



Something Different for Lent 2024

We Journey Lent with



*Recover,
Refresh,
Renew,
Reconcile &
Respond*

MY LENTEN REF **Person's**
Busy Retreat **AT**

A collection of short prayers, reflections, and exercises for **BUSY PEOPLE**
based on the Gospel each Sunday to help aid you on your Journey
through Lent to Easter

My Lenten Journey

Lent is a transforming time, a time for renewal & rediscovery, enabling us to stop and breathe and take stock of our lives. We are all busy. If our experience of the last year has taught us anything, we need to gift ourselves a few minutes out from our hectic world each day and to give ourselves a little space and time. Let these 5-15 mins each day be your gift to yourself as you prepare for Easter. In the Gospels we are told that Jesus frequently goes away to a quiet place to pray, to escape the crowds, to spend time with God – even just to refuel the tanks! With the pull of work, family, commitments, even with the best intentions, this can be hard to find – even an envied luxury!! So this is a collection of short prayers, reflections and exercises based on each of the Sunday Gospels to hopefully help aid you, in your own time & at your own pace, on your Journey through Lent to Easter!

Remember

*The reflections and suggestions on these pages are meant as a guide.
You can do some of them or all of them. Take your time, go at your own pace & be gentle with yourself.*

Lord, in my busy-ness, this Lenten Season with Your help I will try to...

Give up complaining

Give up pessimism

Give up harsh judgments

Give up worry

Give up discouragement

Give up bitterness

Give up hatred

Give up negativism

Give up anger

Give up gloom

Give up jealousy

Give up gossiping

Give up sin

Give up giving up,



Focus on gratitude.

Become an optimist.

Think kindly thoughts.

Trust in God.

Be full of hope.

Turn to forgiveness.

Return good for evil.

Be positive.

Be more patient.

Spread joy.

Pray for trust.

Control my tongue.

Try a little harder.

Hang on in there

I start this Lenten retreat from where I am. I will be true to who I am and bring what I have. I will be open to Your presence journeying with me and trust in your transforming love for me. **Amen**

First Sunday of Lent ~

“The Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness, and he was there forty days,”

Recover

Welcome to the first week of our Lenten retreat. We begin our Lenten retreat by allowing ourselves to be led into the ‘wilderness’. We need time to **recover**, to remove ourselves from our hectic world for a few minutes each day, to give ourselves a little space and time. We need to *gift* ourselves time for ourselves. In the Gospels we are told that Jesus frequently goes away to a quiet place to pray, to escape the crowds, to spend time with God. Where is your quiet place? Where is your little oasis? Make a promise to yourself this week to **recover** some time for yourself each day – it doesn’t have to be *forty days*! Maybe just 10 – 15 minutes each day.

Tasks for this week:

Firstly you are invited to create a **simple sacred space** in your home. This could be in the corner of your bedroom or sitting room. It should be somewhere that you can go for some quiet time each day. Use some symbols in your space – such as a cross, candles, a bible or some significant symbol for you. You can add to it as the weeks go by; significant prayers, events, people, symbols, etc. The colour for Lent is **Violet** so you may like to use that colour in your sacred space. You could even create your own mini-desert using some sand and stones. *Be creative yet keep it simple.* Let it be your little oasis, sanctuary.



Secondly, some people like to carry something with them in their pocket during the weeks of Lent, like a **small stone or pebble**. It can be a reminder of the things that weigh you down, or a worry or concern that prevents you from living as freely and as fully as you can. Take your stone out once every day and hold it in your hand. By the end of the five weeks you will know every part of it as well as you know your inner self.

Some also carry the stone in their pocket to remind them, whenever they touch it, to look for something to be grateful for, to say *thank you* for... *you might want to try it.*



At night leave your pebble in your sacred space as you leave all the worries & works of that day in God’s hands.

Thirdly, in Lent most try to give something up. This year, for this retreat (*and hopefully beyond*) make a commitment to yourself to **consciously** do at least **1** thing each day to help another. Doesn’t have to be anything huge (*or could be if you’re that way inclined*).



ARE YOU READY?

Prayer suggestions for the week:

Breathing exercise: Try to do this at least once a day. Be still. To start take three deep breaths... inhale for a count of four, then exhale for a count of four (*all through your nose, which adds a natural resistance to the breath*). Then, close your eyes and focus on your normal breathing. On the in-breath be aware that it is life-giving, nurturing, a gift from God. On the out-breath be aware that you are feeding the plants and trees around you; you are blessing the world around you. Stay with that for a while: The in-breath as a gift from God; the out-breath as your gift to the world.

Try keeping a record of your thoughts & prayers during Lent – a short, suggested format each day

- Praise God. Use this day to praise God for who He is and the blessings you have received. *Name them.*
- Write out your specific needs for today.
- Ask God for guidance on all the decisions you need to make this week, listing them out for Him to guide.
- Pray for those in your life that you want to grow close to God. *Name them.*
- Pray for something you know you need God to help you with or to learn. *Name it for yourself.*
- Pray for your loved ones. *Write your prayer for them* **Remember - there is no wrong way to do this!**

Read Sunday's Gospel, two or three times: Mark 1:12-15 – Come back to it a few times during the week.

Each year on this first Sunday of Lent, we read one of the synoptic accounts of the temptations of Jesus in the desert. Mark's version of the temptation in the desert is much shorter than Matthew's or Luke's. This makes the significance and impact more direct.



And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time has come, and the kingdom of God is close at hand; Repent, and believe in the 'Good News'".

- **Sit with the text and pick a word or phrase that stands out to you. Repeat that word or phrase in your mind. Let that word sink into your heart.**
- **Why is that word or phrase relevant to you at this moment?**
- **What is the 'Good News' that Jesus is saying to you today?**

Something to think about:

As we begin Lent, let us try to **recover** the call we each received at our baptism to be a disciple of Jesus. As we walk the Lenten journey of transformation, we are asked to re-examine how we are living up to our own Christian initiation. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) describes the process of growing to maturity as a Christian as becoming a person who turns readily to God in prayer, is a witness to the faith, sets his/her hope in Christ, is inspired to Christ-like deeds, and who practices love of neighbour even at cost to self. How do we measure up?

Over the weeks of Lent, take up the invite to **recover** your own call to discipleship. How often and well do you pray? Do you witness to your faith in your family, work and other places? Are you a person of joy & hope? Are your actions inspired by Christ? Do you love others enough to make sacrifices for them?

Action for the week:

Get a pen and paper at the start of the week and write down what the word benefit means to you. Then take a moment to evaluate how you spend your time each day this week, divided between criteria such as family, work, internet/social media/TV, driving, prayer/church/time with God, family time, shopping, cleaning, socialising with friends, etc.

1. On a scale of 1-5, to what degree does this activity benefit me?
2. On a scale of 1-5, to what degree does this activity benefit others?
3. On a scale of 1-5, to what degree does this activity benefit the world?

(Benefit is defined in the dictionary as something that improves one's life.) At the end of the week rank the activities in the order from highest number to lowest. Did anything surprise you? Who benefits most from your week? Who is losing out? How can you rebalance and **recover** these benefits? Are there activities that you are not currently doing much of or are not doing at all that you think would be good to do more of or to start? Are there activities that you think you should be doing less of?

Thoughts for the Week:

'Everything in life has its own time. There is time to celebrate and there is time to mourn. This is the time for reflection and transformation. Let us look within and change into what we ought to be.' ~ Aaron Sault

Every day God thinks of you.

-Psalm 68:19

Every hour God looks after you.

-2Thes 3:3

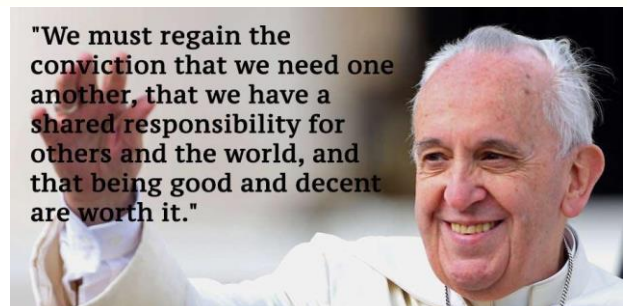
Every minute God cares for you.

-1Peter 5:7

Because every second, He loves you

-Jer 31:3

"We must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world, and that being good and decent are worth it."



Second Sunday of Lent ~ "Rabbi, it is good that we are here!"

Refresh

How are you doing? Did you manage to create a sacred space for yourself last week? If not, don't worry, you can still do it with some candles, symbols, the colour **Violet** for Lent! How is your stone/pebble doing? Did you manage to **recover** a little time for yourself? Did you manage to write down some of your prayers last week?

This week's **task** is to find space and time each day to **Refresh** your relationship with God. Jesus is calling us to do this this week - *to join him on the mountain*. You don't have to go up a high mountain to be alone. Decide what is best for you – ten minutes in the morning or evening? While out walking? Jesus takes the disciples up a mountain this week, is with them on this journey and dispels their fears ~ He walks with you! Maybe write or print out your favourite prayer and put it in your prayer space.

Dear God,
I need you. Everyday,
every moment, every
second that I breathe,
I need you. I am not
strong enough on my
own. AMEN!

Prayer suggestions for the week:

Breathing exercise: When you come to prayer. Be still. To start take three deep breaths... inhale for a count of four, then exhale for a count of four (*all through your nose, which adds a natural resistance to the breath*). **Then, close your eyes and focus on your normal breathing. Do this for as long as you like. Be still. This is the breath of life.** Thank God for this gift of breath and life. Repeat the following slowly:

"Lord, you are closer to me than my own breathing" (St. Teresa).

Gospel reflection ~ Read **Mk9:2-10** two or three times, slowly. Come back to it a few times during the week

Jesus took Peter, James, and John and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no fuller on earth could bleach them. Then Elijah appeared to them along with Moses, and they were conversing with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus in reply, "Rabbi, it is good that we are here! Let us make three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." He hardly knew what to say, they were so terrified. Then a cloud came, casting a shadow over them; from the cloud came a voice, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him." Suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone but Jesus alone with them.



As they were coming down from the mountain, he charged them not to relate what they had seen to anyone, except when the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what rising from the dead meant.

Is there a word, phrase, idea that strikes or surprises you? Maybe something about the Gospel story that you hadn't heard before? Stay with this for a few moments and ask yourself – **Why is this significant to me, now?**

Consider the following:

- The transfiguration experience was one that clarified Jesus' relationship with his Father. What have been the experiences, the moments of insight that have clarified your relationship with God?
- The encounter was a journey that involved the climbing and descending of a mountain, a moment of fear, awe, anxiety; a touch and comfort from a loved one and a mission – Who has comforted you in moments of uncertainty and anxiety on your journey? As you look back can you recognise the loving presence of Jesus who was close to you even at times when you felt far from him? Give thanks for these moments.
- Am I willing to walk with others in their moments of suffering?
- "As they were coming down from the mountain..." When have you returned to day-to-day life after a special experience? What challenges did you face?
- Jesus stands alone with you – What do you say to Him?

Something to think about:

Prayer, put simply, is our relationship with God. But unlike any other relationship God never stops loving us, never stops caring – God never takes the hump! If you understand prayer as relationship with God, you can see how sometimes you are watching God at work, sometimes you're listening to God's voice, sometimes you're chattering away, sometimes you're arguing, and sometimes you're just sitting quietly together. An amazing thing about prayer is that our capacity for intimacy with God is also our capacity to be close to ourselves and others. It's all connected. And, as with any spiritual exercise, prayer benefits from practice, awareness, intention, reflection, and more practice. It's something we always need to refresh. But it's still as natural as breathing. By the way, God's voice is heard in creation, in nature, in human nature, in scripture, and in all forms of inspiration. We need to be open to it. When what you hear carries something like an electric charge, as a special dream does, that's a good clue. It captures your attention, pierces your confusion, arrests your presupposition. It thrills, convicts, consoles, directs. God does talk back, even when we don't listen!

Joyce Rupp puts it very well...

There was a time in my life when I was afraid of being too close or too intimate with God. I was afraid that if I got too close, if I went too deep, God might ask something really difficult of me, like changing my life radically. Even though I prayed every day, I kept my distance. Then one day someone challenged me about this fear. I knew I had to change so I began giving up some of my walls and barriers. I slowly trusted God more. As I did so, I discovered, to my happy surprise, that the heart of God is big and deep and welcoming. Never has God asked too much of me. Always God has led me to become more of who I am meant to be. © Joyce Rupp, Inviting God In

Suggestions for the week:

- **When you wake up in the morning:** Stay in the silence of that moment without radio, mobile phone or T.V. Become aware of your breathing. Tune in to the sounds in your house; listen to the 'dawn chorus' of the birds. ***I thank you, God, for the gift of life and creation.*** What can I do this Lent to show that I am a steward of God's creation? Do I recycle? Could I walk/cycle instead of drive sometimes?
- **When travelling on your own in the car, on the road, or on your bicycle:** Open yourself to your environment and other pilgrims on the way; Look out for spring flowers; notice the colour and shape of buildings; observe the people around you. ***I thank you, God, for your presence in every person, moment and place.***
- **When going to sleep at night:** Begin your preparations for bed earlier than usual and think of all the people you met today; Give thanks for all the blessings of the day; Let go of all hurts that have accumulated through the day ~ **Name** them and **give** them to God. ***I thank you, God, for the gift of your companionship this day.***



Thoughts for the Week:

- *'In my deepest, darkest moments, what really got me through was a prayer. Sometimes my prayer was 'Help me.' Sometimes a prayer was 'Thank you.' What I've discovered is that intimate connection and communication with my creator will always get me through because I know my support, my help, is just a prayer away. ~ Iyanla Vanzant*
- *'About four days a week, I do pretty good at having a morning prayer time. But even at that, it's a rambling sort of thing. What I have learned to do better is to try to keep my mind turned toward God and ear inclined toward God throughout the day, and I think I'm doing better at that, but I've got a long way to go.' ~ Max Lucado*



Third Sunday of Lent ~ "...for he knew what was in each person."

Renew

Lent is moving fast you are already on week 3. How did last week go for you? Did you manage to make time to **refresh** your relationship with God? Have you made a little bit of time for yourself to pray? Keep it up.

Remember to keep your stone/pebble in your pocket each day and whenever you are aware of it, take a deep breath, exhale slowly, and *look for something to be thankful for*. Don't think of something abstract, or far away in time or space, instead think of something to be thankful for right at that moment. It could be thankful for feeling the earth under your feet, for the warmth of the sun on your skin or the air that gives you your next breath... just take a moment to notice it and say thanks. And at the end of the day place it in your prayer space entrusting all your burdens of the day to God.



Lent is often described as a time for **Renewal**: of faith, of commitment, of spirit, of desire, of relationships or even of baptism promises. Quite often we link **Renewal** to a negative, either sinfulness, a failure or a lack of something - Maybe we didn't lack something, maybe we just didn't know it was there or realise the faith we already had?! This week the focus is on you to **Renew** your vision of yourself, your community, your world, and indeed your God! Take the opportunity to explore not only the things that God has for you, but also, and more importantly, to begin to see more clearly the person God wants you to become, how God wants you to live and to reflect God's love and character in your world. *You are loved and you do make a difference!*

*Faith is like the wind,
You can't see it.
But you know it's there!*

Prayer suggestions for the week:

Breathing exercise: As you have been doing for the past two weeks when you come to prayer, **Be still**. Take three deep breaths... inhale for a count of four, then exhale for a count of four, **then focus on your normal breathing. Do this for as long as you can. Build up the time each day to reach 5 mins (or more)**. This is the breath of life. Thank God for this gift. Repeat the following slowly:

*"Be... Be Still. ... Be still and know...
Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10)*

Gospel reflection: Read **Jn 2:13-25** come back to it again a few times during the week. **Is there a word, phrase, idea that strikes you? Maybe something about the story you haven't noticed before? In the stillness repeat that word or phrase in your mind. Stay with this for a few moments.**

When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So, he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!" His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me."

The Jews then responded to him, "What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." They replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" But the temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, many people saw the signs he was performing and believed in his name. But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people. He did not need any testimony about any person, for he knew what was in each person.



Consider the following:

- We are not used to thinking of Jesus angry. Jesus is 'overcome' with fierce love and passion because of the injustice he sees before him. Surely anger is not a good thing? But neither is indifference. What *temples* have we turned into marketplaces today? What should we be angry about?
- How does the Gospel message bear fruit in our lives? What injustices do we see around us? In our communities? In our country? In our world?
- Jesus *knew what was in each person*. Do we see God in ourselves, in others and in the world around us?

Something to think about:

When we look in the mirror who do we see? What I discovered to be true about who I am was so simple that I had been stumbling over it all my life. Who I really am - my true self - is a person created in God's image. God's essence is love. Our true essence is also love. We long to love, and we long to be loved. That is who we are under all the fears and distortions about ourselves, under all our ego and pride and defences. We are spiritual creatures created in the image of the God of love, created to love and to be loved! When we begin to realise this *Good News*, we see ourselves, our world in a new way. Each day becomes a blessing, each moment an opportunity. When we open our eyes to see all that we are being given we become like an artist who takes the time to focus with care on life's details. The slice of toast and cup of tea at breakfast become what they are - a gift. The hug from a friend is seen for what it is - a gift. As we open our eyes and look again, we begin to see that God, the Maker of all things, is a passionate Lover who is forever showering us with gifts, calling out, "*I love you, I love you, I love you! Can you see it? Can you see it in the beauty of the clouds? Can you hear it in that music? Can you feel it in your friend's phone call? Can you see how much I love you?*"

God holds up the mirror of his delight in us for us to look into, to see ourselves as God sees us. God wraps us in love and tells us we are infinitely valuable. God invites us to know who we are—dearly loved children, created to live lives of love.

Adapted from Seeing Ourselves More Clearly by Juanita Ryan



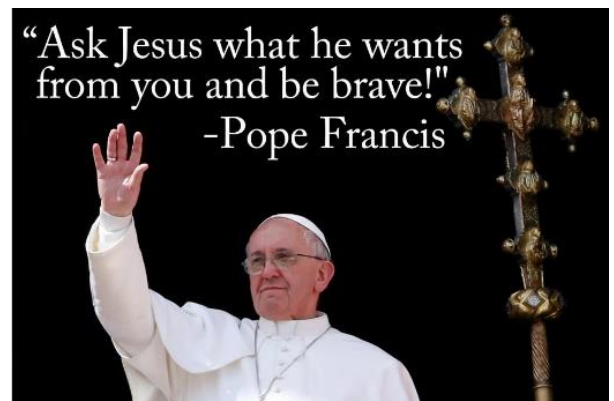
Suggestions for the week:

1. Get some **water** and place it in a bowl in your prayer space. This week recall all the different things you use water for on a daily basis. Give thanks to God for this wonderful gift of water.
2. Drink at least one glass of water each day in a **mindful way**:
 - Take the water slowly to your lips
 - Notice the coolness of the water
 - Feel the heating effect of your mouth on the water
 - Sense the water on your tongue and its flow at the back of your throat
 - Become aware of your body absorbing water
 - Be aware of your thirst abating
3. **Buy a reusable water bottle**, Fill it with water from the tap as you need it, Drink! And finally, if you do have empty plastic bottles lying around, please be sure to recycle them!



Thoughts for the Week:

To be grateful is to recognize the Love of God in everything God has given us - and God has given us everything. Every breath we draw is a gift of God's love, every moment of existence is a grace, for it brings with it immense graces from God. Gratitude therefore takes nothing for granted, is never unresponsive, is constantly awakening to new wonder and to praise of the goodness of God. For the grateful person knows that God is good, not by hearsay but by experience. And that is what makes all the difference.
— Thomas Merton



Fourth Sunday of Lent ~

"God sent his Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but to save the world"

Reconcile

How has the retreat been going for you? **Renewing** your vision of yourself and God is not something that happens overnight - be gentle with yourself & remember, *You are loved and you do make a difference!*

Our focus this week is to **Reconcile**. Forgiving yourself or others is not easy, even harder is recognising the need for or being open to forgiveness. If I gave you a sheet of paper and asked you to write 10 good things about yourself on one side and 10 things you don't like about yourself on the other, which side would get filled quicker and which side would you struggle with? If I then asked you to bring someone else to mind and do the same exercise on a separate sheet of paper for them – which would be easier? *May be an exercise to try?* If you do, put your sheet in your sacred space and bring it to prayer. But remember God loves us in our brokenness, walks with us in our darkness and light, never tires of forgiving us and asks us to be an agent of forgiveness to others.

Prayer suggestions for the week:

- Try this week to take at least one *30-minute* walk through an area you know well. In ordinary walking, we usually have some place to get to. In mindful walking, there is no goal, no place to get to.... set aside a time you decide that would be best to be fully present with whatever is inside of you and all around you. Choose where you will walk and let it be somewhere where you won't be disturbed. It could be your estate, by a river, your area, a park ... *But* walk it as if you are walking it for the first time. Notice colours, plants, faces, smells, signs, voices, sounds ... that you may not have noticed before. On this walk look around and see / feel how wondrous life is, inside yourself and all around you. The lights in the vast expansive sky overhead, birdsong, the caress of a breeze on your face, the smell of cut grass, the taste of the air. Enjoy each nourishing, healing step and with each footprint imprint your gratitude upon this beloved earth. Allow God to surprise you!
- How is your sacred space doing? Can you add a symbol to your sacred space this week to symbolise **Reconciliation**?



Breathing exercise: When you come to prayer, take three deep breaths... inhale for a count of four, then exhale for a count of four, then focus on your normal breathing. Thank God for each breath. Do this for as long as you can. Then begin to repeat slowly the following slowly:

Your word O Lord is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path (Psalm 119:105)

Gospel reflection: Read **Jn 3:14-21**. Not an easy Gospel to read. **Is there a word, phrase, idea that strikes you or disturbs you? In the stillness repeat that word or phrase in your mind. Stay with this for a few moments.** Come back to it again a few times during the week

As Moses lifted up the snake on a pole in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up. Then everyone who believes in him will have eternal life." God loved the world this way: He gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him will not die but will have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but to save the world. Those who believe in him won't be condemned. But those who don't believe are already condemned because they don't believe in God's only Son. This is why people are condemned: The light came into the world. Yet, people loved the dark rather than the light because their actions were evil. People who do what is wrong hate the light and don't come to the light. They don't want their actions to be exposed. But people who do what is true come to the light so that the things they do for God may be clearly seen.



Consider the following:

- This Sunday's Gospel is not easy reading as it is a challenging invitation from Jesus. If we accept the invitation, we must be aware of the consequences:

- *One is that you believe that Jesus is God's Son, and that God loves you and the rest of humanity so much that He gave Jesus as a gift to the world.*
- *The other consequence is that you acknowledge that God's love for you is never-ending. What difference would accepting this make to your Lenten Journey?*
- The imagery in this text of light and darkness, belief and unbelief, emphasises how serious God is about offering us this gift of JESUS. Adapted from Ciaran O'Callaghan *The Year of the Suffering Servant*, (Redemptorist 2011, p. 61).
- Jesus preached/lived a message of salvation not condemnation. What a difference that attitude would make if we could embrace it. Condemning others and ourselves comes too easily to us. Forgiving doesn't. The real task is to **reconcile**, forgive and to work to bring that out in those around us. *Is there something I need forgiveness for? Is there someone I need to forgive? Can I take a step towards that this week?*

Something to think about:

As long as we share our stories, as long as our stories reveal our strengths and vulnerabilities to each other, we reinvigorate our understanding and tolerance for the little quirks of personality that in other circumstances would drive us apart. When we live in a family, a community, a country where we know each other's true stories, we remember our capacity to lean in and love each other into wholeness.

I have read the story of a tribe in southern Africa called the Babemba in which a person doing something wrong, something that destroys this delicate social net, brings all work in the village to a halt. The people gather around the "offender," and one by one they begin to recite everything he has done right in his life: every good deed, thoughtful behaviour, act of social responsibility. These things have to be true about the person, and spoken honestly, but the time-honoured consequence of misbehaviour is to appreciate that person back into the better part of himself. The person is given the chance to remember who he is and why he is important to the life of the village.

I want to live under such a practice of compassion. When I forget my place, when I lash out with some private wounding in a public way, I want to be *remembered* back into alignment with myself and my purpose. I want to live with the opportunity for **Reconciliation**. When someone around me is thoughtless or cruel, I want to be given the chance to respond with a ritual that creates the possibility of reconnection. I want to live in a neighbourhood where people don't shoot first, don't sue first, where people are Story catchers willing to discover in strangers the mirror of themselves. *Christina Baldwin, Storycatcher: Making Sense of Our Lives through the Power and Practice of Story*



Suggestions for the week:

- **Before you go to sleep:** This week, before you go to sleep at night, think back over your day. Were there moments of joy and love? What were the moments of pain or negativity? Name those moments and give them to God, make a commitment to say sorry to another where needed. Give thanks to God for your day.

I thank you, God, for the gift of your companionship this day

- Find out when the **Easter Sacrament of Reconciliation** for your parish is on – make a point of going!
- **Darkness & Light** – Make a plan to replace old filament and halogen bulbs in your house with the much more energy efficient CFL (*Compact Fluorescent Lamps*) or LED bulbs. They last on average 10 times longer, which means less electricity, less carbon in the atmosphere and extra money in your pocket in the long-term. **Maybe have one evening meal** this week by *candle light*, fun and possibly romantic! Turn appliances **OFF** in your work environment & at home at night. The average household spends 9% of their electricity bills on wasted 'standby' energy, costing approximately €115 or £100 a year. By switching off appliances at the socket you'll save money, energy and help the environment!



Thoughts for the Week:

How can you love those who have stolen from you, assaulted or abused you, or tried to blow you up and completely destroy you? How can you forgive those who have kidnapped, tortured and killed someone you love? Yet this is where reconciliation has to begin. ~Andrew White

I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples. ~ Mother Teresa.

Do not be afraid to ask God's forgiveness! He never tires of forgiving us, like a father who loves us. God is pure mercy! ~ Pope Francis

Fifth Sunday of Lent ~ "... my Father will honour anyone who serves me"

Respond

Almost there! We are on week 5 of our Lenten Retreat. How has it been going for you? Did you manage to celebrate the **Easter Sacrament of Reconciliation** in your parish? If not try this week. Remember - *God does not love me because I am good, God loves me because God is good. Every time God forgives us, God is saying God's own rules do not matter as much as the relationship that God wants to create with us!!*

Our focus this week is to **Respond**. *Prayer is important but we must also be open to action* (Trocaire). How attentive are we to the needs of those around us? Do we notice those who have no voice? Are we aware of our connectedness to others? *When we feel helpless where situations of injustice are concerned, we must remember that we are full of light and are being called out of a culture of despair. We are powerful beyond measure. Never forget that. We can do small things; we can help to remove the restraints of injustice instead of sitting in the darkness* (Trocaire).

**LET YOUR
FAITH
BE BIGGER
THAN YOUR
FEARS**

As Pope Francis tweeted, 'Do not give up your dreams of a more just world!!'

Prayer suggestions for the week:

When you come to prayer, take three deep slow breaths and then focus on your normal breathing.

- **This is the breath of life. Thank God for this gift.** When you breathe in you are bringing energy and life to your body. When you breathe out, you are giving a gift to the world, feeding the plants and the trees, playing your part in nature. Stay with these thoughts as you breathe. **Repeat Lord, you are closer to me than my own breathing (St. Teresa). Continue this exercise for as long as you can.**
- Can you add a symbol to your sacred space this week to remind yourself of **solidarity** with the poor and your connected-ness to those around you? Can you write down your prayer?

Gospel reflection: Read **Jn 12:20-30**. Two or three times this week. *Is there a word, phrase, idea that strikes you or disturbs you? In the stillness repeat that word or phrase in your mind. Stay with this for a few moments.* Come back to it again a few times during the week

Some Greeks were among those who had gone to Jerusalem to worship during the festival. They went to Philip (he was from Bethsaida in Galilee) and said, "Sir, we want to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew, and the two of them went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, "The hour has now come for the Son of Man to receive great glory. I am telling you the truth: a grain of wheat remains no more than a single grain unless it is dropped into the ground and dies. If it does die, then it produces many grains. Those who love their own life will lose it; those who hate their own life in this world will keep it for life eternal. Whoever wants to serve me must follow me, so that my servant will be with me where I am. And my Father will honour anyone who serves me. "Now my heart is troubled—and what shall I say? Shall I say, 'Father, do not let this hour come upon me'? But that is why I came—so that I might go through this hour of suffering. Father, bring glory to your name!" Then a voice spoke from heaven, "I have brought glory to it, and I will do so again." The crowd standing there heard the voice, and some of them said it was thunder, while others said, "An angel spoke to him!" But Jesus said to them, "It was not for my sake that this voice spoke, but for yours. Now sentence is being passed on this world; now the prince of this world is to be overthrown. And when I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all to myself.' By these words he indicated the kind of death he would die.

Consider the following:

- This Sunday's Gospel can be a pretty difficult passage to wrestle with. It's one of those passages that seems to defy attempts at a pleasant message, at least that's what I found. Do we *really* want to see Jesus? If so, what would he look like, in our world today?
- Who is the Jesus we are looking for and what does being a true disciple ask of us?
- The short parable of the seed which has fallen on the ground and eventually dies to yield new life in abundance. This concept of losing what one has to give way to something new and life-giving can be frightening. We can get so attached to things, time and worries and lifestyle changes are tough! How does your faith shape your lifestyle?
- How does this passage speak to your Lenten journey? How does it ask you to **Respond**?

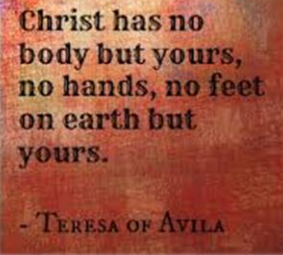


Something to think about:

If we claim to be disciples of Jesus, then baptism should serve as a guide for our own convictions. Through our baptism, we are asked the following: *Are we living among God's faithful people? Are we hearing the word of God and sharing in the Lord's Supper? Are we proclaiming the good news of God in Christ through word and actions? Are we serving all people, following the example of Jesus? Are we striving for justice and peace in all the earth?* What if we took a moment to examine our lives and our current values alongside both the convictions of those who have helped shape us, who inspire us and our baptismal promises? An interesting exercise – if we did it our *real* convictions would rise to the surface of our day-to-day lives.

For me, I decided that striving for justice and peace, being a disciple meant contributing to the efforts that address the systemic causes of homelessness in my community. As a result, I volunteer one afternoon a week at an organization that serves our city's homeless population. During my afternoon of volunteering, I answer phone calls and transfer them to the folks who can help. Sometimes I help people sign up for services. It doesn't always feel like I'm doing a lot, but it enables the staff to work on finding—and creating—homes and other supportive services for people in our community who don't have them. In giving a little, I get a lot. Our convictions, our core values, do represent our faith. **They are our faith.** The ways in which we use our voices, our money, our time, our resources and our talents, the way we **Respond** (or not!!) says something about the God we follow and in whom we place our trust. Standing for our faith can sometimes feel very risky and uncomfortable. Our baptism, our faith does have a responsibility and although tough at times we remember Jesus never asks more from us than we can give. And always we remember that we are backed—and more, that we are loved—by the One who stood for us.

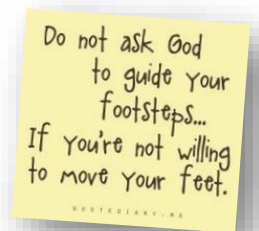
Adapted from Emily K. Hartner, Faith Reflections: Faith in action



Suggestions for the week:

- **Make a conscious commitment** to do **1 thing each day** this week to help someone – *no matter how small.*
- **Before you go to sleep** recognise and give thanks to Jesus at work in your life each day.
 - Where did you meet Jesus today?
 - Did you recognise Jesus in your actions, in your discussions, in your meetings and dealings with others?
 - Did you make use of, appreciate your own gifts and talents today?
 - Were you generous in sharing these gifts and seeing those of others?
 - Did you make a difference to 1 person today?

I thank you, Jesus, for the blessing of your companionship this day



- **Plug into your parish, your faith community.** Every parish has Lenten/Easter liturgies (*like the daily Mass liturgies and the Lent Reconciliation services*), and they also have other seasonal activities. Engaging in them as a family (*if possible*), or with friends helps to keep Christ at the centre, and it will also help you to help others. Keeping connected with other members of your family of faith has been really important and inspirational over this last year. Never underestimate the support you give to others even by your very presence, commitment and enthusiasm – virtual or otherwise. You are building up your parish by participating in these liturgies and activities!! Why not see how you can get more involved? Find out if there is a parish group or ministry you could bring your gifts & talents to. Find out what Charities are in your parish. Take the risk!

Thoughts for the Week:

This then is what we are about. We plant the seed that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that the future holds promise. We lay foundations that will need further development.... We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in that.... This enables us to do something and do it well... We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker. We are workers not master builders, ministers not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own. - (Attributed to Oscar Romero)

Faith comes alive when the word read from the page becomes the word heard in your heart - Rex Rouis

Faith - a gift to be received, one that requires a corresponding action to make it complete - unknown

Palm Sunday & Holy Week ~ "... into your hands I commend my spirit"

This is the last part of this year's Something Different for Lent. I hope this DIY retreat has helped you to find some space during your day for yourself and perhaps it has helped you to pray & reflect; well done for staying with it!! Your Lenten journey is coming to an end as we approach Easter. During Easter week it would be good to finish your retreat by participation as fully as you can in the Holy Week services in your own local parish. I hope these reflections have been helpful in your Lenten preparation, keep me in your prayers and if you have any thoughts by all means drop me an email! Thank you & God bless.

A walk through our retreat – take a moment to reflect on the journey you have taken.

- We began by realising that we need time to **Recover**, to remove ourselves from our hectic world for a few minutes each day, to give ourselves a little space and time. *Continue to gift some time each day for yourself.*
- We then took time to **Refresh** our relationship with God. *Keep up the prayer!* – Remember God never takes the hump!
- There was then a challenge to **Renew** your vision of yourself, your community, your world, and indeed your God! Remembering *You are loved, and you do make a difference!*
- **Reconcile** - Remembering our need for forgiveness and that forgiving yourself or others is not easy, even harder is recognising the need for or being open to forgiveness. But God is with us always, with open arms.
- Last week our challenge was to **Respond**. Prayer is important but we must also be open to action. *We are witnesses to the Good News!*



Can you continue this during Holy Week and beyond? It can be hard at times but as Pope Francis Tweeted, (@Pontifex) *Having faith does not mean having no difficulties, but having the strength to face them, knowing we are not alone.*

Prayer suggestions for the week:

You may have created a sacred space in your home for prayer during this Lenten retreat.



Consider that space now:

- Can you continue to use it as part of daily prayer, especially during Holy Week but also after Easter?
- Has it changed over the course of this Lenten journey? What have you added/taken out?
- Is there a symbol, a reflection, a word/phrase that has stood out for you over the past 6 weeks? What is it? Why is it significant for you?
- Have you managed to write down some of your own thoughts and prayers over the last few weeks? Can you continue to do this?
- Perhaps you can place a palm branch in that space to symbolise the beginning of our journey into Holy Week.
- Also leave your stone/pebble in your prayer space this week – symbolising the journey that has brought you to this point and your openness to the week, the journey ahead.

Gospel reflection: Mark 14:1-15:47

This Sunday's Gospel is often known as 'the long Gospel'. Don't let that put you off otherwise you miss the drama of the journey that this week offers you. It is a story that most know and reveals the drama of the week ahead. It is also the only gospel during the year that the congregation plays an active role in. Try to read the Gospel, or part of it, this week. Read it as if hearing the story for the first time!



- We hold up our palms singing "*Hosanna, Hosanna*" as we prepare to follow Jesus into Holy Week. *How can we enable this to be a personal 'moment of opportunity' for us too?*
- What does it actually mean to be a follower of Jesus? *What does this self-emptying on the cross challenge us to do this Easter season?* (Amanda Dillon ~ Intercom)
- What parts of the story are uncomfortable? What parts are easier to read? *Why?*

- The cross looks shameful, not glorious. It is scandalous and a stumbling block for many. It does not seem to make sense to us. But Jesus' cross displays the glory of his love - love for you personally. Think about the fact that Jesus' love, his love shown on the cross is the ultimate sign of his love, mercy and his glory. Remember that suffering is never the will of God, but the cross shows us that God is *with us* in our suffering – we are never alone. *What will the love of God, the mercy of God, as revealed by the cross, empower you to do?*

Something to think about:

Holy Week is *not* an event but a profound journey. It encompasses all our human and spiritual feelings, emotions and longings. It is a journey that ebbs through darkness and light, from lows to highs, from suffering to joy, from devastation to glory. Our natural reaction may be to move quickly to the resurrection and skip past the rest. But try, this Holy Week, to stay a moment with the story of each day as it is unfolding. Feel the emotion, the drama, the fear & the elation - *Allow it to speak to your own story.*

DO NOT ABANDON
YOURSELVES TO
DESPAIR. WE ARE THE
EASTER PEOPLE AND
HALLELUJAH IS OUR
SONG.

St Pope John Paul II

Monday ~ Reflect on the story of the Passion. *There are so many characters in this story, disciples, friends, bystanders and betrayers. We can recognise bits of ourselves in each of them. Place yourself in the story as it unfolds each day. Be honest with yourself and think about what you would have done as one of Jesus' followers.*

Lord help me to follow you more closely.

Tuesday ~ Wear or carry a small cross in your pocket today as a reminder of God's great love for you.

Lord, thank you for your love for me.

Wednesday ~ Make a small sacrifice for someone today. Make a special effort to be respectful to those you encounter today.

Lord, help me to see you in others.

Holy Thursday ~ What did you hope to achieve and experience this Lenten season? What steps can you take today to bring yourself closer to that goal? Do one thing of service today for another – joyfully!

Lord, guide my steps.

Good Friday ~ When you make the sign of the cross today, remember that God is with us in our suffering with endless mercy & love. As you walk through today look around your community – can you see 'the Crucified One & the crucified ones in your community?' – Notice those who are outcast & suffering.

Lord, open my eyes to see and respond to you suffering today.

Holy Saturday ~ Tonight, light a candle as a symbol of Christ's light in your life, a light that dispels darkness. If possible, light this candle during your prayer time in the Easter season.

Lord, you are my light.

Easter Sunday ~ New life! Is there a change you want to make in your life? The joy of the resurrection is to be shared – so smile! How can you share this Good News? Write a brief note to yourself on this day of transformation. And, enjoy the chocolate!!

Lord, may I be a witness of your Good News for others, Alleluia.

Thoughts for the Week:

Starting over is an acceptance of a past we can't change, an unrelenting conviction that the future can be different, and the stubborn wisdom to use the past to make the future what the past was not. ~ Craig D. Lounsbrough

On Holy Saturday I do my best to live in that place, that wax-crayon place of trust and waiting. Of accepting what I cannot know. Of mourning what needs to be mourned. Of accepting what needs to be accepted. Of hoping for what seems impossible. ~ Jackson Greer

Easter says you can put truth in a grave, but it won't stay there. ~ Clarence W. Hall

On this Easter Sunday.... Forgive someone. Tell someone you love them. Let your light shine. ~ Author Unknown

A Prayer for Holy Week

Lord Jesus Christ,
in this sacred and solemn week
when I see again the depth and
mystery of your redeeming love,
help me;
to follow where you go,
to stop where you stumble,
to listen when you cry,
to hurt as you suffer,
to bow my head in sorrow as you die,
so that, when you are raised to life
again,
I may share in your endless joy. **Amen**
From "Celebrating God's Presence"

My own thoughts, prayers reflections & scribblings -



We are an
Easter
PEOPLE
and
hallelujah
is our song.
- ST. JOHN PAUL II

