

Journey to New Life

Introduction

If you are a young adult who has been looking for a way to make this Lent a more spiritual time, this book is for you. These reflections have been written by people in their twenties and thirties. These young adults have taken the readings for the season of Lent and used them as a springboard for their own prayerful thought and reflection. Now they invite you to do the same.

If you set aside time each day during Lent for prayer and meditation on Scripture, you will grow in a richer appreciation of the treasures the season of Lent holds. This introduction provides an overview of Lent and includes concrete suggestions for using the readings and reflections in this book.

Lent: A Journey to New Life

The season of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and officially concludes on Holy Thursday before the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper. The evening of Holy Thursday begins the Triduum (literally, "three days") during which the Church celebrates the events of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This book will offer reflections based on readings given in the *Lectionary* for each day of Lent and the Triduum.

Lent is a time of repentance and renewal when the Church asks us to focus on the most basic and essential elements of our faith. Actually, the purpose and function of Lent are threefold. First, it is time during which we prepare those who will be baptized at the Easter Vigil. During this season we call these people "the elect." Second, it is a time for those of us who are already baptized to prepare to renew our commitment to the Christian life and mission. Third, as individuals and as a Church we examine the way we live to see if it reflects the life in Christ. This threefold focus of Lent reminds us of the ongoing need for repentance, purification, renewal and enlightenment. It is a journey toward the new life of Christ that comes to us in Baptism.

The Scripture readings assigned for each of the days of Lent guide us through a thorough reflection on the essentials of Christian faith. Some have a clear, baptismal emphasis. Others stress the need for prayer, sacrifice and rebirth. Later in Lent, they focus our attention on the events leading up to the death and resurrection of the Lord.

The theme for each day's readings takes its cue from the Gospel assigned for that day. The Old Testament readings complement or relate to the message of the Gospel. The Sunday readings from the letters of the early Church fit with the other readings and, to whatever extent possible, provide a connection between them.

The weekday readings remain the same each year, but the Sunday readings have a three-year cycle. All three sets of readings are noted on the top of pages for the Sundays of Lent. In 1999, use Cycle A; in 2000, use Cycle B; in 2001, use Cycle C; in 2002, return to Cycle A, and so on.

How to Use This Book

You can use the readings of Lent and the reflections contained in this book in many ways. If you only have a few minutes each morning, read the Scripture readings and meditate for a few moments on the reflection offered for that day. Keep the questions for reflection in mind as you go about your daily routine. Perhaps you can return to those questions again in the evening.

If you would like to devote more time to prayers and reflection during Lent, consider using the following format. It presumes about fifteen to thirty minutes a day. Adapt it to best fit your needs.

1 Pick a Time

Not everyone prays at the same time. Prayer can happen early in the morning, late at night, or at any other conducive time. When can you find 15-30 minutes in your day for prayer and reflection? First thing in the morning? During lunch hour or some other break in your day? When you get back to the dorm or home from work? Just before you go to bed? The key is to make a commitment to keeping whatever time you choose. After a couple of days, if you find that the time you have picked isn't working, re-negotiate a new time with yourself.

2 Create a Space

Pray anywhere you like. Find a place that is conducive for you. You may like to go to a chapel or nearby church. You may pray best in your bedroom or living room or while you walk in the woods or in a park. If need be, you can pray at work or on campus as long as you can find some quiet space. Finding a regular place and time for prayer will help you remain faithful to your commitment.

A little atmosphere can help. Light a particular candle as an indication that this is prayer time. Arrange a "prayer corner" in your room or home with a few simple things such as a Bible, candles, plants, and some items that have personal meaning. Try playing quiet music; a walkman can help make any place a bit more reflective. Find a list of suggested music at the end of this introduction.

3 Focus on the Scripture Readings

The Scripture readings for daily Mass during Lent serve as the basis for the daily reflections. The Scripture readings are cited at the top of each page. Locate them in your Bible, but before you read them, pause and open your heart to God's Word. Put aside any other concerns or distractions and ask God to let the message of these readings touch your heart and mind.

Begin with the first reading. Pause and ask yourself what it is saying. Take time to reread portions that are unclear. Let your mind and heart take you wherever the Spirit leads. After a while, read the Gospel. Follow the same procedure just described. After spending some quiet reflection time, ask yourself what God might be saying to you through these readings. Do they have some immediate relevance to your experience?

4 Read the Reflection for the Day

Read the reflection that this guide offers for that day. How is the reflection of that young adult similar to or different from your own? What does it challenge or inspire you to think or pray about?

Each entry concludes with questions for reflection. Spend some time considering your response to each of the questions.

5 Journal Time

You may find journaling a useful and effective way to pray. To journal is to write down your thoughts and prayers. You might want to use the space provided on each page of this book, or purchase a blank book at a local store to create your own journal.

Because prayer is conversation with God, in your journal you might write what you want to say to God or the things that you want to remember from your conversation with God. Consider journaling your responses to the questions proposed for each day.

6 Say Thanks

Conclude by thanking God for the time you have spent in prayer. Thank God for the insights you have received, the challenges you have heard, and the feelings that were raised. Tell God in your own words how grateful you are.

Suggestions for Reflective Music

Many people find quiet, reflective music a help for entering into prayer. Instrumental music can provide a backdrop for reading and reflection. Music with words that highlight Lenten themes can serve as a complement to the readings and prayers.

There are many sources for such music. Some are available at the usual music outlets. Others can be found at religious goods stores or by ordering them from the publisher. The following suggestions indicate a few offerings that are readily available. If your local religious bookstore does not have them, you can order them directly from Oregon Catholic Press – call 800-LITURGY, or e-mail to liturgy@ocp.org.

Instrumental Music

Tom Conry, *Vigil: Easter*

Tom Conry, *Ashes*

David Haas, *I Am Yours Today*

Paul Inwood, *Eternity*

Tom Kendzia, *I, The Lord*

Tom Kendzia, *Come to the Water, Volume I*

Tom Kendzia, *Come to the Water, Volume II*

Tom Kendzia, *Come to the Water, Volume III*

Carey Landry & Carol Jean Kinghorn, *Gentle Sounds*

Carey Landry & Carol Jean Kinghorn, *Gentle Sounds, Volume 2*

Carey Landry & Carol Jean Kinghorn, *Gentle Sounds, Volume 3*

Patrick Loomis, *Free Fall*

Gregory Norbet, *Waiting Moments*

Tim Smith, *Be Not Afraid*

Music with Words

Grayson Warren Brown, *Half Way Home*

Bernadette Farrell, *Christ, Be Our Light*

Bob Hurd, *Alleluia, Give the Glory*

Bob Hurd, *Behold the Cross*

Gregory Norbet, *Morning Prayer/Evening Prayer*

St. Thomas More Group, *Easter Mysteries*

Roc O'Connor, *Behold the Glory of God*

Suzanne Toolan, *Jesus Christ, Yesterday, Today and Forever*

Christopher Walker, *Christ Is Here*

Ash Wednesday

Joel 2:12-18 • 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2 • Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

Rend your hearts... Return to the Lord.

I have always thought of Lent as a time for some personal soul cleansing. When I was a child I worked hard at giving up some small thing to show that I was serious about doing penance. As I entered junior and senior high, I left a lot of that behind. Now that I am on my own, I am beginning to see the need to look more closely at my spiritual life. Lent seems like a good time for me to do some serious introspection. It is time to get my spiritual house in order, time to purify my motives. I might still give something up, but I will focus on doing some positive things to develop my Christian living.

What can I do this Lent to grow in my relationship with Christ? Is there some sacrifice I can make to remind me that the Lord must come first? How will my daily living reflect my desire to change this Lent?

Thursday after Ash Wednesday

Deuteronomy 30:15-20 • Luke 9:22-25

“I set before you life and death.”

Choices. I make so many of them every day. Big choices and little choices—insignificant things like what to wear, what to eat, where to go, who to hang out with, or important things like what major to choose in school, what person to marry, how to deal with a difficult boss, whether to stick with my current job or look for something else. And every choice has consequences. I’ve learned that over the years. But there is no bigger choice than the one I make each day to live as a follower of Jesus. It has all kinds of consequences for my daily living.

What are some recent consequences of my decisions to follow Jesus and his way of life? What crosses have I carried as a result? How have I been able to “choose life?”

Friday after Ash Wednesday

Isaiah 58:1-9 • Matthew 9:14-15

“This is the fasting that I wish . . .”

It would be a whole lot easier to give up candy or smoking for Lent. But God asks me today to feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, clothe the naked, and remove oppression. Now that is real sacrifice for me. I can get so comfortable in my own ways, taking care of my own needs. This is one of the ways Lent stretches me. It challenges me to move out of myself and out to others. Every year, Lent challenges me to grow.

What are the ways that I can reach out to those in need? What personal sacrifice I am being asked to make in doing so?

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

Isaiah 58:9-14 • Luke 5:27-32

*“I have not come to invite the self-righteous to a change of heart,
but sinners.”*

Sometimes I can become very self-righteous, especially if I am tired or feel threatened. Then watch out. I know that I am right and everybody else had better pay attention. I can be unbearable! Unfortunately my family and the others I love often bear the brunt of my self-righteous attitude. When I realize what I have done and the ways I have hurt them, I struggle to humble myself and to ask them for forgiveness. It is hard to admit that I am wrong. It helps to know that Jesus came precisely to help people like me—a sinner.

Knowing I am a sinner, how can I recognize my need for Jesus? When do I seek his help to avoid sin? How have I experienced his forgiveness and healing?

First Sunday of Lent

Cycle A Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7 • Romans 5:12-19 • Matthew 4:1-11

Cycle B Genesis 9:8-15 • 1 Peter 3:18-22 • Mark 1:2-15

Cycle C Deuteronomy 26: 4-10 • Romans 10:8-13 • Luke 4:1-13

Jesus experienced temptation in the desert.

Temptation as described in the dictionary means “that which is presented to the mind as an inducement to evil; an enticement.” Nearly every day something tempts us, whether it’s a fattening food or something we want to buy that we really don’t need. And often there are bigger temptations that enter our lives, things that could destroy our relationships with others or with God. I believe that if we look beyond the actual temptation to the results we’ll encounter if we submit to it, we may be able to find within ourselves the willpower to resist. God will judge us on how we served God’s will. This should be our focus throughout our lives. Temptations come and go... God is forever.

Have I ever chosen to give in to a temptation, knowing that it would disappoint God? Is there currently something tempting me? How will I handle this situation?

Monday, 1st Week of Lent

Leviticus 19:1-2,11-18 • Matthew 25:31-46

Judge your neighbor justly.

In my high school, as in any high school, I found all types of people—those from rich families and those from poor. There were mostly people like myself, in the middle class. The rich wore nice, new clothes, rarely the same thing twice. The poorer of the class could be seen in the same outfit more than once a week. Wanting to be classified as “better,” we middle class teens worked hard to impress the rich classmates and shun the poor. I was, and still am, the type of person who befriends those in greater need of a friend. Because of this, I have found many meaningful and lasting friendships, often at the expense of my “image.” But I have discovered that it feels so wonderful to make someone feel loved; because of that feeling and its results, nothing else matters.

Am I accepting those in need of my acceptance? Do I look at people for who they really are rather than the image they project? Will I know if God is speaking to me through someone else—especially if society does not consider that person a success by society’s measure?

Tuesday, 1st Week of Lent

Isaiah 55:10-11 • Matthew 6:7-15

“My word carries out my will.”

After much research into several occupations, I decided to pursue a career in the field of Occupational Therapy. I chose this career as a way of equipping myself to bring the most important thing to people in need—their independence. With this independence come increased self-esteem and self-worth. I feel so fortunate to be part of a team of people who have taken helpless individuals and increased their abilities and self-sufficiency. Watching them progress from helplessness to independence has made me confident I chose the right career. It is not just because of the successful feeling it gives me; I also feel I am doing my part to help my brothers and sisters in Christ.

On what basis did I choose my career? What values guided me? Am I doing my part to make the world a happier, better place? Am I pleasing God by the way I am living my life?

Wednesday, 1st Week of Lent

Jonah 3:1-10 • Luke 11:29-32

Nineveh was converted from its evil ways.

Every day in this world someone kills someone else. Every day someone steals something from someone else. Someone cheats on a spouse. Someone abuses a child. Someone has an abortion. Every day. In the Bible, when Jonah warned the Ninevites to change their evil ways or be destroyed in 40 days, they immediately fasted and turned from evil. What if someone came forward now with the same warning? Would evil stop? Will people doing bad things listen to the warning? What will it take for God's word to be heeded in our day and age?

What can I do to rid the world of evil? What if God spoke to me and asked me to bring a warning to those doing evil? Would I be too frightened to confront them?

Thursday, 1st Week of Lent

Esther C:12, 14-16, 23-25 • Matthew 7:7-12

“Treat others the way you would have them treat you.”

My ten-year-old nephew's little league team was selling candy bars to raise money for the team. I offered to walk door-to-door with him to ask people to buy a bar for fifty cents. I was amazed at the number of stern “no's” he received, along with the looks of disgust at having been bothered by such a thing. My nephew walked away from those rejections with a sad face. In order to continue, he needed encouragement. This experience made me wonder how people can treat children so coldly. I doubt that fifty cents would hurt anyone's budget too terribly. And if they treat innocent children coldly, how must they treat their peers?

Do I try my hardest to treat all others with respect? When someone requests something of me, do I turn that person away rudely or make an attempt to be helpful or at least polite?

Friday, 1st Week of Lent

Ezekiel 18:21-28 • Matthew 5:20-26

“Go first and be reconciled with your brother or sister.”

We all are born on this earth as innocent beings, helpless children in need of shaping and training in what is good and right. Let's say one of these children is brought up to be good and do good in the world. Another is treated unfairly and unjustly and seeks revenge on the world by committing criminal acts. What if one day the evil-doer says, “I want to learn to be good; I'm sorry that I was bad?” Will the one raised “good” be able to forgive the bad the other has done? Will he or she help the other become good or will he or she shun the person for the evil previously done? If the “good person” gave the other a chance, a brand new beginning, does it not make sense that the other could and would become good, too? If the Lord forgives the sins of all, we should rejoice and pray that our brothers and sisters who have strayed will have a place in Heaven. We rejoice not because of the bad they did, but because they have changed and sought forgiveness from us and from God.

Am I able to forgive others their failings, especially those who sin against me? Have I sought forgiveness from those whom I have hurt? How did their response make me feel?

Saturday, 1st Week of Lent

Deuteronomy 26:16-19 • Matthew 5:43-48

“If you love those who love you, what merit is there in that?”

I have two beautiful little children and a terrific husband. The love I feel for them is indescribable. I also love my mom and dad and brother and sisters deeply and unconditionally. I have grown to love my husband's family as my own. All of these people I mention are so easy to love, and I would die for them. But what about the other people in my life, like my neighbor who starts up his loud motorcycle at 1:00 a.m. every day? Or the supervisor I have at work who seemingly enjoys belittling me? Or the college roommate I had who stole money and clothing from me? How can I say I love these people? It is so difficult. But what if something bad were to happen to them? How would I feel then? Would I not try to come to their aid if the need arose? I would! I think it is in this sense that I can say that I love them. I love them as my brothers and sisters in Christ. I pray for their well-being, health and happiness.

Do I try hard enough to love others besides my family? Do I make it easy for others to love me?

Second Sunday of Lent

Cycle A Genesis 12:1-4 • 2 Timothy 1:8-10 • Matthew 17:1-9

Cycle B Genesis 22:1-29, 10-13, 15-18 • Romans 8:31-34 • Mark 9:2-10

Cycle C Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18 • Philippians 3:17- 4:1 • Luke 9:28-36

Abraham put his faith in the Lord.

There are often times when I am tempted to take the easy road in life. Instead of speaking my views and sharing my feelings, I sometimes hide behind others and solemnly agree with them rather than risk rejection. At these times, I am afraid to let my faith show. It is just too big a risk. Abraham and the disciples of Jesus gave up everything for God, and yet I sometimes can't even give up my own security to speak out about what I believe. I pray for the strength to do so, for I know God will reward me later.

How often do I hide behind others instead of taking a risk? Isn't risk-taking sometimes worth a later reward?

Monday, 2nd Week of Lent

Daniel 9:4-10 • Luke 6:36-38

“We have sinned, we have done wrong.”

Sin. We all do it, try as we might to follow the way of the Lord. Sin is always there. God knows we sin, so why try to hide it? Instead, shouldn't we just ask for God's forgiveness? Asking isn't always as easy as it sounds, however. It often starts with a person whom we've sinned against. It's much easier to ask God for forgiveness than to ask a person we see in the flesh. But we must always remember that God is that person we see!

How often do I not ask someone for forgiveness? Do I always forgive others when they ask my forgiveness?

Tuesday, 2nd Week of Lent

Isaiah 1:10, 16-20 • Matthew 23:1-12

They do not practice what they preach.

“Do as I say, not as I do.” How often have I heard that expression? It’s a lot easier to say something than it is to actually do something. Saying I will pray to God every day is very different from actually praying to God every day. Talking about being loving and forgiving toward people at work is one thing; to put it into practice takes a lot more effort. I recognize the need to be patient with my parents and roommate, but it is really hard to live it out. It is a daily struggle to “walk the talk.”

Am I truly following God’s word? Do I make an effort each day to live my faith in all the daily circumstances of life? What opportunities may come my way today to “walk the talk?”

Wednesday, 2nd Week of Lent

Jeremiah 18:18-20 • Matthew 20:17-28

The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve.

Me! Me! Me! How often do we put ourselves before others? The other day I was at the supermarket and saw this me! me! me! concept several times. An impatient shove of a cart that was in the way... a quick maneuver to beat someone to a parking spot... a struggling mother no one would help pick up the boxes her child had accidentally knocked off the shelf. How disappointed Jesus would be if He was walking down the aisles that day. Didn't he teach us to serve others first?

How often do I rush by others in need? Am I the person who lets a car in or do I quickly fill in the gap so no one else can squeeze in ahead of me? Do I serve others or expect to be served?

Thursday, 2nd Week of Lent

Jeremiah 17:5-10 • Luke 16:19-31

Lazarus is at your door.

My mailbox is full of requests for donations to worthy causes. As I walk to work I pass countless people asking for a handout. My parish is always asking for help with one project or another. My friends never hesitate to ask for favors. And today someone at work asked for a donation to help out a family whose home was damaged by fire. I try to respond positively to as many of these requests as I can, but sometimes I walk right by Lazarus at my door. I cannot give to everyone who asks, but I am able to help more people than I currently do.

How do I decide to whom I will give help or to what cause I should donate ? Am I sometimes selfish with my time and money? Who is Lazarus at my door today?

Friday, 2nd Week of Lent

Genesis 37:3-4, 12-13, 17-18 • Matthew 21:33-43, 45-46

“They realized he was speaking about them.”

There are days when I find myself wishing I had what someone else has. I wish that I had a better house, a new car or better-paying job. I know I should be grateful for what I have, which is more than what many people have. But sometimes it is easier said than done. I never go as far as Joseph’s brothers or the vineyard tenants, of course, but are my thoughts any different from theirs? Their thoughts were of jealousy—so are mine. Luckily I don’t act out my jealousy in such drastic ways, but I have been known to stretch the truth or think ill thoughts due to my jealous feelings. Forgive me, Lord.

Do I find myself feeling jealousy towards others? Have I ever acted out because of my jealousy?

Saturday, 2nd Week of Lent

Micah 7:14-15, 18-20 • Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

“Coming to his senses at last...”

Now that I am on my own and no longer living with my parents, I see things through a new perspective. I know now how much they really love me. It didn't matter what I did or what I said. They always loved me and forgave me for my wrong doings. I never appreciated it when I was with them every day, but now that I am not always with them, I've really come to appreciate their love and forgiveness. God is like that, too. God will always love us and forgive us. All we need to do is ask.

How often do I take my parents for granted? Do I ever tell my parents that I love them and appreciate them?

Third Sunday of Lent

Cycle A Exodus 17:3-7 • Romans 5:1-2, 5-8 • John 4:5-42

Cycle B Exodus 20:1-17 • 1 Corinthians 1:22-25 • John 2:13-25

Cycle C Exodus 31:8, 13-15 • 1 Corinthians 10:1-12 • Luke 13:1-9

Give us water to drink.

Isn't it appropriate that the Lord uses water as a symbol of the eternal life awaiting us if we choose to "drink?" Our bodies need water to survive. Water cleanses us, refreshes, and also has power, as seen in floods. But once we use it, we need it again. I can go out for a drink with my friends and enjoy not only quenching my body's thirst but also my heart's with the camaraderie that goes with social drinking. But tomorrow I will still thirst, because the well within my soul is dry. God offers us a drink of living water. When we fill ourselves with it, we will never go dry again.

How often do I seek the spiritual water God offers me, water that will renew my soul and overcome my personal trials? How do I satisfy others' thirst for love and peace and justice? Do I, like the Samaritan woman, witness the living water of God to other people?

Monday, 3rd Week of Lent

2 Kings 5:1-15 • Luke 4:24-30

“No prophet gains acceptance in his native place.”

Jesus said that a prophet is never accepted in his homeland. I can relate to this. In their efforts to “protect” us, the people we love the most often put down our goals and ambitions, not necessarily to keep us from growing, but to prevent pain from entering our lives. But in order to grow, we need to take these risks and open ourselves to the possibility of hurt. Sometimes we’ll need to seek out strangers in pursuing that which we feel called to do. And we can draw strength from God in times of frustration and rejection because we’re confident we are doing God’s will.

How am I called to be a witness in my home, at work and in my community? How do I draw strength from God in trying times? Am I open to God using me in ways with which I am less familiar? Do I ever resist the direction God gives me?

Tuesday, 3rd Week of Lent

Daniel 3:25, 34-43 • Matthew 18:21-35

How often must I forgive my brother or sister?

Daniel and his companions had faith that helped them resist temptation and conquer adversity. They offered themselves as sacrifices to God, and God came through for them. Isn't the amount of love God shows for all of us, regardless of how sinful we are, amazing? God has freely offered forgiveness to each of us! All we have to do is accept it. But we must also show responsibility by forgiving each other without limit. Jesus emphasized the importance of our forgiving others, and tells us we face serious consequences if we fail to forgive.

How strong is my faith? Do I believe that God makes good of my suffering as he did for Daniel? Can I see God being faithful to me as I go through the challenges of working and raising a family? Am I confident that Christ is always beside me, even when I feel far away from him?

Wednesday, 3rd Week of Lent

Deuteronomy 4:1, 5-9 • Matthew 5:17-19

Whoever fulfills these commands will be great.

God told Moses to tell the people to observe his laws and teach them to future generations. Isn't it great that God wants to be so close to us and show us what perfect justice is? Then Jesus came and fulfilled the law by adding one simple ingredient—unconditional love. Sometimes it's so difficult to feel loving toward people who have hurt us. Many people want to go back to Mosaic law. An "eye for an eye" is probably the greatest example of this, as we hear news about efforts to reinstate the death penalty in a particular state after a heinous crime has been committed. But the teachings of Jesus are with us forever, and we need to fight the urge to harden our hearts when fellow human beings sin against us.

Do I recognize the intimate relationship that God wants to have with me? Do I examine my conscience on a regular basis, focusing on how I've sinned against God, against the Church, against my community? Do I neglect my social obligations of charity and justice?

Thursday, 3rd Week of Lent

Jeremiah 7:23-28 • Luke 11:14-23

“The one who is not with me is against me.”

Jesus asks us to make a choice to be either for or against him. There can be no neutrality where he is concerned. Taking a stand with Jesus can be challenging in our lives. I can always see the pros and cons of a given situation, and I want to choose a little of both sides and reject a little of both. But Jesus tells us we can't straddle the fence. Even in small things, he calls us to follow him. Whatever we do—prayer, successes, failures—we can offer to him, and he will bless us for doing good in his name.

So how do I show Jesus that I'm totally with him? Do I walk his walk? What are my insecurities and uncertainties that interfere with my being with God one hundred percent? Do my lifestyle and values reflect a total commitment to Jesus?

Friday, 3rd Week of Lent

Hosea 14:2-10 • Mark 12:28-34

“You are not far from the Reign of God.”

The world is such a complex place. I see in front of me so many paths I can choose to follow, each one unique. There is so much I can learn—knowledge of just about everything is at my fingertips. But isn't it good to know that one path is perfectly clear—the path to God? Jesus simplified all of God's laws into one great commandment—to love the Lord with all our hearts, understanding and strength, and to love others as we love ourselves. How simple! How precise!

How well do I keep this greatest commandment? Does God really come first in all my thoughts, feelings and actions? How do I show God that I love him with my whole being at home or at work or in school? How do I show others my love and respect for them?

Saturday, 3rd Week of Lent

Hosea 6:1-6 • Luke 18:9-14

Whoever humbles oneself shall be exalted by God.

In our success-oriented culture, it can be difficult to admit failure. We are not supposed to acknowledge our faults and weaknesses. I often see this in my workplace. There is a big difference in attitude between the executives and the hourly workers. I've often wondered what it feels like to be an executive, to be able to look down on the staff, to feel superior. But the corporate structure I experience is the very thing Jesus argued against. We are to humble ourselves and acknowledge our sinfulness, to see ourselves as no better than others.

As I grow in my career, do I recognize my imperfections and treat my co-workers the way I wish them to treat me? Am I aware of my need for God? Am I able to accept God's graciousness and unconditional love and, in return, extend that love and forgiveness to others?

Fourth Sunday of Lent

Cycle A 1 Samuel 16:1, 6-7, 10-13 • Ephesians 5:8-14 • John 9:1-41

Cycle B 2 Chronicles 36:14-17, 19-23 • Ephesians 24-10 • John 3:14-21

Cycle C Joshua 5:9, 10-12 • 2 Corinthians 5:17-21 • Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

“Do not judge from appearances.”

How many times have I judged someone by their appearance? The receptionist at the doctor's office who wears her make-up in a way that I wouldn't. The man downtown who has no teeth and is shuffling through the streets in tattered clothes. The women at the gym who speak with low male-like voices and have masculine physiques. The gas station attendant with long hair and bloodshot eyes. The beautiful woman at work who receives so much attention. The great looking guy who must be conceited and self-centered. Then I look in the mirror. Do I want people to judge me for my less-than-perfect complexion? the less-than-designer wardrobe I can afford? or for the physique I don't have? No, I would like them to see the beauty of God's creation within me and the gifts He has bestowed on me.

The next time I see someone, will I look at them with the same loving eyes as God or with the judging eyes of human beings? How can I become less judgmental?

Monday, 4th Week of Lent

Isaiah 65:17-21 • John 4:43-54

“There shall always be rejoicing and happiness in what I create.”

The past few weeks have been incredibly busy. I was preparing to go out of town on vacation, committed to family obligations, facing a large stack of unread mail and laundry, working, planning activities for the young adults of our parish, and generally trying to keep my head above water. The result was anxiety and fatigue. My focus was misdirected. Wasn't it God who created the opportunity for me to go on vacation? my loving, supporting family? my ability to read and function as an adult in society? my desire to help my fellow young adults grow in their faith? Isn't it God who calls me to rejoice in His creation with Him? Isn't it God who calls me to be glad in the life He has given me and in the path in which He is guiding me?

What can I do to decrease my anxiety and increase my trust in God? What are the opportunities in my life to show my trust in Christ?

Tuesday 4th Week of Lent

Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12 • John 5:1-3, 5-16

“Do you want to get well?”

Sometimes the answer is no. Sometimes I would rather accept despair when my prayers are not answered according to my will. Sometimes I would rather harbor anger toward someone who wronged me. Sometimes I enjoy the attentive concern of family when I'm not feeling well. It is at these times that I am saying no to God's healing power and rejecting His grace. It is at these times that I am succumbing to a place of perpetual illness, with no motivation to respond to God's call for healing.

What areas of my life have I kept hidden from the healing power of God? my selfishness? my inability to forgive those who have wronged me? my unwillingness to ask for forgiveness through the Sacrament of Reconciliation? Do I have the courage to follow Jesus' instructions, to “take up my mat and walk?”

Wednesday, 4th Week of Lent

Isaiah 49:8-15 • John 5:17-30

The Son can do only what he sees his Father doing.

As a child, I had several role models and people I emulate—my mother and father, my older sister, my aunt, my grandmother, my brother. As I watch my niece and nephew grow through their toddler years, I see them picking up the gestures and manner of speech of the people in my family. Now that I am an adult in the church, who do I emulate—people who are driven by the desire for material goods, societal values of “do whatever feels good” or “do whatever you have to do to get ahead?” Or do I emulate the teachings of Jesus? the man down the street who always helps plow his elderly neighbor’s driveway? the woman behind the checkout counter who has smiled and talked with every customer? the victims of crime who forgive and pray for their enemies? the humble request for forgiveness from a co-worker who misdirected their frustration at me?

Who are the people I admire? What Christian virtues or values do I admire in them? How have I tried to imitate them in my life?

Thursday, 4th Week of Lent

Exodus 32:7-14 • John 5:31-47

“There is another who testifies on my behalf.”

I admire those who can testify to others about their faith in Jesus. I have a friend who can speak about her faith freely without offending anyone. She can do it in a way that puts people at ease. I pray about being able to speak to others more boldly about my faith. Yet, this has never come easy and I often wonder why. It seems that some people have a gift to evangelize. I have often encountered people who came to know the Lord in a deeper way by listening to some individual's personal testimony. I'd like to be able to share my testimony with others.

Do I feel the Lord calling me to share my faith with others? Do I hear the Lord calling me to testify about his love to a particular individual? What would it take for me to be able to share my faith with that person in the next few days?

Friday, 4th Week of Lent

Wisdom 2:1, 12-22 • John 7:1-2, 10, 25-30

The wicked said... "Let us beset the just one because he is obnoxious to us."

Nothing could sound more hopeless to me than these words from the "wicked." Yet, how many times have I been caught up in things of this world and have lost sight of the Risen Christ? At those times life does become troublesome. The car that needs repair, the children who are arguing, the lack of solitude and quiet I so desperately need, all become insurmountable obstacles. Today I will remind myself Christ is Risen, that his death and resurrection bring hope, joy and new life, and that life is lived at its best when it's lived in Him and for Him!

In which things of the world am I caught up? What brings me a sense of hope amid the trials and wickedness I experience around me? How can I share this hope with others?

Saturday, 4th Week of Lent

Jeremiah 11:18-20 • John 7:40-53

“Others said, ‘He is the Christ.’”

I remember being ten years old and making a choice to allow Jesus into my heart to be my Savior. It was at that point that I realized what “Christ” meant. It has always amazed me how some people find Christ after years of difficulty and adversity. They realize that Christ is the only one who can fill the void in their hearts and lives. That conviction has not always been as strong in my life. At times it has been challenged. I know friends who have had doubts about the place Christ has in their lives. Some have walked away from him. Others have searched and struggled and regained a strong faith.

How often do I affirm my belief that Jesus is my Savior? Have I struggled with keeping faith in him? Have I been able to help friends with their own struggles of faith?

Fifth Sunday of Lent

Cycle A Ezekiel 37: 12-14 • Romans 8: 8-11 • John 11: 1-45

Cycle B Jeremiah 31: 31-34 • Hebrews 5: 7-9 • John 12: 20-33

Cycle C Isaiah 43: 16-21 • Philippians 3: 8-14 • John 8: 1-11

God is always doing something new.

I really appreciate the opportunity to make a fresh start. Sometimes when I've messed up a project at work, I just throw it out and start over. It's good to begin anew. Jesus often gave people a new start. He raised dead people to life. He forgave people their sins. He cured the sick and crippled. He restored sight to the blind. He wanted people to be able to begin again. When that grain of wheat dies, it begins a whole new plant. Sometimes I have to let go of the past and be ready to begin again. God is a God of new beginnings.

How have I taken the opportunity God gives me to begin again? Do I thank God often for the opportunity to start over? Am I willing to give other people in my life the same opportunity?

Monday, 5th Week of Lent

Daniel 13:1-9, 15-17, 19-30, 33-62 • John 8:1-11

Has no one condemned you?

How quickly I rush to judge and condemn people! I am like the scribes and Pharisees in the Gospel. A woman I went to school with became pregnant and I immediately judged her. The same is true for a guy at work who I heard is HIV+. Now I find myself thinking less of these people. I've judged them and condemned them outright. Yet Jesus, who certainly has every right to condemn us, chose not to condemn the woman caught in adultery.

I have made some mistakes myself and always appreciated the kindness and compassion that was shown to me by those people who accepted me and loved me nonetheless. Why do I find it so hard to have that same nonjudgmental attitude toward others?

Can I make an effort today to be less judgmental of others? Can I find it in my heart to withhold my condemnation of those who do wrong? How can I bring the compassionate forgiveness of Christ to others?

Tuesday, 5th Week of Lent

Numbers 21:4-9 • John 8:21-30

“The people complained against God. . .”

There have been times when I wondered what God was doing with me. I have felt abandoned and lost, like the Israelites wandering in the desert. I have questioned whether God really is looking out for me. Sometimes this happens when I am dissatisfied with my job: “Lord, why did you bring me to this awful place?” At other times, I wonder why God has left me single for so long. And I also ask why he can allow so much suffering and sickness in the world. Fortunately, I am comfortable talking freely with God about these things. Sometimes I let God know what is on my mind and in my heart. God listens and I think he understands my slowness of faith. Somehow complaining to God doesn’t strike me as a sin.

When do I complain against God in my life? How does God act toward my complaining?

Wednesday, 5th Week of Lent

Daniel 3:14-20, 91-92, 95 • John 8:31-42

Being true to our convictions and beliefs

I admire people who have the conviction to stand up for their principles no matter what the consequence. I know a young family that withholds the federal excise tax from their phone bill payment because it goes to creating weapons of war. They will not contribute to something they don't believe in. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused to follow the king's command rather than serve or worship any alien god. I wish I had that kind of conviction. I struggle to stand up for the things I believe in but often back off. Like the other day when someone at work told a racial joke. I wanted to say that I didn't appreciate it, but just walked away instead. I pray every day for the courage to stand up for my convictions.

What beliefs, principles or values am I willing to stand up for? Have I been able to be strong in the face of opposition and challenges? How far am I willing to go in being true to my beliefs and values?

Thursday, 5th Week of Lent

Genesis 17: 3-9 • John 8: 51-59

Keeping your word.

My grandfather was a man of his word. If he told us as children that he would take us for ice cream, you could count on it. Once, when I was a teenager, he told me he would come to our football game if we got to the championship. Well, the game was scheduled for the same day as his retirement party. He told his friends he would be a little late because he had to go to his grandson's football game. When I became engaged, Grandpa was very sick, but he promised to be at my wedding. On the day of the wedding he was in the hospital, so the wedding party went to visit him after the Wedding Mass. I couldn't celebrate that day without him. I often think of Grandpa when I think of God's faithfulness. God keeps his word too.

Am I a person of my word? Am I keeping my part of our covenant with God? Can people count on me?

Friday, 5th Week of Lent

Jeremiah 20:10-13 • John 10:31-42

God protects us in time of trial

Jeremiah speaks about the ways that God protects those who are betrayed by friends and others who would entrap them. Jesus had the same kind of confidence. Amid all the problems of my life, I would like to have the same confidence in God. When I feel beset by financial problems, I want to trust that God will help me. When my friends seem to abandon me, I want to remember that God never does. When my boss belittles me in front of coworkers, I want to remember the treatment Jesus received from the authorities of his time. When I feel lost and afraid, I want to remember that “the Lord is with me, like a mighty champion.”

When are those times that I forget that God is my Protector? When are some times that God has helped me through difficult experiences?

Saturday, 5th Week of Lent

Ezekiel 37:21-28 • John 11:45-57

Jesus will gather together all the dispersed children of God.

Ezekiel speaks about God's desire to bring people together as one. Jesus had the same desire to gather all God's dispersed children. I often think about the lack of unity in our world. There are so many different religions and sometimes they are at odds with each other. Racial conflicts and stereotypes abound. I can see them at my workplace. Someone I work with, who was well-qualified for a promotion, was passed over because she was a African American woman. We all knew it. The unity and equal opportunity that Jesus sought still eludes us.

How do I experience a lack of unity in my daily life? What have I done to try to bring about greater unity in the places where I have some influence?

Passion (Palm) Sunday

Cycle A Isaiah 50:4-7 • Philippians 2:6-11 • Matthew 26:14–27:66

Cycle B Isaiah 50:4-7 • Philippians 2:6-11 • Mark 14:1–15:47

Cycle C Isaiah 50:4-7 • Philippians 2:6-11 • Luke 22:14–23:56

God disguised himself as a human being.

So often I forget the Lord can still be found “in appearance as a man.” He is both my caring mother and my difficult boss. He is my crying nephew, my sick sister, and the caller who interrupts my rest. But, ironically, so often I cannot humble myself and sit with him. I am too busy. Too bored. Or too preoccupied with myself to become, well, like Him.

This week, will I be the one to add to his insult by my indifference? Or will I take the time to play with the child, compliment my boss, or go out of my daily routine to help someone in need? Can I be the one to wipe the face of Christ around me?

Monday of Holy Week

Isaiah 42:1-7 • John 2:1-11

“Here is my servant... in whom I delight.”

There are some people in life in whom it is easy to delight. Isn't it wonderful to see the forgiving, gentle, or healing presence of Christ in a friend, a co-worker, a priest, a parent, a child or my spouse? But so often I do not say “I love you.” And even more often, I fail to show it. In what ways can I pour the sweet perfume of love? Mary was excessive in her care for Jesus. Her gratitude was so evident.

How can I show my love for the ways God has blessed me? Perhaps I could write a letter or send an e-mail to some friends who need to know they are a blessing.

Tuesday of Holy Week

Isaiah 49:1-6 • John 13:21-33, 36-38

“...But I said, ‘I have labored to no purpose.’”

Surely Jesus must have wondered if his efforts were purposeless, especially when His closest friends failed him. How could he think Himself successful when even his disciples didn't ‘get it’? In my own life it is so tempting to look at earthly results when I judge success. It is tempting to focus on grades or a degree, a job title, a salary, a marriage proposal or no marriage prospects. When friends talk about down payments on a house and I struggle to pay my rent, do I ask if my labor is “in vain?”

This week, can I believe that who I am before Christ is who I am? Can I trust that what is due to me “is in the Lord's hand?”

Wednesday of Holy Week

Isaiah 50:4-9 • Matthew 26:14-25

“Who is my accuser?” “...Is it I, Lord?”

Today’s readings call me to reflect on the times I’ve turned on Christ. When people talk about Jesus, do I become embarrassed or shy away? When others question or deride religious people or Christian values, do I seek the truth and defend others where possible? When it comes to tougher Catholic teachings, like abortion, capital punishment, or the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, do I speak the truth in love—even at work, among peers? Or do I readily betray him?

This week, instead, can I look for opportunities to share my faith in Christ? Can I pray for more conviction, more courage, more integrity?

Holy Thursday

Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14 • 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 • John 13:1-15

“As I have done, so you must do.”

Even serving the Lord can sometimes become an ego trip. People know I volunteer at my parish or help at the food pantry. I am known at work as a “holy person.” A few people even admire me for what I am able to do. Sometimes it’s nice to have the recognition. It’s possible to forget that the Lord can be served in the ordinary without praise or recognition.

This week, and especially today, Jesus calls me to serve him well— without being recognized for it. Can I “wash feet” by performing menial jobs—especially at work—without complaining? Or without gossiping about the boss or management? Can I baby sit a child, visit a grandparent or elderly relative, fold someone’s laundry without being asked—or thanked?

Good Friday

Isaiah 52:13–53:12 • Hebrews 4:14-16; 5: 7-9 • John 18:1–19:42

“He opened not his mouth...”

I think sometimes we forget Jesus was human. He could have run away. He could have cursed his killers. He could have lost his temper. He could have given in to self-pity. The Lord calls me to be like him—and so often I fail. When work loads mount, I find excuses. When my care breaks down, I lose control. When relationships fail or people disappoint me, I wallow in misery.

As I watch the Lord’s perfect acceptance in pain and suffering, I feel my own weaknesses, how I’ve resisted the slightest inconvenience. Can I bring my guilt to Jesus’ cross today? Can I surrender all my false starts and ask him to cover me with his blood? Can I turn to him and pledge again to serve him with all my heart? All my life?

Holy Saturday (Easter Vigil)

Genesis 1:1-22 • Genesis 22:1-18 • Exodus 14:15-15:1 • Isaiah 54:1-14
Isaiah 55:1-11 • Baruch 3:9-15, 32-41 • Ezekiel 36:16-28 • Romans 6:3-11

Cycle A Matthew 28:1-10; Cycle B Mark:16:1-8; Cycle C Luke 24:1-12

Today the Lord shows me that He is a man of His word. He says what he means and means what he says. So often I doubt God's promises and providence in my own life. But, if He would come and die and rise from the grave, why could He not help me in the here and now? If God the Father had a plan for His Son, does he not have a beautiful purpose for my life as well? The God who lives can help me find His job for my life, His spouse, His parish, His ministry.

Can I trust that His plans extend to me today? Can I hope that every sacrifice or suffering performed in love leads me one step closer to resurrection?

Easter Sunday

Acts 10:34, 37-43 • Colossians 3:14 or 1 Corinthians 5:6-8 • John 20:1-9

"The disciple saw and believed."

I cannot imagine what it must have been like for the first disciples of Jesus to witness his suffering and death. The one in whom they had placed all their hopes and dreams was violently taken from them. It must have hurt them deeply. I have had small disappointments in my life: a friend who let me down, a job prospect that fell through, some sickness and physical limitations. But I have never been so disappointed as Peter, John and the others. But Jesus comes through for them. By his rising he conquers death, sin and everything that is opposed to good. His rising vindicates everything he taught them. Seeing that Jesus was no longer lying in a tomb of death, brought his disciples new hope, new life, new joy. What a glorious day!

What does the resurrection of Jesus mean in my life? In what ways does it give me hope? How has Jesus conquered the problems I experience in life? How is this day a glorious day for me?