“Come, Follow me…”
Matthew 19:21
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Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.

— Luke 2:19

DEAR READERS:

Welcome to a new year! Offering a daily connection to God and a boost for your faith, Living Faith is, in some regard, a family. And, it’s very important for family members to stay connected. To that end, we are offering opportunities on the following pages for you to Pray, Reflect and Connect—with God, with one another and with the staff of Living Faith. We will use these icons to point out additional resources and opportunities for you to grow in your faith.

One of the easiest ways to connect with us is to visit our web site at livingfaith.com. There, you may sign up for our free weekly newsletter delivered straight to your e-mail. And look for us on Facebook for even more ways to connect.

Finally, be sure to check out the spiritual resources on pages 104-111. I pray that these features will enhance your relationship to the Living Faith family.

Terence Hegarty, editor
Living Faith provides daily reflections based on a Scripture passage from the daily Mass. With readings for daily Mass listed at the bottom of each devotion, this booklet helps Catholics pray and meditate in spirit with the seasons of the Church Year. Citations are from the Mass Lectionary, which is based on the New American Bible.

IMPRIMATUR
Bishop Mark S. Rivituso, Auxiliary Bishop • Archdiocese of St. Louis

NB: The imprimatur indicates this publication contains nothing contrary to Catholic teaching. No endorsement of the opinions expressed therein is implied.

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With the dawning of 2020, we may dust our exercise machine off, renew our gym membership or even lock candy in a cupboard. This is the year, we tell ourselves, for losing weight, bone strengthening or healthy eating.

Perhaps a better resolution is to sit each day at the feet of Mary, Mother of God, who “pondered things in her heart.” There, we can deepen our relationship with her son, refuse to gossip or bad-mouth, promise to give more time and attention to family. We may not shed unwanted pounds, but we will be able to surrender, as Mary did, to all that lies ahead. The future is mysteriously hidden, but we can be sure that the Lord blesses us and keeps us, no matter what—each and every day. Happy New Year!

Sr. Bridget Haase, O.S.U.

Ursuline Sister Bridget Haase resides in Quincy, MA, gives retreats nationwide and is the author of Generous Faith and Doors to the Sacred. She ministers as a McDonald’s greeter and to 3- to 4-year-olds as Sister Storyteller. Visit wisdomwonder.com.
Anyone who denies the Son does not have the Father, but whoever confesses the Son has the Father as well.

1 John 2:23

Today, the Church commemorates St. Basil the Great and St. Gregory Nazianzen, contemporaries, friends, and doctors of the Church. They are great luminaries, particularly in the Eastern Church. They are celebrated for the richness of their spiritual writing. They endured immense suffering in their opposition to the Arian heresy, but their work was not just abstract theology. They took these words of Scripture from John to heart, reminding those in their care of the deeply personal love of the Father, made present in the flesh in Christ Jesus.

This Christmas season, we can ask the Holy Spirit to continue enriching our understanding and relationship with the Father and the Son. In turn, the Trinity’s communion of love will be incarnated in our own acts of charity and service to God and neighbor.

Steve Pable
Preparation the Garden

I did not know him, but the reason why I came baptizing with water was that he might be made known to Israel.

John 1:31

Well before he found out that his cousin was the Messiah, John the Baptist was preparing people to meet Jesus. With most any chore, the bulk of the work is in the preparation. If you want to have a vegetable garden, once the weather allows, you’ll till the soil, work in fertilizer, plant seeds and water the ground regularly. Then, the unending weeding begins! All this needs to be done before you can enjoy your produce.

Our task is similar as we cultivate our spiritual life. Much of becoming holy is in the preparation.

First, by God’s grace, we are gifted with the seed of faith. We then prepare our spiritual soil by regularly participating in Mass and the sacraments. Through praying, reading and reflecting on the word of God, our faith grows. Associating with faith-filled friends keeps the weeds down. With such regular preparation, we will be more ready when we meet Jesus face to face.

Terence Hegarty
The Quickening

It was about four in the afternoon. John 1:39

There are some events that imprint themselves immediately in our emotional datebook: the first time we saw our beloved’s face and had an intuition that this was “the one”; the moment we heard news of a sudden loss that would forever alter our relationships; the birth of a child for which we had hoped so intensely that our heart ached with longing for months.

When John pointed out Jesus, the Lamb of God, to his followers, so significant was this encounter in the lives of the disciples that they remembered the exact time of its unfolding. They remembered also the looks exchanged, the possibilities implied in Jesus’ invitation. In our day-to-day lives, the Holy One is also at work. May we pay attention today to those times when our hearts quicken, when we sense we are being called to be open to the grace of the moment.

Sr. Chris Koellhoffer, I.H.M.

REFLECT To read other reflections like this and more of Sr. Chris’ writings, visit her web site at chriskoellhofferihm.org.

1 John 3:7-10 • Psalm 98:1, 7-9
John 1:35-42
A Gift for Jesus

…on entering the house [the magi] saw the child with Mary his mother. They…did him homage. …and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Matthew 2:11

One Epiphany Sunday not long ago, the family in the pew in front of me had a little boy of about six. When Mass ended, he ran up to the stable at the side altar and put a tiny wrapped package in the manger by Jesus. He turned and said to everyone watching, “You don’t have to be a king to bring a gift to Jesus! He’s going to love this!”

His insight touched me. We are all invited to bring a gift to Jesus. What could we bring that he would really love? What he wants most is some act of love. As this feast day unfolds, see what special chance to love might occur in your life, a chance to encourage, to welcome, to forgive, to share joy.

Patricia Livingston

PRAY Dear God, who led the kings by starlight, give us your light today, that we might see and respond with love—and bring that gift to your son.
Change of Heart

His fame spread to all of Syria, and they brought to him all who were sick with various diseases and racked with pain... Matthew 4:24

While in London a few years ago, I had an opportunity to tour the interior of Buckingham Palace. The rooms were grand and impressive, but it was a small display of the late Princess Diana’s desk and personal items that caught my eye. Her sons had put the exhibition together to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of her sudden and violent death. In the midst of all that grandeur, it was a powerful reminder that no one escapes suffering.

While we tend to put limitations on who is worthy of our compassion, Jesus was willing to reach out to all human beings. Some of us have difficulty dropping our assumptions and prejudices toward the rich; others reject the poor or minorities. However, in the graced moments when we put our judging minds on pause, there is room for the Spirit of Christ to change our hearts.

Merciful God, help me to see others through your eyes.

Terri Mifek

1 John 3:22—4:6 • Psalm 2:7-8, 10-12
Matthew 4:12-17, 23-25
Love Revealed

In this way the love of God was revealed to us...

1 John 4:9

Jesus is one divine laser beam of the Father’s love! That love permeates our lives in many ways. Wherever there is joy, beauty and compassion, whenever we express kindness and embark on something new, God is being revealed in our world.

You open the blinds in the early morning and gasp at the crystalline snow blanketing the yard. Your sweet baby grandchild smiles for the first time. A text message pops in from your son in Tucson: “Thanks for the package, Mom.” The warm comfort of your morning cup of Earl Grey tea is almost holy. Familiar faces of old friends greet you after morning Mass. In numerous daily ways, the love of God is revealed to us.

Father, open my eyes to your love revealed to me this day.

Jennifer Christ

Jennifer Christ is a spiritual director and retreat leader in Milwaukee, WI. Her most recent book, A Deep Abiding Love: Pondering Life’s Depth with Julian of Norwich is published by Twenty-Third Publications. Jennifer is married, the mother of four adult children and a grandmother.
Beloved, if God so loved us, we also must love one another. 1 John 4:11

Jesus commands us to love one another. We are called to love people; even people who are different from us in any number of ways. Love compels me to be kind and nonjudgmental to all people. But when I try to live this Jesus-inspired love of others, I encounter problems because some people think, speak and act in ways that are very inappropriate. Sadly, within society there are individuals who may be vicious criminals. Even though they are in the minority, these people are included in the worldwide population in which I am to love one another. What should we do? What would Jesus do? Better yet, let us remember what Jesus already did—and still does. He hated sinful conduct and strongly condemned it. And yet, he always gives another chance, for us and others, to reform. When we can hope for and pray for weak and misguided human beings, we then are offering love to one another.

Fr. James McKarns

1 John 4:11-18 • Psalm 72:1-2, 10, 12-13
Mark 6:45-52
Thursday, January 9

Love in the Annoying

...for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. 1 John 4:20

It actually seems easier to love God than to love some of the people in my life. God doesn’t have that annoying voice or leave dishes in the sink. But maybe that’s the wrong way to think about it.

To love someone, I don’t think you have to give up being annoyed by them; you do have to forgive them over and over (and over again). You do have to recognize that you have your own habits that serve as annoyances for others.

Love is for the long-term. Though we speak of “love at first sight,” how often does that infatuation fail to endure? Real love slogs through the days and years of getting wounded and forgiving, of wounding and apologizing. Each round stretches our hearts and souls to reach out more and more past family to neighbors. Then, neighbors to strangers, strangers to the entire world, and the entire world, finally, to God, who is in all whom we have struggled to love.

Aileen O’Donoghue

1 John 4:19—5:4 • Psalm 72:1-2, 14-15, 17
Luke 4:14-22
Beloved: Who indeed is the victor over the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? 1 John 5:5

People sometimes say, “I woke up this morning feeling like I could conquer the world!” Perhaps more often, however, it’s more like, “I don’t think I can face the world today!”

There’s a proverb that says, “How you see is what you see.” That is, if we look at a person or an object or an event with a negative attitude, we will judge the person/object/event as not worth our time or attention. On the other hand, if we look at them with a positive or at least an open-minded attitude, we will more likely view them positively and act accordingly.

So, John is inviting us today to view Jesus as truly the Son of God who draws close to us and teaches us how to grow in love and respect for ourselves and for one another. If we can grow in that direction, we will find inner peace and treat one another in ways that are life-giving for ourselves as well as for them.

Fr. Martin Pable, O.F.M. Cap.

1 John 5:5-13 • Psalm 147:12-15, 19-20
Luke 5:12-16
Pluses and Minuses

He must increase; I must decrease. John 3:30

The life of John the Baptist can be summed up in the six words of Scripture above. In striving to allow Jesus as full an access as possible to his life, John gave way to a lifelong dying to self-interest. Paradoxically, John’s life was in no way diminished. His very stepping aside to allow Jesus the full stature and fullness that was necessitated by being the Messiah freed John to live the truth of his mission.

He found his life by giving it over totally to Jesus. John the Baptist serves as a model for all of us to find in our lives a love and a mission that are so powerful that they draw us to lose everything we have and are. It is possible to seek and find a love to which we give all that we are. There are those in the present day whose lives show us the way—people who live their lives for others and who do not count the cost.

Fr. James Stephen Behrens, O.C.S.O.
How do you respond when given a dazzling, unexpected compliment? Grateful? Embarrassed? Jesus received an amazing compliment at his baptism. Was he surprised to hear himself called “beloved”? Did he doubt or hesitate to accept it? Surely something incredibly powerful stirred within him, an assuredness to go forth with confidence, knowing he would be embraced with love no matter what happened to him in the future.

How many of us believe we are cherished in this way by God? I have never heard a voice from beyond calling me “beloved,” but I have heard countless times how much God cares for me when I pray the Psalms, with their promise of God’s shelter, refuge, comfort and compassion. I also find this assurance in the mercy, kindness and unconditional love reflected in Jesus, the manifestation of the Holy One. Today, let us pause to hear God whisper our name: “beloved.”

Sr. Joyce Rupp, O.S.M.
On a recent trip, we faced a couple of near disasters. These situations weren’t life-threatening by any means, but they were, shall we say, costly. And they were, I also admit, all my fault.

In the midst of one of these situations, of course I was moved to pray. First, for a resolution to the situation that involved no loss, either of material goods or my pride. “Please fix it,” I asked God. “Thanks.” But then a different prayer came to me, a simpler one: “Help me bring good out of this.” Whatever that good might be: greater humility, closer attention to detail, my kids learning a lesson that might help them later—whatever. “Just open me,” I ended up praying more than once, “to whatever good you can lead us to through this, Lord.” And if I’m truly the Lord’s servant, it strikes me that this is a prayer worth remembering and repeating—many, many times a day.

Lord, I open myself to serve you. Bring good out of whatever I do today—even my mistakes.

Amy Welborn
Song of Gratitude

I was only pouring out my troubles to the Lord.

1 Samuel 1:15

The story of Hannah in the book of Samuel is the story of a faithful woman and the mercy of the Lord.

Hannah longed for a son. And she prayed so passionately for it that the priest, Eli, thought she was drunk. The Lord, in his mercy, heard and answered her. The responsorial that follows today’s reading is Hannah’s song of gratitude for what the Lord had done. It is similar to Mary’s Magnificat, praising God as a defender of the weak and the poor.

Like Hannah, we turn to the Lord in our need and our weakness, unafraid to ask but always remembering that not our will, but his, be done.

Lord, may I bear witness to your generosity and mercy with all I meet.

Greg Erlandson

Reflect

Lent is fast approaching. Creative Communications for the Parish has a full line of devotionals and church goods designed to help you and your parish celebrate Lent all season long. Visit creative-communications.com for more details.

1 Samuel 1:9-20 • 1 Samuel 2:1, 4-8
Mark 1:21-28
Benedictines express their model of discipleship in their order’s motto: *ora et labora* ("prayer and work"). The trick for most of us is to balance the two. Sometimes, the darkness of our world can feel so overwhelming that prayer becomes a tempting escape. Other times, prayer can feel like a waste of time when there is so much to be done in the world.

If we look to Jesus, however, we see a spirituality of both work and prayer. Jesus served others tirelessly. He taught us to love our neighbor and wash each other’s feet. He also withdrew often to pray, offering himself to his Father’s will. Jesus’ example reminds us that prayer strengthens us for service. Work, meanwhile, is what we bring to prayer, asking God to bless it and show us his will.

*Lord, help me to follow you in work and in prayer!*

Karla Manternach

*Karla Manternach is the author of two novels for children ages 8 to 12: Meena Meets Her Match and Never Fear, Meena’s Here! (Simon & Schuster).*
Thursday, January 16

The Power of Presence

Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand, touched him… Mark 1:41

We know that Jesus sometimes healed from a distance: the daughter of the Syrophoenician woman; the servant of the centurion; the official whose son was actively dying. All stories of people who interceded for a loved one over time and space.

Today, Mark’s Gospel reveals one of many times when Jesus insisted on being physically present through touch. Perhaps, in the case of this leper, he knew that what was needed most was to offer this leper a tender glance. This leper, shunned and banned from all contact with the rest of the world. This leper, yearning to feel some sense of belonging and inclusion with the rest of his local community. For this person, the presence and the touch of Jesus were important elements of healing.

Today, may we also witness to those in need of the comforting presence of the Holy One.

Sr. Chris Koellhoffer, I.H.M.

1 Samuel 4:1-11 • Psalm 44:10-11, 14-15, 25-26
Mark 1:40-45
Courage, Friends, Faith

They came bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. Mark 2:3

This story from today’s gospel gives me pause, revealing as it does the level of friendship and faith involved. I ask myself these questions:

First, would I have had the courage to risk creating a scene by lowering a gurney through a roof?

Second, would I have been that good of a friend to go to those extremes?

Third, would I have had the level of faith in Jesus to believe he could make a difference in the paralyzed man’s life?

It is a story that has a “then” and “now” component. While I may not be asked to lower a sick friend through a roof, do I take the time to drive them somewhere when I am given opportunity? Am I the kind of friend that will go out of my way to help them? Do I believe that doing so will make a difference in their lives? What exactly is the depth of my faith?

Something to think about as I begin my day!

Judy Schueneman
Yes, Jesus shared his precious time with tax collectors and sinners—and this is the best news we could ever hope to get! Think about it. If Jesus could love them, then surely he can love us. No matter what mistakes we make, Jesus’ love for us never changes. That might be hard to understand. Many people think of love as something we have to earn, but we can never earn God’s love. God’s love is a divine energy constantly being poured into us as a freely given gift. We can’t change that no matter what we do because we can never change God. Rather, it is God’s love that changes us.

God’s love has the power to transform our life. It helps us to seek reconciliation and vow to sin no more. It helps us to love and forgive ourselves and others as well. Can you imagine the kind of world we would have if more people decided to do that?

Fr. Kenneth E. Grabner, C.S.C.
Hearing the Cries

I have waited, waited for the Lord, and he stooped toward me and heard my cry. And he put a new song into my mouth, a hymn to our God. Psalm 40:2, 4

Like most parents, my early days of fatherhood were difficult. For, without their ability to use words, how was I to know what my child needed? And yet, with time I learned the different cries of my children; I grew to distinguish hunger from discomfort from just a need to be held.

We grow in faith in much the same way. We cry out and the Father hears us, discerning our needs and giving what is necessary. Eventually, our cries are replaced by words, and those words become a song of praise, an offering back to the provider of comfort and daily bread.

Hear my cries, even now, O Lord.

Steve Givens

PRAY Steve Givens, along with his wife, Sue, has written a family reflection and activity booklet for Lent titled: Treasures in Jars of Clay. To order copies for your Lenten journey, go to catholic.creative-communications.com.
Containing Love

Rather, new wine is poured into fresh wineskins.

Mark 2:22

Once, I helped out at a wine-bottling operation. The making of wine is a fine art and science, seemingly honed over as many generations as there have been humans, all around the world. Wine is precious. And so, once you have made it, you give great attention to the container in which you are going to store it.

Immeasurably precious, in God’s sight, are his beloved ones, you and I. In Christ, we are newborn, now and every day, growing as we are being renewed in the image of our Creator (see Colossians 3:10). How can we become fitting containers for all that God endlessly pours into us?

Lord, renew me in your image, that I might be fresh and new to receive your love.

Mary Marrocco


1 Samuel 15:16-23 • Psalm 50:8-9, 16-17, 21, 23
Mark 2:18-22
Qualifying the Chosen

We see that, throughout Scripture, God has chosen some surprising individuals to carry out essential missions. From Moses who stutters, to Abraham who has passed his prime fertile years, and even David, the youngest son. Eventually, Saul, who boasts of having been an enthusiastic persecutor of Christians, is chosen. Noah, Ruth and a young girl named Mary—the list goes on, proving the aphorism that God has little interest in choosing the qualified but qualifies the chosen. Our holiest moments, I believe, are the ones when we admit our weaknesses and answer the quiet whisper of God’s call regardless of our human frailty. Even when our ears will not hear and we fail to follow God’s call, the grace of God’s mercy strengthens us, urging us to try again.

Deborah A. Meister

Deborah Meister lives in St. Louis, MO, with her husband, Deacon Bill. She works as a writer, editor and educator. She holds graduate degrees in theology and literature, with Pastoral Ministry and DRE certifications. She is a former editor of Living Faith.
Today’s gospel is a powerful teaching on this day for the unborn. Jesus intentionally broke a Jewish Sabbath law in order to heal a man. Healing this man’s infirmity trumped the local law.

Today’s Christian cannot support or aid actions that would terminate the life of an unborn child, even if the civil law allows it, even if people claim it as their right.

This does not mean, of course, that we can engage in violent actions against others, even in our support of life. Violence against others is not pro-life. Thus, we pray, we seek to persuade, we engage in nonviolent action. We challenge civil laws when they are detrimental to life.

Jesus healed on the Sabbath, despite human laws forbidding it. We, too, recognize that God’s law of life is above any human laws that would destroy it.

Msgr. Stephen J. Rossetti
In a group of people, good manners demand that we listen, make eye contact and respond. Jesus offered the people he encountered more than good manners. He offered healings, forgiveness and grace. No wonder he withdrew from the crowd to rest!

When I’m tired, I often make the mistake of reading on the internet or watching TV—activities that cause me more unrest because they’re designed to stir our impulses and keep us engaged.

Last summer, our family vacationed at a cabin in the woods. I made a decision to offer nature at least as much attention as I’d recently given my TV. Nature doesn’t demand the same allegiances that technologies do. It rewards our attention with rest.

Spiritual writer and social activist Carlo Caretto (1910–1988) wrote that we should “try being governed by those who can still look at the stars at night, or spend an hour watching a beetle under a dry leaf…” I believe Jesus did just that.

Elizabeth Duffy
Retaliate With Forgiveness

You have treated me generously, while I have done you harm. 1 Samuel 24:18

King Saul set out with 3,000 men, intent on killing David because of a rumor that David was rebelling against him. But David’s men cornered Saul, making it easy for David to destroy him. Instead, David spared the king’s life—even though he knew Saul wanted him annihilated.

David’s magnanimous gesture reminds me that every human has the potential to cease retaliation. Yet, how quickly the mind and heart opt for returning inflicted pain, hoping the one creating harm will hurt just as much for doing so. No wonder it is such a challenge to accept the teaching of Jesus: that there is another option—the way of mercy and forgiveness. I need to remember this every morning, because hardly a day passes without my desire to return “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.” All it takes is someone cutting into a long line in front of my impatient self.

Sr. Joyce Rupp, O.S.M.

1 Samuel 24:3-21 • Psalm 57:2-4, 6, 11
Mark 3:13-19
Not Chained to the Past

Is not this the man who...came here expressly to take them back in chains...? Acts 9:21

John Newton, like Paul, had his life turned around by God’s mercy. Born in 18th-century England, he served in the English Navy and became captain of a slave ship. He was jolted into a spiritual awakening during a fierce storm at sea. But his epiphany was gradual; it would be years before he took full responsibility for the victims he persecuted as a slave trader. In his later years as an abolitionist, he stated, “It will always be a subject of humiliating reflection to me, that I was once an active instrument in a business at which my heart now shudders.”

Paul’s conversion touches our lives as believers; John Newton’s does as well. A well-known hymn reflects this man’s remarkable change of heart. Moved by God’s boundless love, John Newton wrote the lyrics of “Amazing Grace.” Spiritual awakenings come unannounced. How will God’s boundless love change your heart today?

Gail Goleas

Mark 16:15-18
Following Jesus More Closely

[Jesus] said to them, “Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Matthew 4:19

As Jesus strolls along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he spots several individuals going about their ordinary business. He says to Peter and Andrew, “Come after me,” and the two brothers walk away from their fishing nets. Then Jesus invites James and John. They, too, leave their boat as well as their father.

Jesus calls us every day in small but significant ways, inviting us to follow him more closely. He whispers to us things such as these: give him a hand… give her a call…pay attention to him…be more patient with them…offer to help with that project…listen…pray.

In each instance, we will have to let go of something in order to follow Jesus’ invitation: our personal agenda, some precious free time, control, our self-interests, our fear of getting involved, a pat excuse.

Jesus, when you show up in my life each day, help me to let go of whatever I must in order to follow you more closely as your disciple.

Sr. Melannie Svoboda, S.N.D.

Isaiah 8:23—9:3 • Psalm 27:1, 4, 13-14
1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 17 • Matthew 4:12-23
Reaching Out

…with my holy oil I have anointed him,
That my hand may be always with him,
and that my arm may make him strong. Psalm 89:21-22

In this verse, the psalmist is referring to God’s presence being with David forever. For your prayerful meditation today, why not hear these words as spoken directly to you? What does a hand and an arm do but hold and uphold, reach out and embrace, bind up and heal? We live in a sadly divided and sometimes violent world. We, too, need to be anointed and lifted up. We need encouragement and protection.

As you consider God anointing you with oil to strengthen you for service, ponder how you, too, might be an anointing presence in the world. As God reaches out to you with everlasting arms, how might you support others through your loving kindness?

Sr. Macrina Wiederkehr, O.S.B.

REFLECT Sr. Macrina’s latest book is featured on page 105 as part of our Spiritual Resources section. The Flowing Grace of Now features weekly reflections for the entire year.
A Family Matter

For whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother. Mark 3:35

Jesus’ family members number much more than just blood relatives. He didn’t limit the membership to Jews only, to Gentiles only, to men only, to landowners, to the wealthy, to city dwellers. His family has an open door to all. It is open to women, to people of color, to slaves and slave owners, to the rich and to the poor, to sinners and saints. It’s a big tent that covers anyone—anyone willing to do God’s will. And doing what God asks is challenging: we need to show mercy when we don’t feel merciful, to forgive when we would rather hold a grudge, to care for the needy when we feel selfish. If we want to be part of Jesus’ family, it will depend on how willing we are to follow God’s will.

Paul Pennick

Paul Pennick worked in the Catholic Press for more than 35 years as a journalist and editor. He is a former editor of Living Faith and Living Faith Kids. He is the father of two grown children and a proud grandfather of three boys. He is retired and lives with his wife, Mary Ellen, in St. Louis, MO.

2 Samuel 6:12-15, 17-19 • Psalm 24:7-10
Mark 3:31-35
The Condition of the Soil

Jesus said to them, “Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand any of the parables? The sower sows the word.” Mark 4:13-14

A friend recently attended a Catholic women’s conference. The keynote speaker touched her soul in some mighty uncomfortable places, hitting so close to home that she could hear the evil one whispering to her that she was unworthy of the message. She crossed her arms in an attempt to ward him off and keep her attention where she knew it belonged.

Later, someone told her that her body language had distracted the speaker and that she should have at least looked like she was listening. Try as she might to explain and apologize, no one would believe her.

That’s the thing about sharing the Good News. What appears to us to be rocky, inhospitable soil actually may be rich and ripe, or vice versa. The condition of the soil isn’t for us to judge. Our job is to sow in his name and let the Lord help it take root.

Jesus, open my heart and soul to your wisdom.

Melanie Rigney
At first I thought this verse sounded cruel, like an inverse Robin Hood rule, not aligned at all with the way I feel God views the poor. And yet, our society mirrors this harsh misunderstanding. It often does seem that those with copious funds somehow seem to get more handed to them, while those who struggle seem to have an arduous, uphill climb.

A homily several years ago shed light on a different way to understand this passage. The essence of the message was gratitude, essentially saying that, To the one who has gratitude, more will be given; from the one who has no gratitude, even what he has will be taken away.

To be grateful for what we have yields more contentment. To be grateful for what God has done for us yields more faith. When we praise God for who he is, we become more open to miracles and abundance.

Kristin Armstrong

2 Samuel 7:18-19, 24-29 • Psalm 132:1-5, 11-14
Mark 4:21-25
Truth and Mercy

Place Uriah up front, where the fighting is fierce. Then pull back and leave him to be struck down dead.

2 Samuel 11:15

What a terrible, wretched incident this is: David, the Lord’s anointed and King of Israel, has an innocent man killed so he can have his wife to himself.

And how striking it is that God’s people didn’t hide this horrifying sin. In reading the Hebrew Scriptures, I can’t help but be struck by their honesty and, indeed, rawness at times.

We may struggle sometimes with how to convey the beauty and truth of God’s promises, especially when weakness and sin seem to characterize the Church that is charged with that task—including, of course, ourselves, in our own weakness. The ancient witnesses, it seems to me, show the way. It’s a way that’s focused on truth—the whole truth, unvarnished. For it’s precisely there, in our shocking weakness, that the even more shocking power and mercy of God shines.

Father, may I be a truthful, honest witness to your mercy.

Amy Welborn

2 Samuel 11:1-10, 13-17 • Psalm 51:3-7, 10-11
Mark 4:26-34
Walking in step with Christ, we may feel like a child holding the hand of a loving parent on a busy sidewalk. Pressing our palms together, we aren’t sure where we’re going, but our trust is cheery; we are open to surprises and move at a happy and hopeful pace. Yet God doesn’t grip us too tightly. We are always free to make our own choices. When distracted by temptations along the way, we may let go of Jesus’ hand, but God never abandons us. No matter how badly we behave or how far away we run, God is ready for us to repent and return to love’s gentle grip.

As we mature, this discipleship is a dance in the tension of freedom and submission, like the movement of wind. When our spirits are aligned with God’s will, then the holy hand-holding feels as easy as air. We move freely and with might, and, considering today’s gospel, we are still able to listen and become calm in response to Jesus’ invitations: “Quiet! Be still!” (Mark 4:39).

Sr. Julia Walsh, F.S.P.A.
Joys and Sorrows of Parenthood

The child’s father and mother were amazed at what was said about him. Luke 2:33

This feast concludes the Christmas season with the presentation of the child Jesus in the temple.

Every young parent wants to believe there is something extraordinary about their child. Dad may see signs that he or she will be a great athlete. And there’s no quicker way to mom’s heart than for someone to compliment her child as the most beautiful or the brightest. So imagine how great Joseph and Mary felt when Simeon predicted that their son would be the glory of his people Israel and a light for the Gentiles! How did they feel when Anna spoke about the child Jesus to everyone in the temple? Yet the words of prophecy and praise came with a warning to Mary that, “you yourself a sword will pierce” (verse 35).

Parents cannot know the future, only that they will share both the joys and the sorrows that their children experience. Like Mary, we can pray for them and trust in the goodness of the Lord.

St. Joseph, pray that our family grows in love of the Lord.

Greg Erlandson
Healing and Freeing

As they approached Jesus, they caught sight of the man who had been possessed by Legion, sitting there clothed and in his right mind. And they were seized with fear.

Mark 5:15

There are millions whose demons have driven them to society’s edges. Some demons make people uncomfortable around others; some make others uncomfortable around them. Society has never been very good at knowing what to do about this. Recently, I was reminiscing with a friend about someone I used to know. Walking the streets of New York, when Keith saw a homeless person struggling with addiction, he’d stop and help. I don’t mean he’d give them a dollar and keep walking. I mean, he’d stop and talk with them; ask what they needed; listen to their stories and their struggles with their demons; maybe walk them to a shelter or to get a meal at a diner. God’s love flowed freely to them through Keith. Over the years, Keith helped to free them of many of their demons.

Lord, let me be a conduit of your healing love.

Phil Fox Rose

2 Samuel 15:13-14, 30; 16:5-13 • Psalm 3:2-7
Mark 5:1-20
Tuesday, February 4

Jesus’ Kind of Love

My son Absalom! …If only I had died instead of you, Absalom, my son, my son! 2 Samuel 19:1

David is overwhelmed with grief when he hears of the death of Absalom. Despite his army’s incredible military victory, David can dwell on only one thing: the death of his son—a son he continued to love despite that son’s bitter betrayal of his very own father. This poignant passage underscores the depth of David’s love. It is a love that does not deny Absalom’s wrongdoing. It is a love that looks beyond the transgression, that refuses to reduce Absalom merely to his crime. To David, Absalom is first and foremost his beloved son.

How deep is our love? Does our love transcend mere fairness? Does our love refuse to reduce individuals to the wrongs they have done? Is our love expansive enough to include even those who have injured or betrayed us? This is the kind of love Jesus taught and lived. Let us pray to love as Jesus loves.

Sr. Melannie Svoboda, S.N.D.

Melannie Svoboda, a Sister of Notre Dame from Chardon, OH, writes and gives talks and retreats nationally. Visit her blog “Sunflower Seeds” at melanniesvobodasnd.org.
Facing a Lack of Faith

He was amazed at their lack of faith. Mark 6:6

Jesus, I wonder how difficult it must have been for you to return to your hometown and experience only blank stares and doubt in the midst of your teaching.

Sometimes, you must also be amazed at my lack of faith. I stand in meadows of grace, yet often live my life distracted from the core of what really matters. The sacramental life of the church enrobes me, yet I fail to allow the sacraments to transform me. I receive Communion almost every day, but I’ve not become a eucharistic presence to others to the extent that I could be. Your face in creation continually gazes at me. Even so, I do not always return that gaze of love to others. Your beatitudes seem almost forgotten in our world, and yet I have not encouraged the prophet in me to emerge.

Jesus, shelter me with your faith.

Sr. Macrina Wiederkehr, O.S.B.

Sister Macrina Wiederkehr, is a Benedictine Sister of St. Scholastica and is well-known for her creative writing and retreat ministry. She is the author of nine popular books on prayer and spirituality. Visit her website at macrinawiederkehr.com.
Welcome Amid the Dust

He said to them, “Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave from there. Whatever place does not welcome you or listen to you, leave there and shake the dust off your feet in testimony against them.”

Mark 6:10-11

Sometimes I wonder what kind of missionaries the world needs now. In America, at least, a person would have to try very hard to avoid knowledge of Jesus and the Bible. Most of the world has already decided whether it will welcome the gospel. And many followers of Jesus, while spreading the message, have not picked up any dust to shake from their feet.

I believe there is a missionary spirit in being one of those households that might have welcomed the apostles of Jesus into our home. Would I have offered food and shelter to these strange travelers who had left home with no money, food or extra clothing? Would I have listened to their suggestion that I repent? Would I have submitted to their offer of healing?

Elizabeth Duffy

1 Kings 2:1-4, 10-12 • 1 Chronicles 29:10-12
Mark 6:7-13
Imagine the courage and conviction of John the Baptist in admonishing Herod for the infidelity of taking his brother’s wife. Herod could have had John executed immediately, regardless of John’s righteousness. John’s fidelity to God’s love compelled him, at great risk, to uphold the greater good found in God’s desire for human happiness.

Moral laws have their foundation in ensuring that human life will flourish. Those who choose to act for selfish gain by misuse of power exhibit only disdain for God’s love. John risks his own life in warning Herod of the dangers of his egotistical action. Herod has corrupted his wife and niece, and those whom he commanded must follow his orders. He silenced the voices that “perplexed” his heart. Like John, we are called to risk, to raise our voices and to protect the greater good. We pray, “here I am, Lord, send me.”

Deborah A. Meister

Sirach 47:2-11 • Psalm 18:31, 47, 50-51
Mark 6:14-29
Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while. Mark 6:31

In the first reading today, Solomon, “a mere youth” (verse 7), admits his inadequacy and humbly asks God for wisdom. And he is granted his prayer.

In the gospel, the apostles return after their first mission, and report to Jesus all that they “had done and taught.” They were amazed at what they had accomplished in Jesus’s name. At the Last Supper, Jesus will remind them, “Without me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). But at this point in his ministry, he teaches by example. They all go off for a little R & R, only to find a “vast crowd,” languishing “like sheep without a shepherd.” So Jesus “began to teach them many things.” Did the apostles get it? This is what mission looks like! You serve, you don’t boast! Do I get it? It’s just February; I’ve got a lot left to learn this year!

Miguel Dulick

After a career as a high school teacher in St. Louis, MO, Miguel Dulick went to Honduras, a country he had visited every year since 1977, to live and pray with the poor. His “mission” is strictly ground level, helping folks however he can.
Light in the Gloom

If you remove from your midst oppression, false accusation and malicious speech; If you bestow your bread on the hungry and satisfy the afflicted; Then light shall rise for you in the darkness, and the gloom shall become for you like midday.

Isaiah 58:9-10

We live, it seems, in a time in which political talk never, ever ends. And about this time in the four-year election cycle in the U.S., it’s reaching a peak. Sometimes the intense emotions and judgments that characterize these conversations lead me to wonder if people are looking for a competent government leader or something more profound in a spiritually barren time. As the prophet Isaiah tells us today, in being confronted with human suffering, our call is not to look for another to fix it all; our call is to leave our comfort zone, find the needy, embrace them as our sisters and brothers, and meet their needs. No matter who wins or loses these earthly battles, nothing is stopping us from bringing his light into that gloom.

Amy Welborn

Isaiah 58:7-10 • Psalm 112:4-9
1 Corinthians 2:1-5 • Matthew 5:13-16
Carrying Jesus

The priests brought the ark of the covenant of the Lord to its place beneath the wings of the cherubim in the sanctuary, the holy of holies of the temple. 1 Kings 8:6

What is it you cherish most? And how do you carry it?

For the Israelites, God’s chosen people, the most cherished thing—the one thing that matters above all—is God’s covenant with them. Through the covenant, they belong uniquely and forever to him, and—wondrously, by his own free gift—he belongs uniquely and forever to them. No wonder they gave utmost care to the ark in which they carried the signs of the covenant through the desert. In today’s reading, we recall one of the greatest moments in all of human history: the chosen people carrying the signs of their covenant to its dwelling place in Jerusalem.

Even so, let us carry the New Covenant we all have with God in Christ. We carry Christ in the temple that is us. Like his mother Mary, we are to become the Ark of the Covenant, the bearer of God.

Dear God, spread your wings over us that we may carry you in the world.

Mary Marrocco

1 Kings 8:1-7, 9-13 • Psalm 132:6-10
Mark 6:53-56
While I know that this is Solomon’s prayer, I can easily imagine St. Bernadette voicing these same words. Bernadette Soubirous, born in Lourdes, France, in 1844, suffered nearly nonstop during her brief life. Yet she did so with an eye toward heaven, saying that it was, “my true home.” Growing up as the eldest of nine children, she was sent to live with relatives because her parents were destitute.

She was nearly always ill, suffering from terrible asthma since she was a toddler. At the age of 14, the Blessed Mother appeared to Bernadette several times over the course of two weeks. Bernadette was severely punished when she told her relatives about the “Lady,” since they did not believe her. She was also ruthlessly ridiculed by others for the same reason.

Bernadette was, truly, God’s “servant.” May she serve as a shining example for us, that we may endure our trials with such courage and grace.

*Our Lady of Lourdes, pray for us.*

Terence Hegarty

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1 Kings 8:22-23, 27-30 • Psalm 84:3-5, 10-11
Mark 7:1-13
Wednesday, February 12

Triggers Within

Nothing that enters one from outside can defile that person; but the things that come out from within are what defile. Mark 7:15

I had too much sugar yesterday. I can feel it in my joints; it’s harder to stand up straight today, and I creak. Maybe you have that reaction to sugar too. Or, maybe too much starch or caffeine or wine brings that about. We all know our “trigger” foods.

Our souls have “trigger” foods too—gossiping about a neighbor, lying to a family member, envying that coworker for her promotion. We don’t creak or get a headache as we let evil thoughts worm their way out. But make no mistake, the damage is real and becomes harder and harder to repair the more we indulge. Today, let’s focus not only on what we’re putting into our bodies, but also on what we let out of our hearts.

Lord, help me to resist releasing evil thoughts.

Melanie Rigney

PRAY Melanie Rigney is the author of Woman of Worth: Prayers and Reflections for Women Inspired by the Book of Proverbs. Go to twentythirdpublications.com to learn more.

1 Kings 10:1-10 • Psalm 37:5-6, 30-31, 39-40
Mark 7:14-23
In his elder years, Solomon slipped from his spiritual practices. He became careless in his devotion to God. “He did not follow him unreservedly” (verse 6). It doesn’t take old age to cause integrity and good habits to slip aside. What we know to be of worth and value can diminish at any time, leaving us forgetful or negligent in our relationship with God.

I am appalled at how easily something like impatience and judgmentalism can become more than an exceptional occurrence. If behaviors like this are not watched and kept in check, they quickly become a daily pattern. That is why I value the Ignatian Examen of Consciousness. This spiritual practice encourages a prayerful review of one’s day, taking time to reflect on how aware (or unaware) I have been of God’s presence and how I have responded. This simple, valuable reflection helps to keep behaviors like Solomon’s from taking over.

Sr. Joyce Rupp, O.S.M.
Miracles and Ministry

He ordered them not to tell anyone. But the more he ordered them not to, the more they proclaimed it. Mark 7:36

Here we see Jesus curing a deaf man in front of a group of people. He tells his disciples not to speak about it. If a miracle happened in front of your very eyes, could you keep quiet about it? If it was something that defied logic or current medical or scientific explanation? If it was done by someone who sought no compensation, no recognition for this amazing act of healing? Could you hold back and not share this with everyone you know? I certainly would not find it easy to remain quiet about it.

Jesus’ ministry was much more than his miraculous healing powers. He was sent to save us from sin, to give us the gift of eternal life, to teach the word of God. The miracles are wonderful, but they are only signs of the central mission of Jesus’ ministry on earth.

Paul Pennick
Keeping Our Compassion Alive

My heart is moved with pity for the crowd… Mark 8:2

Wherever he went, Jesus saw pain, suffering and injustice. How did he keep his compassion alive? What prevented him from being overwhelmed by all the suffering? Or what kept him from becoming numb to human pain and injustices? These are good questions to ask, for we, ourselves, sometimes experience “compassion fatigue.” We become so weighed down by the world’s suffering, we lose our ability to care.

Jesus kept his compassion alive in several ways. First, he balanced work and leisure. Yes, he worked long and hard, but he also found time to attend weddings and play with children. Second, he cultivated healthy friendships with the twelve apostles and others. He enjoyed the company of Mary, Martha, Lazarus, Mary Magdalene and others. And third, Jesus carved out time for prayer, asking God daily for strength, insight and direction.

Compassionate Jesus, help me to keep my compassion alive, to keep caring.

Sr. Melannie Svoboda, S.N.D.

1 Kings 12:26-32; 13:33-34 • Psalm 106:6-7, 19-22
Mark 8:1-10
Only the Clean of Heart

…unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:20

I often encourage people to go to confession. It is an important, healing sacrament. But more than a few times, people have responded, “Why? I don’t do anything wrong.” Some add, “I haven’t killed anyone. I haven’t cheated on my spouse.” But in reading today’s gospel, all of us are guilty of adultery and murder. Jesus says that if we are lustful or angry with others, we are guilty of these crimes and deserve to be thrown into Gehenna (verse 22).

This may seem unfair, but entering into the kingdom requires a completely clean heart. Nothing impure can live in the presence of God. It also may seem impossible. How can I become completely pure of heart? The short answer is, we can’t. But God can! If we open ourselves to God’s Spirit, pray often, love much and, yes, go to confession and Eucharist, God will cleanse us. Then we shall become the clean of heart who see God.

Msgr. Stephen J. Rossetti

Sirach 15:15-20 • Psalm 119:1-2, 4-5, 17-18, 33-34
1 Corinthians 2:6-10 • Matthew 5:17-37
I would be dishonest if I told you I enjoyed affliction, discomfort, brokenness, physical pain or emotional heartache. I have weathered several of these seasons, and I can tell you that, at the time, I found none of it to be enjoyable. But it was endurable. There is a saying that pain is unavoidable, suffering is optional.

So what is the difference? I believe that suffering is different because it involves resistance to pain and attachment to outcomes (what we thought we had to have or what our life should look like).

In times of affliction, we can resist—or we can accept and allow (without allowing abusive situations to continue, of course). When we cooperate with God and commit to learning every possible lesson that pain can teach us, we are forever changed. Looking back on the experience, we marvel at how far God has carried us and at everything we gained in our perceived loss. God refines us in the fire. Let him.

Kristin Armstrong
Tuesday, February 18

Remembering the Disregarded

Do you not remember...how many wicker baskets full of fragments you picked up? Mark 8:18-19

Anyone who has tried to teach or model an attitude or understanding must surely resonate with Jesus’ frustration with his disciples. They once again miss the point of what’s unfolding right in front of them. It’s not actually about the bread, Jesus seems to be saying. It’s about the broken. It’s about noticing what has been disregarded, leftover, deemed “less than.” Jesus reminds the disciples of two occasions when he commanded them to gather up the crumbs that were once twelve baskets full and once seven.

In caring so tenderly for the crumbs that would otherwise be disregarded or wiped away, Jesus tells the disciples and us to pay attention to what our world might consider the worthless, the refuse, those whose voices have been silenced, those who seem to count for nothing.

Sr. Chris Koellhoffer, I.H.M.

James 1:12-18 • Psalm 94:12-15, 18-19
Mark 8:14-21
Most likely, we were told when we were growing up that if we would become angry at someone, or some situation, we should take a deep breath and count to ten before we talked. If we had a really strong temper, make that fifteen. Once words are spoken, we may regret them, but then they are never again able to be unspoken. St. James is known for his teaching about controlling our tongues. He says the tongue is a small member, but it affects us mightily. Serious disagreements and fights can lead to dire consequences, and usually the problems start with words. There was once an elderly rabbi who kept his patience and controlled his temper, even when unfairly criticized. When someone would confront his views, he would often calmly say, “You may be right.” Indirectly, he was informing his critic that he may not be right.

Lord, may our words be filled with kindness and understanding.

Fr. James McKarns
Adolescents are infamous excluders. They create boys- or girls-only clubs or refuse to eat lunch with the outcast. Adults do this too. We unfollow people on social media (although some should be unfollowed in the interest of being prudent, since there are those whose words and actions can harm us in some manner). We avoid sitting next to the bore at a party. We try to “keep up with the Joneses” in how we live and what we own.

Part of what fuels this is our desire to feel like we belong. The Lord’s surprising call to us, however, is to help others feel like they belong. Jesus drew people in. He reached out to the other and the outcast. For us, this means listening patiently to the bore in the break room or heading straight for the person sitting alone at the party. It means valuing the company and the presence of others, regardless of their status or their ability to entertain us. It means treating every person as one created and loved by God.

Gracious God, help me to love all people.

Karla Manternach
Breathing Life into the World

For just as a body without a spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead. James 2:26

When we go to wakes and funerals, we know in a very real way that the person we loved is no longer present, and it is that absence that is so painful. Without an animating spirit—without the breath of God—the body before us is no longer the person we knew.

Likewise, our faith in Jesus must be brought to life by the Spirit—by the breath of God that lives in our words and our work. Without that living proof that Jesus has made a difference in our lives, our faith is dead—a museum piece that signifies “Christian” in the same way a painting of a sunset looks nice on the wall but offers no heat, no light, no source of life for those who gaze upon it.

Spirit of God, breathe through me and make my faith come alive in the world around me.

Steve Givens

James 2:14-24, 26 • Psalm 112:1-6
Mark 8:34—9:1
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Staying in Line

Do not lord it over those assigned to you, but be examples to the flock. 1 Peter 5:3

Several years ago, a priest with whom I worked at a local retreat house passed away. He had struggled with alcoholism earlier in his life, and after he quit drinking, he counseled many who were afflicted with addiction. He was known for his simple frankness and integrity.

His funeral was packed, and the line at the luncheon afterward was long. I was chatting with the Franciscan brother who was director of the retreat house when one of the women serving the luncheon invited him to go to the head of the line. He politely and quietly declined her offer. His refusal to be given preferential treatment struck me as a powerful example of humility that was in accord with the spirit of his deceased friend and fellow friar.

Terri Mifek

Terri Mifek is a certified spiritual director and retreat leader. She enjoys traveling, reading and hiking as well as watching her seven grandchildren grow.
A Call for Prayer

You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you…

Matthew 5:43-44

When there are threats to people in our world by enemies as horrific as terrorists, I feel petty trying to love an enemy of mine these days. That enemy is the apparent multitude of robocallers. Almost 30 percent of my phone calls are now those automated intruders. Some are definitely attempts to “persecute” with dangerous scams, disguising themselves as friendly neighbors by using my own area code or one I have recently called. I was waiting for important news yesterday. Every time the phone rang, I raced to answer. Ten times the caller ID showed what had to be a robocall. The only help I’ve found to love those enemies is to think that God sees some goodness in them that I cannot. Maybe they are just trying to feed their families or escape much worse enemies than mine.

God, strengthen me with your love to pray for these callers who persecute me.

Patricia Livingston

Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18 • Psalm 103:1-4, 8, 10, 12-13
1 Corinthians 3:16-23 • Matthew 5:38-48
Our Wake-up Calls

O faithless generation, how long will I be with you? How long will I endure you? Bring him to me. Mark 9:19

The most important things in life do not come to us immediately. We need time to open our hearts to the gifts of love, faith and hope so that they may slowly but surely lead us to a new way of living. Jesus apparently succumbed to occasional fits of exasperation when those who heard his words simply did not know what to do with them or make of them. How slow they were to experience in themselves the love he had for them—to take his words to heart. But he always countered his exasperating moments with teaching by example: praying, healing, encouraging and loving. We are called to share these same gifts with each other. We should not lose heart when we experience a wake-up call from God. It is a call that most often will come through people who love us and who see in us what we cannot see ourselves.

Fr. James Stephen Behrens, O.C.S.O.
We stand here on the threshold of Lent, and St. James lays out a stinging examination of conscience to help set the tone for our penitential season. He calls us out on our double-mindedness and our persistent inclination to give in to our passions. Some might accuse him of being a killjoy for our Fat Tuesday. But keeping a realistic eye on our moral compass is essential, particularly when the wider culture glorifies indulgence and consumerism.

Jesus reminds those who would follow him that the cross is never far from view. That is why we need this season of self-denial. It is a time to put others first and an opportunity to re-orient ourselves around our Lord and his priorities. Have I prayed about how I can strengthen my relationship with Jesus this Lent? What things might be standing in the way?

Steve Pable
Six Weeks of Housecleaning

A clean heart create for me, O God, and a steadfast spirit renew within me. Psalm 51:12

A clean heart. A steadfast spirit. Two essential components for a healthy spirituality. As we begin the Lenten season, the Church wisely urges us to focus on how our hearts can benefit from some cleansing and our spirits become firmer in their commitment to the gospel teachings.

If we didn’t wash our dishes or clothes, never dusted or emptied the garbage, what a dismal and odorous home we would have! Similarly, there’s great value in doing some spiritual cleansing—decluttering minds stuffed with distracting activities, divesting from unworthy habits, shoring up the foundation of prayer and getting rid of emotional debris. Lent is here. Time to begin an extensive inner housecleaning. (Thank goodness there are six weeks in which to do so!)

Sr. Joyce Rupp, O.S.M.
For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. Luke 9:24

When I traveled in Poland, I was struck by the number of memorials and markers of events from World War II. The Nazi concentration camps of Majdanke (near where John Paul II taught after the war) and Auschwitz are the best known, but lesser-known memorials are nearly ubiquitous there.

As I read the inscriptions, I contemplated the terror and the courage of the people involved and prayed that humanity will someday relegate all such horrors to the past. I also found another prayer arising in my heart—that I would never be called upon to find out if I could be brave in the face of even lesser threats than those posed by the Nazis. I was uncertain that I could imitate those who were so brave.

Through the years, that prayer has matured into asking that, if such a threat does come into my life—most likely a shooter in my classroom, church or at a public event—I will be brave enough to try to protect someone else, even at the cost of my own life.

Aileen O’Donoghue
Seeing With the Eyes of the Holy

Sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless. Isaiah 58:7

When we gather around a table to share a meal, when we bring guests into our home, we see them up close. We recognize their faces and hear in their stories echoes of our own. They are no longer a “them” or a category. They are no longer the nameless poor but are recognized for who they truly are, our neighbors. And once we move from the general and the distant to the individual and the near, the relationship shifts. We come closer to putting on the mind of Christ, to acquiring the consciousness of the Holy One. We come closer to the divine perspective. May this same closeness influence all our Lenten practices of prayer and fasting and giving alms.

Sr. Chris Koellhoffer, I.H.M.

One way to connect your almsgiving to a worthy cause is through helping the mission of the Living Faith Foundation. Please see pages 102-103 for more details.
The road trip had been on my mind for months. I didn’t relish a 14-hour drive, but there was no way around it. I channeled my anxiety and made a list of what to pack. What a mistake. The list grew longer, and I became more uneasy. *What if I forgot something important like my prescriptions (or my hair curler)?* When it was time to head out, I was relieved to get on the road and leave my expectations behind. After the first 100 miles, I stopped fretting about my list and began to unwind.

My mind shifted gears and I focused on the moving scene before my eyes. There were construction vehicles kicking up dust and faded billboards advertising by-gone days. Rolling hills offered landscapes I had never seen before and insights freely given by our gracious God. With or without that hair curler of mine, I rested easy, for the Lord was my guide.

Gail Goleas
Dealing With Temptation

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. Matthew 4:1

Every Lent, the gospel for the first Sunday is always focused on the fact that Jesus, before beginning his public ministry, went into the harsh Judean desert to pray and fast for forty days. We can only imagine how weak and vulnerable he must have felt at the end of those days. Satan saw his chance to tempt Jesus to win people over—not by his teachings or his endurance of suffering, but by a magic show (turning stones into bread, throwing himself off a cliff and not getting hurt, etc.). But Jesus will hear none of it. He has come to do the will of his Father, which will include opposition, rejection by many and a cruel, painful death on a cross. Satan slinks off, waiting for another opportunity.

So the Church does not “ease us gently” into Lent. We are faced with the fact that the Evil One wants to turn us away from following Jesus. But if we choose to follow Our Lord, to turn away from sin and believe in the Good News, our Lent will be a time of spiritual growth and renewal.

Fr. Martin Pable, O.F.M. Cap.
Revved Up for Lent

I am the Lord. Leviticus 19:16

Our inner engines are revved for this Lenten journey of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Perhaps we are trying to free ourselves from a list of rules or minutiae beyond our reach as we prepare our Lenten practices. Yet today’s Scriptural reading from the Book of Leviticus is legislative and creates in us a tendency to skip over this passage with a personal “Not Applicable.” But Leviticus is a call to mainstream God’s thinking into our own, to dig deeper into the challenges of our everyday life, to “be holy [as] God [is] holy” (verse 2). These laws can be far more demanding than we realize, stretching our commitment to life and to one another. Four times today we hear the proclamation, “I am the Lord.” May these four words be our strength during this Lenten walk and sustain us until Easter and beyond!

Sr. Bridget Haase, O.S.U.

Leviticus 19:1-2, 11-18 • Psalm 19:8-10, 15
Matthew 25:31-46
Triumph, in the End

So shall my word be... achieving the end for which I sent it. Isaiah 55:11

While rolling up my exercise mat this morning, I caught a bit of the news. A brawl had broken out among parents at a Little League game. As is characteristic today, people took out their cell phones to video the shameful behavior. I, like many other TV viewers, I’m sure, shook my head and thought, “What’s this world coming to?”

So often we wonder about the fate of humankind on this one fragile planet spinning out its life in the vast universe. Through the voice of Isaiah, we hear divine words of reassurance. God does have a purpose for all of creation. God’s word goes out and accomplishes his purpose. The plan is so vast, beyond our comprehension. But we know that it involves both sin and restitution, drought and abundance, sorrow and joy. And above all, it is about love, a kingdom of love! Pray fervently for an end to human sinfulness, then rest in the sure knowledge that God will always be with us.

Jennifer Christ
Neither man nor beast, neither cattle nor sheep, shall taste anything; they shall not eat, nor shall they drink water. Jonah 3:7

Catholic activist and reformer Dorothy Day fasted often, sometimes as a form of protest, but always, fundamentally, as a spiritual practice. There was no dithering or questioning in her mind about the value of fasting. It was essential, as she wrote, “not only as a sign of sorrow for sins, an offering to God of their life, but also to have the means to show their love for their brother who was afflicted.

“... We all have these habits, the youngest and the oldest. And we have to die to ourselves in order to live, we have to put off the old man and put on Christ. That it is so hard, that it arouses so much opposition, serves to show what an accumulation there is in all of us of unnecessary desires.” She’s right—it’s hard, isn’t it? But as she points out, and as we discover every year, “This is Lent, and Lent is a wonderful time to begin again.”

Jesus, I join my sacrifices to your sacrifice of love.

Amy Welborn

Jonah 3:1-10 • Psalm 51:3-4, 12-13, 18-19
Luke 11:29-32
A Prayer Always Answered

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. Matthew 7:7

Take time to meditate often on these beautiful words and see how this can brighten your day! God deeply cares about us. And so, God cares about our prayers. Of course, for reasons we do not always understand, not all of our prayers can be answered in ways in which we would like. But there is one prayer that will always be answered: “Lord, may I become more aware of your loving presence in my mind and heart, and may I imitate you in my love for others.”

We can ask for this gift, and God will surely answer our prayer, for this is God’s desire for us. The more we respond to God’s desire, the more we will know the tremendous joy of our oneness with God. It takes time though. May we be patient with ourselves. Maybe this could be a part of our prayer too.

Lord, increase my trust in you!

Fr. Kenneth E. Grabner, C.S.C.
A Big ‘If’

Do I indeed derive any pleasure from the death of the wicked? Ezekiel 18:23

It’s just the first full week of Lent, so I suppose the prophet’s “scared-straight” tactics are an appropriate way to get us to sit up and pay attention! Blessing a wicked man if he turns from his evil ways, but opening the chasm of eternal damnation if a good man goes bad, God seems to leave us teetering on the brink.

But Jesus’ command, though gently phrased, is even more challenging: “If you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5:23-24). This is incredibly difficult for most of us. But if it’s ever going happen, it’ll be during Lent, I guess. I pray!

Miguel Dulick

PRAY To join the online Living Faith prayer community, visit livingfaith.com.

Ezekiel 18:21-28 • Psalm 130:1-8
Matthew 5:20-26
In some circles today, it is very difficult for parties to come to an agreement. An agreement doesn’t need to be anything more than both parties giving something and both parties receiving something in return. In today’s first reading, God and the people of Israel formulate an agreement. God promises to care for the Israelites in a special way, while the Israelites promise to observe God’s commands.

What compromises or agreements have you made with others? There are informal ones: “It’s my turn to pick up the tab. You take care of the yard, and I’ll do the shopping and cook supper.” And the more formal kind: marriage vows, religious vows, business contracts.

In healthy agreements, both parties have rights and responsibilities. Both receive and both give.

God of the Covenant, help me to be more willing to give and to receive in my dealings with others—and with you.

Sr. Melannie Svoboda, S.N.D.
I’ve heard that the message “Do not fear” is written, in one manner or another, over 365 times in the Bible. Apparently, we could stand to hear that every single day. So often, what terrifies us and holds us back, is much less threatening than the fear we harbor around it. That’s not to say that we should discount all fears, since there are legitimate fears that we must face at times. But Jesus says, “Rise, and do not be afraid.” Notice that we have to rise first, and the courage will come. Faith is the catalyst. We do not wait to feel brave. We could wait forever.

Fear, like any emotion, can only exist in the present moment. We may become depressed by focusing on the past, or suffer from anxiety by worrying about the future. But right now, the present moment, is the only safe place we have. God’s love casts out fear. We have a choice right here—which will we choose? Love or fear?

Kristin Armstrong
Giving Despite Struggle

Give and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. Luke 6:38

I am the campaign chair at my workplace for a local charity. It has been a bit surprising to me how hard it is to get people to give when they haven’t given before, or to get those who have given to increase their gifts. I understand. Even though I run the campaign, I also struggle to increase my gift. It is hard to give. Our own needs (and wants) are never far from our minds. To motivate myself, I recall how difficult it is when one paycheck doesn’t stretch to the next. One has to juggle bills, deciding which to pay this week and which to let ride for another week. And, unexpected bills can lay one flat. It can grind your spirit.

For all but a very few of us, though, there’s someone who is struggling more than we are. And they are giving what may seem like a small amount to someone who’s even worse off. Giving from abundance is relatively easy, but giving from struggle will be greatly rewarded by God.

Aileen O’Donoghue
Have you heard the phrase “humble bragging”? It is a subtle way to boast of one’s actions while trying to sound humble. “I only go to Mass five days a week,” might be an example of spiritual humble bragging.

In today’s reading, Jesus warns us about spiritual pride clothed as piety. He rebukes the religious leaders of his day for their humble bragging and their willingness to “preach but they do not practice” (verse 3). Jesus is toughest on those who are spiritual hypocrites, who are quick to condemn others and quick to present themselves as deserving honor.

Pope Francis says that such spiritual hypocrites remove themselves from God’s mercy because of their arrogance. We are all sinners, and our role models of humility might be the good thief on the cross or the prodigal son—seeking the Lord’s mercy by humbling ourselves before our just and all-knowing God.

Let me always remember that the Lord, who knows all things, is pleased by humility.

Greg Erlandson
Dealing With the Curve

Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death…

Matthew 20:18

Life has a way of throwing us curveballs. Just when everything is humming along, we lose a job, a friend dies suddenly, or the institutions we trusted fail us. We may feel lost and angry. Encountering unexpected difficulties will test us, just as the first disciples were tested as they faced the death of their beloved friend and teacher.

When things look hopeless, that is simply a challenge, one that, ideally, will prompt us to see the situation through the eyes of faith. We want our wishes to be fulfilled, but we live in a world that we often can’t control. However, our faith calls us to trust that God is at work within and around us. As we struggle with our unbelief, it is comforting to know that even our doubts can be transformative if they make us more compassionate, humble and honest followers of Christ.

Terri Mifek

Jeremiah 18:18-20 • Psalm 31:5-6, 14-16
Matthew 20:17-28
Last year, we spent a couple of weeks in Seville, Spain. Around the corner from our apartment was a church with a forecourt. In the rear of this courtyard stood a statue of St. Jude Thaddeus. Any time I walked past, day or evening, I saw the same sight: a steady stream of people coming in from the street—passing by on the sidewalk bearing briefcases, shopping bags and backpacks, young and old—stopping in to light a candle, offer flowers (there was always a bank of bouquets in front of the statue) and stand for a moment and pray. All day, every day. What a gift, to have such a spot right there in the midst of your daily rounds between work, home and school to stop, bring your joys and sorrows, and take a moment to breathe deep in the quiet, and in the midst of it, find hope, once more, in the Lord.

Lead me to find that place in my daily life where I can gain strength and hope from you, Lord.

Amy Welborn
The Burden of Envy

Your brothers, you know, are tending our flocks at Shechem. Get ready; I will send you to them.” “I am ready,” Joseph answered. Genesis 37:13

Little did Joseph know the cost of his obedience to his father. His readiness was indeed costly. If you read verse 14 of this story, you will discover that Jacob sent Joseph to his brothers to make sure all was well with them. The beautiful concern of a father! And we know the rest of the story.

As things turned out, not all was well with them. Envy is a terrible burden, and it had its grip on at least some of the brothers. It can happen in our lives too. We have probably all experienced a tinge of envy. A real or imagined neglect can turn our lives upside down and take our joy away.

Sometimes when I meet envy face to face, I try to image the one I am envying in a new way. I spend a little time prayerfully wondering about them. Have I neglected them in any way? My prayerful wondering always seems to help.

Sr. Macrina Wiederkehr, O.S.B.
When We Return

His son said to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.” But his father ordered his servants “…let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.” Then the celebration began. Luke 15:21-24

As a sober alcoholic, I have always treasured the Prodigal Son parable. I’ve been comforted by the message that all of God’s love is waiting for us whenever we return—no matter what we’ve done. This parable and the hymn “Amazing Grace” (which borrows from it) are in the unofficial canon of spiritual recovery. Some people relate to the father in the story, while others, the resentful brother even! What a realization. Self-centered much? But the message for all of us, here and in other parables (the Pharisee and the tax collector, the day laborer who starts late but receives the same wage, etc.), is that, if we are self-seeking, if we are trying to earn God’s favor, we are blocking out our ability to receive love. But if we come to God humbly, holding back nothing, then the kingdom is ours.

Phil Fox Rose

Micah 7:14-15, 18-20 • Psalm 103:1-4, 9-12
But the hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth.

John 4:23-24

There’s an industry in helping people explore their physical limitations as they travel the world seeking adventure experiences. We can also recognize the importance of pursuing prayer like an athlete in training. But when it comes to exploring the thick emotional crust that often surrounds our relational habits, it’s easy to get stuck. A family member makes a string of poor decisions, for instance, or expresses opinions I don’t like, and then I find it difficult to tell them I love them.

It can be uncomfortable when someone is growing or changing in their own ways and I feel left behind or powerless around them. And sometimes I know that mercy is called for, but I simply don’t want to practice it. To worship in Spirit and truth means acknowledging all of our limitations, even our emotional ones, and asking that God’s grace will permeate every aspect of our humanity.

Elizabeth Duffy
A recent documentary on the migration of antelope on the Saharan plains underscored how much of these animals’ lives is directed by their need to locate water. How in their unending effort to refresh their bodies for the next stage of their journey, they might even risk exposure to the elements of searing heat and blinding dust storms, all so that they could remain close to the water that is critical for life.

Just so, the psalmist reminds us, do we long for the Holy One. Just so is the deepest longing of our hearts satisfied only in our ongoing quest to draw near to the Living God.

Sr. Chris Koellhoffer, I.H.M.

Chris Koellhoffer, a Sister, Servant of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, is an author and spiritual guide who offers retreats and presentations throughout the United States and Canada. Visit her blog, Mining the Now, at chriskoellhofferihm.org.
Two-way Street

I realized recently that I have very few regrets. I spend little time wondering if I made the right choice or wishing I had said or done something differently. I sin and make mistakes, of course, but then I repent, make amends and let it go. That’s healthy, right? After all, there’s no sense holding on to the past. Let bygones be bygones! When I considered how easily I forgive others, however, I noticed a blind spot. I hold grudges and harbor resentments. It’s easier for me to forgive myself than to forgive others.

Maybe the reverse is true for you. Maybe you’re hard on yourself but forgiving of others. The Lord’s Prayer reminds us, however, that forgiveness is a two-way street—we ask God to forgive us as we forgive others. It’s not enough to choose one or the other. Like the indebted servant, we are called to trust in the Lord’s mercy and to show mercy to others in turn.

*Lord, help me to forgive!*

Karla Manternach
A Higher Purpose

Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.

Matthew 5:17

In Jesus’ time, Rome was the civil authority. Their laws were strict and were enforced ruthlessly. Crucifixion was a brutal and an often-used punishment against all sorts of so-called criminals.

While many hoped a “savior” would free them from their tyrannical oppressors, Jesus was careful not to challenge Rome. He came for a higher purpose. He came to fulfill the words of the prophets. He came to teach the Word of God to all who would listen. He came to die on that cross. He came to be brutalized and tortured. He came to offer us another life, a better life, an eternal life that awaits all who choose to follow his teachings.

Paul Pennick

Deuteronomy 4:1, 5-9 • Psalm 147:12-13, 15-16, 19-20
Matthew 5:17-19
Angelics Inspirations

When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home.

Matthew 1:24

There are several references in Matthew’s Gospel that speak about Joseph when he was sleeping. He received dreamlike messages from an angel, and when he awoke, he acted on the messages. For many years, I have been curious about dream interpretations, but I’ve never found understandable information about those puzzling events of dreamland. However, I dream nearly every night, and often they are about people and places of the distant past. Perhaps I need to be made aware of certain events of earlier times to direct me today.

I have never seen an angel, and I don’t know what an angel looks like. Nor have I heard an angel’s voice. But we can be spiritually savvy like St. Joseph, when both awake and asleep. We can listen with our soul to the divine and angelic inspirations to live a life of a faithful and saintly person.

Fr. James McKarns

2 Samuel 7:4-5, 12-14, 16 • Psalm 89:2-5, 27, 29
Romans 4:13, 16-18, 22 • Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24 or Luke 2:41-51
As Yourself?

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.” The second is this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Mark 12:30-31

With all the violence that exists in our world today, how different life would be if everyone took these words to heart! Hardly a week goes by that we don’t hear of another mass shooting with statistics that should shock us into action.

Many of the perpetrators profess a religious belief and claim that they are acting out against those whose beliefs don’t mesh with theirs. It seems they hear, “Love your God,” but pay no mind to “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Does the crux of the problem lie in the last phrase, “as yourself”? How is it possible to kill others if you love yourself?

I have no answers to this question. I pray, however, for measures that will protect the innocent from the perpetrators and the perpetrators from themselves.

Judy Schueneman

Hosea 14:2-10 • Psalm 81:6-11, 14, 17
Mark 12:28-34
For the Love of God

For it is love that I desire, not sacrifice, and knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

Hosea 6:6

Burnt offerings are easy to make during Lent. I’m not talking about slaying goats or lambs or even doves. I’m talking about those things we offer that don’t really affect our lives. Maybe it’s giving up that television show you’ll binge-watch eventually or giving a charitable contribution that doesn’t pinch you. We make them and “poof!” after Easter, they’re gone.

Our love for God is scarier. It involves us saying yes to something that is going to shake up our life, whether that’s adding daily Mass, abstaining from social media or committing to a weekly morning or afternoon of service for those who live on society’s margins. It’s trusting that when you are loyal to him, the person you become will be more pleasing to him—and to yourself. Regardless of how your Lent has gone so far, consider ways you can add knowledge of God’s love to your practice today.

Jesus, help me make my sacrifice genuine, like yours.

Melanie Rigney
The Heart of the Matter

Not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance, but the Lord looks into the heart.

1 Samuel 16:7

While contemporary society discourages it, judging someone is not always a terrible thing. There is a place for what we call “good judgment.” After all, there are people with evil intent in society.

Obviously, it’s not wise to befriend someone in a dark alley in a crime-riddled neighborhood. Is it less than Christian to be wary of the person approaching us on the street asking for money? They may simply be in need. But while we know that everyone is a child of God, we can’t see into their heart the way that God can. So, what can we do?

If we are to truly live the gospel, then turning our back is not an option. We can take the time, in silence and prayer, to look into our own hearts. We can seek to root out our own evils and prejudices. We can pray for all those in need and then find ways to confidently (yet prudently) reach out to them.

Lord, help me to purify my heart today.

Terence Hegarty

1 Samuel 16:1, 6-7, 10-13 • Psalm 23:1-6
Ephesians 5:8-14 • John 9:1-41
Prayers of Thanksgiving

I will extol you, O Lord, for you drew me clear... Psalm 30:2

Psalm 30 is a beautiful prayer of thanksgiving for God’s deliverance from defeat, from going down, from mourning. Today might be a good day to recall and give thanks for all of the ways God, through the teachings and life of Jesus, delivers us.

Jesus, for example, delivers us from fear: “Fear not, little flock.” From anxiety: “Trust in God, trust also in me.” From self-preoccupation: “Love one another.” From a poor self-image: “You are worth more than many sparrows.” From loneliness: “I call you friends.”

Or we might want to compose a simple prayer of thanksgiving for the blessings of our life: special loved ones, graces we have received recently, our gifts and talents, the blessings of our faith or specific beauties of creation. Thanksgiving to God must not be restricted to a certain day in late autumn. Thanksgiving should be the constant refrain of our hearts!

Sr. Melannie Svoboda, S.N.D.

The book Living Faith Prayers for Catholics is available at:
catholic.creativecommunications.com.
House of Mercy

...in Jerusalem...[near] a pool called in Hebrew Bethesda...[there] lay a large number of ill... One man...had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there...he said to him, “Do you want to be well?” The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up.” John 5:2, 3, 5-7

This story differs from many other miracle stories. Jesus is usually asked to heal someone. This man, physically very weak after decades of sickness with no one to help him, doesn’t even know Jesus. Jesus initiates, asking him if he wants to be well. There must have been some expression of great longing and enduring hope that gave Jesus the opening to say, “Rise up, take up your mat, and walk” (verse 8).

The word Bethesda means house of mercy. Unable to enter the pool, the man entered the house of mercy through Jesus’ compassion, stood up and walked.

Jesus, in our times of weakness and loneliness, help us to know that we walk in your love.

Patricia Livingston

Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12 • Psalm 46:2-3, 5-6, 8-9
John 5:1-16
God’s Delight

…Behold I come; in the written scroll it is prescribed for me, To do your will, O my God, is my delight, and your law is within my heart! Psalm 40:8-9

We have the word of God at our fingertips today, literally. We have Scripture apps, online Bibles, and, if all else fails, we have a printed Bible on the shelf. Many of us can quote from memory our favorite passages. We hear God’s word in liturgies and in music, even on the radio. The psalmist reminds us today that knowing Scripture—the laws of Leviticus, for example—or even strictly following the laws for “holocaust and sin-offering” falls short of what delights God. The Word of God came to us in the flesh that we might live as Jesus did, with God’s word inscribed on our hearts. Then, our love for one another naturally expressed, not merely out of obligation to law but from our “heart,” will indeed be God’s delight.

Deborah A. Meister
How can you believe, when you accept praise from one another and do not seek the praise that comes from the only God? John 5:44

“Good job!” we say to infant children when they do something as seemingly simple as crawl across the floor. From that moment on, they learn that every new and good thing they do will elicit praise from us, as well as from their teachers, coaches, friends and, eventually, their employers. We learn to please others from an early age. And that’s only natural and good in so many ways.

But we are called to more. We are asked to seek and hear a further, higher call—a word of praise that comes from the mouth of the Father and shouts to the world: “This one is perfect and blessed. This one I know by name. This one makes me happy. This one is mine.”

God, let the goodness and grace of being your child be my first and greatest source of pride.

Steve Givens

Exodus 32:7-14 • Psalm 106:19-23
John 5:31-47
Know-it-all?

You know me… John 7:28

In our lifetimes, we are each likely to encounter nay-sayers and know-it-alls, those who arrogantly believe they know what’s happening and provide uninvited explanations and suggestions. Their advice and ideas can cause us to cringe or feel attacked and hurt. At times, their attitudes and actions can be destructive, breaking our hearts and shattering our hopes. Our routes change. We become disoriented and confused. We start to wonder if we ever knew what was true.

When we are under such attacks, it is good to look to our compass, our North Star. Knowing Jesus Christ reveals an abundance of love and mystery. As we get closer to Jesus and know him better, we learn the divine truth. This truth shows us that we, too, can act like arrogant naysayers and know-it-alls. Our own pride can be the biggest block to knowing God’s guidance and love. Once we know this, we can take a humble bow.

Sr. Julia Walsh, F.S.P.A.
Division and Order

So a division occurred in the crowd because of him.

John 7:43

We might expect such a thing to be said of a thief, a liar or a swindler. We might expect that people were divided because of him. But in this gospel, friends and neighbors end up quarreling, not over an evildoer, but over God himself who has come among them in the person of Jesus.

When God comes in, we are not always prepared to welcome him and accept the medicine he brings. Often, as in today’s reading, he comes doing, saying and showing all sorts of things that we do not expect and may very well dislike. He disturbs our order. How else could he bring about a new order? Lent is like that. The old order of our painful and hurtful ways is shaken up, as healing and grace break in anew, within and among us. Never before has anyone spoken like this One. Come, let us listen and be changed.

*Teach us, Lord, to welcome you always and everywhere.*

Mary Marrocco

Jeremiah 11:18-20 • Psalm 7:2-3, 9-12

John 7:40-53
Never-ending

Jesus told her, “I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live…”

John 11:25

When two people deeply love each other, they never want their love to end. I think that’s one of the best experiences we can ever have. And it’s open to every one of us! Our desire for permanence, at its best, is a sign of a vibrant love, one that reaches out to heaven. It’s also a sign of the way God loves us. We are so important to God that God desires to be together with us in an intimate relationship that will grow and never end. Our resurrection is the way God brings this about.

Years ago, I read these words on a sign: “This life is good, but the best is yet to come!” I never forgot it. God offers us a resurrected future full of incredible beauty and joy. But then, what else would you expect a loving God to do?

Thank you, Lord, for your incredible, unending love.

Fr. Kenneth E. Grabner, C.S.C.

Fr. Ken Grabner is a Holy Cross priest and chaplain at Holy Cross Village at Notre Dame. He is the author of books and many articles on the spiritual life.
Glass Houses

Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her. John 8:7

Stones: sharp, hurtful. How much damage they do if hurled at a person! Today, we might not throw physical stones like those in the gospel story of the woman caught in adultery. Instead, our stones consist of ones that kill a person’s spirit and destroy social unity by disparagement and vilification. With electronic communication, anyone has a route to throw angry, hostile stones. All it takes is a rush of emotion, the touch of a hand, and the damage is done. I know, because as much as I detest this kind of thing, I held stones in my hand last year. A message came that ignited my anger at injustice. Instead of pausing, praying and taking time to let the interior fire simmer down, I immediately sent a rush of hurtful words. As soon as I recognized my stone-throwing, I sent an apology—but I could not undo the bruises my hurled stones created.

Sr. Joyce Rupp, O.S.M.

Daniel 13:1-9, 15-17, 19-30, 33-62
Psalm 23:1-6 • John 8:1-11
Jesus: More Than a Holy Man

For if you do not believe that I AM, you will die in your sins. John 8:24

Today, many believe that Jesus was simply a holy man. Others will add that he was a prophet and/or a great teacher. They admire him and his words. But this is not yet a Christian faith.

In today’s gospel, the crowd asks him, “Who are you?” And twice he says, “I AM.” Jesus’ words speak of his divinity. Only God can say, “I AM.” Jesus adds that if they do not believe this, they will “die in [their] sins.”

Jesus was a holy man. Jesus was a prophet and a great teacher. But he was, and is, much more! He is God become flesh, and only the death and resurrection of the God-man can save us. We will “die in our sins” unless we come to believe this. Do you?

Msgr. Stephen J. Rossetti

Msgr. Rossetti is a priest of the Diocese of Syracuse and teaches at the Catholic University of America. He is author of numerous books, including The Priestly Blessing: Rediscovering the Gift from Ave Maria Press.
Morning Prayers

O God of Constant Rising, each morning you bless us with a new resurrection—the rising of the sun and the dawning of a new day; of new light and hope. Instill in us the wisdom to recognize that each moment can be a little rising. Give us attentive hearts this day, that we not miss your moments of visitation. Amen.

Sr. Macrina Wiederkehr, O.S.B.

Gracious God, thank you for the gift of another day. Help me see the people that I meet and the situations I encounter today through the eyes of faith. May I be empowered to live this day with compassion, courage and hope as I place my trust in you. Amen.

Terri Mifek

Like beautiful, fragrant flowers along a welcoming path, your blessings lie before me, dear God. You have graced me with another chance to walk in your garden. I pray for the strength to stay on your path, that I might enjoy the sweet scent of your presence as you walk with me. Amen.

Terence Hegarty
Evening Prayers

Faithful God, thank you for the many ways you were present to me this day. I recall when I trusted you enough to share with you my fear, my sorrow and my anger as well as my joy. I ask forgiveness for when I ignored the urge to listen more intently, act more compassionately and pardon more readily. Amen.

Terri Mifek

Lord Jesus, in this season, as each evening the sun sets a little later, the days slowly but inexorably grow longer, I look forward to preparing throughout Lent for your resurrection and the promise of new life. Let the Holy Spirit guide me as I search myself for what needs to die and be reborn in you. Amen.

Phil Fox Rose

God of Day and of Darkness, as evening falls, look with compassion on the children of this world. Bring rest and healing to all who are troubled this night. May we find comfort and protection under the shadow of your wings. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

Sr. Macrina Wiederkehr, O.S.B.
Prayer While Processing Grief

Comforting Father, even with our faith, we still grieve. Though grieving is natural, we try to avoid it. Walk with us, we pray, as we adapt to this fundamental shift in our lives. Comfort us in our sorrow and strengthen us as we go through these dark days. We pray that our loved one, through your grace, will be at peace with you in your heavenly kingdom. Amen.

Terence Hegarty

Prayer for Contentment

God of abundance, you provide for me as you do for the birds and the lilies. And yet, while I know worrying will not add a single moment to my life span, I still struggle with anxiety about things that are not in my control. Help me to take the next step. Help relieve me of worry over what comes after that, for I know, in faith, that you will provide what I truly need. Amen.

Phil Fox Rose
Prayers & Blessings

Prayer for Lent

Gracious and merciful God, as we begin our Lenten journey, we are asked to be more gracious and merciful ourselves. Yet we often avoid looking into our own hearts for fear of learning the extent to which we have lost our way. As we continue our travels, help us, we pray, to appreciate that your limitless love, compassion and forgiveness always journey with us. Amen.

Terence Hegarty

For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in kindness to all who call upon you. Hearken, O Lord, to my prayer and attend to the sound of my pleading.

Psalm 86:5-6

Acknowledgments

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