

Lectio Divina

Praying the Scriptures in Lent, Year B, 2015

Lectio divina

A reading and reflection on the Scriptures which leads to prayer and transformation of life

Reading – getting to know the text (senses)

At this stage we come to know the text in its entirety. We look at it as a whole, embracing all the elements of it. What is the human author trying to tell in the text? This reading is the beginning of a process that leads to meditation, prayer and the transformation of life.

- Take in all the elements of the text.
- Be aware of context, related texts, quotes.
- Who are key characters; what are key words.
- Apply all that you know about the text.
- Don't choose any one thing to work with at this stage.

Meditation – engaging with the text, making it my own (reason)

Here we begin to reflect on the text. We approach the text not from its literal meaning, but from a theological point of view. What does it say about the God who speaks to me, and how I am to respond to that God. The text here acts like a mirror; it reveals to us our own faith journey and what we need to do to live it better.

What does the text tell me?

- about the God who speaks?
- about responding to that God?
- about my faith life?
- about what I need to do to transform my faith life?

Prayer – let prayer emerge from your working with the text (will)

Our prayer here arises out of meditation. We are humbled and have become aware of our need for God to help us. We pray for the grace to put into practice our insight into what we need to do to live our faith life more fully

- Our prayer stems from our reading / meditation.
- Meditation humbles us, so we turn to God in our need.
- We seek the grace we need to do what we must to transform our life.
- We acknowledge that alone we can do nothing.
- I can do all things in him who strengthens me

Action – throughout the day

To help us throughout the day to focus on our particular insight we now choose a word, phrase or sentence. By repeating it during the day we are reminded of what we need to do, and remember that God gives to us the help that we need to do it. The goal of *lectio divina* is transformation of life, so this continuing repetition is like a leaven that brings about the transformation.

- Now choose a word, phrase, sentence.
- Bring it to mind frequently during the day.
- Let it recapture the experience of your *lectio*.
- Use it especially in situations relating to your *lectio insight*.
- “Daily and hourly till the soil of the heart with the Gospel plough”.

Shared lectio involves hearing the word together, sharing one's initial insights into the text, and then, after a private time for meditation, sharing something of those deeper reflections. After a time of prayer, the text chosen for daily reflection may also be shared.

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Introduction

As we begin Lent let us make a deal to accompany each other into the heart of God's love for us. God is love and is about love. God's love is always a gift and loving forgiveness is a sure sign of the presence of God. God always forgives us, but knowingly or unknowingly uses us to express that forgiveness to one another and, in so doing, we appropriate forgiveness for ourselves.

Pope Francis invites us to listen, to enter into the experiences of others. Throughout Lent you are invited to listen to the hearts of others as they make God's love real for us through the telling of their own personal stories. Treat yourself each week to a new gift of forgiveness and love. Ponder where you are in need of God's love, or where God's love is calling you.

Lent is a time of renewal. Lent is a time of love. There is no need for self-hatred. In fact, that in itself, would be against God's love. There is no need for fear. God's love is free and God's love is grace itself.

During this Lent, be open to God's love and forgiveness, and be inspired to become a sacrament of that love for others. Be assured that the sign of forgiving love is freedom. During this season, enjoy a deeper understanding that, in fact, you are the apple of God's eye.

"I see clearly," said Pope Francis in his interview with the Jesuit magazine *La Civita Cattolica*, "that the thing the Church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the Church as a field hospital after battle." A hospital for sinners, not a museum of saints.

We should print that on billboards and put them on our front lawns. We should paint it on banners and hang the banners from our steeples.

"We are a hospital for sinners. Wounds healed inside." A broken world needs a place to bring its spiritual injuries. We need an emergency room more than a courtroom. We want healing more than judgment.

Our Baptism is the beginning of a path of conversion which lasts throughout our lives, and which is continually supported by the Sacrament of Penance. When we go to confess our weaknesses, our sins, we ask Jesus Christ for forgiveness ... but we also go to renew our Baptism with this forgiveness. Confession is not a torture chamber; it is a celebration of the day of Baptism...and the place in which the Lord's mercy motivates us to do better.

The Pope described Baptism as "the act of birth of a Christian in the Church", and asked the participants in the audience to raise their hands if, alongside their birthday, they remembered the date of their Baptism. Since few hands were raised in St. Peter's Square, he set those present the task of asking their parents or finding out when they returned home, and urged them to celebrate it to commemorate the act of birth into the Church.

Pope Francis understands reconciliation - confession is not so much an encounter with our guilt as it is with God's mercy. The pope talked of the church he wants: "I dream of a church that is a mother and a shepherdess. The church's ministers must be merciful."

Forgiving love is not magic, nor does it erase memories. In fact, it might not even change the concrete reality, but what it does is transform within and allows the true meaning of Easter, the resurrection, to begin in us all.

St Benedict taught his followers to listen to the Word of God they should listen with the ear of the heart. For the next forty days Lectio divina affords us the opportunity to rest and wrestle with the Word of God as we open our hearts in wonder to the mystery that is God's love.

*May you live these Lenten days
not in purple penitential denial
but in the joyfulness of the intimate embrace
of your Blessed God.*

*May you hear on the Lenten winds
your Beloved calling you daily
to go apart from your routine time
to spend desert time with your God.*

*Then your heart can be freshly aflame
with a lover's delight in your God.*

*May you have a blessed and grace-filled
Lenten season so as to be a new person
in Christ in alleluia joy on Holy Easter.*

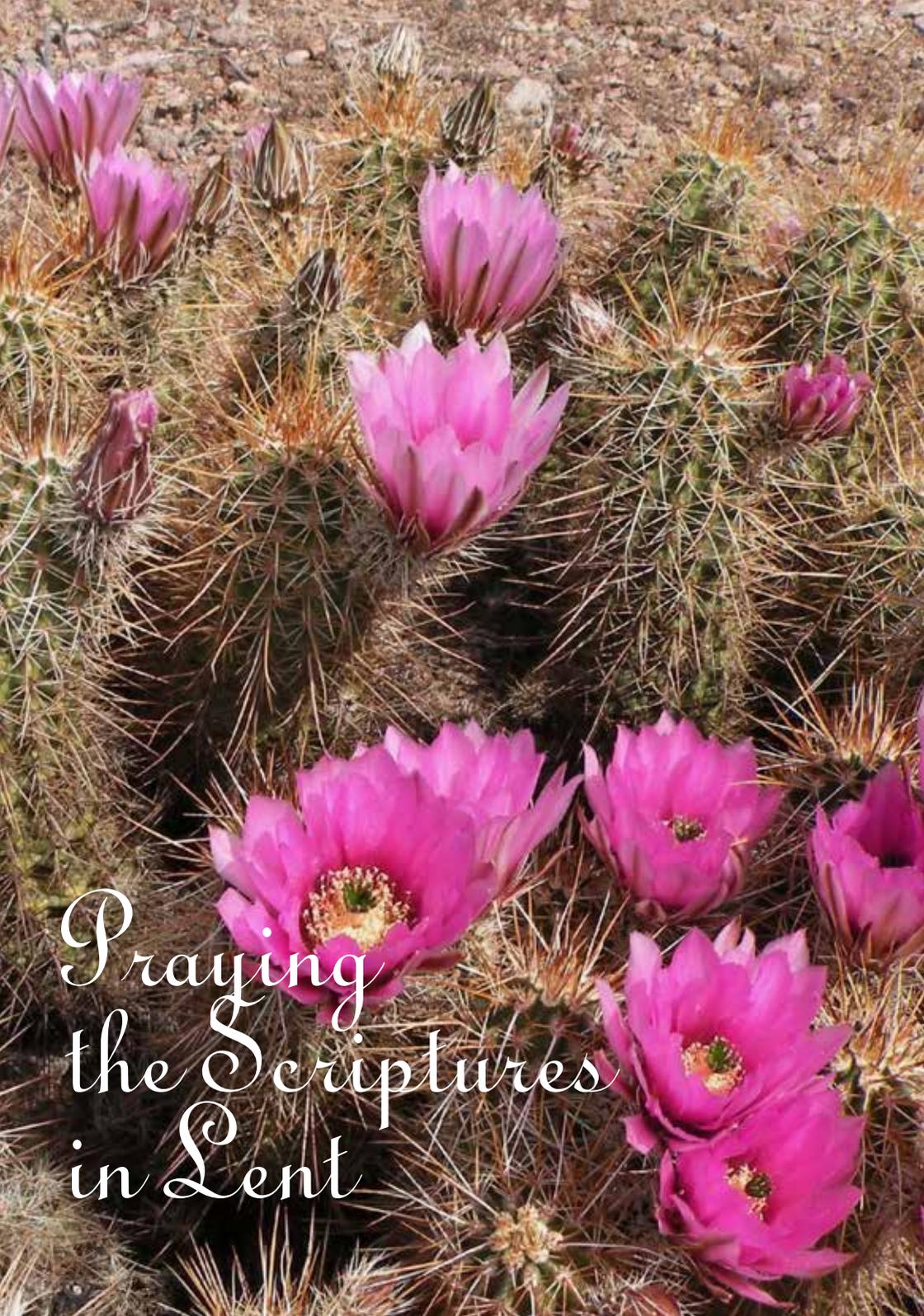
How to use this booklet

This booklet invites you to prayerfully and meditatively reflect on the Sunday readings during Lent and select readings from Holy Week.

An outline of the meditative and prayerful reflection of *lectio divina* is offered on the inside cover at the beginning of this booklet.

To find out more about *lectio divina* and the *lectio divina* App for mobile devices, please visit www.dbb.org.au

This booklet is an instrument that can be used in a variety of ways. Please use it in whatever way suits you best.



*Praying
the Scriptures
in Lent*

A User-Friendly Lent

Lent is an ancient word for springtime; it designates a season of burgeoning inner and outer life. Too often Lent has been misunderstood as a time of grim repentance, but it is meant to be a time of joy, the joy of a fresh start, the joy that greening meadows and blossoming trees proclaim each spring.

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of this special time for sharpening our spiritual focus. Its name comes from an ancient rite in which those who start their Lenten practice are signed with ashes on their foreheads. These ashes come from the burnt palm branches of last year's Palm Sunday celebration.

This year, receiving the ash cross was especially meaningful to me, having read Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan's book *The Last Week*. It starts with Palm Sunday. When you read it you will understand that the Palm Sunday procession in which we carry palm branches, as the people did who welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem, is a counter-demonstration to the entry of Pontius Pilate into the city from the other side. Pilate came on horseback surrounded by soldiers; Jesus came riding on a donkey as Prince of Peace. This and his other non-violent demonstrations cost Jesus his life. So, when we are signed with these ashes we are reminded of the "cost of discipleship" (the title of a book by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, whom the Nazis executed for his faith).

While the priest signs the faithful with ashes he says, "Remember that from dust you came and to dust you will return." (It always reminds me of the little child who notices a pile of dust under the bed and cries, "Mommy, Mommy, there is someone under my bed, but I can't tell whether he is coming or going.") All forms come and go. The implication of this impermanence is: NOW is the time, and the time is short. But the sentence doesn't ring with the joy of living in the Now of God's presence. That's why I like the other formula better, the one that is more often used in today's liturgy: "Turn away from sin, and believe the Gospel." Sin stands for everything that cuts us off from our authentic self, from one another, and from the divine ground of our being; Gospel stands for the Good News that the Kingdom of God is at hand. The world order in accord with God's design is only waiting for us to make it a reality here and now.

And how do we make God's design for the world a tangible reality? By overcoming sin in its three dimensions: we becoming authentic by pulling ourselves together; we celebrate our belonging to the universe by sharing with one another; we ground ourselves in God by letting ourselves down into God's silence to drink from the fountain of life, the very source of our being.

The traditional terminology for pulling ourselves together is Fasting (meaning of course a lot more than discipline in eating and drinking). Sharing with others is called Almsgiving (meaning more than doling out alms). And for grounding ourselves in Being, the term is Prayer (meaning more than saying prayers). Fasting, almsgiving and prayer are the three ways of aligning ourselves and our world with God's design, the three intersecting pathways into the joy of Lent.

The three are inseparably intertwined. How could I become authentic unless I ground myself in God and share? How could I truly share unless I found my authentic Self that is grounded in God? How could I ground myself in God unless I found in God that authentic Self of mine that is one with all and so will joyfully share? These intertwined dimensions help each one of us find our own customized observance of Lent.

What I commit myself to do in order to become more authentically myself (“Fasting”) will spring from alert attention to my personal coaching by God’s Spirit within me (i.e. “Prayer”), and what exactly I give to others (“Almsgiving”) will be the unique fruit of this uniquely personal interaction. It may be money I can give to the poor because I save it by depriving myself of the kinds of food or drink that are not good for my body. It may be extra energy for helping someone in need, energy I gain by fasting from media intake that is not healthy for my mind. It may consist in things I can spare and give away because I get rid of clutter that makes authentic living more difficult. Or the fruit of my Lenten practice may be a service to others for which I find time by following a more disciplined schedule. Or – well you get the point. There is this intimately personal aspect to one’s Lenten commitment, yet it finds expression in public action; the two are as two sides of one coin.

In the monastery each monk gets a personally selected book to guide us through Lent. The book I mention above is one I’d recommend: Marcus J. Borg & John Dominic Crossan: *The Last Week: What the Gospels Really Teach About Jesus’s Final Days in Jerusalem*.

We risk and we receive, and we allow ourselves to fall in love

In college a friend of mine quit a club with the simple excuse that he'd gotten engaged. Some of us thought this was pretty funny at the time, but there is logic to it. **Sometimes it takes all your mental energy to be in love**, and all the boring business of everyday life that interferes with being in love just falls away. In Lent, by cutting down on some of the more useless elements of life's business, we give ourselves a chance to recapture or find for the first time a frisson of Divine love, to remember what it feels like to be in deep mutual love with God.

Whatever you're doing for Lent, use it so that God has a chance to reach you. If you're giving up TV, don't pick up a new hobby: find time for silence or manual work so that God can speak. If it's a food, that's (at least) three times a day you'll be reminded that God affects your daily life. What else can you do with that knowledge?

All the space we could possibly make for God by eliminating TV or iPods or by praying more would make no difference if God didn't reach out. But the truth is that God is constantly reaching out to us, not just during Lent; calling, sending flowers and divine text messages (I <3 U n U R MINE.) We are too good at shutting ourselves off from God's call, at distracting ourselves so that no insight can slip through, at talking ourselves into the ideas of our culture and out of God's genius plans for us. We know what we're about: deep down we know that falling in love with God is a scary proposition. Better to fill our ears with buzz and our days with tasks than to leave ourselves open to the kind of enormous change our enormous God could demand.

But if we keep ourselves shut off from God's gentle nudge, we also shut out the courage and energy and faith that God offers along with those enormous, scary plans. And so we force ourselves to open, even if it's just a chink in the armour, because we know God can shine great light through a tiny crack. **We risk and we receive, and we allow ourselves to fall in love.**

Kate Ward



Ash Wednesday

Ash Wednesday

Ash Wednesday is like the burning and cleaning of our Christian lives. We enter a time for confession, for penitence, for realisation of our earthly nature. But it is also a fertile day, a time for self-examination and self-preparation. It is a day to get us ready for something.

Jan Richardson writing in her book, *The Artful Ashes*, shares what she discovered when she undertook a project where she learned to draw in charcoal:

Taking up a new medium, entering a different way of working, diving or tiptoeing into a new approach: all of this can be complex, unsettling, disorienting. Launching into the unknown and untried confronts us with what is undeveloped within us. It compels us to see where we are not adepts, where we lack skill, where we possess little gracefulness. Yet what may seem like inadequacy - as I felt in my early attempts with charcoal - becomes fantastic fodder for the creative process, and for life. Allowing ourselves to be present to the messiness provides an amazing way to sort through what is essential and to clear a path through the chaos. To borrow the words of the writer of Psalm 51, the psalm for Ash Wednesday, it creates a clean heart within us.

Ash Wednesday beckons us to cross over the threshold into a season that's all about working through the chaos to discover what is essential. The ashes that lead us into this season remind us where we have come from. They beckon us to consider what is most basic to us, what is elemental, what survives after all that is extraneous is burned away. With its images of ashes and wildness, Lent challenges us to reflect on what we have filled our lives with, and to see if there are habits, practices, possessions, and ways of being that have accumulated, encroached, invaded, accreted, layer upon layer, becoming a pattern of chaos that threatens to insulate us and dull us to the presence of God.

- Have you settled on a Lenten discipline?
- Are you thinking of making room for silence in your life?
- What are you thinking about for this Lent?
- What needs to be added to your life?
- What could you do without?

Joel 2:12-18

¹² Yet even now, says the Lord,
return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
¹³ rend your hearts and not your clothing.
Return to the Lord, your God,
for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love,
and relents from punishing.
¹⁴ Who knows whether he will not turn and relent,
and leave a blessing behind him,
a grain-offering and a drink-offering
for the Lord, your God?
¹⁵ Blow the trumpet in Zion;
sanctify a fast;
call a solemn assembly;
¹⁶ gather the people.
Sanctify the congregation;
assemble the aged;
gather the children,
even infants at the breast.
Let the bridegroom leave his room,
and the bride her canopy.
¹⁷ Between the vestibule and the altar
let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep.
Let them say, 'Spare your people, O Lord,
and do not make your heritage a mockery,
a byword among the nations.
Why should it be said among the peoples,
"Where is their God?"'
¹⁸ Then the Lord became jealous for his land,
and had pity on his people.

2 Corinthians 5:20 - 6:2

²⁰So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

6 As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain.
²For he says,

*'At an acceptable time I have listened to you,
and on a day of salvation I have helped you.'*

See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!

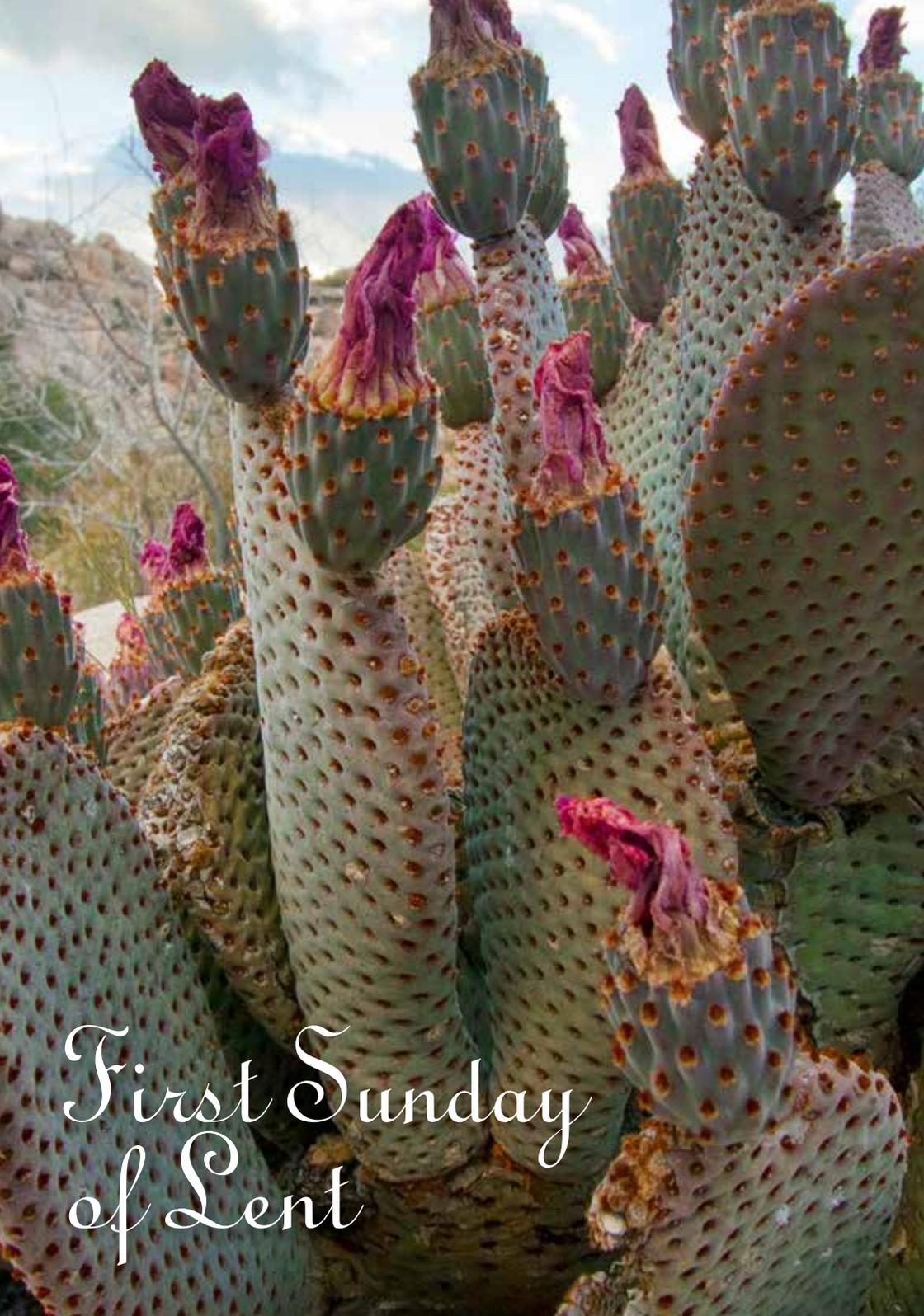
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

6 Beware of practising your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

²So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ³But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

⁵And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ⁶But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

¹⁶And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.



*First Sunday
of Lent*

First Sunday of Lent

Two of the bywords, that dictate the ambiance of Lent, appear in this short text from Christianity's first gospel . . . *reform* (or repent) and *believe*. This is the program for the season; this sets the tenor for the life of the committed disciple of Jesus.

Thomas Smith (*Good News About Jesus As Told By Mark*, Christian Brothers Publications, Winona MN: 1977) has called verses 14-15 a two-line summary of what any gospel is about and an editorial faith-comment by the evangelist. Mark's synthesis of Jesus' person and purpose is simple. Through Jesus, God is among us. Believe that and live accordingly.

Whereas the Revised Common Lectionary and the Episcopal (BCP) include the account of Jesus baptism (vv. 9-11) in their liturgies for today, the Roman Catholic and Lutheran (LBW) lectionaries focus solely on the temptation of Jesus and the inaugural proclamation of the good news.

After his baptism, the Spirit *drove* Jesus into the wilderness. *Drove* is a harsh word, and has been translated elsewhere as *thrust*. When read in combination with the adverb *immediately* (v. 12), it becomes clear that the battle between good and evil has already erupted. Jesus, in his baptism, was anointed and empowered with the Spirit. Fully equipped for the task at hand, he is thrust immediately into the fray. Through the period of testing, Jesus' power is affirmed and, for the rest of his ministry, the struggle between good and evil will be played out for all to see. In the end, his complete victory will be celebrated on the cross; the twin evils of sin and death will meet their ultimate defeat.

Satan, mentioned here (v. 13) for the first time in Mark, simply means adversary. As William Barclay ("Mark", *The Daily Study Bible*, St. Andrew Press, Edinburgh: 1975) has explained, the development of the concept of *satan* is quite interesting. In the Hebrew scriptures, the word was first used of human opponents. The Philistines called David a *satan* (1 Samuel 29:4); David regarded Abishai as his *satan* (2 Samuel 19:23); Solomon praised God that he had no *satan* left to oppose him (1 Kings 5:4). Gradually, *satan* was used to describe someone who prosecutes a case against another as in Job 1:6-7, or someone who accuses others before God, as in Job 2:2 and Zechariah 3:2.

The other title for *satan* is devil, from the Greek, *diabolos*, which means a slanderer. As Barclay further explained, it is only a small step from the notion of one who accuses to one who deliberately and maliciously slanders a person before God. Nevertheless, in the Hebrew scriptures, *satan* is still an emissary of God and the adversary of humankind.

In the Christian scriptures, however, we find another view of *satan*, as the one: who is responsible for disease and suffering (Luke 13:16); who seduced Judas (Luke 22:3); who was confronted by the words and works of Jesus (Luke 10:1-19); against whom we must fight (1 Peter 5:8, 9; James 4:7); who is the power against God and is destined for final destruction (Matthew 25:41). This personification of evil as the essence of everything

that is against God and the source of all conflict was derived from Persian thought which probably began to influence Hebrew ideas during and after the exile. By the time of Jesus, this concept of satan or the devil had become full blown.

Mark's reference to Jesus' being among the wild beasts (v. 13) may point to the danger of the situation; leopards, wild boars, bears and jackals inhabited the Judean desert. But, more probably, the evangelist wished his readers to remember the promises of the messianic age as a time of harmony between humanity and nature (Hosea 2:18, Isaiah 11:6-9). Like the Israelites in their desert trek (Exodus 14:19; 23:20), and like Elijah in the wilderness (1 Kings 19:5-7), angel-messengers from God sustained Jesus (v. 13). But, unlike the Israelites who gave into temptation, complained against God and sinned in the desert, Jesus emerged obedient and faithful to continue the task of proclaiming the reign of God.

Today, we who hear his challenge to reform and believe begin the Lenten process of turning away from self, from evil and sin so as to turn toward God and toward others with renewed faith and fervour.

Genesis 9:8-15

⁸Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹'As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, ¹⁰and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. ¹¹I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.' ¹²God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.

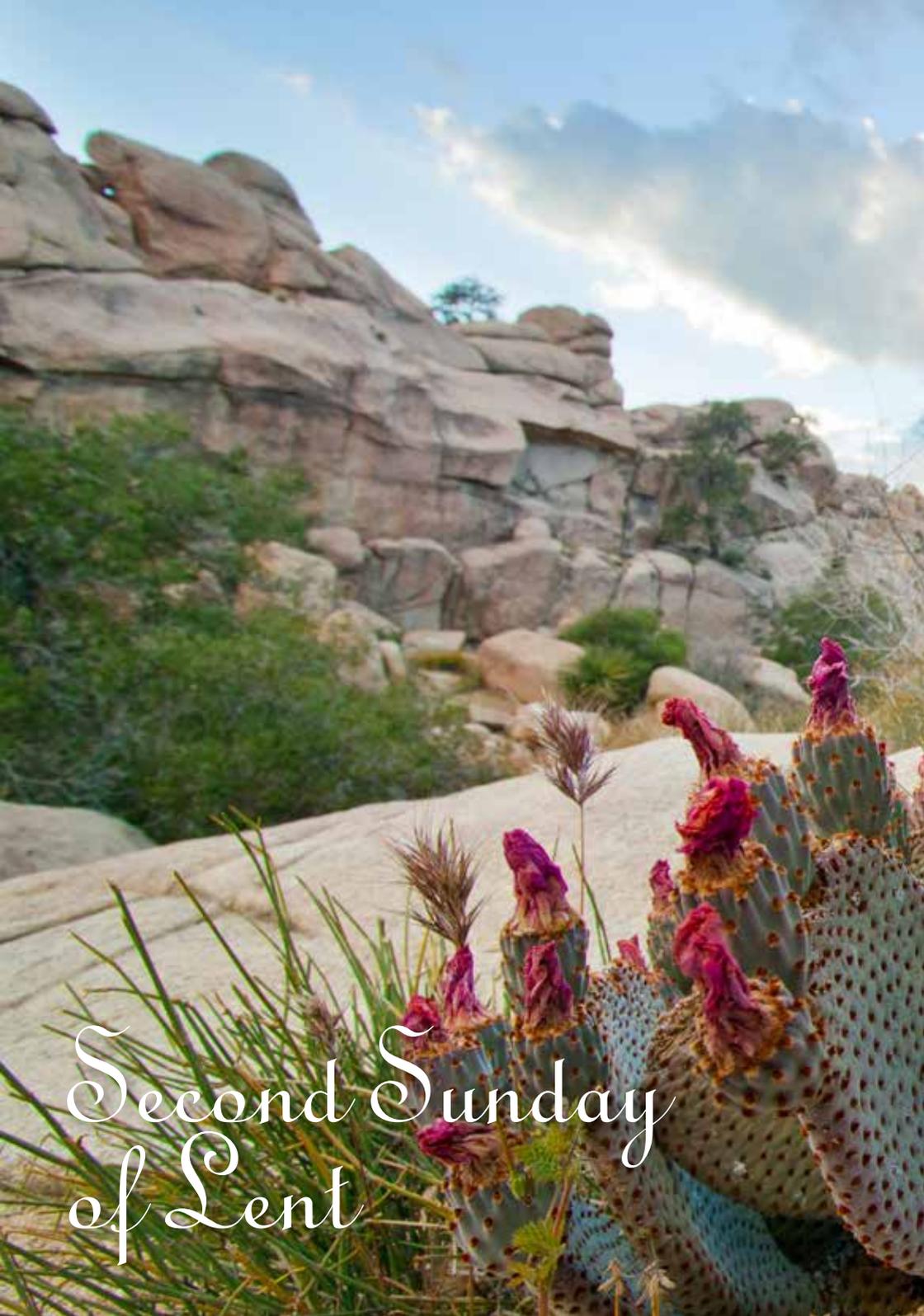
1 Peter 3:18-22

¹⁸For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, ²⁰who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight people, were saved through water. ²¹And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²²who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.*

Mark 1:12-15

¹² And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'



Second Sunday
of Lent

Second Sunday of Lent

Several months ago, the television and print media carried the story of a seven-year-old boy who died in tragic circumstances while on vacation with his family in Italy. Armed thieves, attempting to take the family's car and valuables waited in ambush in the Italian countryside. As the car passed, thieves sprayed a shower of bullets at the vehicle. Although the family was able to escape, some of the bullets had hit the young boy, while he slept in the back seat. A short time later, the child was pronounced dead at a nearby hospital. People were shocked and outraged as the sad news was reported. But public outrage was soon replaced by wonder and admiration.

The boy's family arranged that all of their son's vital organs be harvested and donated. As a result, the lives of eight Italians, each of whom received one or more of the child's healthy organs, were forever changed. For some it meant being able to see again; for others death was postponed because a young vital organ had replaced an aged, defective one. Because organ donation was such a rarity in Italy, the gift of life was all the more remarkable.

As I heard the story of the young boy and learned of the aftermath of his death, I was reminded of another time and place and the death of another son, whose dying brought life to so many. It is the life-giving death of this other son, viz., Jesus, which is the focus of our scripture readings for today.

The moving narrative of Abraham and Isaac which comprises today's first reading (Genesis) has been understood as an Old Testament type of God's willingness to offer Jesus as a sacrifice for human sin. As the ancient author noted, Isaac was Abraham's son, an only son (if Ishmael is discounted), a loved son. To give him up to God was equivalent to relinquishing the future, for it was believed, at this time in Israel's history, that parents lived on in their progeny. Abraham's faith was so intense as to surpass human rationality; his trust in God was greater than his own desire for perpetuity.

Paul, in the second reading, reminds his Roman readers, and us, that God's love has no limits. God has given the greatest gift of all to the world in the handing over of Jesus. Can anyone doubt that God would not give every other lesser gift as well? Indeed, when compared to the gift God gives in Jesus, all else pales into insignificance. Nevertheless, Paul's words offer encouragement to believers, who may be burdened with worries, difficult times or other struggles inherent in the human experience. In a sense, Paul is saying, look at the big picture; gain some perspective and be at peace.

In today's gospel, the Marcan transfiguration scene features a voice speaking from an overshadowing cloud. Identifying Jesus as God's beloved son, the voice further enjoined the disciples to listen to him. As the gospel is proclaimed today, the voice is directed, not only at Peter, James and John, but at every contemporary disciple; the voice instructs believers, yet again, to listen to the words and works of Jesus, and to find therein the message of life and salvation.

Genesis 22:1-2, 9-13, 15-18

22 After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' 2He said, 'Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt-offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you.'

9 When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. 11But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, 'Abraham, Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' 12He said, 'Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.' 13And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt-offering instead of his son.

15 The angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, 16and said, 'By myself I have sworn, says the Lord: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, 17I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, 18and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.'

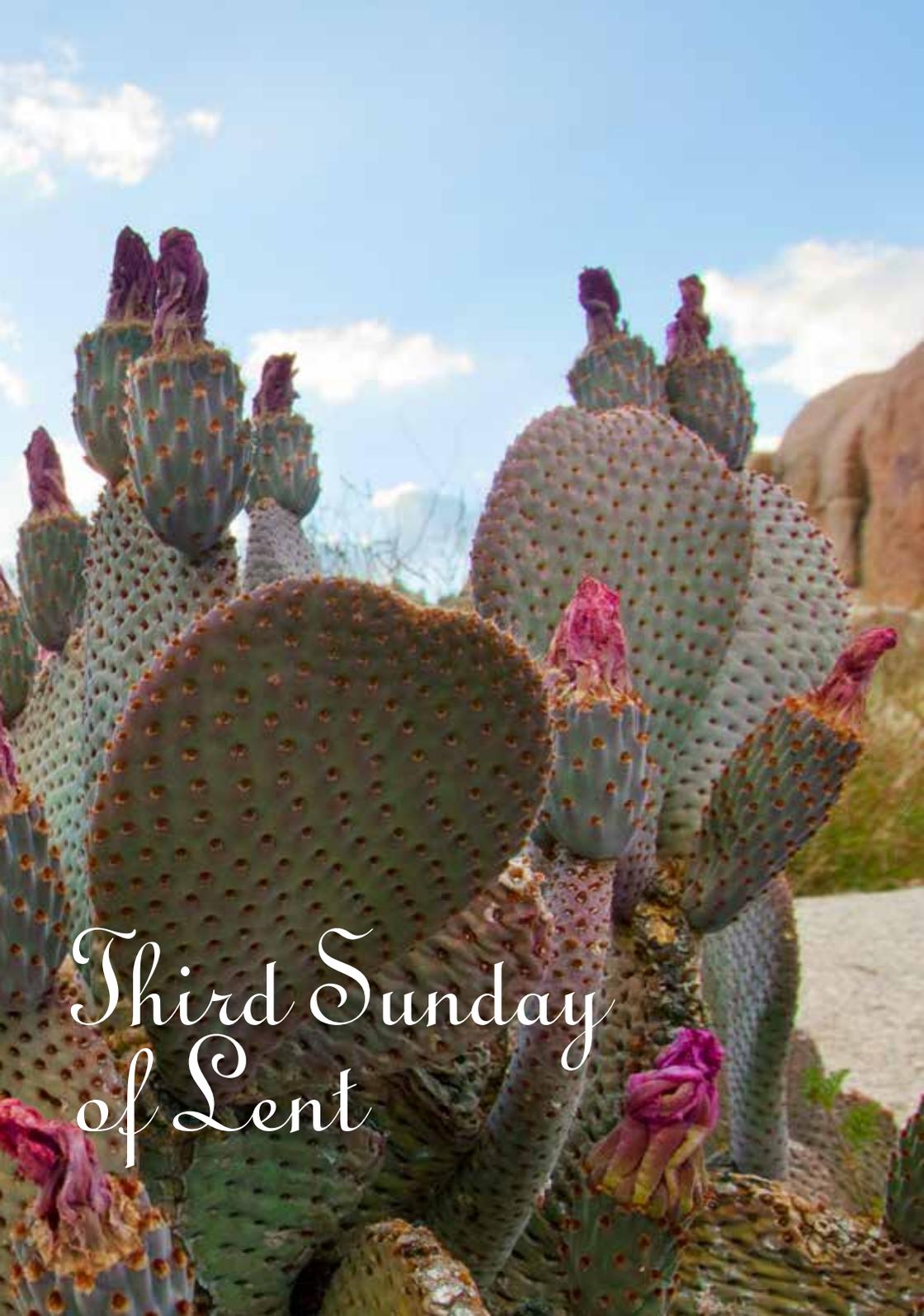
Romans 8:31-34

31 What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? 33Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.

Mark 9:2-10

2 Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, 3and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. 4And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. 5Then Peter said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' 6He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. 7Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!' 8Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus.

9 As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. 10So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead could mean.



*Third Sunday
of Lent*

Third Sunday of Lent

As each Lenten Sunday draws us nearer to Holy Week and Easter, the scriptures urge us to measure ourselves against the mysteries we celebrate so we can be better, grow in God more deeply and believe more fully — both as individuals and as a community.

With Moses and our ancestors in the faith, we are to evaluate our respect for God's laws (first reading, Exodus). The laws that govern our attitudes and actions toward God and one another are regarded as the terms of our covenantal relationship with God. These precepts challenge our efforts at honesty, uprightness, justice and fairness. They safeguard us and our communities while preparing us to accept the far greater challenges posed by Jesus. In his words and in his works, Jesus affirmed and fulfilled the law of Moses, but he also insisted that his disciples accept that law as a basis for a far more comprehensive law: Love God and love your neighbour — i.e., all others — as yourself.

Paul, in his Corinthian correspondence (second reading), invites his readers to measure their wisdom against the wisdom of God. For the Jews, who expected a royal military leader to free them from their oppressors, there seemed to be little wisdom in the idea of a suffering saviour who would die an ignominious death to achieve his purposes. For the Greeks, who placed little value on the body, the very notion of a crucified Christ seemed absurd. But for God, whose ways defy human expectations and logic, a suffering Jesus who gave his life for sinners on the cross was the purest, wisest expression of love imaginable.

During Lent, as we ponder God's wisdom, we are challenged to examine our own attitude toward suffering. If we are honest, most of us would admit that we go out of our way to avoid suffering, and when it comes, we do whatever is necessary to rid ourselves of its burden. But the wisdom of God, made flesh in Jesus, tells us to reach out and touch those who suffer, to ease their struggle or at least share it, to lighten the load. Moreover, when suffering comes our way, we can unite our struggle and pain with the salvific suffering of Jesus for the ongoing redemption of our world.

In today's Gospel, Jesus evaluates the authenticity of the Temple and its liturgy and finds it wanting. His anger was justified; a place of prayer and communion with God had been reduced to a marketplace.

However, before we are too quick to criticize others, we might ask ourselves: "If Jesus came today to my church, what might he do?" Would Jesus recognize our celebrations of the Eucharist as the same gift he left his disciples as a remembrance of himself? Could he find his way through all the rites and rituals? Would he be surprised that there are no women who serve as deacons, as they did in the early church? What would he think of the rich décor of our churches, which now have to be locked to guard them from theft? Would he evaluate the amount we spend on our programs for feeding the poor and sheltering the homeless, and find it wanting? Would Jesus hear preachers defend

the marginalized, the undocumented and all victims of injustice? Would he see in each of us a reflection of the love that God has lavished on us without measure?

Perhaps the last line of today's Gospel will help us to sort out the answers to these questions: "Jesus did not need anyone to testify about human nature. He himself understood it well." Therefore, it is with a sense of humble confidence that we take the measure of ourselves this Lent. We may not always meet the challenge of our belonging to Christ, but he who knows our hearts and our nature also knows our good attempts at holiness along with our failures.

Exodus 20:1-17

20 Then God spoke all these words:

² I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; ³you shall have no other gods before me.

⁴ You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁵You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, ⁶but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.*

⁷ You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

⁸ Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. ⁹For six days you shall labour and do all your work. ¹⁰But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. ¹¹For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

¹² Honour your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

¹³ You shall not murder.

¹⁴ You shall not commit adultery.

¹⁵ You shall not steal.

¹⁶ You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

¹⁷ You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.

1 Corinthians 1:22-25

²²For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, ²³but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

John 2:13-25

¹³ The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money-changers seated at their tables. ¹⁵Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶He told those who were selling the doves, 'Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a market-place!' ¹⁷His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house will consume me.' ¹⁸The Jews then said to him, 'What sign can you show us for doing this?' ¹⁹Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' ²⁰The Jews then said, 'This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?' ²¹But he was speaking of the temple of his body. ²²After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

²³ When he was in Jerusalem during the Passover festival, many believed in his name because they saw the signs that he was doing. ²⁴But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people ²⁵and needed no one to testify about anyone; for he himself knew what was in everyone.



*Fourth Sunday
of Lent*

Fourth Sunday of Lent

Having arrived at the halfway mark on our annual Lenten journey, the praying community is invited today to look back on what has transpired thus far and to press onward for what is yet to come. From this vantage point believers may draw lessons from the past so as to live more faithfully in the present and face the future with renewed insight and resolve.

Recall the words of poet and philosopher, George Santayana, “Those who do not remember the past are condemned to relive it” (*The Life of Reason*, 1905). Perhaps this same understanding of the human experience prompted the Chronicler (first reading) to lead his contemporaries through a galloping overview of their past performance as a people. In assessing what appears to be an overstuffed inventory of infidelity, rebellion and sin, modern readers of the ancient historian may be inclined to engage in fault finding or casting blame on the perpetrators of these failures. However, the church periodically puts texts such as this one before believers so that they may recognize therein a mirror image of their own personal and communal shortcomings.

Perhaps the most significant contribution of the Chronicler to today’s liturgy is the reminder that *early and often did the Lord God send messengers to the people out of deep compassion for them* (2 Chronicles 36:15). Every believer with a regrettable past can discover new hope in that statement because until the eschatological climax of the cosmos, God will continue making loving, merciful overtures toward sinners, *early and often*. Of this, we may be certain, considering the fact that our *early and often* God has made the ultimate overture in the person of Jesus, incarnate, crucified and risen in victory over sin and death.

Both the second reading from Ephesians and the gospel pericope from John call the gathered assembly to focus on the mystery of salvation as a *gift* to sinners. That the gift has come to us shrouded in the trappings of suffering and hammered in the shape of a cross cannot be overlooked; indeed the cross, as the great sign of God’s loving mercy, is central to the Christian faith. In addition to being the physical instrument of Jesus’ death, the crossed wooden beams are replete with theological significance; they represent the contradiction which too often characterizes human behaviour. For example, we are loved by God with impartial and immeasurable altruism, yet we mete out our love and loyalties to the lovable, or to those who can reciprocate the favour; or to those we have deemed worthy of our attention. God forgives each of us freely and fully and yet we punish the faults of others by withholding affection, holding grudges, and clinging to the memories of past hurts. Whereas God is always ready to listen to us in great trials as well as trivial concerns, we build silent walls of indifference that make others feel bothersome or unimportant. Although we have been taught that God’s concerns are actively directed toward the poor, the lost, the homeless, the hungry, the sick and the abandoned, we ease our consciences by offering an occasional prayer or money donation for these least

brethren. We believe that God became incarnate to draw near to these least ones, yet we prefer to keep a safe distance from the faces of human hardship.

Could it be that these whom we shun and overlook are the very messengers that our compassionate God sends to us, *early and often*? Could it be that those whom we think are side-tracked on the path of salvation are the very means God has placed on our way to guide us? At this, the midpoint of Lent, the scriptures alert us to search out these messengers and to rectify those contradictions in our lives which have contributed to the Cross.

2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23

¹⁴All the leading priests and the people also were exceedingly unfaithful, following all the abominations of the nations; and they polluted the house of the Lord that he had consecrated in Jerusalem.

¹⁵ The Lord, the God of their ancestors, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling-place; ¹⁶but they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord against his people became so great that there was no remedy.

¹⁹They burned the house of God, broke down the wall of Jerusalem, burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious vessels. ²⁰He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, ²¹to fulfil the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had made up for its sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept sabbath, to fulfil seventy years.

²² In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, in fulfilment of the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord stirred up the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia so that he sent a herald throughout all his kingdom and also declared in a written edict: ²³'Thus says King Cyrus of Persia: The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the Lord his God be with him! Let him go up.'

Ephesians 2:4-10

⁴But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us ⁵even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—⁹not the result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

John 3:14-21

¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶ 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷ 'Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. ²¹But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.'



*Fifth Sunday
of Lent*

Fifth Sunday of Lent

The covenant God shares with humanity is poignantly featured in today's sacred texts. Scholars have acclaimed this covenant as the central and definitive theological affirmation of both the Hebrew and the Christian testaments. At once a theological idea, a liturgical rite and an enduring public institution, the covenant underscores God's abiding commitment to a people who are too often less than faithful.

In their descriptions of the covenant between God and the Israelites, the ancient authors relied upon the structure of Hittite suzerainty treaties. The covenanting partners were named; beneficial actions done by the greater party on behalf of the lesser party were recited; stipulations were listed and agreed upon; witnesses were called forth; blessings and curses were exacted depending upon the loyalty, or not, of the contracting parties. When the Israelites adopted this structure, it was God who took the initiative and God whose mighty deeds on behalf of Israel made them who they were: "I will be your God; you will be my people," "It was I who called you forth from Egypt to give you a land" (Exod 19:4-6; 20:2).

Similarly, it was God who gave the gift of the law (God did not impose it) to govern the relationship between God and the Israelites (Exod 20:3-23:33). Covenants between God and Israel were often sealed by the sacrifice of an animal, whose blood was offered to expiate sin and whose flesh was cooked and shared as a sign of communion between God and Israel (Exod 24:9-11).

Several such covenants were made and broken throughout Israel's history, but the covenant promised by Jeremiah (first reading) is unconditional and everlasting. Unlike the stipulations of previous covenants, which were carved in stone, the terms of the covenant envisioned by Jeremiah would be recorded in the human heart, and all, from least to greatest, would be privileged to know God. This covenant would also bring forgiveness of sins. Humankind would be forever free of guilt, for God would remember their sins no more.

Although the people longed to experience the covenant of Jeremiah's promise, it was only through Jesus and through his embrace of the cross that this covenant was realized. To signal the importance and necessity of the cross, today's Gospel features the Johannine Jesus declaring that his hour has come, at long last. Jesus' hour — his *raison d'être*, the purpose for which he came into the world — was to establish, solidify and ratify the new and eternal covenant Jeremiah promised centuries before. This Jesus did by revealing God in human flesh and blood and by enunciating, in his every word and deed, the love God has for sinners. Love of God and love for one another became the law by which this covenant would stand.

To seal this bond of unending love, Jesus offered himself in sacrifice. Just as a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, Jesus gave himself for the life of the world. He offered himself to be lifted up on the cross so that through the gift of his suffering, and by his

blood, sinners would be forgiven. Jesus agreed to the cross and all its consequences so that you and I might live and know the love of God.

We are challenged to accept the cross — this symbol of ignominy and hate — as an expression of the purest, truest love humankind will ever experience. What do we say in response to such a love? It calls forth more than words; it summons a celebration. Through the sacred remembrance of every eucharistic gathering, we celebrate the new and eternal covenant.

Jesus is present in word, in spirit, in sacrifice, in communion and in the assembly who has come together in his name. All present recall his hour, his *raison d'être*; all are graced by his fidelity to God and God's purpose. Then, in God's good presence, we eat the bread that Jesus gave so that we too may be blessed, broken and shared with all who hunger for the communion we have been privileged to know and share.

Jeremiah 31:31-34

³¹The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ³²It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. ³³But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the Lord', for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Hebrews 5:7-9

⁷In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. ⁸Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; ⁹and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.

John 12:20-33

²⁰ Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.' ²² Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³ Jesus answered them, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵ Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.

²⁷ 'Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—“Father, save me from this hour”? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name.' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.' ²⁹ The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to him.' ³⁰ Jesus answered, 'This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. ³¹ Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.' ³³ He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.



Passion Sunday

Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord

In most areas of the world, a visit from the Roman Pontiff, an Eastern Patriarch or the Archbishop of Canterbury would be received with great anticipation. As soon as the scheduled visit is announced, elaborate preparations begin, sometimes as early as one or two years in advance. Certain cities have chosen to build a vast meeting centre to accommodate the thousands who will come to acknowledge the visit of one so important. Roads are repaired, landscapes are refurbished with fresh plantings of flowering trees, bushes and plants. In Africa and some areas of Central and South America, preparations are less complex, but no less lavish.

For example, when Pope Paul VI visited Uganda, the roadways were edged with freshly cut *matoke* or banana plants. Considering the fact that *matoke* is the main staple of the daily diet in Uganda, the people had paid great tribute to the Pope in cutting down and offering their “very sustenance” to welcome him. Colourful flower petals arranged in various designs decorated the pathways and the people, turned out in their Sunday best, stood along both sides of the roads shouting their welcome in each place the Pope visited. When the Anglican archbishop visited, the situation was no less festive.

However, in the course of most official visits, there comes a time when the mood must necessarily shift from adulation and celebration to a serious consideration of Christian commitment and life-style. As the spiritual pastor of the people, the visiting dignitary must broach the real, hard issues and discuss these openly; failures must be pointed out and shortcomings acknowledged. Recall the papal plea to the members of the United Nations, to give, not only of their surplus, but of their substance. Remember the instances in which nations have been cited by religious leaders for human rights violations. Recall the numerous times the believing community has been challenged to be more authentically committed to the gospel by actively feeding the poor, clothing the needy and sheltering the homeless, not just seasonally (Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter) but *daily* and *devotedly*.

Unfortunately, and because correction is much more difficult to accept than congratulations, the attitude of the people occasionally becomes surly. No longer is the distinguished visitor the man or woman of the hour; harsh but necessary words have made him/her the object of resentment and derision. So it was with Jesus; people were ready to hear him and make him welcome when the signs and wonders he worked fed their messianic fascinations. But when he supplemented his cures with chastisement and challenges, the popular opinion turned against him.

As this, the holiest week of the Christian calendar unfolds, believers will be led through the full gamut of human emotions from the hosannas of Palm-Passion Sunday to the shouts of “Crucify him!” on Good Friday. What accounts for the shifting mood from acceptance to rejection? From adulation to aggression? How does a welcome and honoured guest become a pariah? It would appear that the answer lies within the human heart; created for greatness, yet, in its freedom, the human heart is also capable of

grievous words and works. Each of us could just as readily have been a voice among the rabid crowd calling for Jesus' death as on the road to Jerusalem shouting acceptance of his leadership.

Today's readings and all the saving events that will be remembered this week prompt us to consider the fickleness of the human heart and to recall the frequent Lenten admonition, "If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts." So it is that we enter these holy days, in humble awareness that hearts, both faint and fickle, are called to firmer, fuller faith. To remain faithful to the Christian challenge will necessitate hearing words of correction as well as comfort. Only a listening, welcoming heart will be able to accept responsibility for the cross as well as to revel gratefully in the blessedness of the resurrection. Such is the message of this week and the daily challenge of Christian discipleship.

Isaiah 50:4-7

*⁴ The Lord God has given me
the tongue of a teacher,
that I may know how to sustain
the weary with a word.*

*Morning by morning he wakens—
wakens my ear*

to listen as those who are taught.

*⁵ The Lord God has opened my ear,
and I was not rebellious,
I did not turn backwards.*

*⁶ I gave my back to those who struck me,
and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard;
I did not hide my face
from insult and spitting.*

*⁷ The Lord God helps me;
therefore I have not been disgraced;
therefore I have set my face like flint,
and I know that I shall not be put to shame*

Philippians 2:6-11

*⁶ Though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,*

*⁷ but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.*

And being found in human form,
⁸ he humbled himself
 and became obedient to the point of death—
 even death on a cross.
⁹ Therefore God also highly exalted him
 and gave him the name
 that is above every name,
¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus
 every knee should bend,
 in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue should confess
 that Jesus Christ is Lord,
 to the glory of God the Father.

Mark 14:1 - 15:47

¹⁴ It was two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him; ²for they said, 'Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people.'

³ While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper,* as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. ⁴But some were there who said to one another in anger, 'Why was the ointment wasted in this way?' ⁵For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii,* and the money given to the poor.' And they scolded her. ⁶But Jesus said, 'Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. ⁷For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. ⁸She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. ⁹Truly I tell you, wherever the good news* is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.'

¹⁰ Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. ¹¹When they heard it, they were greatly pleased, and promised to give him money. So he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

¹² On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, his disciples said to him, 'Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?' ¹³So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, 'Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, ¹⁴and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, "The Teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?"' ¹⁵He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.' ¹⁶So the disciples set out and went to the city, and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

¹⁷ When it was evening, he came with the twelve. ¹⁸And when they had taken their places and were eating, Jesus said, 'Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.' ¹⁹They began to be distressed and to say to him one after another, 'Surely, not I?' ²⁰He said to them, 'It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread* into the bowl* with me. ²¹For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.'

²² While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, 'Take; this is my body.' ²³Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. ²⁴He said to them, 'This is my blood of the* covenant, which is poured out for many. ²⁵Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.'

²⁶ When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. ²⁷And Jesus said to them, 'You will all become deserters; for it is written, "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered."

²⁸But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.' ²⁹Peter said to him, 'Even though all become deserters, I will not.' ³⁰Jesus said to him, 'Truly I tell you, this day, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.' ³¹But he said vehemently, 'Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.' And all of them said the same.

³² They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, 'Sit here while I pray.' ³³He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. ³⁴And he said to them, 'I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake.' ³⁵And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. ³⁶He said, 'Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.' ³⁷He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, 'Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? ³⁸Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.' ³⁹And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. ⁴⁰And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him. ⁴¹He came a third time and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴²Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.'

⁴³ Immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; and with him there was a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. ⁴⁴Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, 'The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.' ⁴⁵So when he came, he went up to him at once and said, 'Rabbi!' and kissed him. ⁴⁶Then they laid hands on him and arrested

him. ⁴⁷But one of those who stood near drew his sword and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. ⁴⁸Then Jesus said to them, 'Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? ⁴⁹Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled.' ⁵⁰All of them deserted him and fled.

⁵¹ A certain young man was following him, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They caught hold of him, ⁵²but he left the linen cloth and ran off naked.

⁵³ They took Jesus to the high priest; and all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes were assembled. ⁵⁴Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the guards, warming himself at the fire. ⁵⁵Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for testimony against Jesus to put him to death; but they found none. ⁵⁶For many gave false testimony against him, and their testimony did not agree. ⁵⁷Some stood up and gave false testimony against him, saying, ⁵⁸'We heard him say, "I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands." ⁵⁹But even on this point their testimony did not agree. ⁶⁰Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, 'Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?' ⁶¹But he was silent and did not answer. Again the high priest asked him, 'Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?'

⁶²Jesus said, 'I am; and "you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power", and "coming with the clouds of heaven." '

⁶³Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, 'Why do we still need witnesses? ⁶⁴You have heard his blasphemy! What is your decision?' All of them condemned him as deserving death. ⁶⁵Some began to spit on him, to blindfold him, and to strike him, saying to him, 'Prophecy!' The guards also took him over and beat him.

⁶⁶ While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came by. ⁶⁷When she saw Peter warming himself, she stared at him and said, 'You also were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth.' ⁶⁸But he denied it, saying, 'I do not know or understand what you are talking about.' And he went out into the forecourt. * Then the cock crowed. ⁶⁹And the servant-girl, on seeing him, began again to say to the bystanders, 'This man is one of them.' ⁷⁰But again he denied it. Then after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, 'Certainly you are one of them; for you are a Galilean.' ⁷¹But he began to curse, and he swore an oath, 'I do not know this man you are talking about.' ⁷²At that moment the cock crowed for the second time. Then Peter remembered that Jesus had said to him, 'Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.' And he broke down and wept.

15 As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. ²Pilate asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' He answered him, 'You say so.'

³Then the chief priests accused him of many things. ⁴Pilate asked him again, 'Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you.' ⁵But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed.

⁶ Now at the festival he used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked. ⁷Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection. ⁸So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom. ⁹Then he answered them, 'Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?' ¹⁰For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. ¹¹But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. ¹²Pilate spoke to them again, 'Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?' ¹³They shouted back, 'Crucify him!' ¹⁴Pilate asked them, 'Why, what evil has he done?' But they shouted all the more, 'Crucify him!' ¹⁵So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

¹⁶ Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters); and they called together the whole cohort. ¹⁷And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. ¹⁸And they began saluting him, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' ¹⁹They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. ²⁰After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

²¹ They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. ²²Then they brought Jesus* to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull).²³And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. ²⁴And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.

²⁵ It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. ²⁶The inscription of the charge against him read, 'The King of the Jews.' ²⁷And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. ²⁹Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, 'Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, ³⁰save yourself, and come down from the cross!' ³¹In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, 'He saved others; he cannot save himself. ³²Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe.' Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

³³ When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon.

³⁴At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?' which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' ³⁵When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, 'Listen, he is calling for Elijah.' ³⁶And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, 'Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.' ³⁷Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed

his last. ³⁸And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. ³⁹Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, 'Truly this man was God's Son!'

⁴⁰ There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome.

⁴¹These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

⁴²When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, ⁴³Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁴⁴Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time. ⁴⁵When he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph. ⁴⁶Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. ⁴⁷Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where the body was laid.

The Easter Triduum



The Easter Triduum

ur long journey to the font culminates in the Easter Triduum. These three days draw us into the mystery of our salvation. Whatever we are doing these days, these prayers and resources can help us to be open to the graces the day offers. Each morning we can pause to acknowledge the meaning of the day ahead. Each night we can give thanks.

Even if we can't celebrate these days liturgically, we can reflect upon the symbols and rituals, and let the prayers of the liturgies draw us in. All, so that we might know the depth of the love being offered us, and the power of the gift of life won for us.

We celebrate Easter each day this week. We keep celebrating so that we might continue to enter into the meaning of the resurrection. In the early Church, the newly baptised would be at each liturgy throughout this week, wearing their white garments. We go through our everyday lives this week conscious of the "white garments" we all wear – the waters of our baptism certainly do not dry off! We are renewed as a priestly people, committed with Jesus to give our lives for others.

The resurrection stories, which we read this week, come from communities that are proclaiming the good news. The tomb is empty – Jesus' tomb and every tomb that tries to claim us in death. These are not believers who, in their deep desire, just made up the resurrection. These are people who can hardly believe what they are seeing and experiencing. They, like us, had trouble recognising his presence with them.

Let the prayers of this Easter week draw us into the Joy of the Gospel, the joy that Jesus is with us. He is not dead, but alive. And, that makes all the difference in the world in how much hope and courage we have, before any struggle, any possible fear of death.

The Easter Triduum
Holy Thursday



Thursday of the Lord's Supper

Being a servant runs against the grain of most people. It's lowly and difficult. We prefer being served. Jesus' disciples still did not understand that selfless service is God's way, the key to the Kingdom. So Jesus showed them what to do. He washed their feet.

Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14

12 The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: ²This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. ³Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. ⁴If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbour in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it. ⁵Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. ⁶You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. ⁷They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. ⁸They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. ¹¹This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the Lord. ¹²For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgements: I am the Lord. ¹³The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. ¹⁴ This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

²³For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, ²⁴and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' ²⁵In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' ²⁶For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

John 13:1-15

13 Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he

loved them to the end. ²The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper ³Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. ⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' ⁷Jesus answered, 'You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.' ⁸Peter said to him, 'You will never wash my feet.' Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.' ⁹Simon Peter said to him, 'Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!' ¹⁰Jesus said to him, 'One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you.' ¹¹For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, 'Not all of you are clean.'

¹² After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you?' ¹³You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.



The Easter Triduum
Good Friday

Friday of the Lord's Passion

Often, the only way out of an ordeal is to go straight through it. We have to accept and submit rather than fight. While on trial for his life, Jesus is asked repeatedly to do this or that to save himself. But he refuses. Jesus accepts his unjust conviction. Then he puts himself completely in God's hands.

Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12

¹³ *See, my servant shall prosper;
he shall be exalted and lifted up,
and shall be very high.*

¹⁴ *Just as there were many who were astonished at him
—so marred was his appearance, beyond human semblance,
and his form beyond that of mortals—*

¹⁵ *so he shall startle many nations;
kings shall shut their mouths because of him;
for that which had not been told them they shall see,
and that which they had not heard they shall contemplate.*

⁵³ *Who has believed what we have heard?
And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?*

² *For he grew up before him like a young plant,
and like a root out of dry ground;
he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.*

³ *He was despised and rejected by others;
a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity;
and as one from whom others hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him of no account.*

⁴ *Surely he has borne our infirmities
and carried our diseases;
yet we accounted him stricken,
struck down by God, and afflicted.*

⁵ *But he was wounded for our transgressions,
crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the punishment that made us whole,
and by his bruises we are healed.*

⁶ *All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have all turned to our own way,
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.*

⁷ He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

⁸ By a perversion of justice he was taken away.
Who could have imagined his future?
For he was cut off from the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of my people.

⁹ They made his grave with the wicked
and his tomb with the rich,
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth.

¹⁰ Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain.
When you make his life an offering for sin,
he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days;
through him the will of the Lord shall prosper.

¹¹ Out of his anguish he shall see light;
he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge.
The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous,
and he shall bear their iniquities.

¹² Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great,
and he shall divide the spoil with the strong;
because he poured out himself to death,
and was numbered with the transgressors;
yet he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors.

Hebrews 4:14-16, 5:7-9

¹⁴ Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

⁵⁷In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. ⁸Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; ⁹and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.

John 18:1 - 19:42

¹After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. ²Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples. ³So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. ⁴Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, 'For whom are you looking?' ⁵They answered, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus replied, 'I am he.' Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. ⁶When Jesus said to them, 'I am he', they stepped back and fell to the ground. ⁷Again he asked them, 'For whom are you looking?' And they said, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' ⁸Jesus answered, 'I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go.' ⁹This was to fulfil the word that he had spoken, 'I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me.' ¹⁰Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. ¹¹Jesus said to Peter, 'Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?'

¹²So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him. ¹³First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. ¹⁴Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people.

¹⁵Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, ¹⁶but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. ¹⁷The woman said to Peter, 'You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?' He said, 'I am not.' ¹⁸Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing round it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself.

¹⁹Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. ²⁰Jesus answered, 'I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. ²¹Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said.' ²²When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, 'Is that how you answer the high priest?' ²³Jesus answered, 'If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?' ²⁴Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

²⁵Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, 'You are not also one of his disciples, are you?' He denied it and said, 'I am not.' ²⁶One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, 'Did I not see you in the garden with him?' ²⁷Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed.

²⁸ Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. ²⁹So Pilate went out to them and said, 'What accusation do you bring against this man?' ³⁰They answered, 'If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you.' ³¹Pilate said to them, 'Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law.' The Jews replied, 'We are not permitted to put anyone to death.' ³²(This was to fulfil what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.)

³³ Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' ³⁴Jesus answered, 'Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?' ³⁵Pilate replied, 'I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?' ³⁶Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.' ³⁷Pilate asked him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.' ³⁸Pilate asked him, 'What is truth?'

After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, 'I find no case against him. ³⁹But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?' ⁴⁰They shouted in reply, 'Not this man, but Barabbas!' Now Barabbas was a bandit.

¹⁹ Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. ²And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. ³They kept coming up to him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' and striking him on the face. ⁴Pilate went out again and said to them, 'Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him.' ⁵So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, 'Here is the man!' ⁶When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, 'Crucify him! Crucify him!' Pilate said to them, 'Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him.' ⁷The Jews answered him, 'We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God.'

⁸ Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever. ⁹He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, 'Where are you from?' But Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰Pilate therefore said to him, 'Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?' ¹¹Jesus answered him, 'You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.' ¹²From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, 'If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor.'

¹³ When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. ¹⁴Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, 'Here is your King!' ¹⁵They cried out, 'Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!' Pilate asked them, 'Shall I crucify your King?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but the emperor.' ¹⁶Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

So they took Jesus; ¹⁷and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. ¹⁸There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. ¹⁹Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.' ²⁰Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. ²¹Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, 'Do not write, "The King of the Jews", but, "This man said, I am King of the Jews."' ²²Pilate answered, 'What I have written I have written.' ²³When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. ²⁴So they said to one another, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.' This was to fulfil what the scripture says, 'They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.'

²⁵And that is what the soldiers did.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' ²⁷Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

²⁸ After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfil the scripture), 'I am thirsty.' ²⁹A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. ³⁰When Jesus had received the wine, he said, 'It is finished.' Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

³¹ Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed.

³²Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. ³³But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. ³⁴Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. ³⁵(He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) ³⁶These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, 'None of his bones shall be broken.'

³⁷And again another passage of scripture says, 'They will look on the one whom they have pierced.'

³⁸ After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. ³⁹Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. ⁴⁰They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. ⁴¹Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. ⁴²And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Holy Saturday

On Holy Saturday, the day before Easter Sunday, churches lie silent and empty . No sacraments of the Church may be celebrated on this day. But it is not just a pause before the big celebration. Rather it is a pregnant silence.

On Holy Saturday the Church recalls and ponders the words of the Apostles' Creed: "He descended into hell." The belief these words express is that Jesus, triumphant over death, saved those who had died without any chance of receiving his grace. Then, starting with Adam, the first human being, he leads them to his Father in triumph.

How relevant is this for us today? It would seem that we are more familiar than ever with the scope of hell: the ravages of war; the miseries of psychosis; the helplessness of deep poverty; the evil manipulations of the human mind and genes.

Yet from all of these Christ can deliver us. His descent into hell, his rising from the dead, his Easter triumph is the source of healing and forgiveness, of light and peace.

Lamentations 3:1-24

*3 I am one who has seen affliction
under the rod of God's wrath;*

*2 he has driven and brought me
into darkness without any light;*

*3 against me alone he turns his hand,
again and again, all day long.*

*4 He has made my flesh and my skin waste away,
and broken my bones;*

*5 he has besieged and enveloped me
with bitterness and tribulation;*

*6 he has made me sit in darkness
like the dead of long ago.*

*7 He has walled me about so that I cannot escape;
he has put heavy chains on me;*

*8 though I call and cry for help,
he shuts out my prayer;*

*9 he has blocked my ways with hewn stones,
he has made my paths crooked.*

¹⁰ He is a bear lying in wait for me,
a lion in hiding;
¹¹ he led me off my way and tore me to pieces;
he has made me desolate;
¹² he bent his bow and set me
as a mark for his arrow.
¹³ He shot into my vitals
the arrows of his quiver;
¹⁴ I have become the laughing-stock of all my people,
the object of their taunt-songs all day long.
¹⁵ He has filled me with bitterness,
he has glutted me with wormwood.
¹⁶ He has made my teeth grind on gravel,
and made me cower in ashes;
¹⁷ my soul is bereft of peace;
I have forgotten what happiness is;
¹⁸ so I say, 'Gone is my glory,
and all that I had hoped for from the Lord.'
¹⁹ The thought of my affliction and my homelessness
is wormwood and gall!
²⁰ My soul continually thinks of it
and is bowed down within me.
²¹ But this I call to mind,
and therefore I have hope:
²² The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,*
his mercies never come to an end;
²³ they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
²⁴ 'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul,
'therefore I will hope in him.'

The Easter Triduum
Easter Vigil/
Easter Sunday



Sunday of the Resurrection

For centuries, Christians have included in their creedal formulae the statement that Jesus rose from the dead *on the third day*. More than a specification as regards the actual chronological moment of Jesus rising, Bruce Vawter explained that the notion of the third day probably reflect an early resurrection theology “that looked backward from the resurrection as the means of interpreting a life and death that had recently been experienced and were otherwise ambiguous” (*This Man Jesus*, Image Books, New York: 1975). But, before this phrase took on significance for believers in Jesus, *on the third day* had a long and well established history.

In the Hebrew scriptures, the third day was traditionally the day of deliverance, of reversal, of victory snatched from the jaws of defeat or death. Recall the invitation which the prophet Hosea extended to his contemporaries: “Come, let us return to the Lord. . . he will revive us after two days; on the third day, he will raise us up to live in his presence” (Hosea 6:1-2). On the third day, as Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac, God told him to spare the life of his son (Genesis 22:4). Joseph freed his brothers from the Egyptian prison on the third day (Genesis 42:18). On the third day, Yahweh appeared to the wandering tribes on Sinai (Exodus 19:11, 16). On the third day, David received the news that Saul, who was trying to kill him, had died (2 Samuel 1:2). The prophet Isaiah told Hezekiah that he would be healed from a grave illness on the third day (2 Kings 20:5). On the third day, and when their situation seemed most hopeless, Esther initiated her plan for saving her fellow Jews (Esther 5:1). In the didactic fiction of Johah, freedom from the belly of the great fish came on the third day (Jonah 1:17).

Given this rich and colourful history, it is not surprising that the early Christians were quick to describe Jesus’ liberation from the grip of death in terms of the third day. Woven into the earliest kerygma and preached to all who would listen (see first reading and gospel), the phrase, *on the third day*, became a verbal clarion call; God has reversed the finality of death. Jesus who was dead is vindicated and lives forever.

Today, on the third day after remembering Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross, believers are celebrating the divine reversal of that event in the faith that Christ’s resurrection stands as a sure pledge of what each of us will eventually share.

In his study of the implications of the third day and Jesus’ resurrection, David Stanley (*Contemplation of the Gospels, Ignatius Loyola and the Contemporary Christian*) underscored the fact that the risen Jesus remains eternally present to the church: “Jesus Christ, through his exaltation to the Father’s right hand, has not been removed to some mythical existence beyond the furthest galaxy, but is *actually more dynamically present* in the world than he ever was when he walked the hills of Galilee.”

Because of Jesus’ dynamic and abiding presence, every day is the third day. Each day is marked by redemption from death. Therefore, ours should be what Gerald O’Collins has called an *Easter morality* (*What Are They Saying About The Resurrection*, Paulist

Press, New York: 1978). Only by sharing in the events of Jesus' dying and rising --only by confronting and confounding sin and death-- only by letting the mystery of the resurrection seize us and inform all our thoughts, words and actions will we become truly Christian and true heirs of Easter glory.

Today is the third day, let us live accordingly.

Acts 10:34, 37-43

³⁴ Then Peter began to speak to them: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality. ³⁷That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: ³⁸how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. ³⁹We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; ⁴⁰but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, ⁴¹not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴²He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.'

Colossians 3:1-4

3 So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, ³for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

John 20:1-9

20 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ²So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.' ³Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. ⁴The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

Pope Francis: There are “bat-like Christians” who prefer the shadows to the light of the Lord

Pope Francis said there are Christians who are afraid of the joy of Christ's resurrection and who instead prefer sadness and staying in the shadows just like bats. The importance of Christians being joyful, rather than sad or fearful, was the focus of the Pope's reflections during his homily at Thursday's Mass (25 April 2014) celebrated in the Santa Marta residence.

Taking his cue from the gospel reading of the risen Christ appearing before his disciples, Pope Francis began by noting how instead of rejoicing over his resurrection, the disciples were struck by fear instead of joy.

“This is a Christian's disease. We're afraid of joy. It's better to think: Yes, yes, God exists, but He is there. Jesus has risen and He is there. Somewhat distant. We're afraid of being close to Jesus because this gives us joy. And this is why there are so many 'funeral' (mournful) Christians, isn't it? Those whose lives seem to be a perpetual funeral. They prefer sadness to joy. They move about better in the shadows, not in the light of joy, like those animals who only come out at night, not in the light of day, who can't see anything. Like bats. And with a little sense of humour we can say that there are Christian bats who prefer the shadows to the light of the presence of the Lord.”

But, the Pope continued, Jesus through his resurrection, gives us joy, the joy of being Christians and following him closely, the joy of travelling on the path of the Beatitudes.

“So often, we are either upset by this joy or fearful or we think we have seen a ghost or believe that Jesus is just a way of behaving. 'We are Christians and so we must behave like this.' But where is Jesus? 'No, Jesus is in Heaven.' Do you talk with Jesus? Do you say to Jesus: 'I believe that You are alive, that You are risen, that You're near me. That You will never abandon me'? A Christian life should be this: a dialogue with Jesus, because – this is true – Jesus is always with us, always there alongside us with our problems and our difficulties, with our good works.”

Pope Francis concluded by noting how many times we Christians are not joyful because we are afraid! We're Christians who have been defeated by the Cross.

“In my country there is a saying that goes like this: 'When you get burnt by boiling milk, later when you see a cow you start crying.' These people were burnt by the drama of the Cross and said, 'No, let's stop here. He's in Heaven: that's all well and good. He is Risen but it's better that he doesn't come again because we couldn't handle it.' We ask the Lord to do for all of us what he did for the disciples who were afraid of joy: to open our minds: 'He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures;' Let him open our minds and help us understand that He is a living reality, that He has a body, that He is with us, that he accompanies us and that He has won. We ask the Lord for the grace to not be afraid of joy.”



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