Barron, *How to Discern God's Will in Your Life* (Park Ridge, IL: Word on Fire, 2020) 7

Saturday of the Third Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: HOSEA 6:1-6**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 51:3-4, 18-19, 20-21AB**
- **GOSPEL: LUKE 18:9-14**

Jesus' parable today has us turning to prayer. There is a Latin maxim used in the Catholic Church, "lex orandi, lex credendi" ("the law of prayer is the law of faith"). It is used to address the centrality of worship. The way we pray is the way we live our beliefs. We become what we pray. For Catholic Christians, the Eucharist is not some "add-on." Rather, it is key to our understanding of how we are to be in the world, how we are to be with each other. It is the reason why the Sunday Eucharist is not one option among many but the "source and summit of the Christian life."⁽¹⁾ It has the power to transform us into being the Body of Christ.

There is no doubt we must combine this with a personal time for prayer. In speaking about prayer, Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB said, "No one finds time for prayer. You either take time for it or you don't get it."⁽²⁾ We need to see both personal and communal prayer as integral to our relationship with God. The tax collector lived this truth with humility and courage. He came before God seeking mercy and forgiveness with sincerity of heart.

Anyone in a relationship knows it is when vulnerability becomes part of their friendship that the relationship grows and deepens. How much more is this true with God? As we create a habit of prayer, which hopefully becomes a lifestyle during Lent and beyond, may we move from certitude into a transforming encounter with God and the world in which we live.

- We become what we pray. What is it you need to pray for in your life (courage, humility, trust, love) to help you to draw closer to Jesus the Christ?
- If we pray at a specific time, we will find ourselves praying all the time. Look at your schedule to see where you can find 15-20 minutes for daily prayer. Be specific.

(1) Paul VI. *Lumen Gentium: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1965) §11.

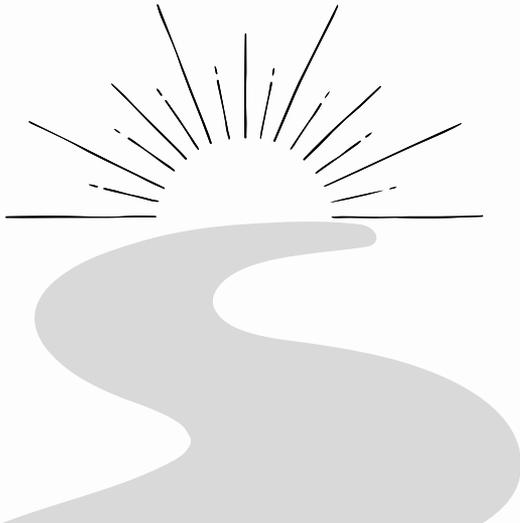
(2) Joan Chittister, OSB. *The Time is Now: A Call to Uncommon Courage*, (Colorado Springs, CO: Convergent Books, 2019) 29

The Fourth Week of Lent

REFLECTIONS BY

A.J. HOY, M.T.S.

Vice President for Mission Integration



Fourth Sunday of Lent

- **FIRST READING: JOSHUA 5:9A, 10-12**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7**
- **SECOND READING: 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17-21**
- **GOSPEL: LUKE 15:1-3, 11-32**

Rejoice, Jerusalem, and all who love her. Be joyful, all who were in mourning; exult and be satisfied at her consoling breast.

This is the greeting of the mass today, the entrance antiphon that would traditionally gather the congregation to prayer. And no, this is not a mistake. On this fourth Sunday in Lent, we take a moment to reawaken our joy. This way of salvation is long, and as we make our way through the back half of Lent, we are starting to get glimpses of the end. As Christians, of course, we know the end of the story, and we anxiously await Easter Sunday when we will once again celebrate Jesus' joyful resurrection and his welcome of us to new life. This Sunday is our chance to intentionally remember that the Christian life should never be without joy.

Pope Francis loves to mention the joy that Christians exhibit because we know the end of the story of salvation. In a 2016 homily he taught, "The Christian identity card is joy, the Gospel's joy, the joy of having been chosen by Jesus, saved by Jesus, regenerated by Jesus; the joy of that hope that Jesus is waiting for us, the joy that - even with the crosses and sufferings we bear in this life - is expressed in another way, which is peace in the certainty that Jesus accompanies us, is with us."⁽¹⁾ Knowing we will soon recall Jesus' Last Supper, passion, death, and resurrection should color the way that we live our lives. Knowing the end of the story should have some impact on the way that we engage with the story of salvation. For Pope Francis, knowing that the redemption of the world is at work is the source of immense joy.



Today's readings focus us in on the salvific work of our God. Our first reading today recounts the great famine of the Israelites as they wandered in the desert away from Egypt. Throughout their wanderings, the Israelites often communicated to Moses how much they would rather just return to Egypt. They may have been enslaved in Egypt, but at least there was food and water. To this, God answered by making bread, manna, fall from the sky to sustain them. Even when they reached the land promised to them by God, they still had to rely on God's gift to sustain them. We read today of the end of the supplement of manna. Faithful to the covenant they shared with God, the Israelites once again celebrated the Passover, this time in their promised land. In this very act that showed their devotion to the God of their salvation, the manna stopped, and the Israelites were finally able to enjoy the fruits of the land they were promised. God is lavish. God provides.

Today's gospel reflects the same theme. We hear of a father and two sons. One spends his inheritance foolishly and in so doing impoverishes himself. His only option is to return to his father and beg his mercy. The word often used to describe this son is "prodigal" which means lavish or extravagant. While many focus on the wasteful son, the father's equally lavish response is often overlooked. Much like God, who ensured the tribes of Israel would not starve in the desert, the prodigal Father from today's gospel passage went beyond merely providing the bare minimum for his child. His response was extravagant at the return of his "lost" son.

Our God is a God who rejoices and who freely gives much more than anyone deserves. To the Israelites' whining and faithlessness, God gives more than they could ever consume. We learn from these readings today that God's joy is found in providing for those whom God loves, regardless of merit or cost. God rejoices in pouring God's very self out for the beloved.

This Lent, let us not tire of rejoicing as we continue to empty ourselves for the sake of the poor, the marginalized, and the vulnerable. We know the end of the story. We know that after the bleak sting of death and decay, joy will rise. We must empty ourselves in order to know the fullness of joy.

- Does knowing the story of salvation affect the way that you live your life? Should it?
- Do you find joy in giving of yourself? If so, why? If not, why?
- Do you make room for others to nurture you? Do you accept help from others?

(1) Pope Francis. *Homily of May 23, 2016* (New York, NY: America Magazine, 2016). <https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/pope-francis-christians-live-gods-love-joy-astonishment>

Monday of the Fourth Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: ISAIAH 65:17-21**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 30:2 & 4, 5-6, 11-12A & 13B**
- **GOSPEL: JOHN 4:43-54**

Today's readings illustrate the joy of the Gospel found in healing and wellbeing. It's no secret that the ministry of Jesus was two-fold. Jesus taught and Jesus healed. Our Providence mission follows this same two-fold track. At the University of Providence and all Providence educational ministries, everything that we teach is imbued with the promises of the Kingdom of God. Likewise, Providence Health Ministries aim to heal the body and mind for the sake of the Kingdom of God. These ministries project glimpses of the coming Kingdom of God in continuing the salvific work of Jesus.

The prophet Isaiah proclaims a kinship, a time of great joy set apart from our present realm. This time of great joy is not marked by wealth or riches. Instead, it is filled with the fullness of life. Likewise, today's gospel recounts one of Jesus' many healings, this time the healing of the child of a politician. What links these two readings is not only the fullness of life that they both project, but how they begin matters just as much. They both begin with apparent loss. Isaiah tells us that if we want to experience the fullness of life in the new order, the old order must pass away and be completely forgotten. Likewise, the politician who encounters Jesus thinks that he is about to lose his child.

If you are presently experiencing loss in your life, take solace in these readings today and in the knowledge that joy still exists for those faithful enough to seek joy from its source, namely our God. You might just be waiting for your old order to pass away before your new order can begin.

- Have you experienced the death of an old order in your life? What followed it?
- What role does patience play in enduring loss? What agency do you have when you experience loss?
- Do you desire a life beyond that which you presently experience? If so, are you willing to give up what you presently have for the promise of future wellbeing?

Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: EZEKIEL 47:1-9, 12**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 46:2-3, 5-6, 8-9**
- **GOSPEL: JOHN 5:1-16**

Take a moment today to contemplate water. It may be difficult but really think about what it means to you. How does it sound? What does it feel like? What does it taste like? What does it look like?

Now that you've done the imaginative exercise of the phenomenon of water, I'd like to tell you about a practice that I had as a child who liked to explore Google Earth. As a child, I wanted desperately to be a civil engineer—specifically to build bridges. I was obsessed with cities and the amazing feats we could accomplish with math and the right materials. I would often open up Google Earth on my family's PC and explore. Very quickly I noticed that nearly every major city in the United States was built around some source of water, and if I found a city like Los Angeles that was not built around a source of water, it was very easy to find out how the city got its water. Don't believe me? See for yourself.

Water is essential to human life and flourishing. Today's readings speak to our ties with this essential molecule. Of particular interest is the first reading where the wellspring of the Temple in Jerusalem is compared to a small flow of water that continues to multiply and sow life everywhere it goes. This metaphor of God's presence is apt. What starts as a trickle of an encounter with God when left to multiply can quickly become a raging river that no one can dream of stopping. Just as nearly all life needs water, and is indeed enhanced in life by water, so, too, do we need God's presence in our lives. What if our cities were not just built around a source of water, but also the source of life? Would our world look the same?

- Have you ever been thirsty? What did that feel like?
- Do you make time for God's presence to trickle into your daily life? What might a trickle of God's presence be?
- Are you open to letting God's presence build within you and spill out from you so that others might flourish?



Wednesday of the Fourth Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: ISAIAH 49:8-15**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 145:8-9, 13CD-14, 17-18**
- **GOSPEL: JOHN 5:17-30**

Reflection by

JUAN ALONZO MIGUEL

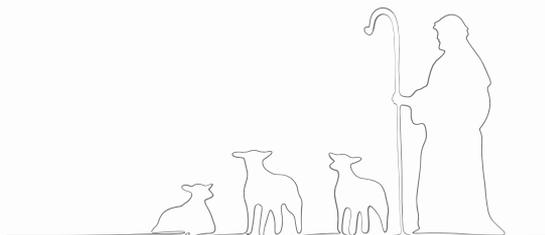
B.S. in Business Administration | Class of 2026

Earlier in John's Gospel, Jesus tells Nicodemus, "For 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."² We have come to this point in our journey of Lent where we must ask ourselves the question: Do you have a relationship with Jesus? I am assuming that since you've made it this far, you likely said "yes" to that question.

In John 14:6, Jesus says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." In today's gospel, we have a glimpse of the intimacy Jesus has with the Father. A good father sets their children up for a great future. There are times when we feel God so very close to us, and then there are times when we can't even feel God near us. But that is when he is the closest to us. The Lord is near to all who call upon him, to all who call upon him in truth. Jesus likens himself to the shepherd who would leave the ninety-nine on the mountain to search for the one who went astray, and the shepherd would rejoice more over the one sheep than the ninety-nine who did not go astray.

The Lord pursues us even when we believe we are not worthy of his love. There might be a time when we feel like we can't keep walking in faith or live up to God's call in our lives. Remember, the Father just wants our heart.

- Will you let God into your heart? Spend some time in the silence imagining yourself sitting face to face with him. What would you tell this loving Father?
- Will you receive the Father with open arms? Is there a someone in your life who has struggled to know who God is. What can you do to help them know God loves them?



Thursday of the Fourth Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: EXODUS 32:7-14**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 106:19-20, 21-22, 23**
- **GOSPEL: JOHN 5:31-47**

“Anyone can say anything. Saying so does not make it true.” My undergraduate philosophy professor would often remind my class of this axiom, especially when a classmate would bring something forward that had very little to do with reality. Admittedly, I now say this to my children when they are not quite seeing the world as it is.

Today’s readings focus us on the power of testimony, specifically its rootedness in reality. Who are we to believe? When we receive an argument from someone, we often evaluate their points to see what is true. If all elements are true and logically add up, then we will likely assent to their point. Yet, if we find inconsistencies within their argument, we may discern that we should reject their testimony.

Our first reading opens as Moses talks God down off a ledge. Furious with the wandering Israelites’ infidelity, God is ready to be done with all of them. Moses counters God, and we are told that God relents, presumably because God was persuaded by Moses’ testimony. In today’s gospel, we find a frustrated Jesus speaking to his fellow Jews about his own divinity. Annoyed by their unbelief, Jesus links himself to Moses, the litigator who once advocated for God’s people. Jesus is desperately trying to save people and yet they remain intransigent because they are ignorant to the truth that he is God. The lesson here is a paradox. Anyone can say anything. Saying so does not make it false.

- Have you ever refused to believe someone only to find what they are saying to be true?
- Does your pride, biases, or stubbornness ever blind you to the truth? What tools can you use to open your eyes to the bigger picture?
- Would you have recognized the truth that Jesus was preaching?

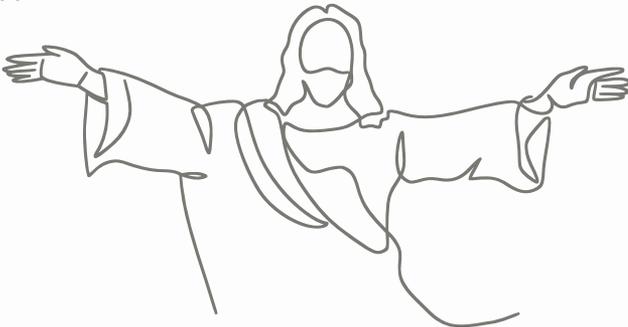
Friday of the Fourth Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: WISDOM 2:1A, 12-22**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 34:17-18, 19-20, 21 & 23**
- **GOSPEL: JOHN 7:1-2, 10, 25-30**

The plot begins. Today's readings start to pave our path toward Golgotha. Contrary to many of the pictures we paint of the life and times of Jesus, his life was threatened long before his arrest on the evening of Holy Thursday. Often in this time of Lent, my son will ask me, "Why did the people put Jesus on the cross?" When he first asked me, I struggled to put my answer into simple words. But the more he asks, the simpler my answer becomes. I reply, "Because they were threatened by his ideas and what He was saying. Jesus' message meant that powerful people would lose their power and that poor people would have better lives." My son now anticipates this answer and often replies, "But Dad...that's all good stuff."

The Kingdom of God is "all good stuff," but how we get there may not necessarily be easy. This path of salvation on which we presently sojourn should not be easy. Jesus' path was not easy, and we are called to be his hands and feet, his very body here on earth. We can also easily look around and see that the powerful voices in our own context still have the power to hurt innocent people, especially people whose very existence indicts them. Just like in our first reading, those in our own context with power can often feel threatened by innocent people whom they disenfranchised or pushed further into the margins of our society. Let us continue to bear in mind that the Gospel message is necessarily dangerous because it asks us to turn our world upside down so that we might one day see God's reign.

- What is it about the Kingdom of God that draws us forward towards it even in difficult times?
- Who are the powerful people in our times? Who are the marginalized righteous that may be perceived as a threat?
- Are you ready or willing to endure hardship to draw others toward kinship with God?



Saturday of the Fourth Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: JEREMIAH 11:18-20**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 7: 2-3, 9BC-10, 11-12**
- **GOSPEL: JOHN 7: 40-53**

Have you ever had the experience of thinking things were going well, but at the same time others were making plans for you that would harm you or ostracize you? If you have not experienced this, consider yourself lucky. In many settings when problems arise, people often look for someone to blame, advocating that the person be taken from their position or role and replaced. Often, the person who falls victim to these plots is the person already close to the margins, and all it takes is a gentle shove from people in power to push the scapegoat all the way out. Today's readings find the prophet Jeremiah and Jesus in a similar position.

Maybe you have not fallen victim to such plotting, but maybe you have participated in something like it. Maybe you have rallied "allies" to your cause against someone else. Maybe you have supported another person's allegations against an innocent other. This is where the Pharisees of Jesus' time come in. They were desperate to keep the status quo because they trusted that this would secure their status and power. Jesus, by proclaiming himself as God and then calling the Pharisees hypocrites, risked screwing up a decently long time of order (not peace). So, like many of the prophets who preceded him in proclaiming the coming reign of God, Jesus fell victim to plots to push him out and harm him.

We can easily point to figures who presently question our status quo as advocates for the poor and the marginalized. Like Jesus and the prophets, these activists risk their lives for the sake of others. They are often called "troublemakers" or "dissidents." Yet, the next time you encounter someone who challenges your privilege for the sake of the poor, I invite you to mentally reframe their advocacy as only dangerous if you are uncomfortable with the reign of God, where the last shall be first, the lost shall be found, and the least shall be greatest.

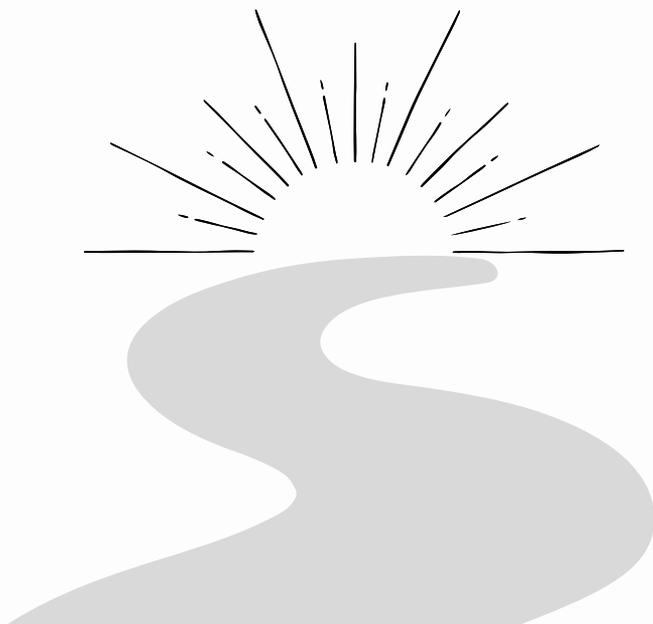
- Have you pushed people out of your life because they called you out on your own failings? Were they right? Were you wrong?
- Who are the last, the lost, and the least in your life? What do you do to raise them up in the eyes of others as worthy of dignity and compassion?
- Are you ready to put yourself, your social capital, even your life on the line for the sake of the marginalized other?

The Fifth Week of Lent

REFLECTIONS BY

JODIE L. SMITH, ED.D.

Assistant Professor Health and Physical Education



Fifth Sunday of Lent

- **FIRST READING: ISAIAH 43:16-21**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6**
- **SECOND READING: PHILIPPIANS 3:8-14**
- **GOSPEL: JOHN 8:1-11**

I love ocean waves, not to walk or surf in them, but to watch and listen to them. They calm me, even when the ocean is not calm. I like to think of the changes as the moods of the ocean. At times the water reminds me of my moods. I can be calm. I can appear calm but have hidden anger like a riptide. I can be loud and aggressive. While I am certainly not advocating for violence, I embrace the gift of having a full range of emotions.

The ocean would not be powerful and transforming without the range of waves from calm to plunging and crashing. An example of transformative work I love is sea glass. From broken bottles, shards of pottery, and even shipwreck pieces, the powerful forces of the ocean churn it over and over. The grit from the sand and compressive forces of the waves eventually over many, many years polish what was once wasted and thrown away or left to waste into beautiful pieces of sea glass.

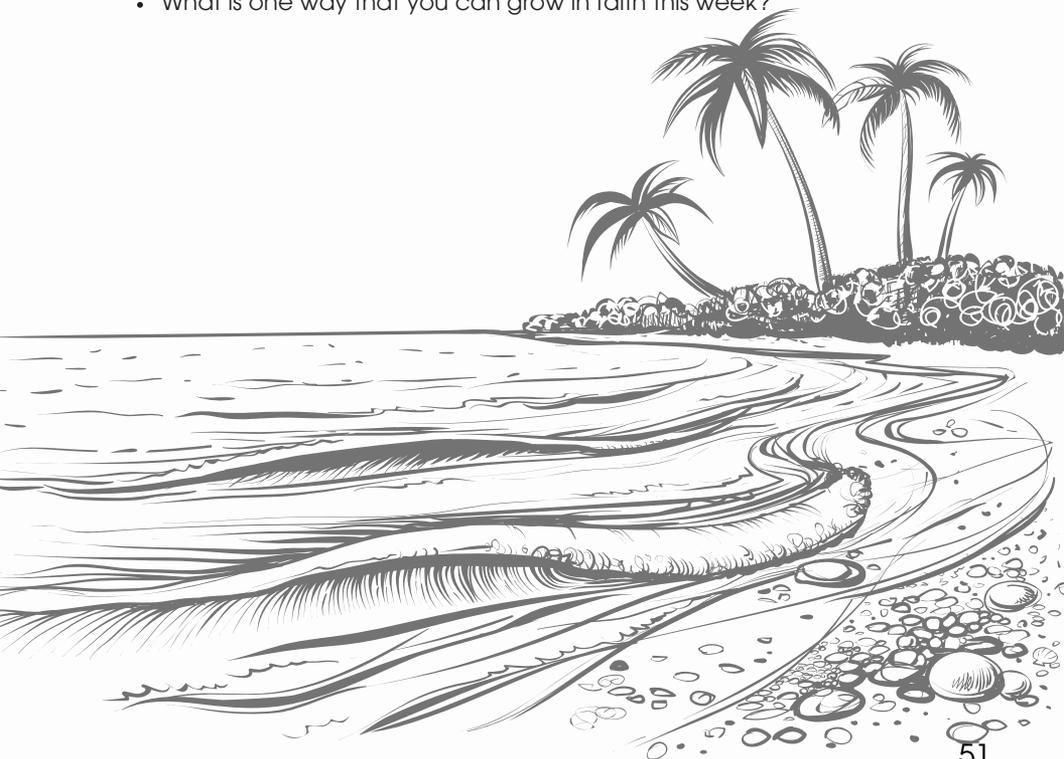
Today's first reading from Isaiah tells of God's saving power by opening a path for the Israelites in the sea and sweeping away their pursuers. These are certainly two different moods of the sea. Then, we read of God providing water in the desert to drink. God saves with water. Today, he quite literally saves us through the water of Baptism. In today's second reading from Philippians, St. Paul refers to the things of society as rubbish and calls upon us to find a new way through our faith in Christ and the power of his resurrection.



The Gospel takes this saving power further when Jesus speaks one of his most powerful lines about judging others: "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." When everyone leaves without throwing a stone, he forgives the adulterous woman, admonishing her to sin no more. This Gospel reminds me that it is not my place to judge, for judgement belongs solely with God. Second, it reminds me of the power of the Sacrament of Confession. If I confess my sins and repent, Jesus forgives my sins and tells me to go forth and sin no more.

Going back to the transforming power of the ocean waves and the smooth, beautiful sea glass that they make, just like pieces being tossed in powerful waves and polished by gritty sand, we, too, are being transformed by trials and challenges in our lives. We are also transformed by the people God sends to aid us in our journey. We draw strength from the Sacraments.

- What are some trials or challenges that are making you feel like rubbish being tossed around by crashing waves?
- Who or what has God sent to help you? Have you thanked them?
- How have you already been transformed in your life? In other words, what has made you a piece of beautiful, polished sea glass?
- What is one way that you can grow in faith this week?



Monday of the Fifth Week of Lent

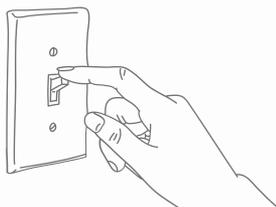
- **FIRST READING: DEUTERONOMY 13:1-9, 15-17, 19-30, 33-62**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 23:1-3A, 3B-4, 5, 6**
- **GOSPEL: JOHN 8:12-20**

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where it seemed that nothing could go your way, or you felt that you were doomed? Okay, maybe not doomed, but you know what I mean, moments in which you could not see any way out. The old phrase “you have dug yourself a hole” comes to mind. Maybe you are just now realizing that you have not done enough work in a class and you are trying to figure out how you will pass. Maybe you were with a group who were gossiping about a friend of yours, and then your friend walked by and heard. You did not say anything but were just in the wrong place at the wrong time.

In today’s first reading, Susanna found herself in a situation where she was innocent yet accused and sentenced to death by liars. She had faith that God could save her, and her prayers were answered when Daniel, still a child, trapped the accusers in their lie. I would like to think I could have unwavering faith like Susanna and pray with confidence to God to save me, but if I were in Susanna’s place, I would likely be throwing a pity party. Lent calls us to prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, and as I reflect on the first reading today, I am reminded to pray with confidence to God.

Thankfully, in today’s gospel Jesus reminds us that he will light the way for us in darkness. I, for one, could use some light on my path. Some days, it seems like I am walking a steep, narrow trail on the side of a mountain and could use some light. Way too often I forget that the light is there, and I just need to “turn it on” by praying.

- Is there a situation in your life that makes you feel trapped or in darkness?
- Have you prayed about it, or did you throw that pity party?
- I am known for asking people “What is something you could change?” and apparently my answer when I ask myself should be turn to prayer. What can you change that is within your control?



Tuesday of the Fifth Week of Lent

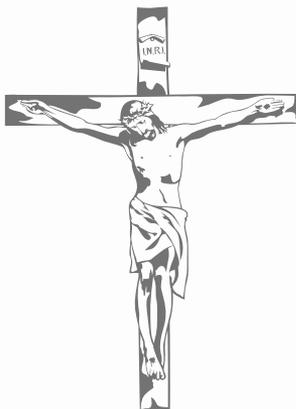
- **FIRST READING: NUMBERS 21:4-9**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 102:2-3, 16-18, 19-21**
- **GOSPEL: JOHN 8:21-30**

Have you ever spent time gazing at a crucifix? In most Catholic Churches, there is one hanging above the altar, but have you really looked at it? Look at the nails that were driven into Jesus' hands and feet. Can you imagine the excruciating pain? Literally look at the words excruciating and crucifix. They have the same root.

Now look at Jesus's head and see a crown of thorns. I don't know about you, but I used to focus on the crown part because Christ is our King. On a trip to Italy, I saw the crucifix that spoke to St. Francis of Assisi. Yes, spoke. This crucifix, like so many in Italy, is a more gruesome depiction of the corpus. I did not see a crown; I saw thorns digging into Jesus's skull, piercing it. That's certainly a different image than my previous crown image. St. Francis of Assisi also saw blood dripping from Jesus' body on the crucifix. Pause for a moment and reflect upon that.

In today's gospel, Jesus told the Pharisees that he is I AM, meaning Jesus is God who is our ALL, beyond any name that we as humans can fathom. Every time we make the sign of the Cross, we are saying a prayer and affirming that God is all. God is Father, God is Son, and God is Holy Spirit, and our "amen" affirms our belief.

- Take time today to look at a crucifix or even a picture of a crucifix. What do you see, and how do you connect Christ on the cross with Christ who walks by your side every day?
- Why do you think the tradition of placing a crucifix in homes and churches came to be? Why would we want to gaze upon the disfigured body of our executed God?



Wednesday of the Fifth Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: DANIEL 3:14-20, 91-92, 95**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: DANIEL 3:52-56**
- **GOSPEL: JOHN 8:3-42**

Reflection by
SPENCER JOHNSON
Undeclared Major | Class of 2028

Worshiping false gods or idols is nothing new. In today's first reading, we read about King Nebuchadnezzar worshiping a golden statue that he had set up as his god. He asks Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to worship the statue he made and threatens to throw them into a furnace if they don't cooperate. They disagree with him, saying, "There is no need for us to defend ourselves before you in this matter. We will not serve your god or worship the golden statue that you set up" (Daniel 3:16b, 18b). Upon hearing this, King Nebuchadnezzar falls into a fit of rage and throws them into the furnace, but then he looks inside the furnace to find them completely unharmed. He also sees a fourth person in the furnace with them who "looks like a son of God." (v. 92)

The three men gave their complete trust to God and put him first even before their own lives, so God sent them an angel to protect them in the furnace.

Look back on your own life. How often do you put God first? Think about the way you use your free time. When we have free time, most of us don't even think about God. Instead, many of us scroll on social media or play video games. We disregard him, we take his love for granted, we assume that just going to church on Sunday is enough. It's not. We need to prioritize him in our lives. When we do this and put God before everything else, we will live in freedom. God will help us face our problems. We won't stress all the time, and we will be able to recognize and feel his presence in our day-to-day lives.

- Where can you make more time for God? Is there something you can replace in your life with God?
- When you get up in the morning, what is the first thing you do? Do you check your phone? Why is that? Do you recognize the gift from God that is waking you up to a new day?

Thursday of the Fifth Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: GENESIS 17:3-9**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 105:4-5, 6-7, 8-9**
- **GOSPEL: JOHN 8:51-59**

In today's reading two words prostrated and covenant stood out to me, along with Jesus' proclamation "I AM." When we receive Eucharist, we receive the Body and Blood of Christ, not symbols, but the actual Body and Blood, under the species of bread and wine. Since the time of Christ's death and resurrection, there are documented miracles related to the Eucharist. One I remember hearing is back when altar rails and a cloth were stretched under the chins of all kneeling to prevent even a fleck of Eucharist from falling to the ground. A host (piece of Christ's body) fell on the cloth and a blood stain formed. Years later when the technology was available, it was determined that this blood stain was the same blood type as Christ. The word prostrated stood out to me from our readings, as part of me wonders, should I lie prostrate on the ground before receiving Communion? I mean, that is Jesus Christ right in front of me. If Jesus was standing in front of me in a living body, I would lie prostrate on the ground. Instead, I bow and say, "Amen." Yes, I do believe that this is the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ, He who is "I AM."

While many equate covenant with contract, it is so much more. A contract is a transactional relationship between two parties for a set term, whereas a covenant is an infinite binding agreement. In the first reading, God makes a covenant with Abraham and all his descendants. A covenant is not something to enter into lightly, as it does not have an end, unlike a contract. During the Marriage Sacrament, husband and wife are sealed in a covenant bound by I AM through the exchange of vows.

God made the ultimate binding agreement in sending his Son to suffer and die on the cross for our sins. In a way he took our place in a covenant that promised death for our sins. The Resurrection of Christ Jesus allows us to be saved from eternal death through our faith and works, along with our true commitment to try not to sin but when we do, to repent and offer penance.

- Do you look at your faith as a contract or a covenant with God?
- How has God shown mercy on you lately?
- Is there something you could do to better live your faith?



Friday of the Fifth Week of Lent

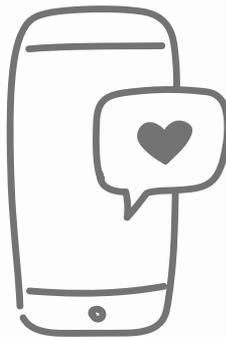
- **FIRST READING: JEREMIAH 20:10-13**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 18:2-3A, 3BC-4, 5-6, 7**
- **GOSPEL: JOHN 10:31-42**

"In my distress I called upon the Lord, and he heard my voice.
I love you, O LORD, my strength,
O LORD, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer."

Read those words again slowly. Take a few moments to meditate on them. Consider these questions: When have I been in distress or at least felt distressed? Did I call upon the Lord? Do I remember that the Lord is my strength, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer? How do I communicate and demonstrate my love for the Lord?

Father Steve, at my parish in Billings, defines love in homilies on a regular basis. He has even hinted at having us respond with, "Love is willing the good of the other as other." This definition, based on the words of Saint John Paul II, means that to love another, we sacrifice ourselves to put the other first. Yes, loving another is always putting what is best for the other before your needs. I witnessed love in my life when my godmother was dying of cancer, and every time I talked with her on the phone, the first thing she said was "how are you, my love?" Even in something as simple as a phone call, she always put me before her.

- How often do you show your love for another by putting what is best for them before your needs?
- Consider the psalmist's words again. How often do you tell God that you love God? Aside from words, how else do you show God your love on a daily basis?



Saturday of the Fifth Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: EZEKIEL 37:21-28**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: JEREMIAH 31:10, 11-12ABCD, 13**
- **GOSPEL: JOHN 11:45-56**

Today's gospel from John contains an often overlooked detail. The Sanhedrin were worried about Jesus causing a revolution that would anger the Romans and that everyone would suffer the consequences. Caiaphas, the high priest, made the statement that it would be better for one man—Jesus—to die instead of the whole nation. Two themes come from this statement. First is the importance of the good of the whole rather than that of the individual. Second, and most profound, is Caiaphas essentially foretold that the death of Jesus would save the whole world. Ponder that for a minute.

I am usually guilty of skipping over the verse before the Gospel. In Sunday Mass, it is often sung with the "Alleluia." Today's verse is from Ezekiel Chapter 18, verse 31: "'Cast away from you all the crimes you have committed,' says the LORD, 'and make for yourselves a new heart and a new spirit.'" As Holy Week begins tomorrow, ask yourself:

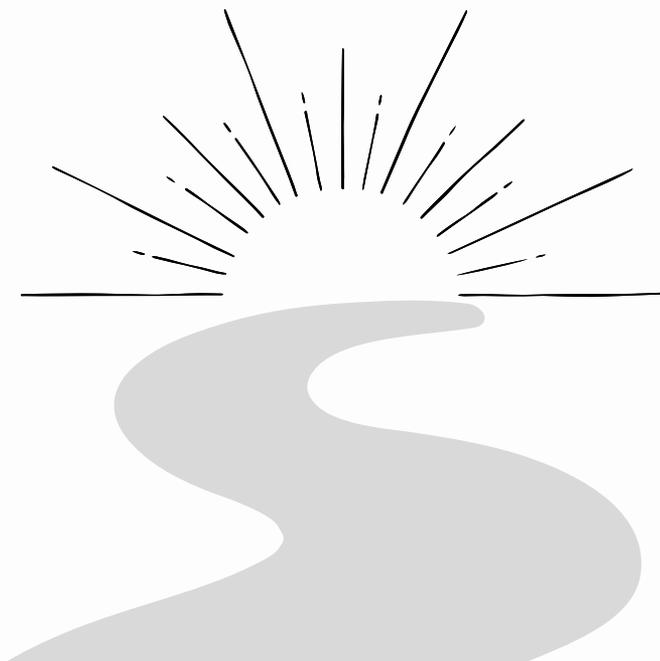
- What have I done that is holding me down? Is there something I am failing to do that is burdening me?
- How can I make a new heart?
- How can I grow in faith during Holy Week?



Holy Week

REFLECTIONS BY
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Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs



Palm Sunday

- **PROCESSION: LUKE 19:28-40**
- **FIRST READING: ISAIAH 50:4-7**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 22:8-9, 17-18, 19-20, 23-24**
- **SECOND READING: PHILIPPIANS 2:6-11**
- **GOSPEL: LUKE 22:14-23:56**

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion marks the beginning of Holy Week. It is a day of celebration and sorrow. The liturgy for the day focuses on Jesus' joyous entry into Jerusalem and the explicit narrative of his Passion. I find these readings to be emotionally charged. Duplicity. Betrayal. Unjust trial. Weakness. Abandonment. Fear. Suffering. Acceptance. Resilience. Love. Salvation. It's all there, and it brings up heavy emotions.

I am angry at Judas' duplicity and betrayal. This triggers me. I give my trust freely and feel hurt when I feel betrayed. I feel for Peter's fears and anguish. Doing the right thing is not always easy or obvious. When I have failed to do the right thing to protect myself? I want to stop the crowd's taunting. What on earth are they doing? What pleasure do they take from Jesus' suffering? I feel a deep sense of shame. Why haven't we learned from this? It makes me reflect on how my actions or reactions may differ when I am one-on-one versus under the guise of anonymity in a crowd. I empathize with Jesus' moments of despair and want to comfort him. I feel his agony and resignation. This brings out the nurturer in me. I want to hug him and make this all go away. I hurt for him.

The Passion emphasizes God's love and the cost of salvation - Jesus' sacrifice. He endured betrayal, abandonment, an unjust trial, and a painful death. My rational mind somewhat understands the teachings - to remain faithful in moments of triumph but also in adversity, to have faith in the immensity of God's Love - a love that embraces suffering rather than avoiding it and seeks to transform the world by giving the ultimate sacrifice for the salvation of humanity. Jesus' teachings encourage me to recognize Christ's glory amid his suffering and to reflect on my relationship with him. We are called to follow Jesus' example by accepting suffering not as an end but as a means of uniting our struggles with his redemptive act.



One more thought: Jesus does not arrive as a conquering political leader but as a humble teacher riding on a donkey. His leadership is characterized by service, self-sacrifice, and love. It was not about power for the sake of power. It was about his circle of influence. Jesus is the essence of a servant leader.

- Are you quick to praise and support when things go well, yet abandon in times of difficulty? Do you stay steadfast when faced with obstacles?
- In what way do you answer Christ's invitation to bear your cross? How do you respond to the contradiction of a Savior who rules through self-sacrifice?



Monday of Holy Week

- **FIRST READING: ISAIAH 42:1-7**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 27:1, 2, 3, 13-14**
- **GOSPEL: JOHN 12:1-11**

Today's reading speaks to the personal relationship God desires with each of us, our place in God's creation, and our responsibility to care for it and one another. It encourages us to persevere in our faith and do good, even when faced with obstacles or setbacks. It reminds us of God's liberating power and that God is our salvation. It is also a good reminder to examine our hearts and motivations in our service to God.

The miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead draws crowds to Jesus and increases attention to him and his miraculous power. It prompts a celebratory dinner held in honor of Jesus and to celebrate Lazarus' resurrection. This gathering provides the setting for Mary's act of devotion and Judas' criticism. Mary anoints Jesus' feet with expensive perfume, reflecting a profound understanding of his significance. Her selfless act is contrasted with Judas' selfish motivations. While Mary gives freely out of love, Judas criticizes her actions, masking his greed with what could appear to be moral concerns. Like the scent of the perfume filling the house, acts of love can spread through our surroundings, impacting us and those around us.

- Do you embody the qualities of God's servant: gentleness, perseverance, justice, and compassion? How do you pursue justice? Are you loud and forceful, or do you work patiently and persistently, like a smoldering wick that refuses to be extinguished?
- What is your response to Jesus? Do you offer your best to him regardless of the cost or criticism you might face? Do you apply Mary's devotion and generosity in your life?



Tuesday of Holy Week

- **FIRST READING: ISAIAH 49:1-6**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 71:1-2, 3-4A, 5AB-6AB,15**
- **GOSPEL: JOHN 13:21-33, 36-38**

Today's readings remind us to trust in God's care, recognize our part in his mission, and keep the faith even when things get tough. Our own stories of faith play a role in the bigger picture of God's work in the world. The readings focus on the journey of faith—how God chooses and prepares us for His plan. Faith grows over a lifetime, and God's plan is often bigger than we first realize, offering a wider view of salvation. We're always called to share God's works and character. Even those closest to God might face moments of doubt or betrayal, but through it all, we're called to trust in his salvation and keep moving forward with our mission.

- What is God's plan for you as you perceive it now?
- Think back to a time when you felt weak or betrayed and had to dig deep into your faith. What did you learn from that time?



Wednesday of Holy Week

- **FIRST READING: ISAIAH 50:4-9A**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 69:8-10, 21-22, 31 AND 33-34**
- **GOSPEL: MATTHEW 26:14-25**

These readings talk about suffering, staying faithful, and betrayal. In our complex and often challenging world, they guide, comfort, and inspire, reminding us that God is always with us and calls us to live faithfully, no matter what we face.

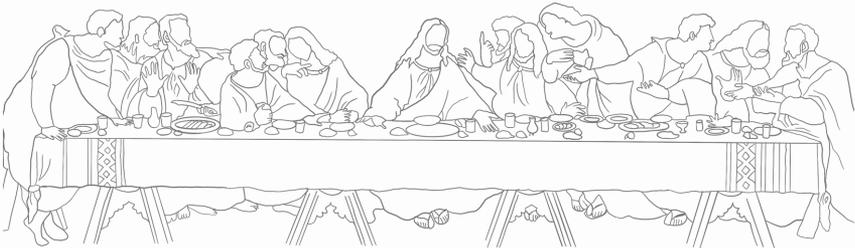
We are called to remain steadfast in our faith amidst life's challenges, equipped by God with wisdom and perseverance. I believe that wisdom comes from continuous learning and listening to God's guidance, the courage to stand firm in one's convictions despite adversity, and faith in God's support in times of difficulty.

Acknowledging the reality of suffering, communicating honestly with God in times of distress, and having faith that God hears and responds are essential. Honest prayer is valuable because it encourages us to be authentic spiritually by bringing our raw emotions and experiences to God.

Jesus' betrayal is a cautionary tale, prompting us to examine our actions and their potential consequences. Human relationships are complex, and betrayal is painful. God is present and active in our struggles, offering comfort and redemption. Self-reflection and recognizing our potential for wrongdoing are critical. Remember there is solace in knowing that God's plan will triumph despite our failings.

- How does God manifest himself when you struggle? How do you feel his presence and comfort?
- What sustains your faith in God's support in times of difficulties?





The Paschal Triduum

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The Paschal Triduum

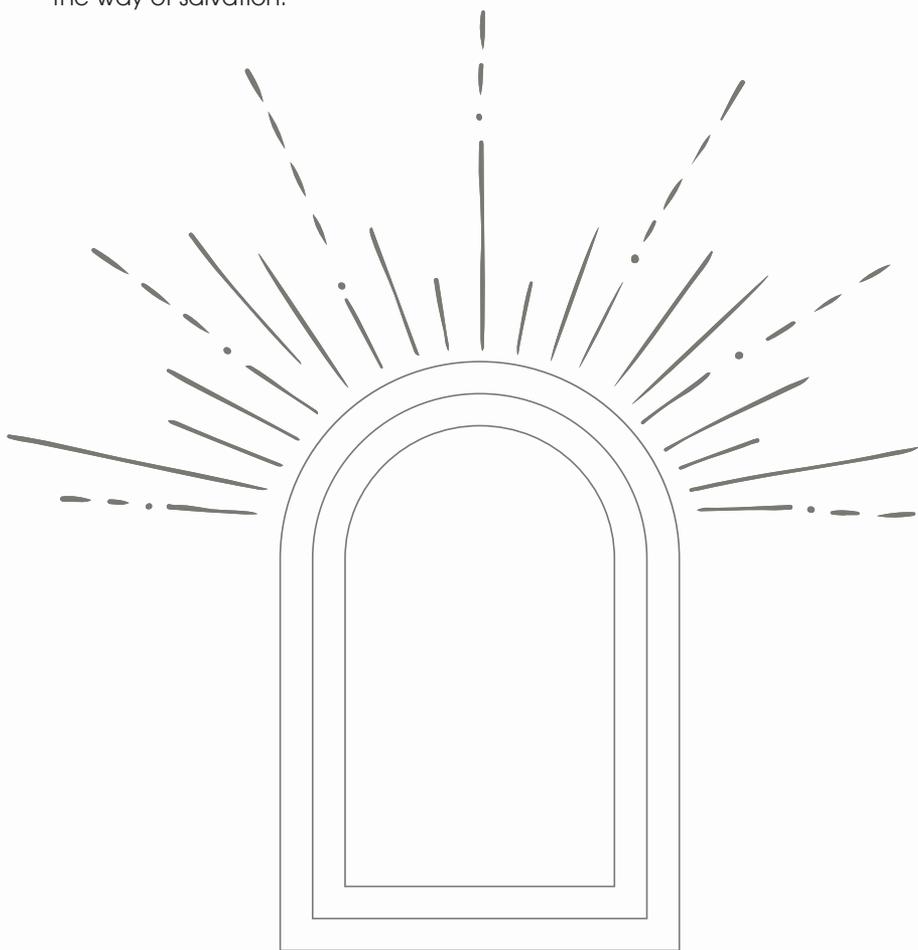
Throughout the next three days, the church celebrates one continuous liturgy. What begins on Holy Thursday with the celebration of the Lord's Supper and the commemoration of the institution of the Eucharist is only completed on the eve of Easter Sunday as we proclaim the resurrection of our Lord. While your attendance at this days-long liturgy is by no means obligatory, we encourage you to attend the liturgy as you are able. What follows is a brief reflection on the journey of the Triduum.

Throughout this Lent we have walked together along the way of salvation. We have certainly not traversed this path completely. Still, walking with one another and with our Lord, who himself is the way, is the nature of Christian life. As the church gathers to commemorate Jesus' last supper with his friends, we also come to learn his ways. The liturgy of the Triduum that begins on Holy Thursday not only recalls Jesus' institution of the Eucharist, that is Jesus eternally with us, but also remembers (anamnesis literally "un-forgets") Jesus' servant leadership. This night, we wash one another's feet, just as Christ the Servant, our savior, washed the feet of his friends. In the last day of his life, Jesus gave us his body and blood as food and drink for our journey, that we should never have to walk this way of salvation alone. After commemorating that first Eucharist, we accompany Jesus to the Garden of Gethsemane, proclaiming, Sing my tongue the Savior's glory.

Good Friday brings the trial and death of Jesus. Our liturgy continues today. Notice there is no introduction, no sign of the cross. Good Friday is also the only day of the year during which there is no consecration of the Eucharist. Although we take and eat Christ's body today, we do so from reserve. Today we hear the Passion of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, according to St. John, and venerate the cross of Jesus, without which we would not know salvation. There is something powerful in venerating this device of cruelty and torture. It speaks to the transformative power of Jesus' love and sacrifice. As we depart, Jesus is dead, and we are left waiting.

Holy Saturday brings with it more waiting. Jesus is dead. He is not yet risen. There is something beautiful that resonates in the waiting we experience today. In many ways the church is a Holy Saturday people. We live in the breach of already and not yet. Jesus has come and gone but we are still waiting for him to come again. We know the love and mercy of Jesus, but we do not yet know if fully. Now we see through a cloudy lens, but only in the resurrection will we see fully. As we wait today, don't rush to push off the discomfort of sitting in the chasm between what was and what will be. Let the already and not yet rush over you. It is our present moment.

As the sun sets on this day of waiting, in churches all around the world a new light rises from the same ashes that were smeared on our foreheads as a sign of our death and repentance just 7 weeks ago. This new light is the light of Christ, risen from the dead. He is the light of the world. He walks with us. He is the way of salvation.



The Exultet

Exult, let them exult, the hosts of heaven,
exult, let Angel ministers of God exult,
let the trumpet of salvation
sound aloud our mighty King's triumph!
Be glad, let earth be glad, as glory floods her,
ablaze with light from her eternal King,
let all corners of the earth be glad,
knowing an end to gloom and darkness.

Rejoice, let Mother Church also rejoice,
arrayed with the lightning of his glory,
let this holy building shake with joy,
filled with the mighty voices of the peoples.

It is truly right and just, with ardent love of mind and heart
and with devoted service of our voice,
to acclaim our God invisible, the almighty Father,
and Jesus Christ, our Lord, his Son, his Only Begotten.

Who for our sake paid Adam's debt to the eternal Father,
and, pouring out his own dear Blood,
wiped clean the record of our ancient sinfulness.

These, then, are the feasts of Passover,
in which is slain the Lamb, the one true Lamb,
whose Blood anoints the doorposts of believers.

This is the night,
when once you led our forebears, Israel's children,
from slavery in Egypt and made them pass dry-shod through the Red Sea.

This is the night
that with a pillar of fire banished the darkness of sin.

This is the night
that even now, throughout the world,
sets Christian believers apart from worldly vices
and from the gloom of sin,
leading them to grace and joining them to his holy ones.

This is the night,
when Christ broke the prison-bars of death and rose victorious from the
underworld.

Our birth would have been no gain, had we not been redeemed.

O wonder of your humble care for us!

O love, O charity beyond all telling, to ransom a slave you gave away your Son!

O truly necessary sin of Adam, destroyed completely by the Death of Christ!

O happy fault that earned so great, so glorious a Redeemer!

O truly blessed night,

worthy alone to know the time and hour when Christ rose from the underworld!

This is the night of which it is written:

The night shall be as bright as day, dazzling is the night for me, and full of gladness.

The sanctifying power of this night dispels wickedness, washes faults away, restores innocence to the fallen, and joy to mourners,

drives out hatred, fosters concord, and brings down the mighty.

On this, your night of grace, O holy Father,

accept this candle, a solemn offering, the work of bees and of your servants' hands,

an evening sacrifice of praise, this gift from your most holy Church.

But now we know the praises of this pillar, which glowing fire ignites for God's honor,

a fire into many flames divided, yet never dimmed by sharing of its light, for it is fed by melting wax, drawn out by mother bees to build a torch so precious.

O truly blessed night,

when things of heaven are wed to those of earth, and divine to the human.

Therefore, O Lord, we pray you that this candle, hallowed to the honor of your name, may persevere undimmed, to overcome the darkness of this night.

Receive it as a pleasing fragrance, and let it mingle with the lights of heaven.

May this flame be found still burning by the Morning Star:

the one Morning Star who never sets, Christ your Son,

who, coming back from death's domain, has shed his peaceful light on humanity,

and lives and reigns for ever and ever.

R. Amen

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