

Lectio Divina

PRAYING THE SCRIPTURES

in Lent and Holy Week Year A



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

One great gift of the Second Vatican Council for Catholic Christians has been the invitation to allow the Word of God to become the companion on our journey, to become the source of nourishment, the very means by which we establish, renew and deepen our relationship with Jesus Christ. The apostolic exhortation, *Verbum Domini*, recognised, that a ‘more prayerful and spiritual reading of scripture will enhance our appreciation of the Bible and our participation in the Church’s liturgical life’ (#86).

In the early part of 2014 we were reminded by the scarcity of rain and the severity of the heat and bushfires that we live in a ‘sunburnt country’ withering away into desert. Nonetheless, we maintain hope in the midst of tragedies and move forward with confidence. Pope Francis, too, has been a source of inspiration for many with the freshness he brings through his example and in his words, to the understanding of faith, frequently inviting us to be people of hope.

Hope — this is a virtue well worth keeping in mind as we journey yet again through the weeks of Lent with God’s Word as our guiding light.

The reality of Easter and its inherent promise reminds us once more that we are a people characterised by hope. It is in our very blood as Followers of Christ. Born as a priestly people through our baptism we hold hope as a virtue that supports and informs our life in faith.

We begin our Lenten journey, a time of letting go, a time in the desert, as our weekly lectio reminds us, ending in the apparent hopelessness of Good Friday, then the culmination of our baptismal promise in the ultimate hope of Christ’s resurrection.

We believe the Christian story does not end on Good Friday. Sunday is ‘a coming!’ And our daily encounter with the Word of God through our Lenten *lectio* deepens this conviction and affords us hope in the midst of darkness, and reminds us that there is a reality greater than those shadows in which we can anchor our soul.

May the time given to your Lenten *lectio* renew your faith in this incredible story and deepen your relationship with the Risen Lord into whose life you have been reborn.

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 reflections 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

“A necessary foundation to prayer is meditating and thinking on the great truths which God has revealed. We should be familiar with all the mysteries of Jesus Christ and the truths of his Gospel. Our souls should be coloured by them and penetrated by them as wool is by dye. These truths should become so familiar to us that we acquire the habit of forming no judgement except in their lights, that they may be our only guide in what we do, as the rays of the sun are our only light in what we see. It is when these truths are inwardly incorporated in us that our praying begins to be real and fruitful.” (Fenelon)

“Meditation sustains our quest for spiritual growth by keeping before us the divine initiatives which draw us on, the essential truths that are the context of our journey, and the goals that are the object of our spiritual journey. Through meditation we deepen our understanding of and appreciation of, the mysteries of the Christian faith.”

“There are two ways in which we can find answers to our questions and guidance when we are alone with God in such a place as this. First, we can consider again His mysteries, rest in them, and humbly bathe our souls in their light. Secondly, in the light of the mysteries of God and His demands and love, we can overhaul our own religious and moral practices in order to discover our slack and disproportionate ways of life...” (Evelyn Underhill)

“Seek by reading, and you find meditating: cry in prayer, and the door will be opened in contemplation.” (John of the Cross)

Lenten commitment finds expression in public action

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.

Receiving the ashen cross is especially meaningful. It starts with Palm Sunday. 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 can remind us of the little kid 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. Perhaps the other formula is 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 become 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.

Lenten Discipline:

Fast from worry; feast on trusting God.
Fast from complaining; feast on appreciation.
Fast from negatives; feast on affirmatives.
Fast from hostility; feast on tenderness.

Fast from unrelenting pressures; feast from unceasing prayer.
Fast from judging others; feast on Christ dwelling in them.
Fast from fear of illness; feast on the healing power of God.
Fast from words that pollute; feast on speech that purifies.

Fast from discontent; feast on gratitude.
Fast from anger; feast on patience.
Fast from personal anxiety; feast on the fullness of truth.
Fast from pessimism; feast on optimism.

Fast from bitterness; feast on forgiveness.
Fast from self-concern; feast on compassion for others.
Fast from discouragement; feast on hope.
Fast from suspicion; feast on truth.

Fast from lethargy and apathy; feast on enthusiasm.
Fast from facts that depress; feast on truths that uplift.
Fast from gossip; feast on purposeful silence.
Fast from problems that overwhelm; feast on prayer that sustains.
Fast from thoughts that weaken; feast on promises that inspire.
Fast from apparent darkness; feast on the reality of light.

Year A

Ash Wednesday



Nine-year-old David decides to give up his favourite sweets for Lent — M&Ms. He's good for a bag a day, so 40 bags, rounded out to one dollar a bag, comes to \$40 over Lent. Plus Mum and Dad offer to match his Lenten sacrifice, dollar for dollar. So, on Easter Sunday, David's Lenten discipline results in \$80. Now: What to do with the money?

In school David learns about a Church agency that drills water wells in poor African countries. Done! David gives his \$80 to the organisation. He receives a letter of thanks — and David is now on their mailing list. Every few weeks, David receives a newsletter about new projects made possible by donations like his \$80.

That \$80 was earned several Lents ago. But David still supports the program and many others like it. The Lenten sacrifice of his childhood instilled in the now-adult David a deep, permanent sense of compassion and empathy.

David's Lenten sacrifice of M&Ms is a model of Lenten conversion. Lent calls us to sacrifice and penance — but not out of self-loathing or false humility. Lent is the season to “turn” away — the word *conversion* means “to turn” — from our own needs and wants in order to see a world bigger than ourselves, a world in which the Spirit of God lives and moves, and a world the Spirit of God calls us to transform and re-create in the love of God. David's “sacrifice” leads him to a new appreciation for what he has and opens his heart to the needs of others; his “turning” results in a life-long “turning” to generosity and empathy.

How might we take on that kind of sacrifice this Lent? Over the next forty days, let's find a way to give up something — money, time, attitudes — that has the potential to result in a new perspective that will last well beyond Easter Sunday. “Turn” this Lent — “turn” away from a self-centred view of the world and toward a Christ-centred perspective that enables each one of us to re-create our homes and hearts in the life of Easter.

God of mercy and compassion, be with us on the journey to Easter that we begin today. Open our hearts to hear your call to holy sacrifice, that these days may be a time for healing and restoration that leads to a permanent change of heart, a transformation of our perspectives and attitudes.

Help us to find within ourselves your grace, that we may transform our lives and our world from the ashes of division and selfishness to the peace and hope of Easter.

Joel 2:12-18

Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; ¹³rend 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. ¹⁴Who 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? ¹⁵Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; ¹⁶gather 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. ¹⁷Between 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?"

¹⁸Then the Lord became jealous for his land, and had pity on his people.

2 Corinthians 5:20 - 6:2

So 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.

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

"Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. ²"So 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.

⁵"And 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.

¹⁶"And 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."

Signs of a Healthy Lent

OUR FASTING during Lent should be integral to our daily living. Some people choose to do only ‘tacked-on penances.’ Rather than looking at their daily life to find sacrifices they could embrace, they opt for penances that are extraneous to their lives. A man might be a workaholic, for example, but gives up chocolate for Lent. Wouldn’t it be a more fitting penance for him to ‘fast’ from his work and spend more time with his family?

Healthy penance flows from our relationships, responsibilities and religious convictions. Some examples of this type of penance are the following: to drive more compassionately, to be more patient with co-workers, to be kinder to store clerks, to visit an elderly relative or friend, to be honest in all our dealings, to slow down, to extend forgiveness, to do a favour for a neighbour, to volunteer at the parish, to count blessings.

Sr Melanie Svoda



1st Sunday
Lent Year A

We commenced Lent a few days ago with Ash Wednesday and our being signed with ashes. There have been hot cross buns and Easter eggs in the shops since the beginning of the New Year. All signal that our Lenten journey has commenced — but what is it all about — saying an extra prayer, attending an extra Mass, popping my loose change from my coffee in the Project Compassion box, or giving up biscuits at morning tea?

Lent is so much more than this. While these are important and have their place, surely Lent is about coming to know the person of Jesus, and building our relationship with him culminating with what he did especially in those days from Holy Thursday, through Good Friday to Easter Sunday. And the scripture readings assigned for this Sunday assist us to deepen this relationship.

We know that Jesus was both human and divine, but this week we really see the human side of Jesus. Jesus is in the desert for forty days — this is an obvious link to our forty days of our Lenten journey. The readings are about temptation and choices. We see Jesus facing temptation on a number of occasions. He has to make a choice. It seems that Jesus has a relationship with God the Father that enables him to make the correct choice. Our lives are full of temptations, especially in our secular world of instant gratification. We are faced with temptations all the time and with choices, but if we spend some time to pray, hopefully we will make the correct choice.

It is also interesting to note that Matthew uses on more occasions ‘It is written’. I wonder if this can be interpreted that we should read the Bible more?

Hopefully over the coming weeks, we can find a few minutes each day to read a little Scripture, possibly re-reading our scripture from Sunday, and also praying a little more. I hope this can bring you to a greater understanding of the person of Jesus and to deepen your relationship with him.

Surely Lent is good opportunity to do this!

Genesis 2:7-9, 3:1-7

Then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. ⁸And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. ⁹Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, ‘Did God say, “You shall not eat from any tree in the garden”?’ ¹²The woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the

garden; ³but God said, “You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.” ⁴But the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not die; ⁵for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God,* knowing good and evil.’ ⁶So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. ⁷Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

Romans 5:12-19

¹²Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned — ¹³sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. ¹⁴Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come. ¹⁵But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man’s trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. ¹⁶And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man’s sin. For the judgement following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. ¹⁷If, because of the one man’s trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. ¹⁸Therefore just as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. ¹⁹For just as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.

Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ²He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” ⁴But he answered, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” ⁵Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’” ⁷Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” ⁸Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour; ⁹and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” ¹⁰Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’” ¹¹Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

2nd Sunday

Lent Year A¹



“HE was transfigured before them; his face shone like the sun” (Mt 17:2)

What really happened at the Transfiguration? Each of the Evangelists tells the story slightly differently, with his own theological emphases.

- Was it a miraculous glimpse of Jesus’ heavenly glory?
- A temporary unveiling of his divine nature to give hope to his disciples?
- Or was it a recasting of a resurrection appearance story placed in the middle of the Gospel?

These and other theories have long been entertained by biblical scholars.

In Matthew’s version, the radiance of Jesus’ face and clothing and the brightness of the cloud that overshadows the disciples are highlighted. Coming on the heels of Jesus’ teaching that he must suffer and die before being raised up (16:21), the brilliance underscores that Jesus, although executed as a criminal, is righteous. As Jesus had told his disciples, at the end of the age “the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father” (13:43). The voice from the cloud likewise reaffirms Jesus’ identity as God’s beloved son, upon whom divine favour rests (as at his baptism, 3:17). The admonition “listen to him” echoes Dt 18:15 and emphasises that Jesus is the authentic interpreter of the Mosaic law and the prophets. He is not replacing Moses and Elijah but continues the long line of faithful leaders.

The presence of Moses and Elijah recalls their powerful mountaintop experiences of God and hints that similar things happen there to Jesus. On Mount Sinai God spoke to Moses face to face, entrusting to him the commandments that would guide his people to live in faithfulness through the desert days ahead. The glory of God is reflected on Moses’ own face as he returns to the difficult task of leadership (Ex 34:29). Elijah flees to the same mountain when trying to escape the murderous intents of Jezebel. There God speaks to him in a “still, small voice,” giving him the courage to go forward to anoint a new king and Elisha as his successor (1 Kgs 19). Likewise, Jesus is at a turning point in his mission. There are those who seek his life, as well as those who try to live faithfully God’s law that he teaches.

On the mountaintop, he is able to see with God’s own vision the way forward in faithfulness.

Jesus’ transforming experience also resonates with that of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. who, on the night before he was assassinated, declared that he had been to the mountaintop and had seen the Promised Land. He set aside all fear and assured his followers that even if he were killed, as a people they would get to the Promised Land. God’s transformative love radiates through a face determined to love no matter what the other’s response. As Jesus had taught his disciples from

a mountaintop about transforming enmity through love, so King reminded his followers to disarm police forces through loving, nonviolent confrontation and to answer fire hoses with “a certain kind of fire that no water could put out.”

King urged his listeners to continue to struggle for justice here and now, not just wait for “long white robes over yonder.” So too, Jesus’ radiant clothes in the Gospel are not simply a glimpse of his own divine status but a vision of the way in which each beloved child of God is to be clothed here and now. King urged his followers to give themselves to this struggle until the end, saying, “Nothing would be more tragic than to stop at this point.”

For Jesus, nothing would have been more tragic than to stop with teaching, preaching and healing in the Galilee. To bring transfigured life to completion for all, he continues on toward Jerusalem.

Prayer:

- Go to the mountaintop with Jesus. What vision do you see?
- How does the mountaintop vision strengthen us for the desert journey to freedom?
- Pray for God’s transformative love to radiate through you by choosing to love no matter the other’s response.

Genesis 12:1-4

Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. ²I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

⁴So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

2 Timothy 1:8-10

⁸Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, ⁹who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, ¹⁰but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Matthew 17: 1-9

¹ Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. ² And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³ Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. ⁴ Then Peter said to Jesus, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I* will make three dwellings* here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' ⁵ While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved;* with him I am well pleased; listen to him!' ⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. ⁷ But Jesus came and touched them, saying, 'Get up and do not be afraid.' ⁸ And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, 'Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.'

said to Abram, "Go
y and your kindred
ouse to the land..."

3rd Sunday

Lent Year A²



"THE water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life" (Jn 4:14)

It is said that the next major wars will be fought over water, not oil. There are growing concerns over the increasing demand for fresh, clean water as the supply is decreasing. Today's challenges about ensuring access to safe water for every human being is one entry point to reflection on today's Gospel, which centres on thirst for living water that is eternally replenished.

The account opens with a tired and thirsty Jesus asking a woman of Samaria for water. Like millions of women who even today spend hours of their day collecting water, the Samaritan woman comes, perhaps for a second time that day, to draw water. Most women would come to the well early in the morning, not at the hottest part of the day.

Most likely the Fourth Evangelist intends the noontime detail to be taken symbolically. In this Gospel, light signifies coming to belief, while darkness corresponds to unbelief. In contrast with the preceding story of Nicodemus, who came to Jesus at night and is unable to believe, the woman of Samaria comes at the brightest part of the day and will come to full belief.

Jesus and the woman enter into a deep theological conversation, laden with symbolism. As often happens in the Fourth Gospel, the two are cast as representative characters for the whole of their people. They begin by speaking of their thirsts, their shared human need, and this enables a conversation by which they can begin to break down the enmity between their two peoples. Elsewhere in the Gospel, Jesus speaks of his thirst to draw all people to God through himself (12:32) and of his desire for all to be one (17:21).

Step by step Jesus and the woman reveal themselves more deeply to each other. They speak of some of their deepest thirsts: for worship, salvation and the search for truth. They listen intently and allow their perceptions of the other to shift, just as we may need to change our former impressions of the Samaritan woman. The focus of the dialogue is not on her marital history, nor is she said to be a sinner. Jesus does not tell her to go and sin no more, as he does to the man at the pool of Bethesda who had been paralysed (Jn 5:14) or to the woman caught in adultery (Jn 8:11).

The woman's understanding of Jesus progresses from the simple observation that he is a Jew to pondering whether he is greater than Jacob. Another step is her recognition of him as a prophet when he uses the marital metaphor favoured by Hosea to speak of the peoples' relationship with God. Finally, she arrives at the conclusion that Jesus is the Messiah, which she shares with her townspeople in question form, so that they too can enter into the process of discovery that will culminate in faith.

This encounter illustrates a process by which enmity can be transformed into friendship. The two start by focusing on common thirsts that spring from their shared humanity. They had to let go of their ingrained stereotypes of the other, and they had to stop avoiding each other. They had to be willing to stay in the conversation for a good deal of time and not give up when they stumbled over their differences. They had to be willing to overcome the objections of some of their own people. They had to be willing to stay with each other. As the waters of understanding wash away ignorance and fear, the gift of living water wells up within them, making each one a spring from which others who thirst may drink.

Prayer:

- Pray for the courage to discover the gift of living water in another's well.
- Ask Jesus to deepen in you the desire to be one with all people, with whom you share a common thirst.
- How do you conserve and share our precious water resources?

Exodus 17:3-7

³But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" ⁴So Moses cried out to the Lord, "What shall I do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me." ⁵The Lord said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink." Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarrelled and tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

Romans 5:1-2, 5-8

⁵Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. ⁵And hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. ⁶For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person — though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. ⁸But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

John 4:5-42

⁵So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. ⁷A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸(His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) ⁹The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) ¹⁰Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." ¹¹The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? ¹²Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" ¹³Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." ¹⁵The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water." ¹⁶Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." ¹⁷The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" ¹⁹The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." ²¹Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²²You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." ²⁵The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." ²⁶Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

²⁷Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" ²⁸Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ²⁹"Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" ³⁰They left the city and were on their way to him. ³¹Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." ³²But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." ³³So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" ³⁴Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. ³⁵Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. ³⁶The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷For here the saying holds true, 'One

sows and another reaps.' ³⁸I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour. Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour." ³⁹Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." ⁴⁰So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹And many more believed because of his word. ⁴²They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world."



4th Sunday
Lent Year A

Some years ago many witnessed an extraordinary race. It was during games for people with disabilities. The race was a running race. One runner ran alone. His coach spoke into a megaphone saying one, one, one, or two, two, two or three, three, three. One, one, one, meant that the runner was running in the correct lane. Two, two, two meant he was veering left and three, three, three that he was veering right. The crowd was eerily silent. The runner was blind. Yet he ran at full pace into the darkness, guided by the voice of his trainer, trusting his trainer to lead him along the correct lane. When the runner crossed the lane, the crowd erupted into cheering and applause. What courage, what faith, what a race.

In today's Gospel Jesus heals a man who has been blind from birth. He heals him on the Sabbath. When challenged by the authorities the man first tells them how Jesus healed him, then identifies Jesus as a prophet, then praises Jesus as coming from God. The man is driven out of the Temple by the priests because they saw but did not believe, because the man made them feel uncomfortable, because Jesus made them feel inadequate. Knowing that the man had been driven out, Jesus sought him out and the man came to realise that Jesus is the Son of the Living God. The man worshipped Jesus praying, "Lord, I believe."

The Pharisees criticised Jesus for healing on the Sabbath, saying he could not be from God because he broke the Law of Moses in doing so. In our 1st Reading Samuel anointed the youngest of eight brothers, a mere boy, because God does not see things as we do. God saw in the boy the qualities needed to lead the tribe of Israel. The boy's name was David who became the greatest of the Jewish kings. Others saw David as a boy. They had eyes but did not see. Jesus responded to the criticism of the Pharisees by noting that they too had eyes but chose not to see the ways of God.

In our 2nd reading Paul tells us to live as children of the Light and that Christ will shine on us. It is difficult to see in the dark. For some darkness is all they know. Jesus is the light of the world, lighting our path, guiding us. The voice of Jesus is like the trainer guiding the runner. The one, one, one spoken by Jesus is all we need to live in the light. As we prepare for the great miracle of Easter, let us turn our faces to the light of Christ. Like the runner let us be guided by the voice of our Lord. Like the blind man, let us see the way of God and profess, "Lord, I believe."

1 Samuel 16:1, 6-7, 10-13

The LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." ⁶When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD's anointed is now before the LORD." ⁷But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." ¹⁰Jesse made

seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, “The LORD has not chosen any of these.”¹¹ Samuel said to Jesse, “Are all your sons here?” And he said, “There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep.” And Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here.”¹² He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The LORD said, “Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.”¹³ Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

Ephesians 5:8-14

⁸For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light — ⁹for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. ¹⁰Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹²For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; ¹³but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, ¹⁴for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, “Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

John 9:1-41

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ²His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ³Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. ⁴We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” ⁶When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, ⁷saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

⁸The neighbours and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” ⁹Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” ¹⁰But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” ¹¹He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight.” ¹²They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

¹³They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, “He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.” ¹⁶Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And they were divided. ¹⁷So they said again to the blind man,

“What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” He said, “He is a prophet.”¹⁸The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight¹⁹and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?”²⁰His parents answered, “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind;²¹but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.”²²His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue.²³Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”²⁴So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, “Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.”²⁵He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”²⁶They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”²⁷He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?”²⁸Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses.²⁹We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.”³⁰The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes.³¹We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will.³²Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind.³³If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”³⁴They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out.

³⁵Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”³⁶He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.”³⁷Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.”³⁸He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him.

³⁹Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.”⁴⁰Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?”⁴¹Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.

5th Sunday

Lent Year A



As we look to the future, to Easter when we celebrate the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, we also look to the past, to the death of another who too was risen. We look to the death of Lazarus.

Jesus and his disciples had left Galilee to stay out of the way of the religious leaders who had plotted to kill Jesus. They were on their way back to Jerusalem to the Cross when news came to them of Lazarus being ill. Jesus did not immediately set off for Bethany where Lazarus lived with his sisters Mary and Martha. Jesus waited for two days. Why? So that Lazarus would die, so that when Lazarus was risen from the dead the disciples of Jesus would believe.

Today's Gospel is very much about belief. Martha and Mary both believed that if Jesus had arrived before Lazarus had died, Jesus would have healed him and Lazarus would have lived. When they first encountered Jesus at different times each said, "Lord, if you had been here my brother would have lived." That statement was both a profession of faith and an accusation of not being present when needed.

In answer to that statement by Martha, Jesus tested Martha's faith. Jesus pronounced, "I am the resurrection and the life, those who believe in me though they die will live, and everyone who believes in me will never die." What a statement! In answer to the question Jesus put to Martha, "Do you believe?" Martha responds, "Yes Lord I believe. I know that you are the Messiah, the Son of God." But what is it that Martha believes? When Jesus commands that the stone be rolled away from the tomb, Martha urges caution because Lazarus had been dead four days. His Spirit has left. His body has started to decay and there would be a smell. It seems that Martha's profession of faith, as wonderful as it is, had limitations.

When Mary tells Jesus that Lazarus would not have died had Jesus arrived earlier, Jesus does not engage in conversation with her at all. He sees how upset she is and is "greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved." He begins to weep. Why? He knows that God will raise Lazarus from the dead. He knows that his friend Lazarus will live. Why does he weep? Is it because of the lack of faith of Mary, one of his closest friends?

When Lazarus is raised we are told that those who witnessed the miracle believed. What did they believe? The authorities hearing of the event plot even harder to kill Jesus and Lazarus as well. Thomas prophesied that in returning to Bethany Jesus would seal his fate and die, and he did. Within a few days of raising Lazarus, Jesus died on the Cross. Jesus gave his life for the life of Lazarus, just as Jesus gave his life for each one of us.

This is powerful Gospel with many layers and great subtlety. What do we believe? Do the words spoken by Jesus to Martha ring in our ears, do they reverberate in our soul, "I am the resurrection and the life, those who believe in me though they die will live, and everyone who believes in me will never die." If they don't, why not? What do we believe?

Ezekiel 37:12 -14

¹²Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. ¹³And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act," says the LORD.

Romans 8:8-11

⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ⁹But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

¹⁰But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

John 11:1-45

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ²Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. ³So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." ⁴But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." ⁵Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, ⁶after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. ⁷Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." ⁸The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" ⁹Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. ¹⁰But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them." ¹¹After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." ¹²The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." ¹³Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. ¹⁴Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." ¹⁶Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

¹⁷When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days.

¹⁸Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, ¹⁹and many of the Jews had

come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. ²⁰When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. ²¹Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²²But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." ²³Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." ²⁵Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, ²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." ²⁸When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." ²⁹And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. ³²When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

³³When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. ³⁴He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵Jesus began to weep. ³⁶So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" ³⁷But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" ³⁸Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." ⁴⁰Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. ⁴²I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." ⁴³When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" ⁴⁴The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

⁴⁵Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

Passion Sunday

Year A³



Had you been pressed into suggesting a symbol of the salvation wrought for all of humankind through the death and rising of Jesus, would the Cross have been on your short list. Probably not! Perhaps a dove, flying upward to the sky, untethered and free to soar...? Perhaps a flower in full bloom...? Perhaps a boat moored safely in a serene harbour after a long and treacherous journey...? Perhaps a door opened wide with welcome...? But a Cross?

Every year during this sacred week, the Church invites us to consider once again, the meaning of the Cross. With each passing year we are to bring to our considerations an understanding and acceptance proportionate to the depth and growth of our faith during the year which has passed. What each of us brings this year is known only to ourselves and to the one who has given us the mystery of his Cross to consider.

Found in both pre-Christian and non-Christian cultures where it has a cosmic or natural significance, the two crossed lines of unequal length symbolise the four dimensions of the universe. In both primitive and advanced civilisations and in places as widespread as India and Peru, the cross was regarded as a sign of power, and regeneration. “These natural, cosmic significations of the cross are not abrogated but rather deepened and purified by the development of Christian symbolism.”⁴

Until the fifth century C.E., the early Christians generally avoided representing the Cross with the body of Jesus; in fact even bare crosses were rarely depicted until the fourth century C.E. As J. H. Miller (op. cit.) explained, there were many reasons for the Church’s reluctance to openly represent the cross as its symbol. For many Jews and gentiles, the cross underscored the seemingly irreconcilable contradiction of Christian belief, namely, that a crucified man could also be God. As various early heresies attacked either the divinity or humanity of Christ, the symbol of the cross, which seemed to exacerbate the conflict, was avoided. Ironically, the oldest known representation of the crucified Christ is a graffiti which a pagan artist scratched on one of the Roman Palatine buildings: this blasphemous second century C.E. cartoon depicted a man with an ass’s head on a cross, while another man stands in adoration. The caption, “Alexamenos worships his god”, is still legible. Not until the fourth century, (during the reign of Constantine, did the cross begin to appear everywhere in public places as the pre-eminent symbol of Christianity. Despite the frequency of its representation in Christian art and architecture, the cross remains an ambivalent symbol. In its crossbeams meet death and life, sin and salvation, conquest and victory, immanence and transcendence. The cross represents both the basest aspects of the human condition and the most sublime reflection of divinity.

As Karl Rahner once explained, “the cross of the Lord is the revelation of what sin really is. The cross of Christ mercilessly reveals what the world hides from itself: that it, as it were, devours the Son of God in the insane blindness of its sin — a sin which Godless hate is truly set on fire upon contact with the love of God”⁵.

⁴ J. H. Miller, “Cross”, *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 4, Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.: 1981)

⁵ *The Content of Faith*, Crossroad Press, New York: 1992

As we consider the Cross, we see the truth, of who we are without God juxtaposed with the love of him who: (1) sent his only Son so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life (John 3:16); (2) showed his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us (Romans 5:8); (3) was lifted up so as to draw all people to himself (John 12:32).

As the dual revelation of the sinfulness of humanity and the love of God, the cross is unparalleled. To accept Jesus' challenge "to take up our cross daily and follow him" (Luke 9:23) involves a simultaneous acknowledgement of our desperate need for salvation and a celebration of his loving overtures to the sinful. Consider the cross... it is at once sin and love bound together by the contradiction that in his death there is life; in his seeming failure there is triumph, and what appeared to be the end of one man's journey is but the beginning of the universal homecoming of humanity.

Isaiah 50:4-7

⁴The 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 awakens — awakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. ⁵The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward. ⁶I 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. ⁷The 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

⁶Though 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.

Matthew 26:14 - 27:66

¹⁴Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests ¹⁵and said, “What will you give me if I betray him to you?” They paid him thirty pieces of silver. ¹⁶And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

¹⁷On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?” ¹⁸He said, “Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, ‘The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.’” ¹⁹So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal. ²⁰When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve; ²¹and while they were eating, he said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.” ²²And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, “Surely not I, Lord?” ²³He answered, “The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. ²⁴The 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.” ²⁵Judas, who betrayed him, said, “Surely not I, Rabbi?” He replied, “You have said so.”

²⁶While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” ²⁷Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; ²⁸for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

³⁰When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

³¹Then Jesus said to them, “You will all become deserters because of me this night; for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’” ³²But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.”

³³Peter said to him, “Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you.” ³⁴Jesus said to him, “Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.” ³⁵Peter said to him, “Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.” And so said all the disciples.

³⁶Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” ³⁷He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. ³⁸Then he said to them, “I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me.” ³⁹And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible,

let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.”⁴⁰ Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, “So, could you not stay awake with me one hour?⁴¹ Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”⁴² Again he went away for the second time and prayed, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.”⁴³ Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy.⁴⁴ So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words.⁴⁵ Then he came to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.⁴⁶ Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.”

⁴⁷While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people.⁴⁸ Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him.”⁴⁹ At once he came up to Jesus and said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” and kissed him.⁵⁰ Jesus said to him, “Friend, do what you are here to do.” Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him.⁵¹ Suddenly, one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear.⁵² Then Jesus said to him, “Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.⁵³ Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?⁵⁴ But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen in this way?”⁵⁵ At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, “Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me.⁵⁶ But all this has taken place, so that the scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled.” Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

⁵⁷Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest, in whose house the scribes and the elders had gathered.⁵⁸ But Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest; and going inside, he sat with the guards in order to see how this would end.⁵⁹ Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for false testimony against Jesus so that they might put him to death,⁶⁰ but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward⁶¹ and said, “This fellow said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.’”⁶² The high priest stood up and said, “Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?”⁶³ But Jesus was silent. Then the high priest said to him, “I put you under oath before the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.”⁶⁴ Jesus said to him, “You have said so. But I tell you, From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.”⁶⁵ Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, “He has blasphemed! Why do we still need witnesses? You have now heard his blasphemy.⁶⁶ What is your verdict?” They answered, “He deserves death.”⁶⁷ Then they spat in his face and struck him; and some slapped him,⁶⁸ saying, “Prophecy to us, you Messiah! Who is it that struck you?”

⁶⁹Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant-girl came to him and said, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean." ⁷⁰But he denied it before all of them, saying, "I do not know what you are talking about." ⁷¹When he went out to the porch, another servant-girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth." ⁷²Again he denied it with an oath, "I do not know the man." ⁷³After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you." ⁷⁴Then he began to curse, and he swore an oath, "I do not know the man!" At that moment the cock crowed. ⁷⁵Then Peter remembered what Jesus had said: "Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

²⁷When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus in order to bring about his death. ²They bound him, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate the governor. ³When Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. ⁴He said, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." But they said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself." ⁵Throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself. ⁶But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since they are blood money." ⁷After conferring together, they used them to buy the potter's field as a place to bury foreigners. ⁸For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. ⁹Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the one on whom a price had been set, on whom some of the people of Israel had set a price, ¹⁰and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me."

¹¹Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You say so." ¹²But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer. ¹³Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?" ¹⁴But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed. ¹⁵Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted. ¹⁶At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Jesus Barabbas. ¹⁷So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?" ¹⁸For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over. ¹⁹While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him." ²⁰Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. ²¹The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." ²²Pilate said to them, "Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" All of them said, "Let him be crucified!" ²³Then he asked, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all

the more, "Let him be crucified!" ²⁴So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." ²⁵Then the people as a whole answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!"

²⁶So he released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified. ²⁷Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. ²⁸They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, ²⁹and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" ³⁰They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. ³¹After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him. ³²As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross.

³³And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), ³⁴they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. ³⁵And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; ³⁶then they sat down there and kept watch over him. ³⁷Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." ³⁸Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁹Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads ⁴⁰and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." ⁴¹In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, ⁴²"He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. ⁴³He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, 'I am God's Son.'" ⁴⁴The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way. ⁴⁵From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. ⁴⁶And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" ⁴⁷When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "This man is calling for Elijah." ⁴⁸At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. ⁴⁹But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him."

⁵⁰Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. ⁵¹At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. ⁵²The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. ⁵³After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. ⁵⁴Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

⁵⁵Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus

from Galilee and had provided for him. ⁵⁶Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

⁵⁷When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. ⁵⁸He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. ⁵⁹So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth ⁶⁰and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. ⁶¹Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb. ⁶²The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate ⁶³and said, “Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise again.’ ⁶⁴Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, ‘He has been raised from the dead,’ and the last deception would be worse than the first.” ⁶⁵Pilate said to them, “You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can.” ⁶⁶So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.

The Easter Triduum Holy Thursday



When the young woman volunteered to become a foster mother, she knew that the children she would take in would eventually move on. Still, that didn't stop her from growing fond of a three-year old girl who came to stay with her. As time passed, the little girl became attached to an old stuffed rabbit that the woman had since she was a girl. The rabbit became the child's most cherished toy.

After two years, the day came when the little girl was to be adopted by a new family. Though she knew that this would open up worlds of opportunity for the child, the woman still found it hard to say goodbye to the vivacious youngster she would probably never see again. As they said their final goodbyes, she gave the youngster a special present — the stuffed rabbit she loved so much. "This is for you to remember me by."

The overjoyed child hugged her and the toy. Then, quite suddenly, the little girl ran to her bedroom one last time. The girl returned with a stuffed animal of her own. "Here," the little girl said. "This is so you won't forget me either."

That stuffed animal, the foster mother later said, was the best present anyone ever gave her. [Adapted from "Never underestimate the love of a child" by Alicia Swartz, cyberstory.com.]

What binds us together as families, as friends, and as a church, are the memories we share. Like the two stuffed animals exchanged by the foster mother and her young ward, the Word of God we hear and sing and pray and the bread we bless and break and share are the living memory of the great Paschal event of Christ.

In the bread and wine of the Eucharist, in our imitating his simple but eloquent act of washing the feet of our brothers and sisters, we become the story we remember. Our remembering Jesus at this table as he instructed is not just a faded picture in a photograph album or a forgotten memento on a shelf but a living reality — the Christ of the Gospel lives among us in our love for one another; the Risen One continues to walk among us in every act of forgiveness and generosity. This night challenges us to make the memory of Jesus' healing and humble love for all humanity live again in our own acts of healing forgiveness and compassionate generosity.

Gracious Father, tonight we remember the beginning of Jesus' "passover." Help us to be faithful to his memory: to remember his life and love among us: As we receive this night the bread and wine of the Eucharist, may we become Christ's body and blood for our broken, hurting world; as he washes the feet of his disciples as his last lesson in selfless love, may we become joyful and generous foot washers of all your children who come to this table with us.

Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14

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 judgments: 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. ¹⁴This 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

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.”⁹ Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!”¹⁰ Jesus 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.”¹¹ For 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?”¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord — and you are right, for that is what I am.¹⁴ So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.¹⁵ For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.

The Easter Triduum Good Friday



At a retreat, the leader asked the participants to think of someone who represented Christ in their lives. When it came time to share answers, one woman replied, “I had to think hard about that one. I kept thinking, *Who is it who told the truth about myself so clearly that I wanted to kill him for it?*”

According to John’s account of the passion, Jesus died because he told the truth to everyone he met. He *was* the truth, the perfect mirror in which people saw themselves in God’s own light.

On this Good Friday, that mirror is held up to our own faces and lives. In the presence of Jesus’ integrity, our own pretence is exposed. In the presence of his constancy, our cowardice is brought to light. In the presence of his fierce love for God and for us, our own hardness of heart is revealed.

On this Good Friday, we stand at the foot of the cross, and if we stand there long enough and thoughtfully enough, the cross becomes a mirror in which we see ourselves in all our imperfections and inconsistencies; we confront in the reflection of the cross not what we say we believe but what really believe, the values we actually live and that propel our lives.

But in Jesus’ cross we also begin to see the transforming and healing presence of love in our lives. Jesus’ death is love most complete and humble, love that is unconditional and joyfully offered.

Do not turn away from the cross. Make yourself look in the mirror.

See the injustice, the cowardice, the failure that nails Jesus to his cross and leads to the countless crucifixions that take place in our world every day. And once you see and understand and accept, you are ready to embrace and be embraced in the hope of tomorrow night. [Adapted from “The Perfect Mirror” by Barbara Brown Taylor, **The Christian Century**, March 18-25, 1998.]

Today we stand at the foot of your cross, O Christ. Open our hearts and spirits to see ourselves in your cross and confront the hard truths of our lives in the here-and-now and the redeeming truths of your life in us. By this sacred tree may we be re-born in your compassion and forgiveness; may it always be a living sign for us of what you have called us to be; may it be the perfect symbol for us of how to live the lives our baptisms compel us to live.

Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12

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

¹⁴Just as there were many who were astonished at him — so marred was his appearance, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of mortals — ¹⁵so 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.

Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? ²For 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. ³He 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.

⁴Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. ⁵But 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. ⁶All 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. ⁷He 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. ⁸By 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. ⁹They 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.

¹⁰Yet 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. ¹¹Out 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. ¹²Therefore 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

¹⁴Since, 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.

In 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

After 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?'

¹² So 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.

¹⁵ Simon 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.

¹⁹ Then 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.

²⁵ Now 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.

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.

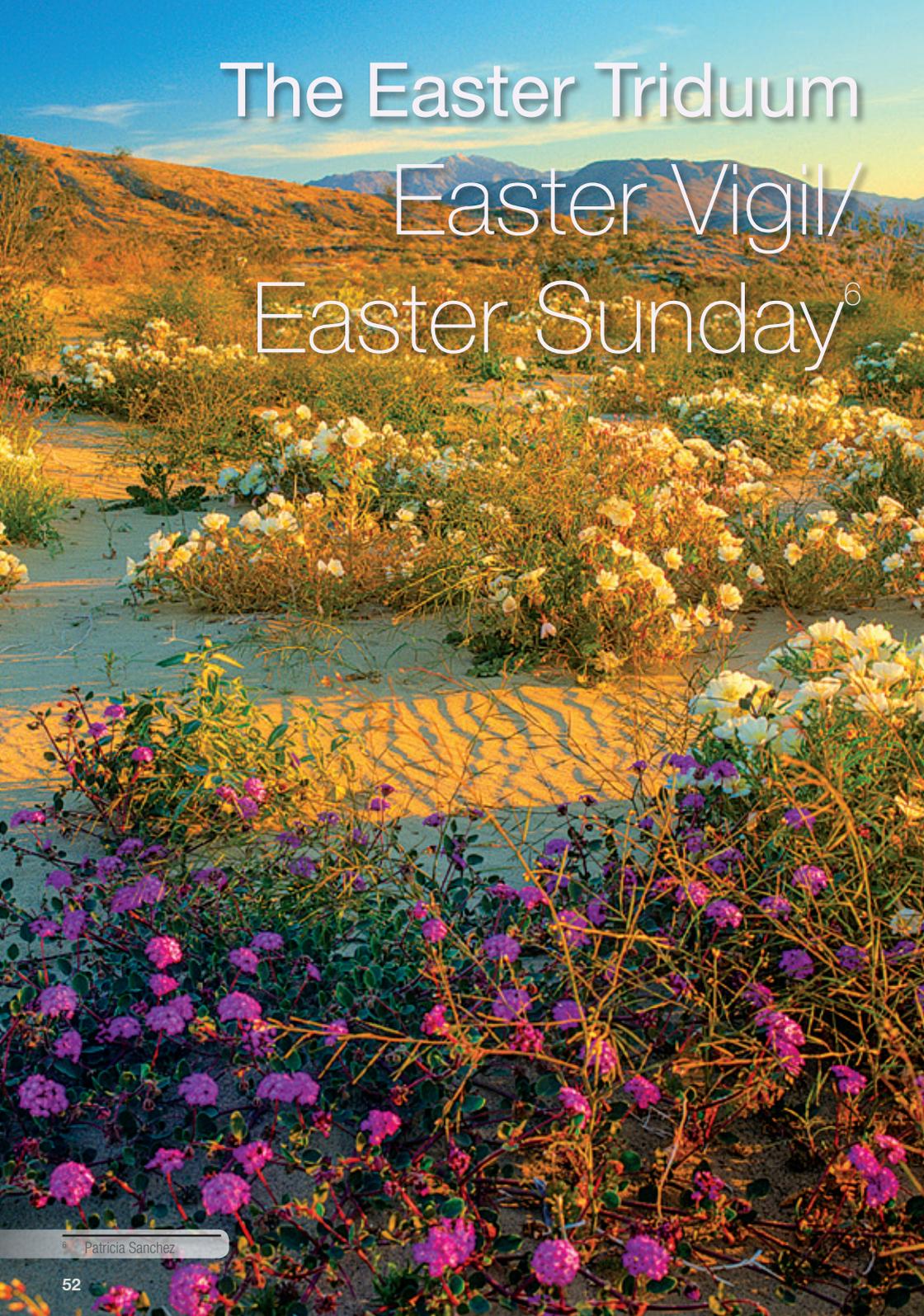
Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' ²⁷Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is 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.'³⁷ And 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.³⁹ Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds.⁴⁰ They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews.⁴¹ Now 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.⁴² And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.



The Easter Triduum Easter Vigil/ Easter Sunday⁶

Several years ago, the Italian film maker, Franco Zeffirelli offered the public his cinematic version of the good news of Jesus of Nazareth. In the film, after the crucifixion of Jesus on Calvary and his hasty burial, a member of the Sanhedrin was informed that certain followers of the itinerant teacher and healer were claiming that his tomb had been found empty. Others were spreading the news that they had experienced his risen presence. At that, the Jewish official moaned softly and sighed almost inaudibly, "...and so it begins." And so indeed, the resurrection of Jesus marked the beginning of a new way of life centred in Christ Jesus, who died but now lives forever. By virtue of Jesus' victory over sin and death, believers are offered a new perspective. Jesus' cross and resurrection changed forever the way we look at death; it changed the way we look at life, at this world and at one another.

As the late Karl Rahner once explained, Jesus' resurrection gives meaning to the Holy Saturday of human existence. "A strange, mysterious, silent day, a day without a liturgy, Holy Saturday is a symbol of everyday life which is a mean between the abysmal terror of Good Friday and the exuberant joy of Easter. For ordinary life is also mostly in between the two; the Holy Saturday of our life must be the preparation for Easter, the persistent hope for the final glory of God."⁷

To live the Holy Saturday of this life worthily, Rahner suggested, is to live in hope, doing what is possible and expecting God to do the impossible. It is to recognise the truth of the words of Tertullian (145-220 C.E.), namely, *Caro cardo salutis*, or the flesh is the hinge of salvation. The reality of Easter is that God is not simply up yonder or the totally other transcendent one. He has come to us, in the flesh and blood of human existence and therein has transformed who we are. "Since then, Mother earth has only borne children who are transformed. For Jesus' resurrection is the beginning of the resurrection of all flesh."⁸

Another perspective on the resurrection was proposed centuries ago by Augustine (354-430 C.E.). "Give me a lover", said the bishop of Hippo, "and he will understand the resurrection." Expanding on Augustine's thought, Gerald O'Collins⁹ explained that the love between a man and a woman hints at the divine love revealed in the resurrection. "For God the Father to say, 'This is the Son whom I love' (see Mark 1:11, 9:7) was to say 'He will not die', or rather, 'I will not abandon him to death' (Acts 2:25-31). The fourth evangelist used similar love-language in his telling of Jesus' passion, death and resurrection: "Before the feast of Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father. He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end." (John 13:1) Love is not confined by the limitations of time or death. Parents do not tell their children, we shall love you for 10, 15 or 20 years. Children do not say, "I shall forget you when you die." Lovers do not say, "I will love you for five years." "Genuine love is committed and committing to the language of 'forever'." (Gerald O'Collins, op. cit.).

⁷ *The Great Church Year*, Crossroad Pub. Co., New York: 1994

⁸ *The Content of Faith*, Crossroad Pub. Co., New York: 1992

⁹ *What Are They Saying About the Resurrection?*, Paulist Press, New York: 1978

In Jesus' resurrection, the loved children of the Father are promised that his forever love will travel with them to life beyond the grave. In the risen Lord, believers find a new perspective of hope and meaning with which to view the Holy Saturday of human existence. Jesus, who was dead and is now risen assures us of the saving transformation of all flesh. With every Easter celebration we are privileged to affirm again: "... and so it begins..."

Sunday of the Resurrection



Matthew 28:1-10

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ²And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³His appearance was like lightning and his clothing white as snow. ⁴For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. ⁵But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. ⁶He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’ This is my message for you.” ⁸So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

An Easter Prayer

We praise you, O Divine Keeper of Promises!
What you pledge you always bring about,
as the glorious resurrection of Jesus proves.
His freedom from death fills us with hope
since we his disciples are promised the same.

By our baptism we have become his body,
and we rejoice that the Risen One guarantees us
freedom from death and endless life.

O God, give us the grace to daily live out
this glorious life of the risen Christ.

The Pilgrimage Way of the Cross by Fr. Ed Hays

Easter Week



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 this week, wearing their white garments. We go through our everyday lives this week conscious of the “white garments” we all wear. 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 now, had trouble recognising his presence with them.

We let the prayers of this Easter week draw us into the joy. 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.

An Easter Message

The proofs of eternal rebirth are everywhere. Spring comes every year. Dawn comes every morning. Love happens out of hate. Birth absorbs the pain of death. And people everywhere look to Nirvana, to enlightenment, to reincarnation, to resurrection in the hope of eternal renewal. To the Christian, both the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus we see as proof of God’s will for the world, and in the Paschal Mystery the demonstration of the cycle of struggle.

It is true that Jesus who lives in us died but did not die. But just as true is the fact that we have all known resurrection in our own lives as well. We have been crucified, each of us, one way or another, and been raised up again. What had been bad for us at the time, we now see, was in the end an invitation to rise to new life. The invitation was to a road, we now admit, which we would never have taken ourselves if we had not been forced to travel it. Looking back we know now that this hard road was really the journey that brought us at least one step closer to wholeness in a world in which wholeness can never exist. It may be because we lust after some kind of mythical wholeness that we fail to see the life-giving truths that come to us one byway, one fragment at a time.

Life is not one road. It is many roads, the walking of which provides the raw material out of which we find hope in the midst of despair. Every dimension of the process of struggle is a call to draw from a well of new understandings. It is in these understandings that hope dwells. It is that wisdom that carries us beyond the dark night of struggle to the dawn of new wisdom and new strength. [Joan D. Chittister excerpt, *Scarred by Struggle, Transformed by Hope* (Eerdmans)]



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