

**The Catholic Community of
St. Charles Borromeo**



Lenten Journal 2020

*When you call me, and come pray to me, I will listen to you.
Jeremiah 29:12*

Like Jeremiah, God invites us to prayer. The season of Lent is a time we set aside to reflect on our relationship with God through prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

For many years we have provided the Lenten Journal as a tool for daily prayer and reflection. The entries for each day were written by parishioners, reflecting on the readings for the day. We invite you to set aside time each day of Lent to pray. How do these stories touch you, challenge you, inspire you? How do they relate to your story?

February 26, 2020 Ash Wednesday

JL 2:12-18
2 COR 5:20—6:2
MT 6:1-6, 16-18

In Joel, God tells me, “*Return to me with all your heart. . . . Rend your heart not your garments.*”

Well, I think, I am nothing but whole hearted in my commitment to God so why would I need to “rend my heart.”

But then, I read further. I reflect. I get honest with myself. I realize, to give all my heart, is really not possible without rending my heart. In the Old Testament, tearing one’s garments was a sign of repentance. Clearly, God does not need me to tear my garment. There’s no real value there, it is ritual based and symbolic. What God needs is entry into the inner side of my faith – where it resides. That’s my heart. Tearing open my heart bares my soul in all its perfection and imperfection. This is, through Joel, what God asks of me – vulnerability first in tearing open my heart, and then repentance as I intentionally expose the sinfulness at my core. My ego, prejudices, misguided priorities, hatred, fears laid bare before God. This is a tough task – because justification, excuses, self-delusion have no part here, just truth, self-awareness and remorse

I confront my imperfect self in the light of God’s love. When I can give myself over to this process, His promise in return is to be merciful and renew my spirit.

I can reach a deeper, heartfelt, union with Christ. I can learn to take the measure of my faith from a different vantage point. I think many of us measure our faith in terms of performance and participation. The rituals, everything from how we pray, to how we act as Christians, scripted to an extent so that we feel our faith through our actions. For me, it’s not that I have not felt deep emotion as well, but Joel, as I understand him, is asking for heart first. It’s a journey of spiritual self-awareness born of an inner journey that feeds the outer journey.

As I read further, I can see in both Mathew and Corinthians, that a call to be an ambassador for Christ, or to live with humility, happens more fully if I first open my heart.

“Return to me,” Jesus says, “with all your heart.” And, I think to myself, this invitation is meant as a continuous opportunity to renew, re-do, re-shape, repent. I am always leaning toward a better version of myself. It is then that my heart will be whole, in him

Colleen Lang

February 27, 2020
Thursday after Ash Wednesday

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Luke 9:22-25

I've recently retired, and the question "what will I do with the next 30 years" can be quite daunting. Today's readings offer up some stark life-and-death choices. Moses offers "Today I have set before you life and prosperity, [or] death and doom"...according to Moses, we get to choose. In the Gospel, Jesus tells us "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it."

At first reading, these passages struck me as especially challenging, with no middle ground allowed between the two extremes on offer. But upon further reflection, I kept coming back to one word in each passage: "Today" from Moses, and "Daily" from Jesus. In a way, this replaces what feels like a 30-year decision with a series of daily choices. It's easy for me to procrastinate when I have 30 years; after all, I have plenty of time later, right? On the other hand, being presented with daily decisions and opportunities to contribute certainly add a sense of urgency. At the same time, I find comfort in these words. Regardless of what happened yesterday, or last month, or whenever in the past, I get to choose again today.

Today's readings are an invitation to me to continue to be alert for opportunities to make an impact on the lives of others, and to choose to act on those opportunities.

Frank Kelly

February 28, 2020
Friday after Ash Wednesday

Isaiah 58:1-9a
Matthew 9:14-15

“Why have we fasted,” they say, “and you have not seen it?” “Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?”

This called out to me the most because it is something that I see in my life every day. Often people will do nice things just because people are watching or they want to be rewarded. They expect that after one act of kindness, they are suddenly going to be noticed and applauded for what they did. In order to truly be a kind person in your heart, it should not matter if someone is watching. This reading reminded me of something that was done during my 7th and 8th grade at the upper middle school. The principal started this program called pause applause. This was an award given out to certain individuals who were seen doing good things for others at school. At the end of the day they would be announced on the loudspeakers and everyone would know they got an award. Unfortunately, most of the time, this just became a popularity contest to see who could do something nice in front of a teacher to get one. I remember not understanding the concept because I didn't get how they could applaud someone's character by just seeing certain actions that they did. People would be doing things just because a teacher was watching. This relates to the reading because in this, his followers say that they did good things, but he has not noticed yet. Often in life, just like in middle school, people are doing things just because others are watching. I have always tried to live my life as if no one is watching. Be kind to people because that is how you want to treat people. Do things for others because you want to, not because you are expecting things back. During this Lenten season, I am going to strive to be nicer to others and not expect things in return. Instead, just be content with the fact that I am being a good person because I want to be.

Lindsay Bouldin

February 29, 2020
Saturday after Ash Wednesday

Isaiah 58:9B-14

Luke 5:27-32

The message that I took away from Isaiah's passage is that the Lord will guide us through challenging times in our lives and provide us with immeasurable strength so long as we give to those who are in need of His love. In Luke's gospel the takeaway is that the sinners and troubled individuals in our world need our love more than most others. Keeping both of these lessons in mind here is how they have rung true in my life.

In May 2019 I was in the hospital for a week on suicide watch. My severe depression had escalated, and I knew that I needed help. While I was there, I distracted myself from all the negative thoughts in my mind by talking with the other patients. There is no question that I needed His love more than ever that week, but so did everyone around me. My conversations with other patients sparked new friendships because shortly after discussing the reasons why we were in the hospital, we started giving one another hope. Although we couldn't do it for ourselves at the time, we were able to encourage and reassure one another. By showing His love to other patients and allowing myself to receive it, I was able to find the strength to come out of the darkness.

In the hospital I met a guy in his twenties like me. On many occasions throughout the week he told me that he felt like I was his only friend. We formed a close friendship that week and I wrote a poem for him to express our special bond. When I read it to him, he cried and told me that no one has ever done something like that for him before. This man was previously in jail for dealing cocaine. He had been pistol-whipped, shot at, hit by a car and stabbed but none of that mattered. We cared about each other.

After being discharged from the hospital I joined an outpatient support program in Princeton where I continued to give and receive His love. Finally, when I felt I was healthy enough I went on two different week-long mission trips. My life will never be the same and I owe it all to Him.

Andrew Gordon

March 1, 2020
First Sunday of Lent

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

Romans 5:12-19

Matthew 4:1-22

"For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so, through the obedience of the one, the many will be made righteous."

In this reading for the first Sunday of Lent, St. Paul tells us that because Adam disobeyed God, his sin became our sin and spiritually we died. But St. Paul also reminds us that Jesus carried out God's will and died for us, so that we can regain spiritual life. This was difficult to understand at first, but I can see how the message can be relevant today.

It may seem unfair to be born with sin because of Adam's trespass in the Garden of Eden. We weren't there and didn't choose to disobey God. But in our own lives, sometimes our trespasses can have the same effect on others as Adam's sin had on us— when our cruel words or unkind actions toward one person cast a negative light on other family members, coworkers, classmates, or teammates; in other words, the sin of one becomes the sin of all. Yet consider what Jesus did—He obeyed God and forgave us through his death on the Cross, and asked nothing of us. It is difficult not to sin; we are challenged every day. But we also have opportunities every day to change our attitudes and ways, to speak and act with integrity. This reading helped me arrive at my Lenten goal—to use the example of Jesus' obedience, through respectable words and deeds, to show others the righteousness He gave us.

Marjorie Hale

March 2, 2020
Monday of the First Week of Lent

Leviticus 19:1-2,11-18

Matthew 25:31-46

I wrestled with this passage for a while... At first I was bogged down by the idea of separation, of right and left, sheep and goats, righteous and unrighteous... seeing how divided our world is right now and all the pain and suffering caused by these separations it just did not seem right to validate the concept of division.

Once I heard a priest say that we could not be saved alone, that it really did not matter if we did everything “right” while the others are doing it “wrong” (division thinking). He said that we are all meant to be saved, not one at a time, but all of us, together (no division). That thought resonated with me, not the finger pointing we often find ourselves involved in.

I was already late to hand in this message, so I sat down to write. I said a prayer. I stood quietly and cleared my head of the busyness and noise, as best as I could. I read the passage once again and paused for a moment, paying attention to what would arise.

Then suddenly, I realized that both - the ones on the right and the ones on the left – were confused with the verdict, they asked questions. I assume that all of them thought they were doing it “right” and that somebody else was doing it “wrong” and there’s the division again and out of that, confusion arises.

A little light popped in my head, this is not about left or right, righteous or unrighteous, it is about love, or rather, compassion.

When there is compassionate love, there is no division, no confusion. When I am compassionate to myself and acknowledge my brokenness, my shortcomings, my imperfections, my bias, I can more easily accept others and direct compassion to them and thus can recognize and serve their needs.

Mada Campos

March 3, 2020
Tuesday of the First Week of Lent

Isaiah 55: 10-11

Matthew 6,7-15

Establishing a nourishing prayer life has been a challenging process for me. I believe this is related to the inherent nature of prayer as a way to bring requests to God. Through prayer, we can ask for protection and forgiveness. We can supplicate for spiritual gifts like wisdom, patience and compassion. We can even pray for family, friends and the global community.

When I feel my prayers are answered, there is a certain sense of clarity and peace that sets in. It can feel like I have been equipped with a spiritual toolkit that will help me navigate any difficulty I encounter. However, when I feel my prayers are ignored, it's as though I have been abandoned by God in the face of unrelenting obstacles. This dichotomous relationship with prayer does not bode well for establishing a consistent connection with the divine. It not only leads me to doubt the efficacy of prayer but also works to undermine trust in my spiritual values.

As I see it, Matthew's message about prayer is pretty direct. Keep it simple. Don't get bogged down in the details. He references the pagans to advise us not to get stuck in reading a long winded list of requests to God.

The most powerful line to me is "Your Father knows what you need before you ask him". When I encounter setbacks in life, I often believe I have the remedies to navigate the given situation. Matthew is reminding me that maybe I don't have all the answers. That maybe it would be more fruitful to pray that God's will be done instead of asking for specific fixes to cope with life's circumstances. Praying in this simple but radical way requires a degree of surrender and letting go that only can emerge from a leap of faith.

John Neri

March 4, 2020
Wednesday of the First Week in Lent

Jonah 3:1-10
Luke 11:29-32

Luke 11:29-32. *“This generation is an evil generation.”* Jesus gave a rather stern warning to his generation when they demanded a sign from him. With the way we perceive the world in 2020, what would Jesus say of our generation? With the current political climate, social injustice, immigration legislation...I could list all of the discontent in the world, but that may take up pages and pages. Though there is so much bad news, which we hear every day, we need to find the strength to see and spread the good news.

“To make this generation rise from evil.” I was recently asked to be a sponsor for a member of the Confirmation class at St. Charles. When I was young, those confirmed were referred to as soldiers of Christ. This is not a military designation but a spiritual duty to fight the war between good and evil, light and darkness — a war between the human race and all the powers of hell.

Personally, I am impressed by the reflections and activities that we need to do together. It continues to strengthen my faith, and gives me hope that this generation through the gift of his Holy Spirit offers us freedom from sin and wisdom for our lives, if we listen to Him.

Jesus confirmed his message with many miracles in preparation for the greatest sign of all — his resurrection on the third day. Do you thirst for Godly wisdom?

During this Lenten season, ask the Lord to renew your mind and to increase your thirst for his wisdom.

Eva Nemeth

March 5, 2020
Thursday of the First Week in Lent

Esther C:12:14-16,23-25

Matthew 7:7-12

In today's readings, Esther appeals to God as a part of a Jewish minority facing growing opposition within her community. In her difficult situation, she turns to prayer. In the Gospel, Jesus instructs his disciples to pray and promises God's provision if they trust in Him. Society and culture have changed greatly since the times of these scripture passages, but the call to pray and trust is just as relevant.

We live in a world that is growing increasingly secular. Americans spend more and more time on platforms such as television, the internet and social media. While technologies such as these can bring people together and promote good, far too often they are a vehicle for antagonism and vitriol. We can feel like the minority with our opinions and values, but these situations can propel us to heed our calling as Christians to pray and to obey His command to love our neighbor. Sometimes I will contemplate these challenging events that are reported in the news, and I try to think of what I could have done to demonstrate the love to Christ to those involved. The answer is found in the final line of today's Gospel, "Do to others whatever you would have them do to you."

These scripture passages remind us that when we, like Esther, face hard times, we should turn to God. This doesn't mean we will always get the answers we seek, but through prayer we can grow closer to our Father. We learn to trust in his faithfulness. While we may not always see His plan as clearly as we may like, He assures us that He will not provide "a snake" when we need "a fish"

Steve Posluszny

March 6, 2020
Friday of the First Week of Lent

Ezekiel 18:21-28

Matthew 5:20-26

The urgency is clear: “Come to terms quickly.”

The consequences are clear: “You will be liable to the fire of hell.” “Truly I tell you, you will be thrown in prison and will never get out....”

Jesus really challenges us with this reading. It is easy for us to be lulled into a false sense of security and sanctity. We can tell ourselves that we have never done physical/bodily harm to anyone. We are law abiding. We love our family. We go to church. We pray. We are just fine with the Lord. But we are told in this reading in no uncertain terms that this is not enough. We must be “right” with all our brothers and sisters. In fact, we must be “right” with our brothers before the Lord wants to see us at the altar. And Jesus does not say be right with the brothers and sisters that we like or who think like we do!

In this world we live with quick and harsh judgements of others. If someone holds a different opinion or political view we can feel justified to think of them as less or perhaps ignorant or arrogant. Anger is provoked by the littlest things. Jesus reveals that these are serious offenses - as serious as doing physical harm. It seems we must go beyond the letter of the law and be on good terms with all people in our deepest heart. We must let go of the negative thoughts, anger and ridicule even with those that seem so difficult to understand or love. And do it quickly!

What can we do today and going forward to set it right? It seems it must start with the conscious decision to do so and then a request for grace for this day.

Maureen Yourenoff

March 7, 2020
Saturday of the First Week of Lent

Deuteronomy 26,16-19

Matthew 5:43-48

“...if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have?” I do not know precisely when it happened. I must not have been paying close attention. Somewhere along the way, volume overtook eloquence; antipathy supplanted empathy; discourse succumbed to dictate; reason became secondary to reaction; the artistry of debate was rendered unnecessary by a simple stroke of dismissal that declared a different voice or view, irrelevant. Was it after the understanding that what was ours to be expected fell in the shadow of disappointment? Perhaps it was when we mistook the separation of the body of church and state to mean removing the body of Christ’s words from our participation in the process of each. When the need to be right obscures the integrity of being righteous. So many times, the stories told in the Gospels seem of a time and place far from where I find myself. A thirst, today is no different. A large crowd drawn to follow a curious stranger. Together, listening, searching, and needing. They come upon a hill and gather at the base and listen as He ascends and speaks. But in an instant, as I read the words spoken, I am transported into that crowd. The sound of the voice, the simple truth of the words washes in and upon me and all the nameless faces with whom I share the moment, and we are all one, joined and rapt by the simple resonance of the truth He speaks. The weight of the words shock me back to the jarring discordance of this time, and I wonder how different our current state might be if the planks of our shared beliefs were fashioned with the splinters of the cross that supported those truths spoken that day on a hill.

Joe Darcy

March 8, 2020
Second Sunday of Lent

Genesis 12:1-4A

2Timothy 1:8B-10

Matthew 17:1-9

Today's gospel, Matthew 17: 1-9, is a familiar one – the Transfiguration. Jesus and three of his apostles went to a mountain to pray, and Jesus is transformed before their eyes into a dazzling image of light. Moses and Elijah also appear. For the apostles, I would venture to say this was an “aha” moment for they had witnessed the presence of God.

While perhaps not as dramatic, many of us have experienced these “aha” moments in our lives - events that served to strengthen our faith. The key is being able to recognize them, requiring a conscious decision to live in the moment. In our busy lives, it is not always easy to do.

I recalled a recent “aha” moment from my life. Last Thanksgiving, we hosted our family and friends, a group of 30. The size of the group was a bit daunting requiring two dining room tables, lots of food and much preparation. For our family, it was a year of highs and lows – two new babies and two cancer diagnoses. Just before Thanksgiving, both family members completed their cancer battles successfully and were given clean bills of health. As Thanksgiving Day approached, I was filled with a sense of anticipation hoping the day would go well.

There were the extraordinary moments: our parents holding their new great grandchildren and extra hugs for my father in law and niece for beating cancer. And then there were the ordinary moments of parents, siblings, cousins and friends just happy to be together. On that day, I witnessed joy and gratitude. Wanting to have a special memory of that day, I corralled this group of 30 onto my foyer staircase for a picture. In that moment, every single person was smiling or laughing. “Aha!” I thought to myself. “I am witnessing the presence of God.”

Joanie Sartorio

March 9, 2020
Monday of the Second Week in Lent

Daniel 9:4B-10

Luke 6:36-38

When I was reviewing the readings for today's reflection, I was immediately drawn to the Gospel of Luke verses. The part of verse 38: "For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you" resonated with me. To me it speaks to the relationships that we have with others. These relationships all intertwine. And to live and thrive with others in our various home, work, school and volunteer communities I believe we need to respect and accept that we are all different and with these differences we can coexist. If I respect and accept others then they will respect and accept me. Furthermore, when I am in a difficult situation with someone or when someone is not making the decisions I would make, I always try to see the situation through the other person's eyes. This helps me not be so judgmental and critical or not to condemn them and allows me to be a person who is caring and forgiving. When I try to put myself into another's shoes I am able to see what they are going through to make their choice and I can either steer them in another direction or understand their choice and accept it. I feel this makes my relationships with others stronger and more connected. Sometimes I am teased as either being naïve when I share how important living my life this way is or "too nice" if others realize that I do this when we are discussing controversial situations involving other people. I think though I am accepted and respected for who I am. It is my hope others close to me will maybe try to look through another's "eyes" when they are confronted with situations that they don't understand or that anger or confuse or challenge them.

Anne Marie DeMarco

March 10, 2020
Tuesday of the Second Week of Lent

Isaiah 1:10, 16-20

Matthew 23:1-12

As I began to reflect on *Gospel MT 23:1 – 12*, I could not help but think about my own calling in life of being a teacher, coach, and most importantly Husband & Father. In all of these roles I try to not only set a good example for my students, players, and family with my words, but also in my actions. Unlike the Pharisees, I constantly try to lead a Christian life in all that I do and say. Am I perfect in this quest; absolutely not, but it is something I strive for.

I feel that too many times in life some go the way of the Pharisees as it pertains to passing judgement on others. These people have a tendency to “preach but do not practice” when it comes to leading a life of faith. When it comes to my own faith journey, I try to never project my own beliefs onto others realizing that everyone is dealing with their own issues, concerns, and/or insecurities. Instead I try to keep an open mind understanding that everyone is doing the best they can within whatever struggles they are facing. Fortunately, God has granted me the platform, through Montgomery High School, to be able to be there for my students and players when they are faced with hardships in their lives. I use this opportunity to try to be a “servant of God” as I call upon my own life experiences to help these young adults to realize that whatever ills they are experiencing, no matter how enormous they appear in the moment, are manageable with the support and love of God & those close to them.

I feel very blessed to have been given the many gifts that the good Lord has bestowed on me. I would not trade being a Husband, Father, Teacher, and Coach in Montgomery for anything...FAMILY!!!

Kris Grundy

March 11, 2020
Wednesday of the Second Week in Lent

Jeremiah 18: 18-20

Matthew 20: 17-28

“Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave.” MT 20: 27

There was an underlying philosophy within the all-women’s high school and college I attended, and that was to produce independent thinkers and women of leadership. It seems that the mother of the sons of Zebedee might have had similar assertiveness training when she told Jesus to command that her two sons sit at the his right and the other at his left in his kingdom. Jesus reminded her and his followers that the seats at the right and the left are decisions prepared by the Father.

This gospel was for me, a firm reminder of my place here on earth. Just as the “Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve”, the role of servant is important for each one of us. If Jesus’ life and His reason for coming are to serve, and we are designed to emulate him, the gospel story is a huge lesson for us. It speaks to equality, hand in hand with the great commandments of loving/helping one another. Since service can take on so many dimensions, I think mindful listening is key to understanding how this fits at home, professionally, socially and beyond. Challenging, even overwhelming! An important takeaway, I think, is that we are not solitary decision-makers or our own masters of our fate. Prayerful time is always needed to let Jesus in, and in all things, to allow him be our guide.

Mary Ann L. Mertz

March 12, 2020
Thursday of the Second Week in Lent

Jeremiah 17:5-10

Luke 16: 19-31

This reading from Jeremiah brings to mind our human susceptibilities and frailties. We can all get distracted by enthusiasm, pride and hasty judgement.

I recall an interpretation of Judas Iscariot's actions, as an attempt to protect Jesus from his destiny by putting him safely into custody of the authorities, rather than recognizing God's will to fulfill a mortal life. Patience, understanding Christ's message, listening and watching would have served Judas's intent better, but he was blind to the role he played in God's plan. It seems he assumed his actions could spare his teacher's life and so prevent the events leading to Christ's execution. It seems to us that his impetuous actions may have originated from love, but he was too impatient to realize and appreciate his contribution to God's plan.

Some 1800 years later, a righteous Colonel George Armstrong Custer assumed the power of his own judgement and successes could bring victory in his world. His 7th Cavalry confronted the Lakota, Cheyenne and Arapaho nations on February 25, 1876. 210 men in his command died from his ambition and the imprudence of his actions. Our human condition includes many choices where humility, patience, mindfulness and clear focus on God's message provides potential clarity to God's plan for our role on earth.

We need time for patient listening, watching and considering God's words. These are our best tools. Focus and mindfulness about the Lord's teachings for our actions should bring us to know how we can serve God.

"Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose trust is the Lord".

Tim Corlis

March 13, 2020
Friday of the Second Week in Lent

Genesis 37:3-4, 12-13A, 17B-28A
Matthew 21:33-43, 45-46

“The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; by the Lord has this been done; it is marvelous in our eyes.”

Raised in the Lutheran Church, my religious upbringing was big on Bible Stories. We were taught the stories each week at Sunday school through storytelling and songs – even today, when I light upon a Bible Story, the lyrics of a song spin in my head.

JOSEPH: The eleven elder sons of Jacob disliked the youngest, Joseph. He was “daddy’s favorite” and a dreamer (important when Joseph got to the Pharaoh’s court.) The brothers plotted to kill Joseph and leave his body in a ditch; but the brothers instead sold Joseph to Egypt-bound travelers for 20 pieces of silver (some Old Testament foreshadowing?) Musical reference: the entire score of “Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat”

THE WICKED TENANTS: A landowner planted a vineyard (with a winepress and a tower) and let it out to tenants. When the time came to harvest the fruit, the landowner sent two sets of servants and his own son to collect the fruit. Each in turn was killed by the tenants. Jesus asked, how did the landowner treat these tenants upon his return? Jesus’s response was not one of revenge or continued violence, but a warning to the Chief Priests and Pharisees listening: The stone which the builders rejected has become the corner stone. Jesus will be rejected and will be made the cornerstone. He is marvelous. Musical reference: Settings of Psalm 118, including by our own Tim Keyes, but the one in my head is from my Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults in 1990 by Bernadette Farrell. She also wrote “Christ be Our Light”, which you will know from Vespers. These readings reminded me to maintain an accepting attitude – do not judge. The stone -- the person or idea or opportunity -- I initially reject may become a cornerstone of my life and my faith.

Kimberlee Phelan

March 14, 2020
Saturday of the First Week in Lent

Micah 7:14-15,18-20

Luke 15:1-3,11-32

When God Ran...

That is an interesting image, isn't it?

It is an idea that was first introduced to me many years ago on a retreat.

We were reflecting on the story of the Prodigal Son, which happens to be the scripture passage for our Lenten journal today.

There is a part in this familiar story where the Father sees the son coming from afar and he runs out to meet his long-lost son.

During that retreat, we were asked to consider this question:

“What if the father did not just happen to see the son one day as he went about his everyday tasks, but rather, he was actively, daily, watching and waiting for his son’s return?”

What a beautiful image...a father walking out onto his land each day, scanning the horizon, hoping that maybe today would be the day his son would return. And then, when the father finally catches a glimpse of the son, he is unable to contain himself and runs...*runs* out to greet him and embrace him.

The truth is this: if I were the father in the story, I most likely would be standoffish and wait to hear if the son had learned a lesson. Or I would wait to hear an apology for his actions. Or I would make him earn back my trust. I often think how lucky we are that God does not treat us in the same way we human beings treat one another.

When God Ran...

I am brought to tears whenever I let myself reflect on that image. I struggle to really believe that God could love me that much. That God is looking for me each day. That when God runs...he is running to me.

Trish Scalese

March 15, 2020
Third Sunday of Lent

Exodus 17:3-7

Romans 5:1-2, 5-6

John 4:5-42

The reading in Exodus 17:3-7 holds an important meaning for all of us during Lent. As we get closer and closer to Easter, our hearts and minds are getting prepared to receive the good word and will of our Lord, however our patience and discipline is quite tested. I'm sure, most of you who are reading this have given something up for Lent and you may have had troubles as you go on in your Lenten journey. It's normal to feel anger or a loss of hope, as the Israelites did, and it is quite common to forget what your goal was by the end of Lent. We often also lose sight of what lent means and how it is important for us to feel a sense of struggle, as Jesus did. The passage in Exodus reminds us that God is always present, regardless of the situation or the impulse and want for someone to give up. Every Sunday we hear the word of the Lord and sing our praises to him all in hopes of forgiveness and strength. The reading from Exodus helps us strengthen our bond with Christ and guides us to answer the question of "Is the Lord among us?" with a constant "yes". I hope, as you move on in your season of lent that you are constantly reminded by things and people that surround you that the Lord is always present and that he will always be watching over you.

Raul James

March 16, 2020
Monday of the Third Week in Lent

2 Kings 5:1-15 AB

Luke 4:24-30

“Jesus said to the people in the synagogue at Nazareth: “Amen, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own native place”.”

With these words to friends and acquaintances in His synagogue, Jesus issues a challenge: “You aren’t taking seriously what I’m trying to teach you,” recalling that the prophets Elijah and Elisha found more receptive audiences outside of their own communities. The people most familiar with Jesus had expectations of Him that did not include the moral authority to preach to them about anything; after all, wasn’t this just “the carpenter Joseph’s boy?”

As a liturgical minister, I believe that continuing faith formation should be a priority for all Catholics. Over the years it has become easy (some would say *too easy!*) for me to share that belief with other liturgical ministers – a receptive audience accustomed to faith sharing. However, I find it much more difficult to discuss my faith with co-workers in my office or neighbors at Shop Rite - and especially with most family members. Those closest to me know my faults and have expectations of me that don’t include suggestions for growing closer to Jesus.

Recently, however, I’ve discovered a few “safer” ways to share my faith. At work, I noticed that my office neighbor kept an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe pinned to his cubicle wall; surely discussing faith was “fair game” with him! Another liturgical minister added his church activities to his shared office calendar. I include my St. Charles life on my LinkedIn page for my 500+ connections to see. On a business trip, I made sure to mention that I skipped Sunday breakfast to attend Mass.

When I’ve been able to overcome the expectations that faith should only be discussed within church walls, and that an imperfect person can’t also be a person of deep faith, I’ve learned that many people are receptive – even hungry – to discuss their relationship with God ... and this is a very liberating, warm feeling!

Frank Iati

March 17, 2020
Tuesday of the Third Week of Lent

Daniel 3: 25,34-43

Matthew 18:21-35

I felt a chill going through me as if the wind would blow directly through my chest and all at once there were tears in my eyes. Without music, the purity of the spirit was drifting away. I wished I could see the world from above, as it was a distant blue ball, whose sorrows had nothing to do with me. Only when I let the radiant light in, I became grateful: the choice I made and its burden belonged to me alone. Azariah was not alone when the wave of sorrow stretched out. The artist in him was also able to break the silence with a beautiful prayer for others.

The prayer of my childhood was a variation of Angel Guardian, which my mom instilled in us so early. The charming poetry and *The Angel*, a prayer, I kept repeating over and over, when in distress.

I will not be at St. Charles around Easter or even at any church but wherever we are, we can search for beauty to forget the sadness, if it needs to come. The grace of the ancient prayer *Salve Regina!* It can start with understanding the Latin words and humming the chant and then living it. Lenten moments are treasured to hold on to them in the future for each of us. We are not living in the past when we feel God's wonders. I saw the wonder in my great grandmother Marija's eyes that day when I came alone. My mom and my brothers, and now my sons; they all possess that same look. I am blessed to experience it in the sign of peace with you. It is in Azariah's prayer and the angels' whisper:

"Face what life brings and love more"

Urska Haule

A March 18, 2020
Wednesday of the Third Week of Lent

Deuteronomy 4:1,5-9

Matthew 5:17-19

As I read this scripture, I can't help but see a message for me and others today. The passage speaks about how Jesus, in his fulfillment of God's law, has not come to abolish God's commandments given to Moses, nor the common laws of the land, which we MUST follow.

I can't help but look at the challenges of our society, today, where respect for telling the truth, being a good neighbor, treating others as we would like to be treated ourselves, seem to not be a common framework that people live by. God's guide, framed by the "Ten Commandments" seems like a simple recipe for goodness and righteousness . . . believe in and be true to God, remember and keep holy the Sabbath (Sunday), honor your father and mother and don't kill anyone. These shouldn't be hard to follow? Other commandments: not to steal, not to bear false witness (lie), be faithful to your spouse and not commit adultery, or covet those things of others - seem to be optional values and inconsequential to many people.

The Lord is telling us that he is watching and when we break the laws of God and society (in the smallest way) it is wrong. Even worse, to teach our children and those who look to us for guidance, that it is OK to break these laws will be seen with disdain in heaven. Too many of us dilute our thinking by seemingly "harmless sins" (defiance of the law), which erode the foundation and begin to blur what is considered right and wrong. Being complicit with others, who break the law and not standing up for Jesus has taught us to be right, is equally sinful. God is watching and cheering us on to be good keepers of the faith, ready to support us and give us the strength to do his will (what is right) on earth.

We need to be careful NOT to be like the Pharisees, who satisfied the fringe of the law, considering themselves righteous. We cannot be content with just attending Church on Sunday and upholding the easy commandments, while closing our eyes to hatred and bigotry around us. We need to be bold examples of Jesus in the world (imperfect as we are) and stand-up, speak-out, show forgiveness, and NOT confuse: mediocre for greatness; lies for the truth; silence for righteousness; or lack of doing wrong for doing what's right. Jesus is saying: "If we do this, He will make a place for us in heaven".

Ken Drake

March 19, 2020
Solemnity of St. Joseph

2 Samuel 7:4-5A, 12-14A, 16

Romans 4:13, 16-18, 22

Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24

How many times has it been easier to walk away from someone?

“Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, *planned to dismiss her quietly.*”

This brought me back to a moment when I avoided passing by one of my tenants. That was not the right choice. I was walking outside and just didn't want to have a controversial moment based on my last email I received from this individual.

I decided from that moment on, I was going to listen to the voice in my head and heart. God would never dismiss us, hide from us or ignore us. Every day is a continuous challenge and we need to be up to it. What is the worst that can happen? You took a chance and maybe you learned something new about that person with a one on one conversation and not behind an emotional email.

Joseph took a huge leap of faith. In today's times, I would love to know who would “walk his walk”. Faith is a strange thing but God is always right there to carry us through the good, the bad and the ugly. It is easy to feel God's grace in the good times but he is always there for us and the voice in our head to do the right thing. Just maybe someone is watching you and they learn something by your example.

Julie Drobits

March 20, 2020
Friday of the Third Week of Lent

Hosea 14:2-10

Mark 12:28-34

One of the scribes came to Jesus and asked him, "Which is the first of all the commandments?"

For the past five or so years I have been blessed to be a chaperone for our high school youth group on the Appalachia immersion trip. It is an exhausting and yet exhilarating experience. Last summer, we worked on a home that was situated on a quiet lot with a spectacular view of the mountains. When we arrived each morning, I looked out toward the mountains and prayed for our group and for the family who would live in the home. I prayed for all the Habitat workers and for all the people in West Virginia who struggle. And, I prayed that I would feel closer to God this week.

We met the family who will eventually live in the home and heard their story. We all fell in love with them and with their precious three-year old adopted daughter. We wanted this house to be a wonderful home for them. The team painting the bedroom was extra careful about drips, missed spots and paint on the ceiling. Meanwhile, the outside team worked hard to put up a beautiful wrap around deck. At the end of our week, the family was closer to being in their forever home, and our group had shown love to a neighbor. And my prayer had been answered. I think that William Blake was right when he said,

"I sought my God, my God I could not see".

"I sought my soul, my soul eluded me."

"I sought my neighbor and I found all three."

Cathy Souto

March 21, 2020
Saturday of the Third Week of Lent

Hosea 6: 1-6

Luke 18:9-14

“He then addressed this parable to those who were convinced of their own righteousness and despised everyone else”.

A yo-yo! That is what I often feel like. I go back and forth in my thinking I'm not doing enough and then patting myself on my back for all I have accomplished. Whenever I read this gospel it has me stop in my tracks. Who do I think I am? Am I one who is convinced of my own righteousness maybe despising others? It is easy to think of all the ways I do good but very hard to really face all the ways that I am just like the Pharisees. I recently led a discussion about implicit bias and I was really surprised at the hidden ways that I am biased towards others. When you really reach inward it is revealing to find the little ways that we go out of our way to avoid certain situations or certain people. Judgment of others seems to be a theme in this culture and so it is easy to fall into that pattern. I think Jesus is cautioning us to not judge but to love. Instead we need to look deep inside of ourselves and ask for the courage to face those dark places in us and let the light of Christ enter in. When you look at yourself through God's eyes, you will see the beautiful person that God created you to be and the path ahead will be clearer. It all begins with awareness.

“Interpret all things from the best possible view.” ~ Jean Pierre Medaille

Christine Barranco

March 22, 2020
Fourth Sunday of Lent

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

Ephesians 5:8-14

John 9:1-41

After reading Ephesians 5: 8-14, I explored the meaning of “light” in this context and understood it to convey the interrelated ideas of truth and holiness. As followers of Jesus, we have knowledge and therefore responsibility to live in a manner that reflects the characteristics, actions and morals of the church’s teachings. My family’s religious beliefs and practices such as prayer, attending mass and other activities at St. Charles teach, sustain and give more meaning to our lives. However, this reading encourages a re-examination of how I am doing carrying that forward during the gaps when I am away from church or God, whether it’s at work, home, with people, or alone. Is my Catholic identity the reality of how I act when faced with negative distractions, human emotions, or someone in need? These situations indeed challenge me to act in a way that reflects my truth, knowledge and beliefs.

In the language of Botswana, a country I served as a Peace Corp volunteer, I was taught the idea of “lasedi”. It is a quality of a person whose countenance is said to demonstrate ”the light of God”. Despite hard labor, the hardship of primitive ways of life, and difficult living conditions, I clearly recall many faces of the Botswana people who epitomized the simple radiance of lasedi. During this Lent, I will try to remind myself and family of our purpose to be worthy representatives as a light of God “for light produces every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth”.

Ken Rizzi

March 23, 2020
Monday of the Fourth Sunday of Lent

Isaiah 65:17-21

John 4:43-54

After reading the passage, one verse stuck with me. It says, “Unless you people see signs and wonders,” Jesus told him, “you will never believe.” As a Catholic, I am told that I must believe without receiving obvious signals, but I have had moments where I struggled with that. Especially as a child, it always confused me how I was supposed to follow what God said, but there was no way for me to see him. As I grew older, GIFT and Youth Ministry taught me more about my faith and helped me realize that although God may not be a physical entity, He does send us signs to keep our faith strong. The first time I can acknowledge seeing God was through a person who stood by my side when I needed them, even though I thought I didn’t. After my first experience, it was easier to see the things that were being sent to me. I saw God in a ladybug on my window, lyrics from a new song, or a hug from a friend. These signs not only gave me clarity that God was there, but that He cared about me. Being able to see what God is sending me allows my faith to grow stronger every day. Recently I have been working towards having the same strength in my faith without relying so heavily on signs and this reading was a personal reminder that although I may not see Him, God will always be there for me.

Alex Lister

March 24, 2020
Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Lent

Ezekiel 47:1-9,12
John 5:1-16

The angel, speaking to Ezekiel, tells him of the majestic power of water. The whole passage is one of hope and I believe that hope rests on the foundation of faith. We have hope when we believe in positive outcomes and futures, and that certainly rests on faith, especially in a world where we see so much that could lead to doubt and despair.

In thinking about the role of faith in my life, I remember two stories from my childhood. When I was about eight years old I desperately wanted a two-wheeler bike. Coming from a lower middle class family, I didn't ask my parents to buy a bike for me. I simply told them I was going to get a bike. When my mom asked me, "How do you know that?" I said, "I have faith."

My parents bought me a second-hand small bike from a neighbor and I was thrilled. My dad took me to the park and held the back seat while I pedaled until he thought I could ride.

I rode that bike for years, long after I outgrew it. Then there was a contest in the local dry cleaners on the block where we lived. Second prize was a beautiful Schwinn bicycle. To win, you had to make as many words as you could from the word "sanitize." Working as a family, we submitted our list right before the deadline, and we won the bike!

Was that faith in God? Perhaps it was a child's view of our Lord as magician. It was, however, a kind faith and hope combined, something many of us have or strive to have. In my adult life faith involves belief in what we cannot "know" for certain.

I have faith and hope that there is a heaven after this life. While we live in this one, though, am I trying to see our Lord in everyone who crosses my path, including strangers, immigrants, and refugees? Will I strive for peace in my relationships and in the world? If we believe in our Lord's second greatest commandment, "Love thy neighbor as thyself," at the very least, we all have to strive.

Angela Provitera McGlynn

March 25, 2020
Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord

Isaiah 7:10-14; 8:10

Hebrews 10:4-10

Luke 1:26-38

You may already know the meaning of the acronym, “FHB”. When guests were at our house for a meal, my mom would pass this code to my oldest brother, who would pass it down the line, through my sister and five other brothers, finally to me, the youngest. It meant that Mom was worried we might run out of food, an unthinkable outcome for her. “FHB” stood for “Family Hold Back”, meaning we were to let the guests eat first and keep our own portions to something less than the usual Viking-like amounts.

My mother’s name was Mary, and she invariably comes to my mind whenever I read or think of Gabriel’s call to our spiritual Mother. I imagine if my mother had received word she was to bear and raise eight kids (big difference here is that, I can guarantee you, not one of us was born without sin), with an age span of 19 years from oldest to youngest, in a small three bedroom house, her response would have been similar to our Mary’s – troubled, wondering, questioning, then, accepting. And her acceptance turned out to be, like our Lord’s Mary, deep, complete, abiding and borne of great love.

“FHB” means caring about others first and it always reminds me of my mother and of God. Both were loving, gentle, generous, and humble spirits dedicated to serving others. And yet, neither were pushovers. My mom had no problem issuing a mandatory FHB, as Mary had no qualms asking her Son to take care of the wedding guests at Cana.

For both, saying, "Yes," to God was fraught with challenge and sacrifice, yet in true FHB style, they held back, served others and trusted in God's plan for them.

Tim Fagin

March 26, 2020
Thursday of the Fourth Week of Lent

Exodus 32:7-14

John 5:31-47

While most of us are probably not busy erecting golden calves in New Jersey, I would venture to guess that we all have them. What takes over my life and keeps me from hearing and acting on God's call in my life? Where do I hold back from truly living as a follower of Jesus? What are my false gods? Some of us worship the god of busyness. We become so caught in the cycle of busyness that we forget about putting God first, we are just too busy! Or maybe we worship the god of selfishness. We don't take time and look around to see the needs of our neighbor. How about the god of I-am-right-and-you-are-not? We live in a polarized nation and listening to other's point of view is a lost art.

Whatever your golden calf may be, we are challenged today to examine our lives, and ask ourselves, what does it mean to live as a person of faith? How do my words and actions reflect my beliefs? What false gods prevent me from living as a believer should? How do I remember all that God has given me and truly be thankful?

Anonymous

March 27, 2020
Friday of the Fourth Week of Lent

Wisdom 2:1A, 12-22
John 7:1-2, 10, 25-3

I found these readings unsettling. It seems few are in alignment with Jesus. Many do not believe Jesus is who He is and they seem suspicious of Him. In the final lines, they **“tried to arrest him, but no one laid a hand upon him, because his hour had not yet come”**. To the observer, what did this look like? How could they **“try”**, but **“no one laid a hand upon him”**? Based on our knowledge of the Crucifixion, we know it wasn't the right time for Jesus's arrest. But did their belief change at all, as they witnessed this unsuccessful attempt to arrest Him?

I have so many questions. Sometimes I feel I can't wait until heaven. Did you ever think that? I wonder if, when we enter heaven, we can ask all these questions and have all our curiosities addressed.

In my vision at heaven's doors, I often lead with questions about family. I want to meet my paternal-grandfather, an MIA German soldier, and learn what actually happened to him. I grew up knowing my paternal-grandmother, but as a child, I never thought to ask her what was it like to struggle as a German refugee with 8 children in tow, not knowing where her husband was or from where their next meal would come?

I also want answers to “all” the questions – like where's my maternal-grandmother's lost wedding ring?! How do those black holes really work and where do they lead?

However, after letting these readings sink in, it dawned on me - I want to ask Jesus – how did you feel – knowing all the “right” answers and having so few trust you or believe you, but mock you instead. And did it look like a magic trick – they tried to arrest you, but no one laid a hand on you?

Or maybe, when we get to heaven, we instantly know all our answers. Perhaps we can stop questioning and debating, and just bask in a realization that we now all know the “true” answers, the truths, and share them together in harmony. Wouldn't that be wonderful?

Karen Anderson

March 28, 2020
Saturday of the Fourth Week of Lent

Jeremiah 11:18-20
John 7:40-53

Growing up I attended Church every Sunday. I was an active participant in the church youth group and as a young adult out of college a counselor for a local church youth group. As an adult, my spiritual needs have generally been satisfied each Sunday, listening to the sermon, reflecting on the week that just ended and thinking about the week ahead. For me, that time in Church has been the only time I look for Christ. After reading this scripture, these words stood out – “this is truly the prophet?” Like some in the crowd, I too have a narrow view of who Christ is and where I expect him to be present in my life. For me, it’s always been that Sunday morning...but that belief and short-sightedness is preventing me from looking for and seeing Christ in so many other places in my life. I am writing this from the mountains in Utah. My wife and kids are at the pool after a day on the mountain and I am having a quiet moment looking out at the majestic snow-capped mountains and beautiful blue sky. The person in me I am most comfortable being would not notice much beyond the beautiful surroundings but as I seek to grow in my faith and come to understand all the ways God is present in my life, I am trying to be more aware of the blessings God has provided me, whether they be opportunities to spend special moments with my family or simply my every day routine. That is the challenge in stepping out of what we have grown accustomed to, what we feel comfortable with and testing ourselves to see Christ in ways we may not expect.”

Dave Berwick

March 29, 2020
Fifth Sunday of Lent

Ezekiel 37:12-14

Romans 8:8-11

John 11:1-45

I identify with the clueless disciples. Jesus chose them to accompany him, but they seemed oblivious, fell asleep, became fully awake, saw Jesus' glory, wanted to act for the sake of acting and did not know what they were saying. When "a cloud" came they became afraid and fell silent after they heard God's voice coming from the cloud.

When life is going well I "see" God's glory but I do not know what I am saying. When a cloud comes and surrounds me with darkness I become afraid. I see the darkness negatively like facing my mother's Alzheimer's or my daughter's cancer diagnosis. When confronted with darkness I feel out of control and angry and because of my fear I cannot see God's glory or anything else because of my fear.

However, the story tells me that God is present in the darkness that God is the "cloud" that at first casts a shadow over me and then totally surrounds me!! Just to clarify, I do not think God brings sickness to get my attention, but rather that I tend to miss God's presence in the darkness due to my fear. For instance, by accompanying my mother as her Alzheimer's progressed and sharing her pain I was able to have an intimate relationship with her that would have been otherwise impossible. By sharing my daughter's struggle I was able to gain a greater appreciation of my baby's courage and strength and I was also able to develop a deeper relationship with my grandson and son-in-law.

The story challenges me to put aside my fear and anger and to remember that God is always with me - especially in the darkness - and that I **MUST** trust God!

The story tells me to *LISTEN* now!!!

Ana Sauthoff

March 30, 2020
Monday of the Fifth Week of Lent

Daniel 13:1-9,15-17,19-30,33-62

John 8:1-11

In John 8:1-11, Jesus does not punish the woman who has committed adultery due to the fact that he understands that all humans who are created by God are born sinners. That is why he tells the crowd of people that only the person who has never sinned is the one who has the right to stone her. Naturally, the crowd disappeared as all of them were sinners and they had no right to punish the woman who was a sinner just like them. Likewise, it is not fair for us to judge other people based on the mistakes of their past that you may be aware of as all of us are sinners as well. As all of us equally children of God, instead of shaming, judging, or humiliating someone else because of what they may have done, we should instead embrace each other's faults as that is what makes us all human and no one has the right to judge anyone. Only someone who has never sinned in their life has the right to assess one's character based on their actions. If Jesus, the son of God and the only person to have ever set foot on earth and never have sinned, did not even condemn someone who had committed adultery, what gives us the right to judge others? Especially during a time of self-growth like Lent, it is important to recognize that being created by God also means that we are naturally sinners; however, we can still continue to be disciples of the Lord without being perfect one hundred percent of the time. God created us all for a reason and it is our responsibility to share the love he has given to us with others and continue to help the people around us grow and help make this world we all live in a better place.

Steven Paul

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March 31, 2020
Tuesday of the Fifth Week of Lent

Numbers 21:4-9
John 8:21-30

Recently I participated in an online course that a friend was giving on “Happiness”.

It is definitely fun to study happiness because it certainly makes you happy to do so! Yet, why are so many of us so unhappy that we may actually need a happiness course? My friend brought up three habits that chip away at happiness that she describes as the “Blame, Shame and Complain” modes.

I don’t know about you, but for me it can be so easy to fall into the Blame, Shame and Complain (BSC) trio when things go wrong from my perspective.

I find when I fall into the “BSC” mode, my eyes are focus on “me”, there is fear involved and it puts me in a victim mode.

How do I break out of it? Focusing on gratitude and love draws me close to God with my eyes and heart embracing the life of God in others.

In the first reading today, the people are in the “BSC” mode and they are complaining a lot! To redirect their behavior and thoughts, God sends serpents. And of course, that works!

In the second reading, Jesus talks about sin, (which I associate with the BSC trio). Yet, Jesus says “I am... and I do nothing on my own, but I say only what the Father taught me”. Let’s follow in the example of Jesus and do nothing on our own and surrender all to God.

To do that, my happiness friend would say:

1. Look for the good.
2. See the face of God in something and savor it for 20 seconds.
3. Go for a 3:1 ration, i.e., for every thought that is negative (in the BSC mode) have 3 empowering positive thoughts or memorize a favorite scripture verse and say it 3 times!

Terry Lynch

April 1, 2020
Wednesday of the Fifth Week of Lent

Daniel 3:14-20,91-92,95

John 8:31-42

“... *and the truth will make you free.*”

This is one of the most frequently quoted statements of Jesus. The phrase is the motto of Johns Hopkins University and Southern Methodist University. When I was in Austin this past summer, I noticed the phrase inscribed on the main building of the University of Texas.

Even Fred Rogers composed a song in 1970 entitled *The Truth Will Make Me Free* which was featured in nine episodes of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. The fourth stanza of Mr. Rogers reads:

But what if I could know the truth,
and say just how I feel?
I think I'd learn a lot
that's real about freedom.

For me, recognizing the truth within myself and learning about freedom is not easy and sometimes even terrifying. Those moments have the potential to point me to situations where being faced with the truth can free me from some unfreedom, obsession, catastrophizing or inner darkness. It is hard to face such truths. Yet when I acknowledge such truths, they can liberate me.

Jesus wants to lead me into truth so that I may be free. If I truly desire freedom, I need to be ready to accept the truth. It is about being known fully and loved deeply.

May I have the grace to listen to those who tell me the truth about myself. May I listen to the Word of Jesus, which tries to reach into my heart and liberate me. May I start with the great truth which Jesus tries to convince me: that I am endlessly loved by him.

Christopher Fusco

April 2, 2020
Thursday of the Fifth Week of Lent

Genesis 17:3-9

John 8:51-59

“Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever keeps my word will never see death.”

Death – a difficult subject for me after losing some of the most important people in my life, some at young ages. My parents, in-laws, 3-year-old nephew, close friends...the list goes on. Without God’s help I would not have been able to get through the grief and sadness. But I learned to stop dwelling on the list and focus more on *life*.

My faith tells me if I keep God’s word, I will never see death. I believe it also saves us from death here on earth. It means not letting difficulties or sadness take life away from us but rather to use those experiences to do some good for God’s purpose. It is in keeping God’s word and knowing Him that the word becomes part of you, and with it comes a sense of peace and joy.

It reminds me of a woman I encountered in a store who was talking on her cell phone with the speaker on. Normally, it could be annoying but this was the opposite. I could hear her conversation about her son who had visited her from out of town. They had a great visit and he left that morning to go back home. The person on the other end said, “Aren’t you going to be lonely without your son?” The woman, without hesitation, replied “No, I have my bible!” I was touched by her response. The Word was certainly giving her life!

That kind of faith and the life it brings is inspirational. May we always strive to keep His word knowing the promise of never seeing death, now and at the end of our earthly lives.

Rose Kowalczyk

April 3, 2020
Friday of the Fifth Week of Lent

Jeremiah 20:10-13

John 10:31-42

Today's readings were challenging for me to wrap my head around for this reflection. Then, I looked at my calendar to see where exactly I'll be on April 3rd. On the 3rd I will wake up on the Navajo reservation in Tohatchi, NM with six members of our youth ministry program. We will spend our day being of service on a small Franciscan mission. As soon as I realized this I was able to see the relevance of today's gospel.

In the gospel we find the image of the Jews attempting to stone Jesus and that leads me to consider where those stones are in my own life today. What are the things or even who are the people in my life that I use to prevent myself from seeing and hearing Jesus? While on the reservation it's always been obvious how blinding my phone can be while at home because there on the mission I am phoneless and feel completely liberated. The stones I use to prevent myself from hearing God's call at home are not negative ones. I'm not struggling with an addiction and I do not find myself stuck in an abusive relationship. I do, however, see how overscheduled my life has become and how the many blessings I have can at times feel like nothing more than a distraction. Today I am reminded that Lent calls us to minimize these distractions and become more present to where our faith is calling us.

Where is your faith calling you today?

Chris Small

April 4, 2020
Saturday of the Fifth Week of Lent

Ezekiel 37:21-28
John 11:45-56

In this reading, the following verses stood out for me.

“I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land.”

“My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd.”

“I will make a covenant of peace with them.”

“I will be their God and they will be my people.”

Ezekiel fearlessly preached the word of God to the exiled Jews in the streets of Babylon about the timeless truth of God’s love and power. It made me think about my responsibility to trust God and know that he is my Lord and Savior. It made me think about what I should be doing to let others know about the timeless truth of God’s love and power. These verses inspired me to commit myself to obey God, in whatever, wherever, and whenever He asks. It is not always easy to do what God asks, but in doing so, you will grow closer to Him. There have been many difficult times in my life that I do not believe I could have made it through without trusting in God. There is always a light at the end of your dark tunnel and that is where God is. He is the Light of the World.

Mary Traub

April 5, 2020
Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion

IS 50:4-7

PHIL 2:6-11

MT 26:14—27:66 OR 27:11-54

We are familiar with the story of the last supper, the betrayal by Judas, the arrest of Jesus and his torture and death. In our daily life we are not confronted with such horror. But we do experience the deaths of friends and loved ones. As we consider these losses, we are often pushed to grapple with our own understanding of the meaning of death and the afterlife. If only it was just more clear. We know the witness of the Gospel writers who described the risen appearances of Jesus after his death, but what about our own experiences?

So here is the experience of a good friend of mine. This happened in the last four months. Bill's sister had died in her middle age due to severe childhood illnesses that had never fully resolved. Bill had come back to NJ prior to the wake to be with family. Bill is a man of prayer, and he missed his sister greatly. Inwardly he asked her to please give him some sign that she was OK. The day before the wake he was a passenger, going on an errand in his aunt's car with her. Her phone rang and the call was routed to the viewing screen with the caller ID. The ID read out Bill's sister's name. Bill immediately took a picture of the screen. His aunt then answered the phone, and it was one of her friends...just a normal call. Of course it wasn't a normal call, because Bill's sister had used the electronics to give a wink to Bill from the other side.

I know Bill and the story is true. Each of us gets to interpret it as we wish. For me, I interpret it as a confirmation of my unshakable faith that we are united with the great cloud of witnesses (Heb 12:1) on this earth and beyond it.

So, I meditate and pray, trying to get a little closer to the source of Goodness, Jesus and the Spirit.

Tom Cusak

April 6, 2020
Monday of Holy Week

IS 42:1-7
JN 12:1-11

The gospel story of Mary washing Jesus' feet with expensive oil shows her devotion to Jesus. According to Mary, Jesus was worthy of all her love and gratitude. How can we be giving and grateful in our own lives?

When I give back to society according to my financial abilities or find time to volunteer and provide resources to a charitable organization, I achieve a greater sense of growth and gratitude for all my blessings. Donating resources and volunteering as a family helps us to teach our children that they can make a positive change in the world.

Mary's selfless actions were criticized by Judas. Judgment keeps us from understanding a situation, but curiosity helps us recognize and accept the situation. Whenever we see a person acting a certain way that doesn't agree with us, we should ask ourselves" what is it that I don't see or know about?"

Discipleship calls us be present to another, and to listen and understand someone who needs us. During this Lenten season, let us ask God to guide us to be giving and understanding to others in need of our love and care.

Beena Simon

April 7, 2020
Tuesday of Holy Week

Isaiah 49:1-6
John 13:21-33,36-38

As Christians we know that it was Jesus' destiny to suffer and die for us. It was His destiny to fulfill the prophecies (Isaiah 49:1-6 being one of them) of the Old Testament. So, I think if Judas didn't betray Jesus, the Romans would have ultimately found a way to arrest Him. What if the only betrayal of Jesus came when Peter denied knowing Him? What if Judas changed his mind and never followed through on his original intentions? Both Peter and Judas were called to discipleship and Jesus loved them equally. When Jesus said to Judas "what you are about to do, do quickly" Jesus was filled with empathy and His expectation for Judas was to seek contrition and like Peter, continue living his call to discipleship. As we know, Judas didn't choose that path.

It is difficult for us to always know when, why or how we are being called. Our life stories can help us realize how we can "glorify God". Peter's life story is one of the greatest examples of moving past personal gain and self-pity and fully embracing God's call. Whereas Judas' story becomes an example of what happens when we turn away from God's plan for us. Thankfully when Jesus said to Peter "you will not follow now but you will follow later" He was talking to all of us. We will always have opportunities to turn away from the darkness that Judas fled into and accept our imperfections.

I often relate to Peter (and even sometimes Judas!) when I become preoccupied with agendas that take me away from what Jesus is calling me too. Lent will end soon, but I will continue to think about this reading and how it can help me realize how I continue to be called. Fundamentally, this reading is a call for all of us to love one another. Peter and Judas both betrayed their call but Jesus still loved them. They had to make a choice about how they wanted the rest of their story to continue, Peter put his faith in Jesus and knew love would be the driving principle for the rest of his life. If we, from this moment also put love first; the when, why, or how we will be called is just part of our Christ centered life story.

Dan Pace

April 8, 2020
Wednesday of Holy Week

Isaiah 50: 4-9
Matthew 26:14-25

As the holidays were winding down, I began to think in earnest about a practical New Year's resolution. My plan was to exercise more consistently and since I love walking, I felt that this would be a healthy resolution I could actually keep. My husband Robert surprised me with a set of wireless earbuds as a Christmas gift to encourage me to listen to a favorite playlist or podcast while walking. I love the noise cancelling feature of the earbuds that blocks out everything and everyone around me so that all I feel are my footsteps one by one getting me closer to my exercise goal. As I listen to a podcast playing, all I can hear is one voice, one message. I am reminded at this time of the year, as we enter the season of Lent, that it is important to cancel out the extraneous noise in our lives; to slow down and listen to God's Word – one voice, one message. In the reading Isaiah 50:4-9, I am struck by the words, "Morning after morning he wakens my ear to hear as disciples do." When am I called to simply listen? What is it I will hear? While I can't walk around all day with noise cancelling earbuds to block out interruptions, Lent is a good time to look inward, reflect and find ways to become closer to God. Just like my resolution for the New Year, my goal of discipleship during the season of Lent will take one step at a time and it is up to me to listen closely to hear God's message for my life.

Melissa Martin

April 9, 2020
Mass of the Lord's Supper

Exodus 12:1-8,11-14

1 Cor. 11:23-26

John 13:1-15

This day should be a memorial feast for you, which all your generations shall celebrate with pilgrimage to the Lord, as a perpetual institution.

I live with certainty that I have a cadre of family and friends in the Communion of Saints. I may not have known all of them when they were on earth but they are an ongoing part of my heart and soul. They are with me in Spirit as I tag along after them on my pilgrimage to the Lord.

Every year, I come to the table on Holy Thursday giving thanks for my spiritual predecessors in Faith. I am grateful that, across millennia, they prayed that generations to follow them would come to know the Lord. Even when they wandered and lost their way, they were seekers of God. Today, we are blessed to remember and celebrate because they believed.

I do not need 23 and Me to know that many faith traditions reside within my genetic coding. It is quite likely that I have ancestors who fought both for and against each other in the Name of God. Some of them would take delight in knowing I am a Christian and Catholic, and some would be appalled. It matters not, for they are with God now. They are all seated at the same table. There is no need for words in heaven. There is only the peace of God.

Polly Seitz

April 10, 2020
Good Friday

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

Who is this Jesus gazing down at us from the cross? Isaiah prefigures him as the suffering servant who was pierced for our sins. St. Paul shows us Christ as a high priest able to sympathize with our weaknesses and refers to the cross as a “throne of grace” where we can receive mercy. When the soldiers with Judas called out to him in the garden, Jesus answers, “I AM,” recalling the words God used to Moses in Exodus. John’s Passion thus directly links Christ to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who led the Jews out of slavery in Egypt to eventual freedom in the Promised Land. Pilate later asks Jesus if he is King of the Jews and then places that inscription on the cross despite the objections of the chief priests. Jesus Himself tells Pilate that His kingdom is not of this world, but that he came into the world “to testify to the truth.”

Which Jesus do we see today and every day? Probably the Jesus we need at any particular moment. When my heart or the hearts of friends are wrenched by devastating losses, we look for grace and see Jesus sharing our suffering. When we find ourselves with misguided priorities or hurting others, we look for mercy and forgiveness, knowing that it is there if we take the time and have the intention to seek it. When we get mired in the pronouncements of false gods that arise around us in every shape and form in our daily lives, we look to the truth teller to set us straight. And when joy arrives with a new child, or a good diagnostic test result, or a successful completion of even a mundane task, we experience a bit of the Kingdom of Christ the King and rejoice with Him. For even on this most sacred and sorrowful of days, we know the Easter end of the story and join with the Christian world in calling this Friday “Good.”

Mary Jacobson

April 11, 2020
Holy Saturday

Readings of the Great Vigil of Easter

It was becoming too warm in the apartment so I moved to the balcony. As an unpredictable chilly gust blew about me, my mind wandered past some flashing lights as it flicked some switches, and screwed together some nuts and bolts before arriving at the end of a gloriously garbled mess of a metaphor with a question. Why would God ask Abraham for such an act? It was the same question I struggled with as I sat alone, grouchy awaiting my flight. After waiting for 25 years and successfully undergoing many tests of obedience, he is given a child, only to be asked to kill that child that he has hoped for, by the same God that bestowed it to him. But Abraham is willing. Without argument, he is ready to sacrifice this child. As I rapidly approach a time where I am challenged to become independent, I can see more clearly that such independence is, for a parent, a hidden challenge. All the scenarios that must have gone through my mom's mind as she said goodbye to me at the security gate were surely terrifying, and yet she sacrificed to let me learn. And while Abraham's sacrifice was brutal, life can be brutal sometimes as well. His experience is that of everyone, with bumps and pain. But it is with a constant dedication to good that he manages to prevail. So as I sat on the balcony rereading the passage, a smile crept upon my usually pessimistic face. It is a smile that I will keep for my journey back because maybe by revealing the best in myself, I have a chance to prevail on my adventure home.

Mihael Haule

April 12, 2020

Easter

Acts 10:34a.,37-43

Col 3:1-4; John 20:1-9

Jesus Christ is Risen Today – Ab-ab-ab-ab-le-ee-lu-ia! Whenever I think of Easter Sunday – I hear this song playing grandly in my mind. We all know the story of the resurrection and the celebration of Easter Sunday. As a Catholic, it is the cornerstone of our faith. To believe in the resurrection is to believe in God. Today is truly a day of celebration, hope and promise.

In the gospel reading for this Easter Sunday, it struck me that Mary and Peter saw the empty tomb but had not yet realized that Jesus has risen, “*For they did not yet understand the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead.*” The Resurrection story as we know it hadn’t been told yet. I imagine in the moment, Mary and Peter didn’t understand what was happening and likely speculated all sorts of things: “Did someone steal the body?” “Maybe he wasn’t buried at all.” “Is this the work of evil?” They were probably confused, frightened and didn’t know what to make of the situation, still feeling the despair and helplessness from His recent crucifixion.

I can relate. Sometimes I feel despair that our world is broken and I don’t know what to make of it. I often react frantically before understanding what’s really going on. At times, when I think that Jesus isn’t there, I feel confused and frightened, too.

Easter Sunday reminds me that Jesus always walks beside me – he’s always present, even in dark times of confusion and despair. His resurrection gives me hope that maybe, just maybe, there is a miracle waiting to happen in our world.

As I celebrate this Easter Sunday, my prayer is to renew my hope in the goodness of humanity and trust in God that we are each called to be part of his plan. Just like Mary and Peter on that day at the tomb, I don’t yet know how the story ends.

Jesus Christ is Risen Today – Alleluia!

Andrea O’Brian

