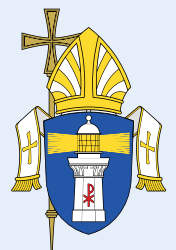




JESUS Our Light and Our Life

Becoming One in Christ

Diocese of Broken Bay
Lenten Program 2023



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Palm Sunday
*Participating
in the Journey*



imprimatur:
✠ Anthony Randazzo
Bishop of Broken Bay
16 November 2022

nihil obstat:
Fr John Hill
Diocesan Censor
16 November 2022

Introduction

Bishop Anthony



Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

The journey through the Lenten weeks to the celebration of Easter will hold a familiar rhythm. Each year, we enter these sacred weeks with a desire to let go of what is keeping us bound so that we can grow deeper in our faith and draw closer to Christ.

This year is no different, and yet it has the potential to be very different. It offers a new opportunity to encounter Christ, and to make His message of Good News more personal and real in our lives.

The Year A Gospel texts that we reflect on this year present New Testament characters from the Gospel of John who find themselves totally transformed from their encounter with Jesus. The Samaritan woman at the well finds an amazing interior living water she didn't know was possible; the man born blind was marvelously able to see for the first time; and Lazarus, who had died, is remarkably given a new life that is beyond even the deepest hopes of his two sisters, Mary and Martha.

As we journey towards the Passion of Jesus, we hear these stories of transformation – from thirst to fullness of life, from blindness to sight, from death to life. These are the transformations of the Christian life. Dare you hope that this could be your story too? As baptised Christians, this is indeed the story of each of us, the story that unites us all. Perhaps you have had an experience of feeling some unexpected peace or newness after a loss. During our darkest times, we can trust in the One who has defeated death.

My prayer is that in this Lenten journey you will walk faithfully beside Jesus, so that the Easter story can more authentically and personally become yours. May you be open to allowing the Holy Spirit to bring about transformation in your life; and may you receive the new sight and the new life that Jesus offers you.



Most Rev Anthony Randazzo DD JCL
Bishop of Broken Bay

How to Use this Booklet

This booklet invites you to prayerfully reflect on the Sunday Gospel readings in Lent. It can be used individually or as part of a group. The notes below are provided for use in a small group context.

For each of the 6 weeks of Lent, this resource includes a reading of the Gospel text; a reflection on the text; and a personal testimony related to the text. All materials and reflections have been prepared by members from the Broken Bay Church community, including our Plenary Council members who have drawn on their experiences of the Council in their writing.

It is suggested that you allocate 1 ½ hours to complete each session. **The recommended process is as follows:**

1. Opening Prayer (10 mins)

An Opening Prayer is offered, which may be read together by participants. Note that these prayers are written in the first person, to facilitate a more personal experience for participants. You may wish to encourage people to read the prayer silently before inviting all to pray aloud together.

Song suggestions are given for each week which you may wish to use as part of the gathering prayer time for the group.

2. Gospel Reading (15 mins)

Optional: To allow participants to prepare themselves well to hear God speak through the Sacred Scriptures, you may wish to pray the prayer of Saint John Chrysostom prior to reading the Gospel text.

Listen to the Gospel text by inviting a participant from the group to read the text.

Pause for silent reflection for a few moments.

Invite people to share one insight into what they are hearing through the text. This is not a time for discussion, but only an invitation to offer a short comment. The group listens attentively to each person but does not respond.

3. Reflection with Guided Questions (35 mins)

A reflection is offered on the scripture text, drawing out the themes of the Gospel.

Invite participants to read the text, one paragraph each. They may wish to underline phrases that they particularly notice.

Discuss the Scripture text and reflection, inviting conversation about what people are hearing, and their insights or comments.

Invite conversation using the guided questions offered at the end of the session.

4. A Personal Story (25 mins)

A personal testimony is offered on the text. It is suggested that this could be read quietly by participants, whilst underlining phrases that stand out for them.

Discuss the Personal Story, asking: What aspects of the testimony spoke to you most deeply? How is this story encouraging you in your faith journey?

To conclude the session, invite participants to respond to what they have heard and discussed during the whole session. How are they been called to respond? What action might they take? They may wish to write down one or two personal actions that they could take into their week in the space provided. There is no obligation to share these; only do so if appropriate to the group.

5. Closing Prayer (5 mins)

To conclude, pray the final prayer together.

Suggested Music

A selection of music is offered for each week.

Week 1

Run To the Father – Matt Maher

Lord Have Mercy – The Vigil Project, Greg & Lizzy

Week 2

No Greater Love – Fr Rob Galea

Belovedness – Sarah Kroger

Week 3

Nameless – Maeve Louise Heaney

You Heard My Name – Taylor Tripodi

Week 4

Light The Way – Matt Maher

Christ Be Our Light – Bernadette Farrell

Week 5

Lord, I Need You – Matt Maher

We Adore You – The Vigil Project

Week 6

Evermore – Stephen Kirk

Alive and Breathing – Matt Maher

Prayer of Saint John Chrysostom

before reading the Scriptures

*O Lord Jesus Christ, open the eyes of my heart, that I may hear your word and understand and do your will, for I am a sojourner upon the earth. Hide not your commandments from me, but open my eyes, that I may perceive the wonders of your law. Speak unto me the hidden and secret things of your wisdom. On You I set my hope, O my God, that You will enlighten my mind and understanding with the light of your knowledge, not only to cherish those things which are written, but to do them; that in reading the lives and sayings of the saints I may not sin, but that such may serve for my restoration, enlightenment and sanctification, for the salvation of my soul, and the inheritance of life everlasting. For You are the enlightenment of those who lie in darkness, and from You comes every good deed and every gift. **Amen***



First *Led to the* Sunday of Lent *Wilderness*

Opening Prayer

Loving and gracious God,

Here I am, being led to the wilderness of this Lenten experience.

I am open to the changes You wish to work in me over these weeks. Accompany me through my own deserts, where there is dryness, emptiness or hurt. Be my guide toward healing and peace.

As I reflect on Your word today, may Your Holy Spirit reveal to me the saving power of the life, death and resurrection of Your Son Jesus Christ. May my relationship with Him be renewed; my trust in Him deepened; and my joy increased. **Amen**

Gospel Reading

Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.' "

Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying 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.' "

Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' "

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.' "

Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Gospel Reflection

By Ashleigh Donnelly. *Ashley is the Community and Outreach Manager, CatholicCare, Diocese of Broken Bay.*

For most of us, our sacraments are occasions of joy, celebration, and community. On the day of our Baptism our loved ones would have gathered afterwards to feast and celebrate. Similarly, few newlyweds return to normal life before a honeymoon.

It is a little unsettling, shocking even, that immediately after Jesus is baptised, He finds himself in the wilderness. Barren, lonely and inhospitable, Jesus finds himself in a land that bears little resemblance to the life-giving waters of the River Jordan.

“Why?” is the question that naturally follows. Why doesn’t Jesus use His Baptism as a launchpad into public ministry? Surely, there are better ways He could have used these forty days. In our western society, success is closely connected with speed and efficiency. Our performance at work is determined by how much we can achieve in an eight-hour day, and for many of us we define our self-worth by our output. Yet here we see Jesus, freshly baptised and teeming with potential, spending forty days removed from the people He came to serve. One can only think of the words that would be used to describe a colleague who chose to take 40 days “off” immediately after accepting a new position.

These forty days couldn’t have been more pivotal to Jesus’ ministry. The Spirit leads Jesus into the desert to prepare Himself, and to ensure that He is truly ready for the mission.

Jesus enters a time of trial and temptation to grow in strength and to align himself even more closely with the will of the Father. The wilderness is presented as a place of preparation, a place of discerning God’s voice, and a place of learning to trust in His great plan.

It is no coincidence that the three things Jesus is tempted with seem, at face value, to be good things. It is not as if the devil is enticing Jesus to lie, steal or commit murder. Quite the opposite, the devil tempts Jesus with bread, scripture, and the kingdoms of the world. Indeed, it takes a relationship with God and a desire to know His will to distinguish between right or wrong at times. By tempting Jesus with bread, Jesus must choose between what He immediately wants and what the Father desires for His time on the earth. By tempting Jesus with holy words for evil purposes, Jesus is made to consider how easily scripture can be used to assert our superiority.

By tempting Jesus with the kingdoms of the world, Jesus is urged to consider the lucrative nature of power and wealth. We see in this passage how a relationship with God and a deep desire to know His will is essential to our discernment processes. The key to overcoming sin and fighting temptation is to know God.

When Jesus was tempted, He suffered. When He fasted His body entered a weakened state, and in this way, He experienced what it is to be human. God desires for us to enter into a relationship with Him, and by being at our most human we are able to engage even more deeply in that relationship, knowing that Jesus personally understands our suffering. When we fast this Lent, we do so with the knowledge that Jesus, too, used fasting as a way of getting His body into a weakened state where He could hear the voice of the Father without the things of this world that distract us. May this passage be a challenge for us to change the way we look at temptations this Lent. Rather than seeing temptations as barriers to God, may we see temptations as opportunities to turn to God, and a reminder to listen out for the still, small voice of God in our hearts.



“

Temptations can be opportunities
for us to turn to God... a reminder to listen out for the still,
small voice of God in our hearts.

”

Ashleigh Donnelly

A Personal Story

Ashleigh Donnelly offers us a personal reflection

In July 2016 I stood in a field of 1.6 million young people in Krakow, Poland listening to the words of Pope Francis:

“Jesus is not the Lord of comfort, security and ease. Following Jesus demands a good dose of courage, a readiness to trade in the sofa for a pair of walking shoes, and to set out on new and uncharted paths.”

I was pumped. I left my incredible World Youth Day experience ready to take on the world as a Social Worker. I had just three months left of my degree, and I would dream of my graduation day – the day that I would finally “put on my walking shoes to set out on new and uncharted paths.”

Looking back, I realise I glamourised my career as a Social Worker and my dream of making the world a better place. I imagined bustling soup kitchens full of life and quick fix solutions to people’s problems. What I didn’t imagine was turning up to my first shift and being greeted by a young person asking, “Who the F#\$% are you?” What I didn’t imagine was spending months trying to build rapport with the young people I worked with.

I still remember the night, early on in my career, that I spent in the Emergency Department with a 14-year-old who had used ice. Minutes felt like hours as we waited for her heartbeat to regulate and her hallucinations to ease. I so desperately yearned for a quick fix solution for this young person, and I wanted her to know that she was loved and had purpose. To her, though, I was just another adult to be suspicious of. These young people had experienced significant abuse and neglect as young children, and adults were not people to be trusted. Building trust and forming relationships with the young people was everything... but it took time.

Ashleigh Donnelly



It also took introspection and prayer. Looking back, I was so eager to succeed in my new career that I would enter situations swiftly and robustly without taking time to listen to the still, small voice of God.

Six months into my Social Work career, I went on retreat at the Jamberoo Abbey. I remember learning about the Benedictine quality of deep listening ‘with the ear of the heart.’

St Benedict instructed his monks to ‘listen with the ear of your heart,’ which is a kind of silence, but it is not the absence of sound. It is an act of generously listening to people with a mindful and loving heart, uninterrupted by inner chatter and hidden agendas.

God has shown me that change takes time. My swift and robust way of entering into situations wasn’t inherently bad, just like the things Jesus is tempted with in this week’s Gospel aren’t inherently bad either. But if I’m honest, my desire for quick fix solutions was often for my own ego, to say that I had ticked that box or achieved that goal. I have learnt the importance of slowing down, stepping away from the chaos every now and then, and waiting for God to speak into my heart at His pace not mine. This week’s Gospel is a reminder to come down from the mountain every now and then. For Jesus, this was after His Baptism, and for us it may be after a special celebration, a graduation or a profound spiritual experience. Then, our prayer can be something as simple as, “Lord, prepare me for what is next.”

Reflection Questions for Discussion

1. What are you hearing most clearly today from the Gospel text and the accompanying reflection?

2. Cast your mind back to a “wilderness experience” that you have had - a time, perhaps, of discomfort and testing. Did any opportunities arise for you from this experience?

3. Can you recall any times in your life when distinguishing between right and wrong was particularly difficult?

4. This Lent, how can you rely less on your own resources and more on God?

Closing Prayer

Loving God, I give thanks for Your word today. Allow it to shape my life; and enliven my efforts to put it into practice.

Bless my Lenten journey so that with Your help, I may be able to turn to You with a change of heart that opens up new pathways of prayer and friendship.

Give me the grace and wisdom to recognise Jesus as my light and my life; and draw me more genuinely into unity with Your people, the Church, so that we may all be one in Christ. **Amen**



Second

Sunday of Lent

Being the Beloved

Opening Prayer

Loving and gracious God,

Here I am, Your beloved. I give thanks for Your presence in my life, and that I am known and loved beyond measure.

Give me the grace to live out of this awareness of belovedness, with gratefulness and steadfast faith. In times when I feel empty or feel a lack of self-worth, remind me that I am yours.

As I reflect on Your word today, may Your Holy Spirit reveal to me the saving power of the life, death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ. May my relationship with Him be renewed; my trust in Him deepened; and my joy increased. **Amen**

Gospel Reading

Matthew 17:1-9

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. 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.' 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!' When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, 'Get up and do not be afraid.' And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

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.'

Gospel Reflection

By Danny Casey. Danny is Director of Schools, Diocese of Broken Bay, and was a Member of the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia.

On the road to Damascus, Saul encountered the risen Christ and was transformed into one of the greatest missionary disciples, St Paul. When Mary said 'yes' to the angel at the Annunciation, she was transformed into the Mother of our Lord.

Transfigured means "transform into something more beautiful or elevated"; "transform outwardly, usually for the better." In Matthew's Gospel, we are being invited to transform into something more beautiful. Just as Jesus showed His divine self to Peter, James and John, He asks us to transform into something more beautiful or elevated. This requires us to come to know the Father and respond through our actions so that our faces will 'shine like the sun'. In our daily lives, the warmth and light of the morning sun can provide hope for the day, fill us with the energy we need to give what we have received. Although the disciples did not fully comprehend the encounter they experienced, Jesus fills His disciples with hope so that in time they too can share the Good News with all. We are invited to share the Good News with our community where we are guided by the Holy Spirit towards Jesus Christ.

The words from the text 'with him I am well pleased' remind us of the Baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3:17). This encounter on the mountain shares similarities with Jesus' Baptism and reminds us of our own Baptism. The heavens opened: a reminder of our call to holiness and our mission. God sent His beloved Son, Jesus, as our role model (with whom He was well pleased) and asks us to follow him. At our Baptism we were freed from original sin so that we can be open to the forgiveness of God as we are truly Human. The

Transfiguration reminds us, that, through our Baptism we are also created in the image and likeness of God and when we 'come back down' from the mountain and live out our Baptismal vocation, we show our divine selves, like Jesus did. We become one in Christ when we see others in their 'dazzling white clothes'. It is clear, however, that we do not do this alone. The presence of the Holy Spirit is a reminder that God is always with us and we should 'get up, and not be afraid' as we try to follow in the footsteps of His Son.

Pope Francis summarises this as the ascent and descent:

"From the event of the Transfiguration I would like to take two significant elements that can be summed up in two words: ascent and descent. We all need to go apart, to ascend the mountain in a space of silence, to find ourselves and better perceive the voice of the Lord. This we do in prayer. But we cannot stay there! Encounter with God in prayer inspires us anew to 'descend the mountain' and return to the plain where we meet many brothers weighed down by fatigue, sickness, injustice, ignorance, poverty both material and spiritual. To these brothers in difficulty, we are called to bear the fruit of that experience with God, by sharing the grace we have received."

The final words of God the Father in this scripture passage are 'Listen to Him', a clear instruction for the disciples and all of us to listen to Jesus. The Plenary council follows God's directive in choosing the theme 'Listen to what the Spirit is saying' (Rev 2:7). To overcome the many challenges we face, and to achieve the many hopes and dreams of the Australian Church, we must listen to the Holy Spirit, we must be united as a 'community of communities', and we must be 'open to conversion, renewal and reform'.

The Transfiguration reminds us that Jesus is the source of our strength; any light that shines in us comes from His grace and love. Just like Peter, James and John, we are invited to live our lives as witnesses to Jesus' unconditional love. Through prayer, with others, in union, we can work towards receiving and being the light, accepting the greatest gift, the Grace of God.



“

In our daily lives, the warmth and light of the morning sun can provide hope for the day, fill us with the energy we need to give what we have received.

”

Danny Casey

Danny
Casey

A Personal Story

Danny Casey offers us a personal reflection

I have often wondered what the Apostles must have thought as they were walking down the mountain after the Transfiguration.

They had just witnessed a vision of Our Lord in His full glory – something Jesus wanted them to see in order to strengthen them for the challenges that lay ahead. We are told that they honoured the instruction to not discuss it with anyone until the resurrection. We are also told that they discussed it among themselves. What were those discussions? What impact did this have when they were grieving after the Crucifixion? Did it all make sense after they witnessed and experienced the great joy of the Resurrection?

In our life, we often go through this same cycle. We are full of confidence and optimism and very much in touch with Our Lord, and then it evaporates like morning dew in the hot sun. We become deeply troubled and lose heart until we once again experience the great joy of the Resurrection and regain our confidence that our Lord is truly risen, that He loves us, and He wants to be with us in Heaven.

Some years ago, I was given the great privilege of being involved in the organisation of World Youth Day in Sydney. It wasn't until we were well progressed that I came to understand the enormity of the challenge, and the

responsibility, that I and many others had to ensure the Papal visit and the gathering of young pilgrims went smoothly.

On numerous occasions, the size of the challenges were overwhelming and I couldn't see a way through. But, at each time, supported by the prayers of many, I was again filled with confidence and optimism that the challenges would be overcome, and the Holy Spirit would touch the hearts of all who participated and all who worked so hard to plan and deliver the event.

If there was one key learning from the many ups and downs, it was to never lose heart, to pray hard and have confidence. All we are asked to do, is do our best, and our Lord will do the rest.

It is important for all of us to try and hold the truth of the Transfiguration – not just when it is easy to do so, but at the dark and challenging times when it is so easy to lose heart.

As believers, we should be powerful witnesses to the joy of the resurrection at all times. The apostles were, and we are called to be these witnesses in the current times.

Reflection Questions for Discussion

1. What are you hearing most clearly today from the Gospel text and the accompanying reflection?

2. How do you understand the word ‘transfiguration’? Have you ever experienced a transfiguration experience in your spiritual life? How were you changed?

3. What are the differences from being ‘on the mountain top’ and ‘on the plain’? What do we learn from each?

4. Do you see yourself as ‘the beloved’?

Closing Prayer

Loving God, I give thanks for Your word today. Allow it to shape my life; and enliven my efforts to put it into practice.

Bless my Lenten journey so that with Your help, I may be able to turn to You with a change of heart that opens up new pathways of prayer and friendship.

Give me the grace and wisdom to recognise Jesus as my light and my life; and draw me more genuinely into unity with Your people, the Church, so that we may all be one in Christ. **Amen**



Third

Asking for Water

Sunday of Lent

Opening Prayer

Loving and gracious God,

Here I am, asking for the water of Your life-giving presence to fill me up.

Holy Spirit, renew me and refresh me. Where I feel stuck in parched and monotonous patterns, send new life and new possibilities. Come, Holy Spirit, into all the areas of my life that need reawakening or re-energising.

As I reflect on Your word today, may Your Holy Spirit reveal to me the saving power of the life, death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ. May my relationship with Him be renewed; my trust in Him deepened; and my joy increased. **Amen**

Gospel Reading

John 4:5 - 42

Jesus came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'. (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The 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.) Jesus 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.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?' Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but 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.' The 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.'

Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come back.' The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus

Gospel Reading Continued

said to her, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband"; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!' The woman said to him, 'Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.' Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, 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 know, for salvation is from the Jews. But 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. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.' The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming' (who is called Christ). 'When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.' Jesus said to her, 'I am he, the one who is speaking to you.'

Just 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?' Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, 'Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?' They left the city and were on their way to him.

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, 'Rabbi, eat something.' But he said to them, 'I have food to eat that you do not know about.' So the disciples said to one another, 'Surely no one has brought him something to eat?' Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do 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.



“...worship in spirit and truth.”

JOHN 4:24

The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, "One sows and another reaps." I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour. Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour.'

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I have ever done.' So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there for two days. And many more believed because of his word. They 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.'

Gospel Reflection

By Kerry Power. Kerry is a member of the Evangelisation and Catechesis Workstream, Catholic Schools Broken Bay.

The Gospel this week is from John. He writes for a universal Christian community living sixty years after Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. They have experienced the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple; the apostles and disciples are all likely deceased; and Paul has taken the message of Jesus to the gentiles of the Mediterranean.

Whilst our contemporary experiences may be quite different, the spiritual needs, when it comes to knowing Jesus, are no doubt similar.

John uses dynamic imagery and metaphor to enable the reader, in this case us, to come to an encounter with Jesus - water collection, food-gathering, community, personal and intimate relationships, travel, and religious practice are all experiences of daily life. They are also metaphors for the spiritual nourishment in our journeying in friendship with Jesus.

The Samaritan woman meets Jesus at a well - Jacob's Well. Jacob was a grandson of Abraham and one of his sons was Joseph. So, this land is significant and the water in it is part of a deep and lasting faith story that both Jesus and the Samaritan woman know well. The social and political background of the scene makes this encounter even more powerful.

The disciples have left Jesus alone to acquire provisions in the nearby town for the next part of their journey. With Samaritans hostile to the Jewish people, this is traditionally unfriendly territory!

The woman approaches the well in the heat of the day. The collection of water was vitally important to the day-to-day life of a first-century household. The women of the house would journey -often in groups- from their homes in the early

hours to collect the water required for the day, avoiding the midday heat. The familiar banter of the female collective is absent as this woman is alone.

Jesus breaches a cultural norm and speaks to the woman in public, and in this case somewhat curtly, "give me a drink." Not to be put off, she cheekily retorts, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep." It is the middle of the day, it is hot, Jesus and the woman are both thirsty.

For John, this speaks to the thirst for a deep and meaningful way of life.

In the lively conversation of claim and counter claim, we hear parts of the woman's life story in regard to her relationship failures, and her longing for the Messiah who will reveal the truth about all things.

Jesus converses, listens and in good time reveals that He is the Messiah she has been waiting for. Excitedly, she completely forgets the water she needs and returns to her town to share this astonishing encounter and news with her community. She becomes a passionate messenger and first receiver of the "Good News" of God in Jesus, outside Jerusalem.

Jesus and the disciples stayed for two more days, and many became followers because of the testimony of the woman. "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world" (John 4:39-42).

Before she even lays eyes on Jesus, this woman, in the deepest and hidden part of her life, is desiring God in her life.

A Personal Story

Kerry Power offers us a personal reflection

Kerry
Power



I clearly remember the last time we proclaimed the Readings of Year A. It was 2020 and it was the last week of regular Masses before we were locked down due to the COVID-19 pandemic. There were certainly the rumblings of what was to come but no one could foresee the devastating effect on the fabric of our society over the next two years. At the time I was also excited about my preparation for a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and it seems so unreal now to think that just four weeks out from leaving I still thought this 'experience of a lifetime' would go ahead. I know one day I will walk the roads of Israel, spend time contemplating the stories of its landscape and be covered in its sacred dust.

In my work as a teacher and leader in the Catholic schools of Broken Bay I have the joy and challenge of guiding teachers, students and their families in opportunities to develop a relationship with Jesus, and grow in their love of faith. For me the work of the Holy Spirit is active in both 'what' we teach, the Catechesis, including a deeper understanding of Sacred Scripture and Tradition as well as 'how' we live, Evangelisation, which integrates a love of prayer, liturgy and a sense of Mission in a lived experience. In Catholic Schools Broken Bay we have three Foundational Principles of Encounter, Accompaniment and Transformation guided by the story of 'The Road to Emmaus'. In this story following the events of the Easter Triduum two disciples encounter a stranger on the road to Emmaus who accompanies them on the journey and then is revealed as the resurrected Jesus in the 'breaking of bread'. This encounter and shared companionship lead these disciples to a transformation of faith.

The Samaritan woman at the well relives a similar experience of encounter, accompaniment, and transformation. Jesus reveals to the woman at the well, that He knows her, truly knows her and despite her faults, which she willingly admits, He still loves her.

There is an intimacy in this brief meeting that gives the woman a sense that the person of Jesus she encounters has always known her. His merciful love fills her with such joy she just wants to share it, she is bubbling over with it, she is transformed! Her powerful testimony leads many in her community to follow Jesus.

In my own life I feel immense gratitude to live each day with a sense of encounter, accompaniment, and transformation. My daily activity allows me to embrace The Word of God every day, seeking ways to finding meaning for myself and those I serve. Scripture stories I thought I knew well reveal more to me with each reading; and praying on the words allows for deeper understanding and intimacy. As I walk with others as they encounter Jesus, I feel an intense presence of the Spirit working in me and in others, and this brings me great joy. In all things I am reminded of the amazing transformation I have lived as a result of my experience. I often ponder, 'If I can bring just one person to believe how my life has been transformed because of my faith'; and this prayer brings me great peace.

Reflection Questions for Discussion

1. What are you hearing most clearly today from the Gospel text and the accompanying reflection?

2. What do you thirst for in your life?

3. Can you describe a time, place and circumstance in which you encountered Jesus?

4. Can you describe a time, place and circumstance in which you spoke of Jesus to others? How did it affect them?

Closing Prayer

Loving God, I give thanks for Your word today. Allow it to shape my life; and enliven my efforts to put it into practice.

Bless my Lenten journey so that with Your help, I may be able to turn to You with a change of heart that opens up new pathways of prayer and friendship.

Give me the grace and wisdom to recognise Jesus as my light and my life; and draw me more genuinely into unity with Your people, the Church, so that we may all be one in Christ. **Amen**



Fourth *Wanting* Sunday of Lent *to See*

Opening Prayer

Loving and gracious God,

Here I am, wanting to see with clearer vision
the promise that You hold for me.

Help me to see, not just with my eyes, but
with my heart. Where I don't understand
the Paschal mystery, send me new insight.
Where I struggle to know of Your love for me,
give me eyes to see Your action in my life.

As I reflect on Your word today, may Your
Holy Spirit reveal to me the saving power of
the life, death and resurrection of your Son
Jesus Christ. May my relationship with Him
be renewed; my trust in Him deepened; and
my joy increased. **Amen**

Gospel Reading

John 9:1 - 41

As Jesus walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.' When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. The 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?' Some were saying, 'It is he.' Others were saying, 'No, but it is someone like him.' He kept saying, 'I am the man.' But they kept asking him, 'Then how were your eyes opened?' He 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.' They said to him, 'Where is he?' He said, 'I do not know.'

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, 'He

Gospel Reading Continued

put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.’ Some 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. So 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.’

The 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 sight and asked them, ‘Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?’ His parents answered, ‘We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but 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.’ His 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. Therefore his parents said, ‘He is of age; ask him.’

So 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.’ He answered, ‘I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.’ They said to him, ‘What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?’ He 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?’

Then they reviled him, saying, ‘You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.’ The man answered, ‘Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind.



“...and yet he opened my eyes.”

JOHN 9:30

If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.’ They answered him, ‘You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?’ And they drove him out.

Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, ‘Do you believe in the Son of Man?’ He answered, ‘And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.’ Jesus said to him, ‘You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.’ He said, ‘Lord, I believe.’ And he worshipped him. Jesus said, ‘I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.’ Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, ‘Surely we are not blind, are we?’ Jesus said to them, ‘If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, “We see”, your sin remains.’

Gospel Reflection

By Alison Newell. *Alison is the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) Diocesan Co-ordinator, Diocese of Broken Bay, and was a Member of the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia.*

Gazing into the eyes of a newborn baby must surely be one of the most delightful treasures of parenthood and as the child's sight develops and they begin to recognise us when they are just a few weeks old, our hearts are warmed with a love that has no comparison.

We often take the gift of sight for granted. Imagine though being blind from birth, never having seen the face of a newborn baby, or a sunrise, a dusty road, the rain falling gently on a field or the ocean roaring amidst the fiercest storm. This is the plight of the blind man in today's Gospel, who had been blind since birth. Worse than this, in Jesus' time those born with a disability were frowned upon as either having sinful parents or being a sinner themselves. Their disability was their punishment for sin. Jesus, however, uses the man's disability "so that God's work might be revealed in him".

After telling His disciples that neither the blind man nor his parents are sinners, Jesus sets about healing the man of his blindness by spitting in some dirt and making a mudpack with His saliva and spreading it on his eyes. He tells him to go and wash in the Pool of Siloam. When he did this, he was able to see. The event leads the blind man to faith, but for others it leads to fear, disbelief and false accusations.

As this dramatic story unfolds and Jesus interacts with the disciples, with the blind man and the Pharisees, we may find ourselves being challenged as we relate aspects of this passage to our own lives. This story has elements of blindness (in more than the literal sense) - of fear; of judgement; of misuse of the law. It is also a story of courage and healing. However, as we follow the story to the end, the key message contained in this passage is one of faith.

Fear can blind us in our day-to-day relationships with our families, friends, our work colleagues and other

acquaintances. This can lead us to judgements of others which are harsh and uncompromising.

When we view our relationships through the eyes of faith, as the blind man did when interrogated by the pharisees, not once but twice, our fears fall away which allows us to see others through a different lens. It allows us to see the world in colour, not black and white. This takes courage but has the capacity to allow Jesus to heal not only ourselves but others in our lives.

How do we do this? Lent invites us to concentrate more on our prayer life, and to ask Jesus to journey with us and to see the world as He does. Prayer allows us to examine the fear in our own hearts that contributes to broken relationships and harsh judgements.

Sometimes in the chaos of family life, we can even be blinded by love. It's often easier to turn a blind eye to the behaviour of people simply because we love them. True love, however, can sometimes be 'tough love', as when we impose consequences on children for poor behaviour. The parents of the blind man avoided answering the tough questions through fear of what might happen to them. Have we ever acted in this way?

The Pharisees challenged Jesus for working on the sabbath (by making the mudpack for the man's eyes). They used this to attempt to discredit Jesus in the eyes of others. When might we have misused the "law" to discredit others?

The fearlessness of the blind man in proclaiming to the Jews that Jesus came "from God" was a spontaneous statement of faith from one who had been abandoned and forgotten. His courage caused him to be driven out by the Jewish authorities, but Jesus found him, and he worshipped Jesus, saying "Lord, I believe!"

All of us have a bit of Pharisee within. Lent provides us with the opportunity to nurture our spiritual lives so that our eyes are opened to see, like the blind man, with the eyes of faith.

Let's not get to the end of Lent and be asking, like the Pharisees: "Surely we are not blind, are we?"

A Personal Story

Alison Newell offers us a personal reflection

As I reflect on today's Gospel, my mind keeps wandering to my experience as a member of the Second Assembly of the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia, which was held in Sydney in July 2022.

The week began with members getting to know each other and entering into respectful dialogue and spiritual conversations about the agenda items and motions for deliberation. There was a sense of togetherness as the agenda topics were discussed and, with little opposition, the motions of the first day and a half were carried almost unanimously.

On the afternoon of the second day, there was a spiritual conversation about the equal dignity of women and men in the Church and it became obvious from the dialogue and interventions that there were clear divisions around how some women and men see the role of women in the Church. I found this to be extremely unsettling.

I recall going back to my room that evening feeling sidelined and deeply wounded after a lifetime of dedication to the spreading of the Gospel. Had I been kidding myself all these years, that my faith journey as a woman mattered? I was aware of the division around how the equal dignity of women and men is interpreted in the Church, but I was unprepared for the impact that the dialogue and voting would have on me personally.

The following morning as motions on this topic failed to receive the required number of votes to pass, I wasn't sure how I could re-group and continue with the agenda, and a business-as-usual attitude. I was praying for the guidance of the Spirit to enable me to positively contribute to the Plenary process and to be open to the will of God.

Alison
Newell



As the morning unfolded, there was a moment of awakening, for me a moment of grace. Members were called back to the table to prayer, and to a further spiritual conversation the likes of which I have never experienced. It was challenging work, but I felt the Holy Spirit was guiding the process. There were tears and an honest reckoning of the role of women in the Church amongst members.

It was a privilege to experience and, for me, a resurrection moment following the woundedness of the previous day. A redrafting of the motions resulted in an almost unanimous outcome towards promoting the role of women in decision-making, leadership, governance and more.

At a pivotal moment in the Plenary Council's Second Assembly, the Holy Spirit opened the eyes of my heart to reveal that we all have the responsibility to respond to our Baptismal call to holiness. This pathway is not always an easy one to follow. Like the path which Jesus walked, there are bumps along the way but staying true to the message of the Gospel takes courage and strength.

The practice of synodality is a new one for the Church. My prayer is that all levels of the Church across the world will continue a journey of sharing, reflecting and listening so that our eyes will be opened to the will of God for the Church at this moment in history.

Reflection Questions for Discussion

1. What are you hearing most clearly today from the Gospel text and the accompanying reflection?
2. This Lent, how might we open the eyes of our heart to heal our broken relationships?
3. When, like the Pharisees, might we have misused the 'law' to judge other people?
4. Reflect on a time when you stood up for your faith in Christ Jesus even though you were being challenged by 'Pharisees'.

Closing Prayer

Loving God, I give thanks for Your word today. Allow it to shape my life; and enliven my efforts to put it into practice.

Bless my Lenten journey so that with Your help, I may be able to turn to You with a change of heart that opens up new pathways of prayer and friendship.

Give me the grace and wisdom to
recognise Jesus as my light and my life;
and draw me more genuinely into unity
with Your people, the Church, so that we
may all be one in Christ. *Amen*



Fifth *Searching* Sunday of Lent *for Life*

Opening Prayer

Loving and gracious God,

Here I am, searching for the new life that
You offer to me.

I believe that You have defeated death
through the Resurrection of Christ, and
that death no longer has the last word.
Give me the courage to stand firm in this
foundational Christian truth, and let it
be the basis from which I live out every
aspect of my life, especially the most
difficult. I pray that I may understand the
Resurrection more deeply this Lent, and
that this will bind me more closely to my
sisters and brothers in Christ.

As I reflect on Your word today, may Your
Holy Spirit reveal to me the saving power of
the life, death and resurrection of your Son
Jesus Christ. May my relationship with Him
be renewed; my trust in Him deepened;
and my joy increased. **Amen**

Gospel Reading

John 11:1-45

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, 'Lord, he whom you love is ill.' But 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.' Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

Then after this he said to the disciples, 'Let us go to Judea again.' The disciples said to him, 'Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?' Jesus 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. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.' After saying this, he told them, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.' The disciples said to him, 'Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.' Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus

Gospel Reading Continued

told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.' Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow-disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'

When 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.' And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The 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. When 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.' When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.' Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!' But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'



“ Yes, Lord, I believe... ”

JOHN 11:27

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus 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 for four days.' Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. I 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.' When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The 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.'

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

Gospel Reflection

By Fr Ireneusz Czech SDS. *Fr Ireneusz is a Priest of the Society of the Divine Saviour (Salvatorians), and Parish Priest of Pymble Parish.*

Some time ago I participated in a meeting of several people who had been through some tough times. All of them had had heart transplants. They were saying about themselves, "We were dead, but we are alive again!" When asked about their age, they were responding: two, five, seven and so on. Even though they were all mature people they counted their age from the day of their operations. I noticed that they were very enthusiastic about life. They loved to meet regularly to share their life's stories. Some of them said that they looked at everyday experiences from a different perspective. Simply put, because of their near-death encounters, they tried to live their lives to the full.

Today's Gospel is a great story about death and life. We hear about Lazarus who has been dead for four days. I was lucky enough to visit his tomb in Bethany. While there I imagined him lying on the cold surface wrapped in white cloths. I saw in my mind Jesus approaching the tomb and saying, "Lazarus, here! Come out!" (Jn 11:43). We know what happened next: Christ's friend emerged from the darkness of the tomb. We don't know what Lazarus said after coming back to life. We don't know if he started to count his days from the moment of his resurrection. However, I guess, he was excited and appreciated the second chance of living among those he loved.

Today Jesus calls you and I out of different kinds of graves - graves of our own making. They might be associated with addictions and different kinds of sins. Maybe we are angry with God because we lost a loved one and cannot imagine living without that person. Perhaps we feel ill and are frustrated, losing hope of a cure. The Lord wants us to accept His invitation to live in the light of His grace. When we live in His light, we are fully alive! Moreover, through our faithfulness to His commandments he is glorified!

St Irenaeus of Lyons wrote, "The glory of God is man fully alive!" Jesus offers us a new life because He truly is "the resurrection and the life" (Jn 11:25). If we allow Him, He will raise us up from our spiritual darkness and fears of sickness and death. Let us remember that Jesus has already destroyed the power of death and invites us to experience His life in abundance. Also, it is so consoling to know that there is an eternal happiness waiting for us! We just need to say 'yes' to the Lord's invitation to participate in that eternal banquet.

I have seen many people departing from this world in total peace after being sacramentally prepared. Many years ago, I was one of them. I was ready to enter eternity full of joy and trust in Jesus' promise. An experience of God's love raises our lives to another level.

It takes away any fears of death. Jesus said, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God still, and trust in me. There are many rooms in my Father's house" (Jn 14:1-2).

The Lord assures us that life beyond this earthly existence is a reality prepared for us by His Father.

I pray that today's Gospel reading, and this reflection, will help you to open your heart to the loving presence of God. Allow the Holy Spirit to deepen your faith in the Saviour and accept His promise that anyone who believes in Him, even though he dies, he will live forever (see Jn 11:25).



“ ... because they see
the light of this world. ”

JOHN 11:9

A Personal Story

Fr Ireneusz Czech SDS offers us a personal reflection

I remember that the Solemnity of All Saints was always a special occasion in Poland where I grew up. Every year on 1 November cemeteries were full of people visiting the graves of the dearly departed. The same situation was happening on All Souls' Day. Most of the population didn't work on those two days. People could go to the cemetery and pray for their deceased relatives and

Fr Ireneusz
Czech SDS



friends. Even atheists visited their dead loved ones paying their respects.

On one occasion, I came back to the cemetery at night. Together with my brother Andrew we took a few photographs. Snow covered the graves. The marble crosses indicated the final resting places of our family members, friends and neighbours.

There was no need for electricity or torches. The light coming from thousands of candles illuminated the whole cemetery.

It was a scene both beautiful and poignant. Each time I reflect upon the Gospel of Lazarus, that night's visit to the cemetery comes to my mind. The thought of the light coming from the candles continues to remind me of the souls of those buried who are alive in Jesus - the Light of the world!

We, Christians, are united with one another for eternity. Not even physical death can ever separate us! The communion of saints is a reality we belong to because of the redemptive work of our loving Saviour. Let us remember it each time we look at the Paschal candles placed in our parish churches near the baptismal fonts.

Reflection Questions for Discussion

1. What are you hearing most clearly today from the Gospel text and the accompanying reflection?

2. To what degree are you comfortable with a thought that you too will have to depart from this world one day?

3. Remembering St Irenaeus' words, do you have the courage to be fully alive?

4. Are you able to accept that God loves you so much that He wants to spend the whole of eternity with you?

Closing Prayer

Loving God, I give thanks for Your word today. Allow it to shape my life; and enliven my efforts to put it into practice.

Bless my Lenten journey so that with Your help, I may be able to turn to You with a change of heart that opens up new pathways of prayer and friendship.

Give me the grace and wisdom to recognise Jesus as my light and my life; and draw me more genuinely into unity with Your people, the Church, so that we may all be one in Christ. **Amen**



Palm Sunday *Participating* of the Passion of the Lord *in the journey*

Opening Prayer

Loving and gracious God,

Here I am, participating in the journey of Jesus to the Cross.

I walk alongside as best I can, watching the events unfold, and feeling the emotions of all involved – some in distress, others in ridicule.

I recognise these same elements from my own life. For the moments in my life where I have fallen, I ask for the perseverance to get back up; for the moments where I've been ridiculed for my faith, I ask for the courage to stand firm; for the times when I've run from the presence of Jesus, I ask for the humility to return; for the times when I've experienced pain and loss, I ask for a renewed conviction of the Good News that offers us love and life.

As I reflect on Your word today, may Your Holy Spirit reveal to me the saving power of the life, death and resurrection of Your Son Jesus Christ. May my relationship with Him be renewed; my trust in Him deepened; and my joy increased. **Amen**

Gospel Reading

Matthew 27:27-66

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and 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!' They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross. And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; then they sat down there and kept watch over him. Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, 'This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.'

Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, 'You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are

Gospel Reading Continued

the Son of God, come down from the cross.' In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, '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. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, "I am God's Son." ' The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way.

From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And 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?' When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, 'This man is calling for Elijah.' At 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. But the others said, 'Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.' Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised.

After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. Now 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!'

Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him. Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it



“ ... Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. ”

Matthew 27:50

to be given to him. So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and 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. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, 'Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, "After three days I will rise again." Therefore command that the tomb 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.' Pilate said to them, 'You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can.' So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.

Gospel Reflection

By Raj Rajasingam. *Raj is Leader Evangelisation and Mission, Couples for Christ Australia, and was a Member of the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia.*

In Matthew's Gospel, the story of Jesus' Passion and death focuses particularly on the obedience of Jesus to the will of His Father. As Jesus sends His disciples to prepare for Passover, He indicates that the events to come are the will of the Father. In Jesus' prayer in the garden, He prays three times to the Father to take away the cup of suffering, but each time, Jesus concludes by affirming His obedience to the Father's will (Matthew 26:39-44). Even Matthew's description of Jesus' death shows Jesus' obedience to the Father.

Jesus acts in obedience to the Father even in death, so that sins may be forgiven. Matthew makes this clear in the story of the Lord's Supper. As Jesus blesses the chalice, He says: "... for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins." (Matthew 26:28).

Matthew and Mark's Gospels have many parallels in their narrative of the Passion. There are also a few details worth noting that are unique to Matthew. Only Matthew indicates the price paid to Judas for betraying Jesus. The story of Judas's death is also found only in Matthew, as is the detail that Pilate's wife received a warning in a dream, and that Pilate washed his hands of Jesus' death. Finally, Matthew's Gospel alone mentions the earthquakes and other phenomena that happened after Jesus' death.

On Sunday, Jesus rode into the city with the people shouting praises and praising God for all the wonderful miracles they had seen. On Friday, they are shouting for the return of Barabbas and for Jesus' crucifixion. One could say that their words did not match their heart. They possessed a casual not a committed faith. They had religion but they missed the person Jesus.

Today, we may sit back and say that it was the Jewish leaders and Jewish people of that era who showed animosity and ignored Jesus and they are to blame for Jesus' death. The Second Vatican Council Fathers said that this was not true and made clear that all sinners share responsibility for the suffering and death of Jesus.

Committed faith is not self-centred, it is Christ-centred. Committed faith is relationship driven. Committed faith is not swayed or blocked by our personal trials and crises. Today, there are many of us in the Catholic Church, like the Jews in Jerusalem, who welcome Jesus into our lives. We worship and praise Him when things are good or going our way but are quick to turn against Him when things go sour or when we face difficulties. Many of us seem to follow the crowd and lack a personal relationship with Jesus or faith in Jesus that is strong enough to withstand the negative noises around us or oppression to the Church. We tend to lack the maturity to change our lives to be more like Jesus, to give our lives over to Him. A committed faith takes the good with the bad, knowing that all we are ever promised in the midst of both good and bad, is that Jesus will never leave us nor forsake us. He will stand with us.

In the characters of Matthew's Gospel, we find reflections of ourselves and the many ways in which we sometimes respond to Jesus. Sometimes we are like Judas, who betrays Jesus and comes to regret it; sometimes like Peter, who denies him; or like the disciples, who fall asleep during Jesus' darkest hour but then act rashly and violently at His arrest. Sometimes we are like Simon of Cyrene, who is pressed into service to help Jesus carry His cross.

Sometimes we are like the leaders who fear Jesus or like Pontius Pilate, who washed his hands of the whole affair. Jesus dies so that our sins will be forgiven.

We all have one thing in common. We are all sinners and salvation is only possible through Christ. The life and death of Jesus Christ, which culminated in His resurrection on the third day, truly reflects God's love and mercy for all of us.

Today, is your faith casual or committed? As we approach this week where Jesus suffered incredibly for us, where our sins, past, present, and future were the nails that hung Him on that cross, doesn't Jesus deserve a second look? Doesn't He deserve total control of your life? Doesn't He deserve a personal relationship with you? Can we be as obedient to God the Father just like Jesus? This week consider it all... and choose to give it all to Him.

A Personal Story

Raj Rajasingam offers us a personal reflection

As I reflect on my journey to becoming a Catholic, I can see God's hand in many aspects of my life.

I am from Malaysia and my family were practising Hindus. In my Methodist high school days, my friends used to bring me tracts on the Gospel. In the late 70s, I spent eight years in Sydney, doing the HSC and studying at university.

On returning to Malaysia in the late 80s, my sister dragged me off to her Pentecostal Church. I have been attending church services regularly since that day. At this point, prayer has been an extremely important part of my daily life.

During this time, my sister introduced me to an orphanage where she was a volunteer. I attended their weekly volunteer praise and worship with the kids. I helped kids with their studies and also cooked meals on Sunday nights.

I also moved on to a more familiar church, an Anglican Church, where I was eventually baptised and confirmed. I became an active member with the young adults' movement in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur and was instrumental in starting the youth movement in the parish.

A year later, I was sent to Taizé, an ecumenical community in France, for eight months. On behalf of the brothers of the Community, I travelled and spoke to Youth and Young Adults in Parishes and schools in Scandinavia and Poland.

On returning to Malaysia, I eventually married Roslyn, from the Philippines, who I met in Taizé. We lived in Malaysia for three years and were successful in migrating to Sydney in the mid 90s.

We planned to start a family but this proved difficult and eventually we realised that God had other plans for us. Over a period of 10 years, we were able to adopt two boys, aged 2 ½ years and 18 months from the Philippines, through the Department of Community Services in New South Wales.

Raj
Rajasingam



They had different stories, backgrounds and challenges.

We decided to become part of a Covenant Community, Couples for Christ Australia (CFCA). We became active in this community, becoming leaders and rising to be responsible for Evangelisation and Mission in Australia.

I can see God's hand in every aspect of my life journey: A young man, coming to Australia, then returning to Malaysia, being invited to Church, being introduced to an orphanage, being sent to France on a mission where I met my wife to be, being able to return to Australia and being blessed with two lovely boys.

I have always been open to God's calling. I always knew that God's hand was upon me, the people that He had sent into my life, those that were responsible for introducing the faith to me and those who nurtured me.

In my current role as the Evangelisation and Mission director of CFCA, I have a passion to proclaim Christ to as many people as possible. I encourage our members to go out and evangelise other families, telling them of God's unconditional love for them and to make an effort to live the life that Christ called each of us to live.

I am blessed to have been chosen as a Member of the Australian Plenary Council, a journey that has opened my eyes, not only to the varied work of the Church, but also to the great work that still needs to be done. I experienced how God, with His mercy and love, can bring us all together as one, the Body of Christ.

So far, I have been saying 'yes' to God whenever I hear His calling, remaining obedient and continuing to pray that I can keep saying 'yes' in the years ahead.

Reflection Questions for Discussion

1. What are you hearing most clearly today from the Gospel text and the accompanying reflection?

2. What is the significance of Jesus's obedience to His Father? How does this relate to your daily life today and what, if anything, needs to change?

3. What character/s in the Passion of Christ do you relate to and why?

4. Do you have a relationship with Christ? Is Christ in total control of your life? How? What can you do this Holy Week to welcome Jesus as master and ruler of your life?

Closing Prayer

Loving God, I give thanks for Your word today. Allow it to shape my life; and enliven my efforts to put it into practice.

Bless my Lenten journey so that with Your help, I may be able to turn to You with a change of heart that opens up new pathways of prayer and friendship.

Give me the grace and wisdom to recognise Jesus as my light and my life; and draw me more genuinely into unity with Your people, the Church, so that we may all be one in Christ. **Amen**



“

If any want to become my followers,
let them deny themselves and take up their cross
and follow me.

”

MATTHEW 16:24

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