

COMPASSION

LENTEN PROGRAM 2026



CONTENTS

- 4 Leading the weekly sessions and visio divina
- 5 Foreword: Bishop Brian Mascord
- 71 Contributor biographies
- 74 A detailed examination of conscience
- 75 A guide to Reconciliation

the GARDEN

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT



8

the PROMISE

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT



17

the THIRST

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT



26

the ANOINTING

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT



36

the RESTORATION

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT



46

the EXCHANGE

PALM SUNDAY



56

the STONE

EASTER SUNDAY



68

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Responsorial psalms

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Ash Wednesday

WEDNESDAY 18 FEBRUARY 2026

JOEL 2:12–18

PSALM 50(51):3–6, 12–14, 17

2 CORINTHIANS 5:20–6:2

MATTHEW 6:1–6, 16–18

Let your hearts be broken. JOEL 2:13

The Latin word *compassio*, or compassion, is more than just going out of one's way to help a person in need. Compassion literally means "to suffer with" that person.

My dad, for example, had been relatively healthy throughout his life, but in 2006 he took a massive stroke and died within a week. Now, I come from a very close family and I know I have always loved my dad. But when he had his stroke, just before he died, the first time I walked into the hospital and saw him there laid out on the bed with bloodshot eyes and tubes hanging out of him unable to speak or move his right side, there was absolutely nothing I could say and nothing I could do to help him. And so, I just sat by his side and held his hand and cried. I suffered with him.

I know I have always loved my dad, but it was only there in the midst of suffering that I realised just how much I loved my dad; it was only there in the midst of suffering that I discovered a depth to my love which I simply never knew I had, and never knew I was capable of experiencing.

To suffer with someone is a moment of grace in the sense that it is a moment for us to discover the depth of our love for the person suffering—the depth of our love for one another. It does not make the suffering any easier, it does not mean that God is the cause of suffering, but God allows suffering because God is able to draw some good from it. God is able to transform a moment of suffering into a moment of grace.

Lord, help me to experience your grace in moments of suffering. Amen.

FR ANTONY JUKES OFM

Thursday after Ash Wednesday

THURSDAY 19 FEBRUARY 2026

DEUTERONOMY 30:15–20

PSALM 1:1–4, 6

LUKE 9:22–25

If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross every day and follow me. LK 9:23

Lent is a journey accompanying Jesus as he travels to Jerusalem—the place where the mystery of his passion, death and resurrection is to be fulfilled. As we begin this Lenten journey, it's a good idea to ask ourselves: what does it mean to have a part in the Cross of Christ daily?

At times, we may think that taking up the cross means taking up the large, superimposed, and difficult events. But quite often, the Lord is inviting us to embrace and accept those minor daily hardships. How do we respond to those irritating "jabs" that come up in our conversations in our homes and workplaces? Do we stay calm and try to defuse arguments, or are we quick to complain? In our fast-paced society, we are used to wanting, and having, everything now. How do I respond to those unexpected inconveniences that result in the need to wait a little longer?

When we choose to accept these little annoyances and respond with greater patience with, and for, the Lord, we are not pretending that the suffering doesn't exist. Rather, we are learning how to love God through it, and as we choose to make these daily sacrifices, it helps us to become a more loving and giving person.

This Lenten season, let us have a renewed desire to give more of ourselves to God and to our neighbours. Let us recognise the ways in which Jesus may be inviting us to greater love through accepting these daily sufferings.

Lord Jesus, help me to accept my daily crosses with greater love. Amen.

SR ELENA MARIE PITEO OP

Monday of the 5th week of Lent

MONDAY 23 MARCH 2026

DANIEL 13:1–9, 15–17, 19–30, 33–62

PSALM 22(23)

JOHN 8:1–11

Then he bent down and wrote on the ground again. JN 8:8

The first reading and the Gospel place us as members of the gallery in courtroom dramas, watching as norms and traditions are upended. Both stories are staged trials where the accused is placed at the mercy of sinful men. And in both, God steps in to judge rightly. Susanna was declared guilty but proven innocent; the woman is guilty but declared loved.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, Daniel becomes Susanna's advocate, her defender, a truth-teller, and an instrument of divine justice. Jesus, second person of the Trinity, becomes the woman's advocate, her defender, a revealer of truth, and the giver of mercy. Jesus is the new Daniel, fulfilling the Law of Moses and bringing salvation.

Both stories reveal a God who truly sees us. He sees innocence beneath lies, he sees wounds beneath sin, and he sees deeply into fearful hearts, full of judgment. Where we often judge too quickly, harshly, or selectively, God sees perfectly and chooses to save.

The men holding stones were face to face with Jesus, and they couldn't see it. Notice that Jesus never told them to leave. His words were, "If there is one of you who has not sinned, let him be the first to throw a stone at her" (Jn 8:7). One by one, they left. If they only knew of Jesus' love and mercy, perhaps they might have the grace of courage to stand beside the woman, another sinner in need of a saviour. I pray we all have that grace.

Lord, help us to approach the throne of grace and courageously once more ask, "Jesus, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me, a sinner." Amen.

PETER GILMORE

Tuesday of the 5th week of Lent

TUESDAY 24 MARCH 2026

NUMBERS 21:4–9

PSALM 101(102):2–3, 16–21

JOHN 8:21–30

When you have lifted up the Son of Man. JN 8:28

What do we think about when we hear that God loves us? Lent invites us to rediscover the depth of this truth. As we walk towards Easter, Jesus' words remind us that he is prepared to do everything to reveal the Father's love for us.

Jesus says, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he" (Jn 8:28). These words point us directly to the Cross. The "lifting up" of Jesus is not only his crucifixion, but also his exaltation. The moment that seems to be his defeat becomes the revelation of his true identity: the Son who is one with the Father.

We are drawn to gaze upon the crucified Christ and learn what love truly is. From the Cross we see that he does nothing by himself, but everything according to the Father's will. His humility is not weakness, but trust—trust born of knowing the Father's love for him and for all his children. In looking upon Jesus, given totally for us, we discover the depth of the Father's love. The open, pierced heart of Christ reveals the Father's love to us.

Jesus knew the Father had not left him alone. Even in the agony of the passion, when abandoned by friends and mocked by enemies, the Father remained united to his Son. This certainty gave him the strength to surrender.

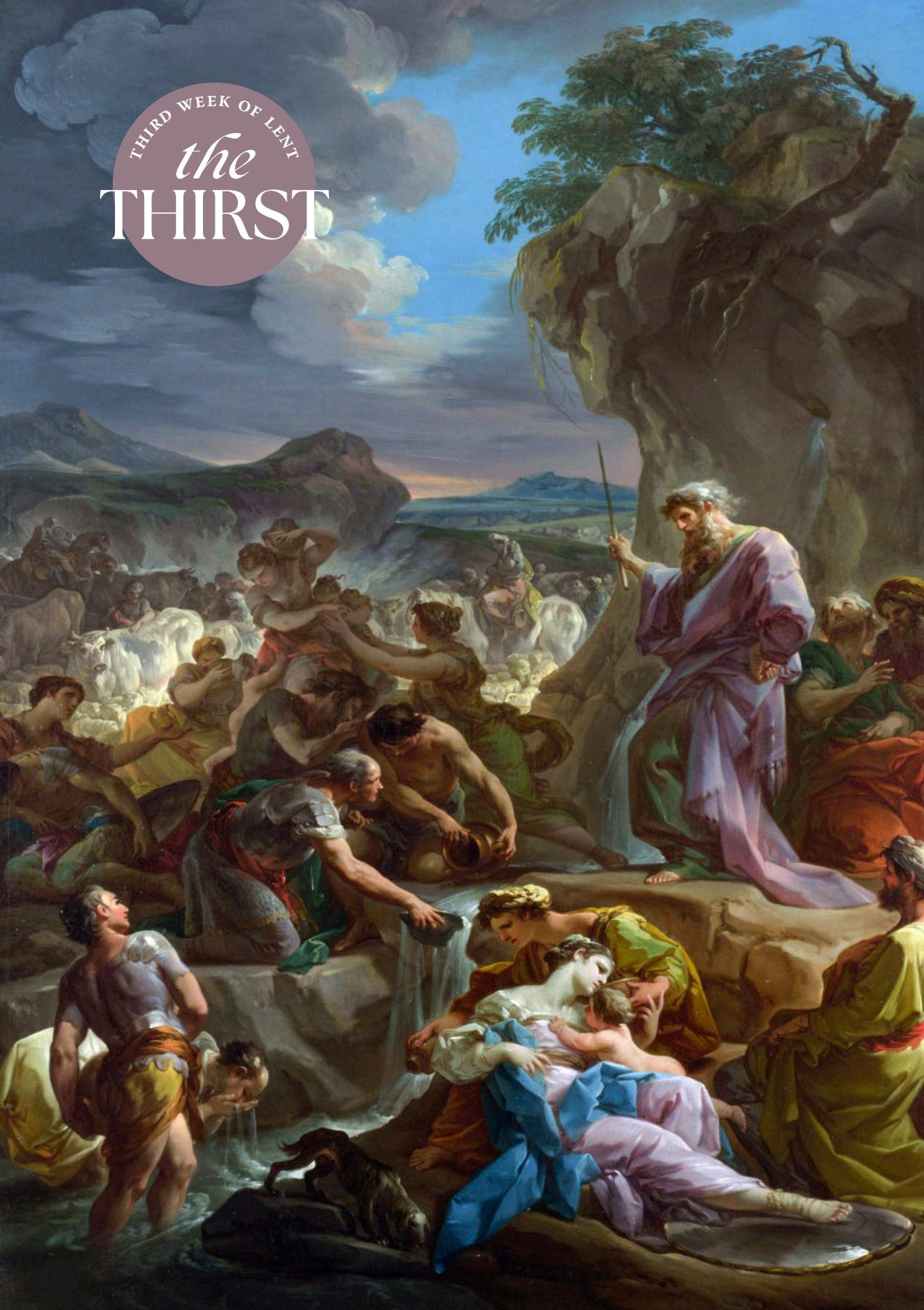
As we accept this love, we are invited to make the same surrender. We often act "of ourselves", relying on our own strength or clinging to our own plans. Yet, the Cross shows another way: to live in dependence on the Father's love. When we unite our struggles and obedience with Christ's, we, too, discover that the Father never leaves us. To look upon the "lifted up" Son is to know we are beloved children of the Father.

Lord Jesus, lifted high upon the Cross, draw me into the mystery of the Father's love. Teach me to trust as you trusted, to surrender as you surrendered, and to live as a beloved child of the Father. Amen.

KATE ATKINS MGL

THIRD WEEK OF LENT

the
THIRST





ARTWORK SPOTLIGHT

with Mons Graham Schmitzer
(*for personal reflection*)

Moses Striking the Rock (c. 1743–1744).

Corrado Giaquinto (1703–1766)

Oil on canvas, 136.5cm x 95cm. National Gallery, London, UK. Public Domain.

“T ormented by thirst, the people complained against Moses” (Ex 17:3). It was not the first, nor would it be the last time the people complained to God during their trek across the desert—even after witnessing the miracle at the Red Sea! Looking at the map, Israel could have reached the Promised Land in a year, instead, it took 40! Every time they lost faith in God, the people began to go around in circles, if not backwards. Isn’t this the story of our lives? It could be said of many of us that we don’t get serious about our lives until we are over 40!

Looking not just at this episode, but at the Old Testament as a whole, we can only marvel at God’s patience. The author of Psalm 107, in writing a short history of the Chosen People, four times

uses the refrain: “Then they cried to the Lord in their need and he rescued them from their distress,” to emphasise God’s continuous forbearance. St Paul, not one to pretend he had no weaknesses, could say: “If mercy has been shown to me, it is because Christ Jesus meant to make me the greatest evidence of his inexhaustible patience” (1 Tim 1:16).

Life-giving waters flow from what was hard and dry. The response to today’s psalm (94) quietly suggests that it is our hearts that have become hard and dry...

When they reached Mount Horeb, Moses reminded the people that they had nothing to boast about. “The Lord set his heart on you and chose you not because you were the most numerous of all peoples—for indeed you were the smallest of all—but because he loved you” (Deut 7:7). “Because he loved you”—it is the only reason for his choice of us, too.

The scene of today’s reading became known afterwards as Massah—meaning “testing”—and Meribah—“dissatisfaction”. But God answers the people with a gracious response. Moses uses the rod which he had stretched over the waters of the Red Sea to strike the rock. Life-giving waters flow from what was hard and dry. The response in today’s psalm (Ps 94) quietly suggests that it is our hearts that have become hard and dry: “If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.” Prayer, fasting, almsgiving are the remedies the Church prescribes to soften those hearts.

In referring to this incident, St Paul declares that the rock involved was actually Christ. “They drank from the spiritual rock which followed them, and that rock was Christ” (1 Cor 10:4). Paul is quoting a tradition amongst the rabbis of his time that the rock followed the Israelites in the desert. For him, this rock symbolises the pre-existent Christ already active in Israel’s history.

The whole scene speaks of divine providence under the leadership of Moses. As the chosen intercessor between God and his people, he is a type of Christ, providing sustenance and hope to a needy people.

"On the last day of the festival, Jesus stood and cried out: 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me! Let anyone who believes in me come and drink!' As Scripture says, 'From his heart shall flow streams of living water'" (Jn 7:37–38). Jesus is living water for us. He is foretelling that, having drunk of him, we will become living water for others.

Moses Striking the Rock, held in the National Gallery in London, was painted by Corrado Giaquinto about 1743–1744. He had been born in the Kingdom of Naples in 1703, later relocating to Rome. He is less widely known than many of his contemporaries, but his art is notable for its spiritual intensity and elegance of composition, and led to his being invited to Madrid by King Ferdinand VI as court painter. He would have an indirect effect on the future Francisco Goya.

Jesus is living water for us.
He is foretelling that, having drunk of him, we will become living water for others.

In the right-hand centre Moses stands prominently on a rock. Holding his staff, he appears contemplative. A thin stream of water flows from the rock beside him, spreading throughout the composition, providing life for the multitude around him. The foreground is crowded with men, women, and children desperately drinking or gathering the water. A woman seems to have fainted. Her servant, probably, is offering her a drink while gathering more for the baby. A man on the left washes his face.

Light enters dramatically from the left, hinting at the miraculous origin of the scene. Storm clouds give way to a clearer sky—life is about to get better for the wanderers. The whole scene speaks of divine providence under the leadership of Moses. As the chosen intercessor between God and his people, he is a type of Christ, providing sustenance and hope to a needy people.

MONS GRAHAM SCHMITZER

3rd Sunday of Lent

SUNDAY 8 MARCH 2026

EXODUS 17:3–7

PSALM 94(95):1–2, 6–9

ROMANS 5:1–2, 5–8

JOHN 4:5–42

OPENING PRAYER

Host: Let us pause and call mind God's loving presence—the God who walks with us, shares our burdens, and gathers us together in compassion.

Brief pause.

All: Merciful and faithful God, you draw near to us in every joy and every sorrow. As we gather in this Lenten journey, open our hearts to your compassion—the love that suffers with us and teaches us to suffer with one another.

Help us to listen with tenderness, to speak with humility, and to honour the stories we share.

Make us patient, gentle, and courageous as we seek your presence in your Word and in each person here.

May your compassion steady us, your Spirit inspire us, and your grace renew us.

We make this prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

PSALM 94(95):1-2, 6-9

● 1 ○ 9

**R. If today you hear his voice,
harden not your hearts.**

Come, ring out our joy to the Lord;
hail the rock who saves us.
Let us come before him, giving thanks,
with songs let us hail the Lord. **R.**
Come in; let us bow and bend low;
let us kneel before the God who made us:
for he is our God and we
the people who belong to his pasture,
the flock that is led by his hand. **R.**

O that today you would listen to his voice!
“Harden not your hearts as at Meribah,
as on that day at Massah in the desert
when your fathers put me to the test;
when they tried me,
though they saw my work.” **R.**

GOSPEL

JOHN 4:5-16, 19-26, 39-42

● 1 ○ 10

Jesus came to the Samaritan town called Sychar, near the land that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well is there and Jesus, tired by the journey, sat straight down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” His disciples had gone into the town to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, “What? You are a Jew and you ask me, a Samaritan, for a drink?”—Jews, in fact, do not associate with Samaritans. Jesus replied:

“If you only knew what God is offering and who it is that is saying to you: Give me a drink, you would have been the one to ask, and he would have given you living water.”

“You have no bucket, sir,” she answered “and the well is deep: how could you get this living water? Are you a greater man than our father Jacob who gave us this well and drank from it himself with his sons and his cattle?” Jesus replied:

“Whoever drinks this water will get thirsty again; but anyone who drinks the water that I shall give will never be thirsty again: the water that I shall give will turn into a spring inside him, welling up to eternal life.”

“Sir,” said the woman “give me some of that water, so that I may never get thirsty and never have to come here again to draw water. I see you are a prophet, sir. Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, while you say that Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.”

Jesus said: “Believe me, woman, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know: for salvation comes from the Jews.

But the hour will come—in fact it is here already—when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth: that is the kind of worshipper the Father wants.

God is spirit, and those who worship must worship in spirit and truth.”

The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah—that is, Christ—is coming; and when he comes he will tell us everything.” “I who am speaking to you,” said Jesus “I am he.”

Many Samaritans of that town had believed in him on the strength of the woman's testimony when she said, “He told me all I have ever done”, so, when the Samaritans came up to him, they begged him to stay with them. He stayed for two days, and when he spoke to them many more came to believe; and they said to the woman, “Now we no longer believe because of what you told us; we have heard him ourselves and we know that he really is the saviour of the world.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.

Pause for silent reflection.

Living water, living witness

In a 2025 homily, Pope Leo XIV challenged us by declaring, “If we want to keep our identity as Christians from being reduced to a relic of the past, it is important to move beyond a tired and stagnant faith. We need to ask ourselves: Who is Jesus Christ for us today? What place does he occupy in our lives and in the life of the Church?” (*Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul*, 29 June 2025).

...once we taste living water, the most natural reaction is to desire this refreshment for others as well.

Reflecting on these questions, I was challenged to examine whether my faith overflows into the world or lies stagnant at the bottom of a deep well. At times, caught in the banality of routine, my faith feels stagnant. I notice myself going through the motions in personal prayer or celebrating Mass, drawing water from the bottom of the well. At other times—especially when I intentionally break from routine and search beyond the ink on the page or the limitations of time—I’m given a powerful sense of God’s peace, love and joy washing over me. In those moments, I’m reminded that these gifts are never just for me, but are given to be poured out in compassion. Encountering the living Lord inevitably stirs empathy, mercy, and readiness to serve, because once we taste living water, the most natural reaction is to desire this refreshment for others as well. How would you respond to Pope Leo’s probing questions?

The interaction between Jesus and the Samaritan woman in our Gospel this week offers a blueprint for what happens before, during, and after people encounter the power of the Holy Spirit by drinking the water Jesus offers. The Samaritan woman’s initial interaction with Jesus carried layers of tension—social, religious, and personal—that made it difficult to understand what he was offering. Bound by the conventions of her time and a worldview shaped by the physical and the ordinary, she had no way of recognising the depth of his invitation. Jesus’ offer to drink “living water”

was not about the well before them, but the gift of his very self: life springing up within, renewing her from the inside out, and overflowing into the world.

Compassion for the whole person—body, mind, and spirit—opens the door to trust, curiosity, and transformation.

Notice how Jesus’ first move was compassionate understanding. He met her where she was—not with condemnation, but with kindness that broke through her defensiveness. What won her over? The promise that her needs would be met—that she would never thirst again. Jesus often begins with people’s tangible needs: thirst, blindness, grief, exclusion and loneliness, to name a few. Compassion for the whole person—body, mind, and spirit—opens the door to trust, curiosity, and transformation. The result is a new openness to what Jesus truly offers: his peace, love and joy. “Sir,” the woman said, “give me some of that water” (Jn 4:15).

Finally, when the woman realised who was before her, the Messiah, her encounter could not be contained. She ran back to her town, not to defend herself or hide her past, but to invite others to meet the One who had looked into her heart without judgment. Her testimony was not a theological treatise, but a vulnerable sharing: “He told me everything I have ever done” (Jn 4:39). And it was enough. Compassion had moved her from isolation to mission.

This is the “after” of every true encounter with Jesus—when love overflows into witness, and witness draws others to the source. Like the people of Sychar who believed “on the strength of the woman’s testimony” (Jn 4:39), we, too, are called to let compassion carry the living water beyond ourselves, so that others may come to know, not just through our words, but for themselves, that “this is truly the Saviour of the world” (Jn 4:42).

FR JOSHUA WHITEHEAD

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

PAGE 32

Where thirst meets Love

Well, well, well, (pun intended)—isn’t our God an adventurous God? In Week One, we were led into the desert with Jesus. Week Two, we took to the mountains with Peter, James, and John to encounter the transfigured Christ. This week we meet Jesus and the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s Well. This woman comes to Jesus in her fragility. She brings into that encounter her shame, her wounds and pain, her regrets, and her deep fear of rejection. However, Jesus sits with her and listens with a compassionate heart—without condemnation.

...we, just like the Samaritan woman, try to fill our hearts or “our jars” with the waters of this world

Jesus sees her! He asks her for water, but his thirst was for her. His longing was to pour out his life-giving water into her parched heart. Jesus’ offer of water to drink would not quench her physical thirst, but instead was a promise of the fullness of life only he could provide. Jesus wants to fill her heart with his love and his Spirit because of his deep love for her. You see friends, we, just like the Samaritan woman, try to fill our hearts or “our jars” with the waters of this world—be it relationships, addictions, gadgets, entertainment, success, fame, esteem, and the list goes on.

The waters of this world cannot quench the profound thirst of the human heart, yet we look for solutions to fill our earthenware jars. The well of Jesus provides permanent solutions—*life-giving water*.

The waters of this world cannot quench the profound thirst of the human heart, yet we look for solutions to fill our earthenware jars.

I remember Pope Benedict XVI’s visit to Australia for World youth Day in 2008. He shared how our desperate hearts need the Holy Spirit, saying, “How many of our contemporaries

have built broken and empty cisterns (cf. Jer 2:13) in a desperate search for meaning—the ultimate meaning that only love can give?” He spoke of hearts having “an interior emptiness, an unnamed fear and a quiet sense of despair”. He then said that it is only in, and through, the life-giving water—the Holy Spirit—that our thirst can be quenched. At the empty wells of our lives, Jesus waits—offering the life-giving water that satisfies forever. I invite you to spend time with Jesus, bringing your jar to fill the wells of your life—the wells of despair, emptiness, pain, shame, guilt, fear, condemnation, loneliness, or whatever your well may be. Jesus waits for us, just like he waited for the Samaritan woman, without any judgment, disrespect, or condemnation. Bring your jar to him!

At the empty wells of our lives, Jesus waits—offering the life-giving water that satisfies forever.

Jesus cannot but help look at you with love. He sees you.

THERESE MILLS MGL

HOST INSTRUCTIONS

PAGE 32

Jesus waits for us, just like he waited for the Samaritan woman, without any judgement, disrespect, or condemnation. Bring your jar to him!

GOSPEL REFLECTION

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. When has your faith felt like “living water,” overflowing with peace, love, or compassion—and when has it felt more like a stagnant well? What made the difference?
2. In what ways might Jesus be meeting you this Lent at your own “well”—in the ordinary places of thirst, weariness, or longing—to offer you his living water?
3. How is the Holy Spirit inviting you to let your encounter with Jesus overflow into witness, so that others might come to know his love through you?

LIVING THE WORD THIS WEEK

Take time this week to sit with Jesus at your own “well”. Be honest about your thirsts and needs, and let him meet you there with compassion. Then, look for one simple way to let that encounter overflow—through a word of encouragement, an act of kindness, or a quiet gesture of mercy—so that living water may flow through you to others.

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

HOST INSTRUCTIONS

(to be read aloud and/or adapted)

Let's now take some time in prayer with today's Gospel of the Samaritan woman at the well.

1. Begin by sitting comfortably and taking a few slow, steady breaths. Allow your body to relax and your mind to become still.
2. We will hear the Gospel passage read aloud. As you listen, notice any word or image that touches your heart.
3. After hearing the passage, I invite you to imagine yourself in the scene.
 - You walk toward Jacob's well.
 - What do you see around you? Are there others nearby? What does the well look like?
 - What do you hear—perhaps the splash of water, voices, or the rustle of leaves?
 - What do you feel—the warmth of the sun

- on your skin, the dust beneath your feet?
 - What do you smell or taste in the air?
4. Now picture Jesus sitting at the well. See him looking at you with love, just as he looked at the Samaritan woman.
 - What emotions arise as he gazes at you?
 - What would you like to say to him?
 - What jars or empty wells in your life do you want to bring to him today?
 5. Spend a few quiet minutes in conversation with Jesus, asking him to pour his life-giving water—his Spirit—into your heart.

(Pause for a few minutes of silence and prayer.)

When the time feels right, gently return your attention to the group, carrying with you the grace or insight Jesus gave you at the well.

CLOSING PRAYER AND INTERCESSIONS

Host: Loving Father, your Son has shown us the depth of your compassion—a love that walks with us, carries our burdens, and draws us into healing and new life. With trust in your mercy, we place our prayers before you.

For the grace to let Jesus meet us in our shame, our questions, and our thirst for belonging.

All: **Lord, draw us into your healing compassion.**

Host: For the courage to speak the truth of our lives and allow grace to transform us.

All: **Lord, draw us into your healing compassion.**

Host: For all who hunger for acceptance or struggle with their past.

All: **Lord, draw us into your healing compassion.**

Host: Father of mercy,
hear the prayers we have spoken
and those held silently in our hearts.
Strengthen us in compassion,
that we may walk with Christ and one
another toward the fullness of Easter hope.

All: **Amen.**