

**LENT, A JOURNEY TO DISCIPLESIP**  
**A PERIOD FOR PURIFICATION AND ENLIGHTENMENT**  
**A PERSONAL WALK ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS**

*Jesus himself drew near and walked with them on the road to Emmaus.*

The unknown stranger spoke  
and their hearts  
burned.

*Walk with us too!  
Let our hearts burn within us!*

Their eyes were opened  
when he blessed  
and broke  
bread.

*Let us  
know you in the  
breaking of the bread,  
and in every person we meet.*

They begged him

to stay  
with them in the  
village they called home.

*Please  
stay with us.  
Do not leave us  
at the end of this day,  
or at the end of all of our days.*

## **INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>:**

Each year, Lent offers us a providential opportunity to deepen the meaning and value of our Christian lives, and it stimulates us to rediscover the mercy of God so that we, in turn, become more merciful toward our brothers and sisters. In the Lenten period, the Church makes it her duty to propose some specific tasks that accompany the faithful concretely in this process of interior renewal: these are prayer, fasting and almsgiving. In this year's Lenten journey, we want to spend time reflecting on the Scripture and in prayer. We are not unlike the disciples who were accompanied by the Lord on the road to Emmaus.

They reflected on the Scripture as Jesus explained it to them. And they engaged in the most formidable type of prayer known to us, a dialogue with the Risen Lord.

The materials that follow are presented to you as "signposts" on your personal walk with Jesus this Lent. Recommended Scripture readings, reflections and suggested prayers are provided. But no one can walk your walk for you. You need to spend time with the Lord whenever and wherever you can. He wants to share in your life and He wants you to share in His. And like the disciples who walked with Jesus, at the end of your own walk, you, too, will recognize Him in the breaking of the bread.

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<sup>1</sup> Adopted from the message of His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI, 2008  
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## **ASH WEDNESDAY**

### **Message of Pope Benedict XVI, Ash Wednesday, 6 February 2008**

Dear brothers and sisters, let us ask Our Lady, Mother of God and of the Church, to accompany us on our way through Lent, so that it may be a journey of true conversion. May we let ourselves be led by her, and inwardly renewed we will arrive at the celebration of the great mystery of Christ's Pasch, the supreme revelation of God's merciful love.

A good Lent to you all!

### **Reflection on Ash Wednesday**

Last year, the writer Mary Karr published a beautiful memoir of her life, and her conversion to Catholicism. Some have actually compared it to the "Confessions" of St. Augustine. The book is called "Lit." The title refers to literature, but also to the idea of carrying within you a kind of light, of being "lit."

It's not always easy reading. Karr writes about growing up in an abusive, alcoholic home...about her early, unsatisfying marriage...about her own struggles with addiction and time she spent in a mental hospital.

At one point, she describes her father's final illness. The family knew he was deteriorating, and they brought him home to die. He often had difficulty speaking. But repeatedly, surprisingly, he managed to communicate one simple word: "Garfield." Well, he had an orange Garfield the cat coffee mug by his bed, and people thought he was talking about that.

But his daughter Mary realized, after a time, the real meaning and poignancy of that one word: "Garfield." He wasn't talking about a cartoon cat. He never even read the comic page in the paper. No, Mary realized: that word meant something else. It was the family's address — 4901 Garfield Street. He was talking about where he lived. "Garfield," to him, meant home. Safety. Security. Even, perhaps, love. He wanted everyone to know that was where he was, where he wanted to be, and where he belonged.

And so it is, I think, with all of us.

It's one reason we are here, on this ordinary day, in the middle of an ordinary week, to declare our desire, our yearning, our hope. We want to return to God.

We want to be home.

It turns out, that's what God wants, too. "Return to me, with your whole heart," we hear in the first reading from Joel. We are prodigal children, who have drifted away. We need to be back where we belong, in the arms of a loving father.

And so we begin the return: Lent, the long 40-day walk back.

Lent is a penitential season, a time for doing without. Ashes are just the beginning. Our music becomes simpler, our liturgies plainer. The "Gloria" is gone. We fast, we pray. We may give up chocolates or meat or television. But for all of this season's sobriety, we shouldn't lose sight of something vitally important: this is a journey we undertake with joy.

Part of that is because we are seeking to draw closer to God – the source and summit of our happiness. But part of it, I think, is something else, too. Something that goes to our roots as Catholic Christians.

It's right there, in our baptism. When we were baptized, our parents and godparents received a tiny flame, a burning candle, with the words, "Receive the light of Christ." Well, that light still burns. Maybe it's dimmed. Maybe it is only a small ember now. Maybe it's had to struggle against wind and cold. Maybe we've ignored it, or forgotten it.

But the light is there.

So yes, this day is about ashes.

But Lent? Lent is about that fire.

Over the next 40 days, let's ask ourselves: how can we fan the flame, and make it grow? How can we turn a flicker into a blaze?

Or to borrow the title of Mary Karr's book: how can we affirm to the world that we are lit?

Sometime this day, ashes – the remnant of a flame — will be placed on your forehead. And the great work of these 40 days will begin. Work of conversion and repentance. The work of praying more faithfully, loving more deeply.

And when you go into the world today, those ashes will speak volumes – about belief, about commitment, and even about hope. People will pass you on the street, see you at the office, sit beside you on the train. They'll notice something different. They may give you a curious look at the grocery store or stare at your forehead when you step up to the counter at the bank.

Most of them may only see the ashes.

But strive for something else. Strive to let them see the flame.

Strive to bring them the light of Christ.

Because these 40 days are about much more than ashes. They are about that light — and about rediscovering something we may have too easily forgotten.

In spite of sin and indifference, in spite of living in a world crowded by cynicism and doubt, we are still what our baptism proclaimed us to be. We are “children of the light.”

And the candle still burns.

## I. First week of Lent

A. Recommended Scripture readings: Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-15; Luke 4:1-13

B. Historical and biblical references

1. A forty day period of time is repeated throughout the bible;
2. Presentation of Jesus 40 days after his birth to the Temple (Lk 2:46-49)
3. Time between resurrection and ascension (Acts 1:3)
4. Flood (Gen 7: 17); time until Noah opened hatch of the arc (Gen 8:6)

C. Who is Satan? What does his name mean in Hebrew

1. Seducer; accuser (Refer to Book of Job for Satan's role as accuser.)

D. The forty days of temptation preceded the beginning of Jesus' ministry and prepared Him to resist the temptations which followed. The forty days of Lent is to allow *us* to prepare to resist the temptations of the world and precedes our renewed ministry, as witnesses of Christ.

E. The temptation of Christ gives us comfort that as a man, Jesus confronted the temptations of Satan. Therefore, we have a great advocate before God the Father. (Heb 4:15 “For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sinning”)

F. Jesus is the “New Adam” (Catechism of the Catholic Church 538); Man fell to Satan’s temptation (Gen 3:1-7) but Jesus resisted.

G. Catechism of the Catholic Church 538-540 (Profession of Faith, Jesus' temptations)

#### **H. Matthew 4:1-11: The Temptation of Christ**

1. The easy ways and earthly rewards offered by Satan can lead to the fear of our loss of friendship with Jesus
2. What would have happened to all of us if Jesus had accepted the offers of Satan?
  - a) “One does not live by bread alone.” What about us; are we placing a worldly god...material things...ahead of the true God?
  - b) “You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.” Are we constantly testing God? Do we bargain with the Lord? Do we believe that God isn’t there in the hard times? Have we asked “Where is God?” when something bad has happened?
  - c) “The Lord, your God, shall you worship and Him alone shall you serve.” How many gods do we serve? Money? Pride? Power? Prestige?
    - (1) Mother Theresa said: “We are not called to be successful, but faithful.”
  - d) What would have happened to mankind if Jesus didn’t die for us, but rather took the easy way...like most of us...and became the King of the world? How would we have been redeemed without the shedding of His blood and paying the price of sin, death, for us?

#### **I. Mark 1:12-15**

1. Mark: “The battle in the desert”
  - a) The struggle of Jesus in the desert is considered a preview of the ministry of Jesus as well as the likely struggles of His Church.

b) Notice that Satan *is not* defeated, he merely leaves to wait for another opportunity; the temptations will not end, but rather continue. When was the temptation likely the most severe? (Read the account of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane to see Jesus' anxiety).

(1) If we are the people of God, doesn't this warn us that temptations will occur in our "deserts"?

(a) Those in the desert need water; Jesus is the living water (See, Readings for 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Sundays of Lent)

(2) Why did He go to the desert? The Gospel teaches He was tempted by Satan? What's the purpose? Is Jesus experiencing what we experience to assure and comfort us that He knows how we are tempted?

(3) Could Satan ever win? Isn't the message that evil can *never* triumph over Christ? So to whom should we cling, the winner or the loser?

(4) "...and the angels ministered to him." This recalls the angel who guided the Israelites in the desert in the first Exodus (14, 19; 23, 20) and the angel who supplied Elijah in the wilderness (1 Kings 19:5-7). God's angels always appear to protect God's people in times of need from "wild beasts." (See also Ezek 34:25; Dan 6:22)

(5) The great news of the Gospel reading according to Mark is that although we will be tempted by Satan, on Satan's own turf (in biblical times, people believe that demons and evil spirits lived in the desert, graveyards etc.) we have a God whose only Son has lived through the temptations of Satan, too, "fought the good fight" and won. Further, our God will dispatch His angels to protect His

children...we are fortunate to be sons and daughters of such a loving God.

c) Mark 1:15 “This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel”

(1) What does “repent” mean?

(a) Jonah 3:1-10 “And God seeth their works, that they have turned back from their evil ways, and God repenteth of the evil that He spake of doing to them, and he hath not done [it].” Repent didn’t always implicate sin.

(b) Greek word [*metanoia*] literally means to change your mind, or turn away

(i) In the New Testament, the term does not merely mean “change of mind”; it reflects the “Old Testament” and Jewish concept of turning around or turning away from sin.

Jewish people were to repent every time they sinned; the New Testament uses the term for the once-and-for-all “turning” a Gentile or sinner would undergo when becoming a follower of Jesus

(c) Which of the two, “repent” or “believe in the gospel” is the most important?

(i) The Gospel [good news] is that Jesus has come to redeem the world; it is an acknowledgment that no man, by his performance alone, can earn reconciliation with God. It would be cruel God the Father to send his only Son to die on the cross if man alone

could, by his performance alone, achieve salvation.

(ii)

J. Luke 4:1-13

1. The Lucan order of temptations ends on the parapet of the temple in Jerusalem , the city in which Jesus will face crucifixion
  - a) Satan tempts Jesus to have his angels rescue him against sure death from leaping from the parapet; the crowds tempt Jesus again in a similar way as he suffers on the cross (Lk 23: 35-37; Mt 27: 42-43; Mk 15: 30-32)
2. Satan departs only “for a time.” Satan’s pursuit of Jesus and His followers is relentless and endless.
  - a) Even this victory over Satan is temporary; Satan *never* gives up in his pursuit of Jesus and His followers.
    - (1) Satan returns in Lk 22: 3(enters Judas),31-32 (testing [“sifting’]of Peter), 53(seizure of Jesus by chief priests, elders and guards under the influence of Satan)
3. The word *tempt* in English usually means to entice to sin. The scriptural word here means *test* in the sense of proving and purifying someone to see if there are ready for the task at hand.

## **A REFLECTION FOR THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT**

Lent is a time of penitence and confession. So today, I want to begin with a confession: I love the TV show “Undercover Boss.”

This reality show debuted on CBS right after the Super Bowl. The premise is surprisingly simple: the CEO of a Fortune 500 company agrees to spend one week living and working as an entry-level employee in his own company. He changes his name, wears a disguise, and literally goes “undercover.”

The first week, the man who did this was Larry O'Donnell, the head of Waste Management Inc., the largest waste disposal company in America. He makes a seven figure salary and lives in a beautiful home. But he gave that up for seven days, agreed to spend a week staying in a cheap motel, driving a garbage truck, emptying waste bins, and cleaning out portable toilets. As it turned out, he was terrible at it. He did such a bad job, he actually – for the first time in his life – got fired.

Last week, the main character was Coby Brooks, the President of Hooters, who worked as a dishwasher in Dallas, and stood on street corners in a tacky tee shirt to give out samples of chicken wings. He heard what people really think of his restaurants – and saw, in one shocking scene, how the waitresses are sometimes treated just as sex objects by management.

In both cases, the CEOs got to experience what their employees have to put up with – indignity, long hours, low pay, sexism. But they also got to share in the spirit that sustains these workers – optimism, faith, love of family. They saw the enthusiasm and sense of humor that some people bring to even the most menial jobs. The corporate leaders ultimately left their experiences changed.

In some ways, these are small stories of redemption and conversion – and not a bad fit, really, for the season we are just beginning, the season of Lent.

But I think there is another way of looking at this show – and I doubt it's one that the creators imagined.

The story of an “undercover boss” — the story of a powerful leader lowering himself to menial work, and enduring all the struggles, hardship and pain that go with it — that story is also the story of something we celebrate every Sunday. It is the Incarnation. It is the reality of God becoming man. Sharing our sufferings. Bearing our burdens. Facing our trials. And knowing, as well, our hopes and joys. Jesus did all that – he was a man like us in all things but sin, Paul wrote – and we get a vivid example of it in today’s gospel.

Luke presents us with the story of Christ's 40 days in the desert. It is more than a period of sacrifice. It is a time of testing – and temptation.

Luke describes three particular temptations – hunger, power and immortality. Face it: those are three of the most urgent desires any one know. And they go to the heart of who we are.

Hunger can be more than just a craving for a hamburger; there is the hunger for love, or for sex, or for attention. The human appetite is sometimes insatiable.

Power is about more than political ambition or world domination or celebrity; it is also about control, and independence -not being accountable to anyone, and being able to do what you want whenever you want, however you want. Tiger Woods acknowledged that this was part of his problem. He thought he had earned the right to do what he was doing.

And immortality is really about more than never dying. It's about more than having the constant protection of angels. It is also about never feeling pain, or loss, or sickness, or sorrow.

Think of what the devil is offering: total satisfaction...absolute power...complete freedom. That would be irresistible to most of us. But not to Jesus. And for one startling reason: these are all things that would deprive Christ of his humanity. In saying "no" to these temptations, and not giving in to them, Christ is saying "yes" to being one with us.

He is saying: I will know what it is like to be hungry, to crave something that I can't have.

He is saying: I will know what it is like to want power, but to be powerless.

And he is saying: I will know what it is to hurt, and to bleed, and to die.

And so, as his earthly ministry unfolds, he will share our hardships and frustrations, our temptations and trials. He will feel what it is like to be denied, and betrayed. He will know every kind of person. He'll know Judas – and St. John, the beloved disciple. He'll meet the woman at the well, and Mary and Martha. He will know our dreams, and the things that sustain us. He will see all that we are – the good, the bad, and the ugly.

He will be the ultimate "Undercover Boss."

As we begin our journey through Lent, Luke's gospel reminds us: we do not go into the desert alone. We go with Christ. He knows what we are living with, and living without. So, turn to him in moments of temptation or need. Take his hand. Receive his strength. Look into his eyes, the eyes that have shed tears, and blinked away sweat. Ask for his help. He is God – but he is also us.

And we do not go into the desert of Lent alone.

This afternoon, our RCIA candidates will also be heading out on a journey – and they won't be alone, either. They are going to take part in the Rite of Sending and Rite of Election, joining hundreds of others from around the diocese, to continue their walk in faith. They will all move closer to receiving their sacraments. And they will carry with them all our prayers, our hopes, our joy, as we eagerly await the day when they can join us at the table of the Lord.

I know this journey for you candidates isn't always easy. And I know there are temptations to just give up. But remember one of the beautiful messages of today's gospel: Christ was also tempted. And in the days ahead, his understanding, his love, his grace will make what seems impossible...possible.

Because none of us goes into the desert alone.

The Boss is with us.

## A REFLECTION ON THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

On Friday, March 11, 2011, when I clicked on my computer at home, I was stunned, like a lot of people, to see the images and video from Japan.



Within hours after it happened, almost instantaneously, hundreds if not thousands of pictures and videos had been loaded onto the Internet, many from cell phone cameras, capturing this disaster as it was happening. It has brought the whole world into this experience in an astonishing way – with an urgency and an intimacy, I think, that rivaled what we remember from 9/11. We have all found ourselves somehow connected to this catastrophe.

Earlier in the week, ironically, the Smithsonian released some pictures that also connected us to another catastrophe: several previously unseen photographs following the San Francisco earthquake of 1906. And they looked like they could have been taken yesterday – because, incredibly, they were in color, using a special technique and camera. It's a shock to see because, as one historian explained: "We only know the world of the past in black and white."

But that's not the way it was lived. I think that relates, as well, to this morning's gospel. The life of Christ was more than just words on a page, more than black and white. Here we see the savior of the world in living color.

He was God. And he was a man.

He was one of us.

In a few weeks, we will hear again of how he suffered and struggled and bled to death on the cross. But here, we get another glimpse of his humanity, when we see him experience – as all of us do – temptation.

As St. Paul reminded us, Christ was a man like us in all things but sin – a figure of flesh and blood, of joy and pain, of appetites and longings. And this gospel makes that abundantly clear.

But it also assures us of something we so easily forget. God's entry into history was total. His decision to take on human flesh was just that – a decision, a choice. And Matthew's account of the temptations in the desert shows us what that choice entailed – and where God chose to dwell.

He didn't choose the self-satisfied, or the fulfilled, or the powerful, or the secure.

He identified, instead, with those who have nothing.

Look at the temptations he faced: for food, for protection, for power. He rejected them all.

When Jesus was in the desert, preparing for his public ministry, he chose to stay hungry, to fast – and so expressed solidarity with all those who are starving, or thirsting. He would know intimately the desires of all who don't have enough to eat, or who go to bed hungry.

When Jesus was in the desert, he chose to go unprotected – and so expressed kinship with all those who feel vulnerable or insecure, weak or defenseless. He would know what it is like to feel helpless, and homeless — to risk falling and have no one to catch you, no safety net to save you.

And when Jesus was in the desert, he chose to be powerless. In doing that, he expressed sympathy for all who have no voice, no power, no control. The God who made everything would know what it was like to have nothing. The One who is so vast that He is everywhere would experience what it is like to be small, and fragile, and profoundly human. He would even take that one step further at the Last Supper: the Lord of all would humble himself to be as small as a piece of bread.

The temptations that Christ faced tell us how very human he was – and in that humanity, we not only see ourselves, but we see even more deeply the profound generosity of God. We see how much God loves us. He loves us enough to experience everything that we are, everything that we struggle against – and He did it willingly, as an enduring and complete act of love.

It is a foretaste of what He will do for us on Calvary.

And it serves to teach us just how real and how immediate the incarnation was. Like history, it didn't happen in black and white. It wasn't just words on a page. It was in living color.

As we begin Lent, we join ourselves with Christ's sacrifice – fasting and giving up simple comforts — to express our own humility and unworthiness, and to share the struggles of a suffering world. This weekend, that includes, in particular, the suffering of the people of Japan – the thousands who in their own way are facing their own desert.

In that bleak landscape, they know hunger. They know uncertainty, and worry about poison in the air. They know what it means to be powerless, wondering if the earth could shift at any moment, feeling as if there is no one to catch them if they fall.

This day, our prayers and hearts are joined to theirs. May the Lord of the desert — our God who knows human suffering first hand — protect them and uplift them, console them and strengthen them.

And may He open our hearts to give all that we can in their moment of need.

**II. Second week of Lent: Recommended Scripture Readings: Matthew 17:1-9; Mark 9:2-10; Luke 9: 28-36**

**A. Historical and Biblical references**

1. According to rabbinical teachings, Elijah was to precede the coming of the Messiah.(Mal 3, 23-24) Jesus identifies John the Baptist as Elijah (“But I tell you that Elijah has come...” Mark 9:14)
2. The shadow of God is similar to the Old Testament when the overshadowing of the cloud indicated the Lord’s presence in the midst of His people. (Ex 40, 34-35; 1Kgs 8, 10) (The cloud envelops the “tent” where Moses met God “face to face.”)
3. Moses and Elijah represent the Old Testament law and prophecy. They symbolize the fulfillment of both the Law and prophecy (Ex 19, 16-20, 17; 1Kgs 19, 2-14)
4. Elijah never died; left in a flaming chariot (2 King 2:11)
5. Moses buried by God, no one knows where (Deut 34:6)
6. Eyewitness account repeated in 2 Peter 16-17
7. Catechism of the Catholic Church 554-556

**B. Matthew 17:1-9: Transfiguration of Jesus; Jesus is the Son of God**

1. Voice from heaven proclaims that Jesus is the Son of God (Mt 17:5)
2. Voice from heaven repeated the words at Jesus’ baptism (Mt 3:17, “This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased”; Mk 1:11, “You are my beloved Son... ”)
3. At crucifixion, a Gentile centurion proclaims that Jesus is the Son of God: “Truly, this man was the Son of God!” (Mk 15:39)
  - a) How many times and ways are we told that Jesus is the Son of God, yet we refuse to hear or fully believe the message?

b) How could a Gentile centurion recognize that Jesus was the Son of God (without the benefit of the scripture, the Magisterium of the Church etc.) whereas we know scripture, have the Eucharist, His real presence, 2000 years of Tradition, yet refuse to acknowledge Him? Jesus, the King of the universe, is present at Mass; do we have the awe that such a gift should provoke? Do we even acknowledge the presence of Christ in our midst?

**C. Mark 9:2-10: Transfiguration of Jesus**

1. At the beginning of Mark's Gospel, Jesus is baptized and a voice from Heaven proclaims Jesus to be God's son. None of the disciples were there.
2. "This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him."
  - a) No ambiguity in the words of God. It wasn't "this could be my beloved Son" or "He may be my beloved Son." The direction also wasn't "Listen to Him when it's easy, convenient or you agree."
  - b) Mary, at the wedding feast of Cana, said to the servants: "Do whatever He tells you." Jn 2:5. Do we "listen to Him" as we have been directed to? Or only when it is convenient or easy?

**D. Luke 9: 28-36: The Transfiguration**

1. The transfiguration is about eight days after Jesus sets forth the conditions of discipleship (Lk 9: 23-27) and shortly after the first announcement of His death and resurrection (Lk 9: 22
  - a) "Must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."(Lk 9:23)
2. Discussion among Elijah, Moses and Jesus about His exodus that Jesus was going to accomplish in Jerusalem

- a) Exodus is a reference to the death resurrection and ascension of Jesus as well as the Israelite Exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land.
- 3. The cloud which overshadowed Jesus and his apostles fulfilled the dream of the Jews that when the Messiah came the cloud of God's presence would fill the temple again (see Exodus 16:10, 19:9, 33:9; 1 Kings 8:10; 2 Maccabeus 2:8)
- 4. While this transpired Peter, James, and John were asleep! Upon awakening they discovered the transfiguration of Jesus along with Moses and Elijah. How much do we miss of God's glory and action because we are "asleep" spiritually?
- 5. Christ's transfiguration is a foretaste of the heavenly glory which awaits the faithful. Jesus said "The righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Mt 13:43). To remove the possibility of doubt on the subject, Jesus exemplifies this in His transfiguration. This quality the Apostles sometimes call glory, sometimes brightness: 'He will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body' (Phil 3:21); and again, 'It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory' (1 Cor 15:43).
- 6. Why did Jesus only take three disciples?
  - a) What did the others believe? Were they hurt by what appeared to be favoritism among the disciples?
  - b) Why didn't Jesus want everyone to know then or witness his transfiguration?
  - c) Was the transfiguration a way of assuring the disciples that even in the lowest of events, such as His death (or theirs) that the glory of God can be achieved? In Acts 14:22, the disciples were encouraged and strengthened in their spirits by reference to the necessary hardships and trials they would encounter.

## A Reflection for Second Sunday of Lent

### **The Transfiguration - Matthew 17: 1-9**

This week's reflection focuses on a number a familiar gospel as we hear about it twice in the liturgical year - during Lent and on the Feast of the Transfiguration.

It has many overtones from the Old Testament and the history of the Chosen People. The Lord and his stalwarts, Peter, James and John go up the mountain to take time apart with the Lord - do we allow "Tabor moments" in our lives? The theme of mountains and the journey to meet the Lord is a frequent motif through scripture - Jesus preaches the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus goes up Tabor for the transfiguration and his exultation, he ascends up into Jerusalem and the Mountain of Zion where he is acclaimed by the crowds.

Then he ascends Calvary to his ultimate exultation on the Cross and finally he ascends the Mount of Olives with the disciples and from there ascends into heaven. From the Old Testament we have the two holy mountains, Sinai - where the Law was given to Moses (the Lawgiver of the Chosen People) - and Horeb - where Elijah (the ultimate Prophet of the Lord) encountered the Lord in that gentle breeze. And as we know the process of making space to encounter the Lord can be difficult - like climbing a mountain.

The Transfiguration is a moment of reassurance to Jesus (and ultimately the disciples after his death and resurrection) as he moves towards Jerusalem that he is doing the Father's will.

The Gospel calls us to use our imagination to be "belonging" people. It is a gospel showing how Jesus was a belonging person. His humanity shown in the relationship with Peter, John and James and how they are with him. Then we also have Jesus at home in the Trinity with the voice of the Father and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the cloud. And the Father encourages us and mandates us to listen to what Jesus has to say so that we can be drawn into the intimacy of God.

But anytime we go to a "high" place and have a remarkable experience, we need to remember that that "holiness is not what happens on the mountain. It is what happens when we come back down and re-immerse ourselves into the reality and humdrum of everyday existence. The mountain moment can give us support when we have our daily moments of dying - dying for another which is when we truly love another. We are called to "listen to him", to create space for Sabbath moments for the Lord and he reminds us to "have no fear" for He is always with us and we need to remind ourselves of that. Many people look for the exotic and the special event to affirm the existence of God to go up onto the mountain. But climbing the mountain and getting out of the pit of despair

is only the first part of the journey. The hard part is to come down safely off the mountain and be willing to answer the Lord's call to come down off the mountain into our daily existence.

**III. Third week of Lent: Recommended Scripture readings: John 2:13-25;John 4:5-42; Luke 13: 1-9**

**A. Historical and Biblical references(Jn 2:13-25)**

1. John places the events “near” the time of the Passover. The other Gospels place the cleansing of the Temple in the last days of Jesus’ life. (Matthew, on the day Jesus entered Jerusalem; Mark, on the next day)
2. Psalm 69, 10 “Zeal for your house consumes me”; the word of the Psalm is changed to the future tense “Zeal for your house will consume me” The change in tense is a reference to Jesus.
3. Destruction of the Temple: There are many references to the destruction of the Temple and its rebuilding. What the disciples and Jews didn’t understand at the time was the difference between the physical Temple and the rebuilding of the Temple of God with the resurrection of Christ.
4. The term “in three days...” was an Old Testament expression for a short, indefinite period of time. (See: Hos 6,2)
5. Moneychangers and the presence of oxen, sheep and doves were not unexpected, in fact, they were necessary. Sheep, doves and to a lesser extent cattle were necessary for the people’s sacrifices to God. (See, e.g. Lev 1:3-9) Further, the money changers were needed to standardize the foreign and Galilean currencies into coinage useful to the sellers of the sacrificial animals. They also facilitated the collection of a temple tax paid by every male Jew more than nineteen years of age, with a half-shekel coin (Ex 30: 11-16) in Tyrian currency. Even Jesus paid the temple tax. (Matt 18:24-27) What made Jesus so upset?
6. Our *external* religious practices must always lead to a deeper *internal* faith; ritual without faith is meaningless.

7. Signs, symbols, architecture, music and rituals must speak to out the deepest realities of life, faith, hope, love etc.

a) The “giving away” ceremony at a marriage bespeaks all the “giving away”—all the “sacrifices”—that these two families have made in making these two people the persons they are. And now, in their marriage, all the sacrifices they will make out of love for each other.

**B. Jn 4:5-42: Samaritan Woman at the well; Jesus is the living water**

1. Notice the patience of Jesus in the stages of conversion
2. Revelation of the knowledge of Jesus; it requires a personal relationship with Him, not just knowing the stories about Jesus (Jn: 40-42 “No longer is our faith dependant on your story, for we have heard for ourselves.”) How well do we know Jesus? Do we only know *about* Him (like knowing about George Washington), not who He is in our lives?
3. The transition of the Samaritan woman is a guide to us; the dialogue with Jesus leads to the enlightenment of who Jesus is in spite of the many obstacles in the way to her faith ( prejudices and injustices of the historical Jewish treatment of and attitude towards gentiles and women) What’s in our way of a personal relationship with Jesus? Fear of the perceptions of the world that we are “religious fanatics?” Prejudices? A feeling of unworthiness? If Jesus believes us worthy of a relationship with Him, who are we not to accept?
  - a) Jn 15:16 “You did not chose me, I chose you.”
  - b) 1 Jn 4:19 “Not that we have loved God, God has loved us first.”

**C. Jn 2:13-25: The cleansing of the Temple**

1. In the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, the false testimony against Jesus in the trial before the Sanhedrin included testimony that Jesus said

He would destroy the Temple sanctuary. (Mark 14:58; Matt 26:61, cf. Acts 6:14) But what Jesus said was “[You] destroy *this* temple and in three days I will raise it up.” He was referring to Himself.

2. The sanctuary of the Temple of Jerusalem was transformed by the Jews from the place of the Holy of Holies into a market place. The replacement for this holy place was the very body of Jesus.

D. Luke 13: 1-9: Parable of the Barren Fig Tree

1. The first part of the Gospel asks the question if bad things happen is it a punishment to good people?

2. When disasters occur and lives are lost for no apparent reason, some wonder if they have been punished more than others as somehow more deserving of God's wrath.

3. People reacted in much the same way in the Jesus' day. A wall had fallen on some workers in Siloam, which some took as God's punishment for those who had sinned more than others. "...do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish." (Lk 13. 4-5)

4. The Jews believed that the righteous fall and rise again; the wicked are overthrown by calamity (Prov. 24:16). But the Book of Job also tells us that misfortune can befall the righteous as well as the unrighteous.

5. He tells us that, without Baptism, no one will enter the kingdom of heaven (cf. Jn 3:5); and, elsewhere, that if we do not repent we will all perish (Lk 13:3)

6. The second part of the Gospel is the parable of the Barren fig tree

a) Fig trees were a common and important source of food for the Jews. Bad figs or a decaying fig tree was linked with evil deeds and spiritual decay. The unfruitful fig tree symbolized the outcome of Israel's unresponsiveness to the word of God. The Prophets depicted the languishing fig tree as signifying the desolation and

calamity of Israel due to her unfaithfulness to God ( Joel 1:7,12; Habakkuk 3:17; and Jeremiah 8:13)

- b)     Jeremiah said that evil people are like rotten figs (Jeremiah 24:2-8)
- c)     This parable of Jesus depicts the patience of God, but it also contains a warning that we should not presume upon it. God gives us time to get right with him, but that time is now. We must not assume that there is no hurry
- d)     Fact that a fig tree didn't bear fruit "on time" didn't mean that it never would (Mk 11:12-14)
  - (1)     Fruit from a newly planted tree was forbidden for 3 years; usually applied to olive trees (Lev 19:23; Is 65:8)
- e)     A vineyard worker answers to the owner, perhaps as his servant. Here, the vineyard worker/gardener intercedes with the owner, just as Jesus intercedes for us with God the Father allowing us to bear fruit lest we perish (Lk 13:8)

### **Reflection on the Third Sunday of Lent**

When my wife and I got married, a friend gave us a practical, but highly symbolic gift: a clock. It's a lovely tabletop model, in a glass case, with gold fixtures and various moving parts.

The gift was especially meaningful because time is part of what marriage is about - the commitment of a lifetime. Every passing day is a reminder of how fleeting and precious that time together can be. The clock sits on a shelf and bears witness to this: there is nothing as valuable, or irreplaceable, as the gift of time.

I thought about that when I read over this Sunday's gospel - which is also about the gift of time. In the parable, it's a gift that the gardener offers the fig tree - an extra year, time to be nurtured, to be cultivated, to produce fruit. It is, by implication, the gift that God is offering all of us - more time to grow, to repent, to bear fruit. And it's something for us to be mindful of during Lent. This is a moment for us to turn back to the Father, to "rend our hearts," as the prophet put it on Ash Wednesday. It's a season to prepare ourselves for our judgment before God, and to realize that we don't have forever.

One person who has come to understand that is a man named Mark McKinnon. He is a media strategist who has worked for people like George W. Bush, John McCain and Texas governor Ann Richards. In an online essay, he explained how he came to better appreciate the time we have been given.

McKinnon described himself as being one of the luckiest people he knew - "hit with the lucky stick," is how he put it. He had a good life, a great career and, best of all, a wonderful wife named Annie. She was more than his friend and companion - she was his high school sweetheart and, in his estimation, absolutely perfect. Beautiful, caring, thoughtful. His love for her is palpable.

A couple years ago, Annie was diagnosed with a particularly aggressive form of cancer - the kind most people don't survive. But Annie McKinnon was determined not to be one

of them. When she was told this cancer only had a 15% survival rate, she stuck out her chin and said to the doctor, "Well, I feel sorry for the other 85%." She refused to surrender.

She went through every kind of surgery and treatment available. By the grace of God - and the miracle of science - she beat the odds. And as her husband wrote, "Annie was Lance Armstrong in a skirt." The cancer went into remission. Instead of a statistic, Annie became a survivor.

And Mark McKinnon - like the fig tree -- was given the gift of time. More time with Annie. Time to grow old. Time to watch their children have children of their own. And he decided that he wasn't going to allow himself to forget it. So he sat down and looked at his age, his family history, his own medical history. And he figured that, if his luck held out, he could expect to live for another 10,136 days. Then he went out and bought two glass jars -- and 10,136 beads. He filled one jar with the beads and left the other one empty, and put them both on his desk. And now every day, he takes one bead from the full jar, and places it in the one that's almost empty. And that is how he measures his days.

As McKinnon wrote: "Every day when I take out a bead, I stop for a moment, close my eyes, and say a prayer of thanks. Thanks for my health. Thanks for my friends. For my two incredible daughters. Thanks for a lucky, lucky life. And thanks most of all for Annie."

It's a beautiful lesson, I think. Especially now. We began Lent with ashes on our foreheads and a challenge: "Remember you are dust, and unto dust you will return." Have we remembered? Or have we forgotten it already? Maybe we also need to remember something else: that our days are like so many beads - collected, and then spent.

Maybe we should imagine God greeting us at the end of our days with a jar of beads.

"Here," He will say. "Tell me what you did with your days." And we may pick them up and remember. But remember...what? "This is the day I broke someone's heart. This is the day I betrayed my wife. Here is the day that I lied to stay out of trouble."

Or will we remember something else? "This is the day I forgave a debt. This is the day I prayed for a stranger. Here is that day in Lent of 2012 that I was finally willing to rend my heart, and return to the gospel. This is the day that I loved like Christ."

A famous ad for a credit card company asks: what's in your wallet?

Maybe we should ask: what's in my jar?

We can all learn something from Mark McKinnon - and from the fig tree. Let us use this Lent to ask ourselves: what are we doing with the time of our lives? How are we spending it? How can we, like the gardener, nurture it, cultivate it, help it to bear good fruit?

None of us knows how long we have - how many days we're allotted, how many beads will fill our jar.

But we do have today. Here. Now. This Lent, this year.

What are we waiting for?

### Reflection for Third Sunday of Lent

Today's gospel poses this intriguing challenge: What would happen if we met Jesus in the middle of an ordinary day? How would we react?

Well, consider the story of a young Japanese woman named Satoko Kitahara. I think she has much to say to us today.



Satoko was a wealthy young woman who lived in Tokyo in the years after World War II. She was well-educated, spoke several languages, played the piano and was trained as a pharmacologist. But she lived in a city in ruins. Some of the poorest people Tokyo, mostly widows and orphans, lived near the river in a place that came to be called "Ant Town," because the people were considered as insignificant as insects.

In 1949, while walking through the city, Satoko decided, out of curiosity, to follow a group of nuns into a Catholic church – and was transfixed by what she saw. Something touched her very deeply, and spoke to her heart. She was especially moved by a statue of the Blessed Mother, and asked one of the nuns who she was. She kept going back to the church and, several months later, at the age of 20, Satoko — a Shinto Buddhist — asked to be baptized.

After that, everything changed. Her world view was altered. A life of wealth and comfort became less important. She began to feel great sympathy for the poor.

One day, a missionary took her to Ant Town — and Satoko was stunned. She lived less than a mile away, but had never seen that kind of poverty. She began spending more time with the people, even helping them pick out rags and junk to sell.

Eventually, she decided that she had to leave her family's comfortable home and live among the poor. She said: "To save us, God sent his only Son to be one of us. He became one of us. It hit me," she explained, "that there was only one way to help these rag-picker children. And it was to become a rag picker like them."

She worked tirelessly for Japan's suffering children – and eventually began to suffer herself. She once said, "Because Christ gave his life for me, if he wishes me to give my life for Ant Town, I would do so." And so she did. She died of tuberculosis, at the age of 28.

Many are now praying that Satoko Kitahara will be beatified and one day become a saint. Certainly, the suffering people of Japan need an advocate, now more than ever.

But on this particular Sunday, I think her story echoes in a profoundly beautiful way the one in this gospel, about Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well. And it brings me back to the question I posed at the beginning – what if you met Jesus in the middle of an ordinary day?

How would we react?

Would any of us even realize it?

The fact is: an encounter with Christ can change everything. It happened with Satoko Kitahara; it happened, too, with this woman at the well.

Reading over this gospel, I was struck by something else, too: like last weekend's gospel about the Transfiguration, this passage also offers us a foreshadowing of a world to come. It's another glimpse of Easter morning.

On Easter, Mary Magdalene, saw Christ and could not keep it to herself. She needed to tell the others what she had seen and experienced.

So it is here, with another woman, the Samaritan woman, who meets Christ, and needs to spread the word. And there's an interesting detail: she does it the same way the apostles did. They left behind their fishing nets to follow him. This gospel tells us she left behind her water jar – and went in to the town and told people, "Come and see...could this man possibly be the Christ?"

Her life was changed. She became, in effect, an apostle, a missionary, drawing others to the Messiah – drawing them, also, to the place where she experienced her own conversion, the well. A source for water became a source for new life – as meaningful as any baptismal font.

This is the story of conversion. We cannot help but be different because we have met Christ. Our world and our world view change – just as with Satoko Kitahara, with Mary Magdalene, with the woman at the well.

And it doesn't necessarily happen in extraordinary ways or dramatic places. Christ meets us where we are – in the dusty crossroads of a busy village, or amid the rags and trash cans of a modern slum. It might be on the train, or the bus, or in line at Acme. Do we see him? Do we hear him? Are we willing to be changed by him?

Are we willing to let him come into our lives and change everything?

Normally, the Feast of the Annunciation would fall on, March 25. However, since that is the Fifth Sunday of Lent 2012, the celebration of Annunciation 2012 is transferred to the day before, March 24, 2012.

Last year, when we celebrated the feast of the Annunciation, one of my classmates emailed me: "Happy Feast Day!" He explained that this is everyone's feast day, because we are all called to proclaim the Good News, to act as heralds of the gospel, just like Gabriel.

It occurs to me, it's a perfect way of looking at the story of the Samaritan woman.

She also engaged in her own kind of annunciation – bringing the Good News to others, and bringing people to Christ.

This Lent, let her story become ours.

Let us be open to meeting Christ.

And – when we do – let us pray to respond as she did...as Mary Magdalene did...as Satoko Kithara did.

Let us bear witness to what we have experienced with our lives, so that those who encounter us...will ultimately encounter *Him*.

### Reflection on the Third Sunday Of Lent

What we've just witnessed is a story of the birth of faith – the dawn of understanding. It is the story of the beginning of a flood – a tsunami of belief that began with one little cupful of water.

Jesus Christ – the Son of God – he is the catalyst here – the one essential chemical added to the potion that causes everything else in it to react – spectacularly in this case. The woman at the well was the beginning – she's an innocent bystander who has her life changed forever because she happened to go to the Well of Jacob on a certain day, at a certain time, just like she had done probably just about every day for who knows how long.

The extraordinary entered into the ordinary – and changes everything. Jesus was the force that entered into this woman's life – and from her belief, soon the entire town and then the entire region of Samaria believed – and they believed like nobody else did at the time in fact.

They didn't just see Jesus as just a prophet, they don't even stop at calling him the Messiah or even the Christ, they actually called him "Savior" – a term that is never used anywhere else in any of the four Gospels in fact – just here this one time. It's an exclusively Post Resurrection term that they figure out before it even happens. The people of Samaria – ironically – see Jesus for EXACTLY who he is – the whole picture. Something the Jews and even the Apostles themselves at this point cannot begin to conceive – but it's something that these people somehow understand . . . . all from a simple conversation that took place at the Well of Jacob on one rather ordinary afternoon.

I'd like to pose a question – a very basic question – for every person here: Do you remember when you FIRST believed?

Have you ever thought about it?

I'm assuming of course that everyone does in fact believe in some fashion, and if I'm wrong please forgive my presumption, but nevertheless stay with me on this.

For everything there is a first time, right? Can you remember when you first understood, at least a little, what you believed?

If you're a Cradle Catholic like me this is probably a really tough question – we grew up in the faith and maybe we've never even really thought about it.

It's okay if you can't answer this question – not to mess with everyone too much but the question is meant to be its own answer actually.

By asking it, I'm trying to get you to start thinking about something you may not have ever considered before.

Sometime's that what a homilist's job really is by the way – not to provide the answers but simply to ask the right questions.

The woman at the well can answer this question – without a moment's hesitation in fact. If you were able to ask her, she could tell you EXACTLY when she first believed – indeed she DID in fact just tell us.

For the many converts, the question is a bit easier I think. They have an amazing gift that many of us Cradle Catholics don't have – like the woman at the well they can probably tell us EXACTLY when and how you came to believe – just when it was that you encountered Jesus.

You see – that's why we read this Gospel today of all days.

This morning at Mass, we had our First Scrutiny of our RCIA Catechumens— those who are to be welcomed into the fullness of the Catholic faith at the Easter Vigil in just a few weeks. It is because of them that this story is told to us on this day.

They have recently come to believe and will publicly profess to the entire Church worldwide on Easter Vigil just what finding Christ means to them – they will take ACTION – because that's what encounters with Christ always result in.

Like the woman at the well who had to run back and tell everyone of just what had happened – Christ moves us to ACT.

So I now ask each of you a second question – a follow up to the first one — whether it was first discovered long ago or only recently, what exactly does your belief in Christ MEAN in your life, in practical terms?

What ACTION does it compel you to take?

Does it inform your everyday actions in any way?

Would anyone who gets to know you be able to tell that you are a believer?

Every person has to honestly answer this question for himself or herself – individually – and nobody needs to hear the answer except yourself (and God of course, although he already knows everything about you anyway, just as he did for the Woman at the Well.) If the honest answer in your heart is something like “Not Much” or “Not Really”, swallow the little tablespoonful of guilt you might feel and treat it as medicinal and don’t be too hard on yourself. We’ll keep working with you.

Faith, you see, is a gift – it requires lots of living water to get it to grow. Not all of us are as lucky as the woman at the well, right?

We don’t get to have a profound encounter with Jesus to the point where our lives are changed forever, do we?

Oh, there’s one of those rhetorical QUESTIONS again. You see the point of this Gospel story is not so much to show how Jesus ONCE UPON A TIME had an encounter out of the blue with a woman from Samaria and it changed her forever.

It’s to show that JESUS CHRIST, being the Son of God, the Christ, True God and True Man IS ALWAYS reaching out to have an encounter with US and can change OUR lives forever too, just like he did for her and her entire people. The Extraordinary is STILL intervening in the Ordinary, even to this day.

He’s in the Assembly gathered here today – the Mystical Body of Christ.

He’s in the Word we just heard – The Eternal Word.

He’s in the person of the priest when he consecrates the Bread and Wine – In Persona Christi.

He’s most especially in the Eucharist– The Source and Summit of our Faith.

And he’s in the faces of those people in need we will encounter this week and next week and every week we walk this earth – whatsoever you do for these least ones, you do it for me.

We don’t need to look very hard to find opportunities for Christ to transform us – what we SHOULD do is try to look and listen a little closer and allow him to enter into each one of us – and watch the spectacular results that just a little cooperation with him on our parts can bring.

#### **IV. Fourth week of lent, John 3:14-21; John 9:1-41; Luke 1-32**

##### **A. Historical and biblical references**

1. The Gospel readings in the fourth week were among the most controversial
2. Notice how Jesus uses the unlikely among the many to convey his messages (a blind man, a Pharisee, Nicodemus, a prodigal son)
  - a) Nicodemus was likely a member of the Sanhedrin, the same “quasi-judicial” council that condemns Jesus to death
    - (1) Sanhedrin composed of seventy-one members of three groups: elders, chief priests and scribes, presided over by the high priest
    - (2) Sanhedrin exercised authority over the Jews in religious matters

##### **B. John 3:14-21 “God so loved the world that he gave his only son...”**

1. Notice that it is not “loved the Jews.” This was a source of great controversy for the Jews, as it included the hated gentiles.
2. “And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up...”
  - a) Moses reference is to Moses lifting a serpent on a pole to bring healing (Num 21:4-9). The reference to lifting up the Son of Man is a reference to the crucifixion. The change in language from the Old Testament to the new is the glorification of the “lifting up.”
  - b) Jn 12:32 “And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself.”

- c) The reference to God not sending his Son to “condemn” is translated as condemn and judge in the Greek language.
- d) The reference to “eternal life” is first used by John in this verse stressing the importance of the quality of life, not its earthly duration.
- e) Jn 17:3 “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”
- f) “Only begotten” is translated literally “special, beloved” and often applied to Isaac to stress the greatness of Abraham’s sacrifice.

**C. Jn 9:1-41: Man, blind since birth is cured and sees; Jesus is the light of the world**

1. The blind man was washed in the waters of Siloam (interpreted as “the one sent”). He is enlightened on his first encounter with Jesus, but comes to see who Jesus really is only after undergoing trials and being thrown out of the synagogue.
  - a) Notice the symbolism chosen by Jesus; a baptism of the man. Is the man really us? The belief was that blindness was caused by sin and for that reason, the man cannot see. Does sin blind us, too?
2. The blind man doesn’t ask to be cured. Jesus goes to him to cure him from his blindness. The man obeys Jesus simple direction and washes in the pool. How easy is it to find Jesus and be cured of our sins? Like the blind man, Jesus approaches us with His love and forgiveness.
3. The cured man is challenged by the Pharisees to explain what has happened to him. They offer explanations and challenge the once blind man’s answers. Are we prepared to address the challenges to our faith? The man, blind from birth, didn’t have education, wealth (a beggar) or the

respect of anyone (even the disciples thought his blindness was from the sin of his parents). Yet, the lowest was chosen to convey the message that Jesus is the light of the world. Do we ignore the lowest (the ill, elderly and unborn) and miss Jesus' messages that he is telling us through them?

4. With the coming of Jesus, those who claimed to see have become blind to him, whereas the man, who was blind, now sees. Are we blind or do we see?

5. What do we believe? Without the grace of God allowing us to see, the Creed is merely words on a paper. With the vision given by Christ, it is a statement of true faith and resolve.

- a) "Without seeing You, we believe."

D. Luke 15: 1-32 The Parable of the Prodigal Son

1. The background and story was an affront to the Jews and their culture and beliefs

- a) Younger son asking for share of father's inheritance equivalent to wishing the father dead. (Deut 21: 17)
- b) Father granting request totally alien to culture. The punishment to son could have been severe. (Deut 21: 17)
- c) Generally a breach of elder Jewish man's dignity to run.
- d) "Best robe" given to returning son *would have been the father's own robe.*
- e) A calf would have feed the entire town.

2. Son doesn't return for forgiveness, but because he is hungry (Lk 15:15-19)

3. Father embraces the son *before* the son gives his planned speech of repentance

- a) God didn't wait for us to repent before He reached out with His forgiveness (Rom 5:8 "God's love for us is shown in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.")
  - b) "In this is love, not that we loved God but that God loved us."  
1 Jn 4:10
4. The parable also contrasts mercy and its opposite -- lack of forgiveness. The father, who had been wronged, was forgiving. But the eldest son, who had not been wronged, was unforgiving. His lack of forgiveness turns into contempt and pride. And his resentment leads to his isolation and estrangement from the community of forgiven sinners. In this parable Jesus gives a vivid picture of God and what God is like. God is truly kinder than us. He does not lose hope or give up when we stray. He rejoices in finding the lost and in leading them home

### **Reflection for Fourth Sunday of Lent**

Today's gospel begins with an encounter between Christ and a blind beggar. So I want to start off with a story of another beggar – a story, in fact, involving Pope John Paul.

Several years ago, a priest from the Archdiocese of New York was visiting Rome. As he was walking into a church to pray, he noticed a beggar at the door. Something looked vaguely familiar about him. As he began to pray, he realized what it was.



He went back outside. "Excuse me," he said to the beggar. "Do I know you?" "Yes," the beggar said. "I think you do." It turns out, the beggar had been in the seminary with him. He had been ordained a priest, but had – as he put it — "crashed and burned" in his vocation.

The priest from New York talked with him for a few minutes, and then had to go. He promised the beggar that he would pray for him. But he was shaken by what he had seen.

That afternoon, this priest attended a function that concluded with a chance to meet the pope. As he stood in a receiving line and took John Paul's hand, he told him about the man he'd met outside the church and whispered, "Please, pray for this man, because he's lost." The pope nodded and assured him he would.

The next day, to his amazement, the priest got a call from the Pope's secretary. The Holy Father, he said, was hosting a dinner and wanted to invite the priest, along with the other priest, the beggar. Stunned, the priest agreed, and quickly went back to the Church and found the beggar and told him what had happened.

The beggar said, "No, I can't." The priest insisted, and promised to make him presentable. He took the man to his room, where he was able to take a shower, and shave put on some clean clothes.

Then they went to dinner with the Pope – surely, the best meal the man had enjoyed in months. Just before dessert, the Holy Father asked everyone else to leave the room, so he could be alone with the beggar. They did, and waited outside. After about 15 minutes, they were invited back into the dining room. Shortly after that, they all said goodnight, and the beggar and the priest walked back to the hotel.

The priest said: "I have to ask you: what happened in there?"

And the beggar stopped in his tracks, still amazed at the experience. "He asked me," the man said, "to hear his confession. I said to him, 'But I'm not a priest anymore. I'm a beggar.' And the Holy Father took my hands in his and looked at me and said, 'So am I. We are all beggars before the Lord.'"

The man tried to explain that he was not in good standing with the Church. But the pope said: "Once a priest, always a priest. I'm the Vicar of Christ and the Bishop of Rome. I can re-instate you now."

Well, the beggar couldn't refuse. And at that moment, in that room, he heard the confession of the pope.

The beggar-priest had barely finished offering absolution before he dropped to his knees in tears. “Holy Father,” he said, “will you please hear my Confession?” And he did.

When they were done, the pope told him to return to the Church where he had been begging, and report to the pastor. He would serve as a priest there, with a special ministry to the poor of Rome.

And that is what happened. It is said that the beggar who heard the pope’s confession still serves at the church in Rome.

“We are all beggars,” the pope said. Like the man in today’s gospel. So, this Lent, ask yourself: what am I begging for? Maybe we are begging for compassion. For mercy. For peace of mind. Maybe we are hungry for love. And like the beggar in the gospel, we may also be blind – craving clarity, and understanding. Wanting simply to see.

But in the middle of our begging, in the middle of our darkness, Christ touches us — and our world is flooded with light.

This gospel is about discovery. One man receives the gift of sight. As the story unfolds, light dawns, and with each confrontation and each conversation, he gains more understanding of just who gave him that gift. At the end, for the first time, he sees — *really sees*.

I think the priest-beggar was also given the gift of sight – the ability to see anew who he was and what he was meant to do. Whether he realized it or not, he was begging for more than money.

He was begging for grace.

But aren’t we all?

This morning, we pray for the grace to see more clearly, to understand more deeply, to live more faithfully. And we join our prayers in a special way with those of the elect before us, the men and women of the RCIA process. Together, we come before God, hands outstretched, asking to have our hungers satisfied, our yearnings fulfilled – asking God to give us what He knows we need.

*“We are all beggars before the Lord.”*

In these final weeks of Lent, let us pray to be open to what He has to give – to let Him touch us, and flood our lives with light.

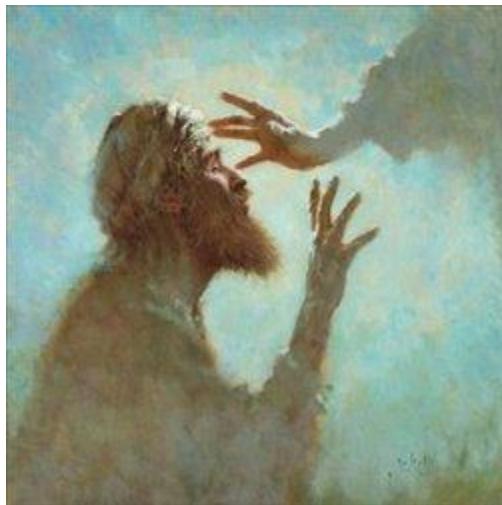
### **Reflection for the Fourth Sunday of Lent**

Most of us are familiar with the story of Saint Damien of Molokai – the Belgian priest who volunteered to minister to lepers in Hawaii, and eventually died of the disease. Several years ago, the writer Aldyth Morris adapted his story into a one-man play called “Damien” that is now performed all over the world. In it, there’s a moment when Damien explains to his bishop why he wants to be with the lepers and minister to them.

“The Catholic lepers,” he says, “are begging you to send a priest, one to live among them, to call them by their names, to be a father to them.” And he explains: “They must have one priest who belongs to them, to prove to them that God has not forgotten them. I want to be their priest.”

It’s a beautiful moment, and it tells us all we need to know about what motivated that great saint. But it also tells us something we all need to hear – an idea that is central to today’s gospel:

God does not forget us.



This reading from John touches on many themes – healing, conversion, light. But as our Elect this morning prepare to receive their sacraments, I want to focus on a detail that I find very moving, and one that I think is worth embracing – and even celebrating.

After the blind man has been given sight, he is utterly alone. He has been rejected by all those around him – the community, his religious leaders, his family. He’s literally thrown out into the streets. The man who was scorned when he was blind is scorned again, even after he’s been cured.

Scorned by everyone, that is, except Jesus.

In what I believe is the only instance like this in the gospels, Jesus goes to seek out someone that he has healed. And he reassures him that he has been given more than just sight.

The man is given consolation, and affirmation. He is given hope.

And in that moment, we are reminded of something wonderful: God does not forget us.

He is there for those who are rejected, mocked, dismissed. He is there for the outcast, and the isolated. He is for all of those whom the world treats like lepers.

He is there for those who are thrown out.

And to them, and to us all, Christ offers this ongoing miracle: light. Brilliant, bewildering light. And in that light we see what we have never seen before.

We see that we are not alone.

To the Elect preparing for your sacraments, this is a great foundational truth of our faith: God does not abandon us. He does not forget us. He goes looking for us when we have been thrown out.

The first reading from the Book of Samuel shows the surprising ways that God works. He chooses for His king a young and inexperienced shepherd named David – someone nobody expected. Not only did they not expect him to be king, he wasn't even considered. They didn't even invite him into in the room.

But that was the very one God wanted. He often wants those nobody else does.

The miracle in this gospel reading makes that point, too. It does it through a dramatic incident that involves healing, and banishing darkness. But it is also a miracle about Christ's commitment to those he has saved.

And the message is one of abiding hope.

To anyone who has ever felt alone or unloved...

To anyone who has ever felt abandoned or betrayed...

To anyone who feels that they may not be pretty enough...or smart enough...or clever enough ...or rich enough...

Remember the blind man who saw, and then believed, but was rejected by the world.  
The Son of Man went looking for him – and found him.

Because God does not forget us.

He is there for those the world has thrown out.

V. Fifth week of lent, John 11:1-45; John 12:20-33; John 8: 1-11

A. Historical and biblical references

1. The reference to “life” lost and preserved is not a common concept to the Hebrew anthropology. The dualism of body and soul is a more recent thought.
2. “Ruler of the world” refers to Satan
3. “Lifted up” reference is to the cross (I 52:13); through the cross, Jesus will “draw everyone to myself.”
4. Reference to “Glorified” and “lifted up” refers back to the servant of God in Isaiah 53; the early Christians recognized Jesus to be the referenced servant.
5. Chardin: “We do not so much swoon at the foot of the cross but rise up in its light.”

B. Jn 11:1-45 Resurrection of Lazarus; Jesus is the resurrection and the life

1. The raising of Lazarus from the dead, the gift of life to Lazarus, leads to Jesus’ own death. (Jn 11: 45-53) And the gift of life to Lazarus was only temporary, Lazarus would die again. Indeed, Old Testament prophets Elijah and Elisha also brought the dead back to life. (I Kings 17: 17-34 ; II Kings 4:32-37) So what’s the difference? How do we know Jesus is more than just a Prophet? What is it about this man Jesus?
2. Martha already believed that Jesus was the Messiah. She already believed that her brother would rise again on the last day. (Jn 11: 24) Wasn’t that enough? Why raise Lazarus?
3. Compare the restoration of Lazarus to life and the resurrection of Jesus; Lazarus emerges from the tomb with the wrapping of his burial; but Jesus leaves them behind because he will never need them again. (Jn

20: 6-7). Dying in Jesus means that we will never experience death again.

4. What else do we learn about Jesus?

- a) Jesus was told that his dear friend was sick and near death and asked to come and intervene. *But Jesus stayed for another two days instead of going right away.* (Jn 11:6-7 “So when He heard that he [Lazarus] was ill, he remained for two days in the place He was.”) Jesus answered the prayers of Mary and Martha, just not on their schedule and for the greater glory of God. Are we too impatient with God? If we don’t get instant responses, do we question our beliefs? Even the most terrible events in life, the loss of a loved one, can be for the greater glory of God. Can we and do we believe that? Or is the easy and instant response all that we want.
- b) The length of time that Lazarus was dead before he was raised was the duration where the remotest hope of returning to life was extinguished. Jesus’ restoring Lazarus to life was in the face of true hopelessness. He overcame what everyone believed was hopeless.
- c) “Roll away the stone.” What stones of unbelief must we roll away?
- d) One of the shortest, but most telling verses in scripture is Jn 11:35 “And Jesus wept.” Jesus was a human; he knows our sorrow and feels it with us. His human tears became at the same time an act of love and hope. We can believe our Lord when he tells us that He knows how we feel? Do we cause Jesus to weep? Through sin, our souls may die. And Jesus weeps for us, but through the sacrament of reconciliation, he can bring us back to life.

C. John 8: 1-11, the woman caught in adultery

1. The story of the woman caught in adultery is a later insertion and not found in any early Greek manuscripts
2. Some suggest it does not belong in the Gospel of John, but rather Luke, but inserted here because of the reference Jer 17:13
3. Punishment for adultery was death according to the Mosaic Law. Lev 20:10, Deut 22:22
4. First stones are to be thrown by the witnesses. Deut 17:7
5. "Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger." Jn 8:6 What did He write? It's not disclosed. What would he write about you or me?

### **Reflection for Fifth Sunday of Lent**

Today's gospel is, to a great extent, about second chances. Someone who knows about that is an Air Force pilot named Joe Kittinger.

In the late 1950s, Joe Kittinger was the director of Project Excelsior, a government program to develop safety techniques for pilots who had to eject from aircraft at high altitudes. It was dangerous but necessary work. Kittinger never had any problems with his testing, until one day in 1959. During a test flight, he jumped from a balloon more than 60, 000 feet above New Mexico desert. But seconds after he jumped, his parachute chord got tangled around his neck.

It was the worst thing that could happen, at the worst moment it could happen.

His body went into a spin – a death spiral that reached 120 revolutions a minute. Two spins every second. He was moving faster than his body could bear — plunging hundreds of miles per hour. Kittinger blacked out. Incredibly, about a mile above ground, his reserve parachute finally opened, snapping him back into consciousness.

When he came to, he thought he had died. But then, he spotted the parachute open above him. And only one thought rushed through his mind: "I'm alive," he later wrote, "I am impossibly, wonderfully alive."

He went on to be honored by President Eisenhower for his bravery and his service to his country. In 1960, Joe Kittinger went on to set the world altitude record, falling 102,800 feet – a record that, to this day, still stands.

I'm not someone who likes heights very much – just climbing into this pulpit is about as much as I can take. But I read about people like Joe Kittinger, and hear how he escaped death, and I'm struck by his words when he understood what had happened.

"I am impossibly, wonderfully alive."

How many of us know what it's like to confront certain death – but to walk away, to be given one more chance? How many of us realize what that really means?

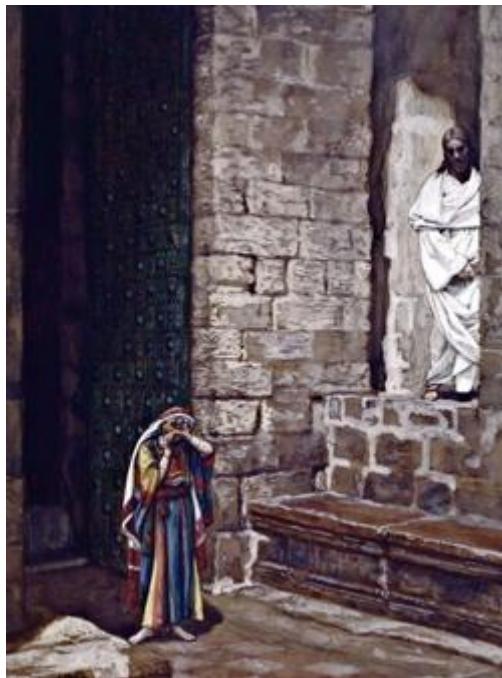
Well, Joe Kittinger does.

And so, I think, did the woman in today's gospel.

Her fall was also dramatic – tangled in the chords of her troubled and sinful life. And at a defining moment in her life, she found herself standing in the middle of a circle of men, as they weighed the stones in their hands and prepared to strike. She undoubtedly knew about other women who had faced those same stones – maybe she had even

seen them killed. And there she stood, alone, terrified, maybe wishing she hadn't made the choices she did, wondering where she went wrong. Wondering which of those faces, the faces of the Pharisees, would be the last she saw.

But then she saw Jesus. "Go," he said. "And from now on, do not sin anymore."



And that day wasn't the last day of her life after all. She lived.

And as she staggered away from that encounter, maybe she thought to herself, with a sense of shock, and gratitude: "I'm alive. I am impossibly, wonderfully alive."

We never find out what happened to the woman – if she followed Jesus's words or not. But maybe that's not important. What's important isn't the choice she made. What's important is that she HAD a choice. She had another chance.

*"Go and from now on, do not sin anymore."*

With those words, our Lent begins to draw to a close. They are the last words we will hear in a Sunday gospel until we begin Holy Week, and begin the walk with Christ to Calvary. But those words tell us everything.

Look back on this Lent. It began on a cold Wednesday in February. Return to me, the prophet Joel wrote. Rend your heart. And we wore ashes and gave up meat and offered alms. Since then, we have heard the gospels cry out to us, telling us about all these second chances in scripture – about the barren fig tree that was spared, about the

prodigal son who was welcomed home, and now, about the woman saved from stoning. Christ's words to her are his words to us.

*"Go and from now on, do not sin anymore."*

Now, here we stand, on a warm morning in March, and we are given new hope. We can take another road, make another choice.

It's not too late to decide.

Joe Kittinger understood that. "I am impossibly, wonderfully alive," he said. And he went on to make history.

What kind of history will we make in these last days of Lent? What kind of change will we make in our lives to be ready for Easter?

A popular phrase in the '70s said, "Today is the first day of the rest of your life."

It's trite, but it's true. And maybe it offers us one more way of looking at the road that spreads before us.

Christ's final command to the woman is so simple, so direct. Go, he says. Begin. Leave this place. Set out on your journey. Go.

He could have ended with that. But he didn't. What follows are words we are meant to carry in our hearts as we turn our gaze toward Calvary. They are words of mercy. Words of compassion. Words of grace in a world where grace is so often in short supply.

So...

To anyone living with a painful past... to anyone who struggles with remorse and regret....to those who feel they have done something unforgivable...take heart. We can begin again. The words of the gospel remind us that God wants to give us another chance. For some of us, it may be a second chance – for others, a 22nd. But it begins with making a choice, taking that first step. Are we able to do it?

Of all the words in the gospel that we have heard over these last five weeks, these may be the ones that matter the most. They are the great legacy of Lent.

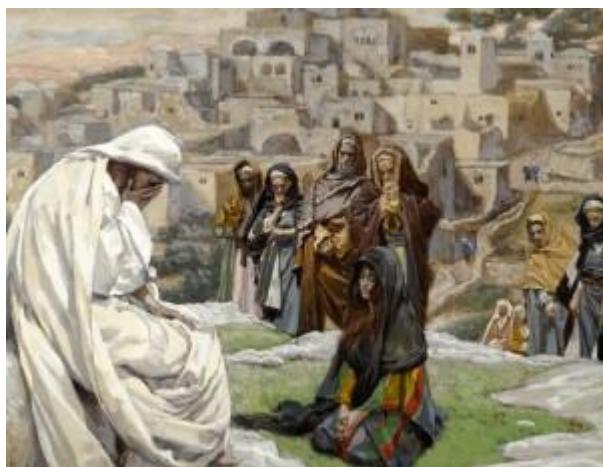
Go, Jesus says. And from now on, do not sin anymore.

### **Reflection for the Fifth Sunday of Lent**

Every now and then, you'll find a film critic who bemoans the state of Hollywood movies by pointing out that there are too many sequels.

Last year, a writer noted that in 2010 there were 86 sequels in various stages of development. Just this year, we have "Scream 4" about to open, along with "Underworld 4," "Mission Impossible 4," "Cars 2," "The Hangover 2," "Transformers 3," and the final part of the Harry Potter Series.

Ever since the first story was ever told, human beings have wanted to know: "What happened next?"



<sup>2</sup>

I find myself feeling that way about this Sunday's gospel – surely one of the most dramatic and moving episodes in all of the New Testament. And it always makes me wonder:

What happened to Lazarus after he was brought back from the dead? How much longer did he live? What did people say to him? What did he say to them? Was he haunted by his memories of his former life? Did he remember what happened when he was dead? How did all of that change him?

More importantly: what would any of us do if given a second chance at life?

Well, there is no Lazarus 2.

His story stands alone.

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<sup>2</sup> Image: "Jesus Wept," by James Tissot  
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But I think if you really want to know what happened next, the best answer is closer than we may think.

Because Lazarus ... is all of us.

That, in fact, is the point of the gospels we have been hearing the last three Sundays – three extraordinary events from the gospel of John. Three people who had an encounter with Christ. Three people whose lives were changed forever because of it.

There was the skeptical and disbelieving woman at the well – who was so stunned at how Jesus knew her, she had to go out and tell others.

There was the blind beggar who gained more than just his sight – he came to see the truth of who Jesus really was.

And there was Lazarus – literally, the walking dead, restored to life because he answered the call of his friend Jesus.

These people are more than figures on a page. They were flesh and blood.

And they are you and me. Look deeper, and you'll recognize it.

We are thirsting, like the woman at the well. Christ quenches that thirst.

We are blind beggars. Christ gives us light.

And – whether we realize it or not – we are Lazarus. We are trapped in a tomb – hidden in the dark and the decay and the stench, wrapped up on our own brokenness, our own sinfulness. We could be there forever.

But in the midst of that, Jesus weeps. He weeps for us – because he loves us, and has lost us. He wants to bring us back.

And then unexpectedly, incredibly, wondrously...he calls out to us.

Do we hear him?

Lent is a time of prayer and penance, a time for sacrifice and soul-searching. A time for taking stock of who we are, and what God expects of us.

We began this prayerful season as “the walking dead,” marked with ashes, bearing a reminder of our fate, hearing words that told us to remember that we are dust.

And here we are, five weeks later, confronting again our destiny. But in the middle of all that, Jesus calls to us, as he did to Lazarus: “Come out!”

Now is the time for us to answer that call.

Now is the time to leave behind the stench, and the dark.

Now is the time to leave the dwelling place of the dead.

It is time to begin again – to get a second chance, like Lazarus.

It's time to be reconciled with God.

This week, priests everywhere will be available for confession. It's an extraordinary effort to let all the faithful be Lazarus – to let everyone who hears the call of Christ answer it, to stumble out of whatever tomb may be holding us, and emerge once again into the light.

So: take this opportunity to make this Lent matter.

Remember the woman at the well, and the beggar who was blind. Both were transformed by one encounter with Jesus. And remember, especially, Lazarus. Remember how Jesus wept for him. And remember how he then cried: “Come out!”

He is weeping for all of us. He is calling to all of us.

Follow the sound of his voice. Grope toward the light. It may seem like hope is lost, like nothing can change. It may even seem to some of us like we are as good as dead.

But we aren't. We can begin life anew. All of us can start again. Just like Lazarus.

Hollywood knows that the great question that has compelled us since the beginning of time is: “What happened next?”

This Lent, we have a chance to write our own answer – to create a sequel to our lives, the next chapter in our story.

What will it be?

### Reflection for Passion/Palm Sunday

One of the more remarkable aspects of the gospel we just heard is the WAY in which we heard it.

This week is the only time that the gospel is proclaimed by someone besides a priest or deacon – every individual in this church takes part.

It's a great privilege. And it – literally — gives us a role in Christ's passion.

But what do we say? What lines are we given?

*"Not this one! Barabbas!"*

*"Hail, King of the Jews!"*

*"Crucify him!"*

*"Take him away, crucify him!"*

We cry out for vengeance, and we accuse his disciples, and we gamble to see which of us will get his cloak. We mock him.

We are the mob. And we cruelly assist in condemning Christ to death.

And the great irony, of course, is that we do it while clutching these palms.

They are a reminder – and an indictment. While we were standing here, crying out “Crucify him!,” we were clutching the branches that we used to sing out “Hosanna.” The palms reveal our very human duplicity. How easily we turn. How quickly we pivot from faithful, to faithless … from belief to doubt … from being disciples, to being betrayers.

We start out acting like angels, singing “Hosanna.” And we end up just being the mob.

It can sometimes be that way throughout the church. The headlines this week have told the story. Men called to holiness can be guilty of appalling sins. Sins of abuse. Sins of neglect. Sins of dishonesty. Sins of betrayal.

And yet, to be a part of the body of Christ is to be with him on the cross. The Catholic writer Ronald Rolheiser has put it powerfully. “To be a member of the church,” he wrote, “is to carry the mantle of both the worst sin and the finest heroism of soul…because the

church always looks exactly as it looked at the original crucifixion, God hung among thieves.”

And all we can do sometimes is echo the words of the one thief, words we heard just a few moments ago: “Jesus, remember me.” That moment is the only one in any of the gospels where someone calls Jesus by his given name. Maybe it is because it is at this moment – the hour of his death — that he is most like us. He hangs there, stripped, beaten, betrayed. He hangs among thieves. This is what we have done to our God. And this is what we continue to do, even today.

And in our own brokenness, and sinfulness, we ask that he remember us. We pray that we may be better than we are, and receive better than we deserve. We pray that we, who often deserve to be forgotten, may be remembered.

And so, this day, we remember. We remember Christ’s journey to the cross, which began with his journey into Jerusalem. We remember our role in his passion – our own sinfulness.

As our participation in this gospel emphasizes: we helped send him to Calvary.

He died for us. He died because of us.

And yet... as we mark the days leading up to Easter, we remember, too, that we are called to something else. As a people. And as a church.

As we journey forward this Holy Week, let us look at these palms and remind ourselves of this beautiful, hopeful truth:

We may be the voice of the mob – we may too often act like thieves. But we have it within ourselves to be more.

We can sing Hosannas.

We can, we must, act like angels.

### **Reflection for Palm Sunday**

It feels good to sit down, doesn't it?

When I was a kid, I was impatient. I used to dread going to church on Palm Sunday. There was a long mass and all the standing for the gospel, and I couldn't wait to sit down.

It was probably the only Sunday I looked forward to the homily.

But lately, I've come to think of Palm Sunday differently.

After what we've heard and said and experienced over the last 15 minutes, sitting isn't really the right response.

The fact is, we should be using another part of our anatomy.

We should be on our knees.



This liturgy makes us remember something we like to forget: we helped bring about the death of Christ. With the words we've spoken here, we have reaffirmed our role – as sinners — in one of the most violent, brutal, unjust and notorious murders in all of recorded human history.

We should be on our knees.

And it is not just because of our complicity in the crucifixion.

We should be on our knees not only for what we as a people did to Christ. We should be on our knees for what HE did for US.

This gospel is a perfect companion piece — a bookend, really — to the gospel from the first Sunday of Lent. If you remember, we began this holy season in the desert, with Satan tempting Jesus. He challenged Jesus to throw himself from the top of the temple, because his angels would protect him.

But this Sunday, Jesus isn't in a desert, alone. He's in a garden, surrounded by people. And this time it is Jesus himself – recalling that moment in the desert — who declares that "legions of angels" could save him, if he wanted.

Again and again, he could have spared himself.

Christ had the chance to avoid his passion and death, to make it stop, to escape.

But he did it anyway.

He was betrayed, arrested, denied, and abandoned. He was beaten. He was stripped. Abused. Spit upon. Whipped. Ridiculed. His skin was ripped from his body and his scalp was pierced with thorns and his hands and feet were stabbed with nails.

He could have said no.

But he didn't. He did it anyway.

If you want to know how much God loves us, there is your answer.

Not only did He become one of us. He became one of us and then experienced the worst of the human condition. Pain. Humiliation. Scorn. Helplessness. Loneliness. Death.

And He did all that for us.

Yes: we should be on our knees.

Over the next several days, in between shopping for the ham and decorating the eggs ... remember what happened. Remember what you heard here at this mass – the great story of Christ's suffering and death. Remember how we were the ones who cried out: "Let him be crucified!" And remember that he could have stopped it – but didn't.

Blessed Charles de Foucauld once wrote: "Christ didn't save the world with miracles, or with preaching. He saved the world by dying on the cross."

That is what this Holy Week is all about.

And it should bring every one us to our knees.

### **Reflection on Good Friday**

The Welsh poet Dylan Thomas remembered his father as a man robust and militant for many years. But Thomas' father, in his eighties, became blind and weak, and so his son addressed him in a poem that opens with these lines:

"Do not go gentle into that good night,  
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light."

The poet goes on to declare that various classes of men--the wise, the good, the wild, the grave--all of them do not go gentle into that good night, all of them rage against the dying of the light.

Listen to these lines:

"Though wise men at their end know dark is right,  
Because their words had forked no lightning they  
Do not go gentle into that good night.  
  
"Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright  
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.  
  
"Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,  
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,  
Do not go gentle into that good night.  
  
"Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight  
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light."

Wise men. Good men. Wild men. Grave men. Dylan Thomas will have all of them rage against the dying of the light, and not a single one go gently into that good night.

Certainly the poet recognizes two fundamental options. There are those among us who slip into death. And there are those among us who resist it with every ounce of their power, refusing and rejecting the dark that awaits them.

What does Jesus choose? In the final moments, when the light fades for him, does he go gentle, or does he rage?

He chooses neither one. Jesus does not slip away. Nor does he dig in his heels all the way down.

John's Gospel presents his last word as a scream of triumph. "**It is finished!**"

A sentence in English, a single word in New Testament Greek, this indicates not simply the end of something, but its completion, the goal accomplished, the purpose realized.

But what is it that Jesus announces as finished just before he dies?

It is his life, all that the Father sent him into the world to do. It is the abundant result of that life: prophecies fulfilled, sin's power broken, the world overcome. All this finally and definitively realized. The work of a lifetime. The salvation of this world. So Jesus goes out with a shout: "It is finished!"

The imperial death machine that places Jesus on the wood ends up with nothing to brag about. The cross is not a defeat that must wait for Easter morning to be reversed. It is already an instrument and sign of victory.

Jesus does not go gentle into that good night. He sweats blood when he prays in Gethsemane. Yet he has no need to rage. It is finished. It is complete. Nailed to the wood, Christ is already triumphant. He reigns from the cross. As Jesus dies, he conquers.

In the final lines of his poem, Dylan Thomas calls out:

"And you, my father, there on the sad height,

Curse, bless me now with your fierce tears, I pray.

Do not go gentle into that good night.

Rage, rage against the dying of the light."

He insists his father ought to shed fierce tears in resisting the death that awaits him. The poet equates these tears with a paternal blessing: they are inspiration and example. He equates them with a curse as well, a reminder of our unavoidable

mortality. Dylan Thomas sees his father, himself, and all of us sooner or later dying into death. He has his reasons for doing so.

Jesus sees it differently. He knows himself to be dying into God his father, and invites us all to accompany him when our time arrives. He knows that he has come from God and will go home to God. He has lived life unafraid. Realizing this as he does, his life is complete.

For him the light is not dying. It is becoming brighter. The rage of bitter defeat has no place. Nor is what prevails some gentle weakness, an evaporation of spirit. Jesus triumphs. Jesus glories like a young athlete who bursts the tape at the finish line of the race.

It is precisely there, in his death, that we begin to know him for who he is: the prince of life whose reign will never end; the one who calls us beyond our weakness and our rage to reign with him forever.

"It is finished!" The life and mission of Jesus are complete. But something else is finished also--in the sense of brought to an ignominious end, broken, destroyed. And what is that?

As we began with a poet, so we end with a poet, this one also a preacher and a priest, John Donne. Rather than issue a passionate call to rage, Donne engages in mockery and contempt that is almost playful.

Listen to these lines:

"Death be not proud, though some have called thee

Mighty and dreadfull, for, thou art not so,

For, those, whom thou think'st, thou dost overthrow,

Die not, poore death, nor yet canst thou kill me.

. . .

One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally,

and death shall be no more; death, thou shalt die.

**Homily from the 2010 Easter Vigil (Deacon Greg Kendra)**

A few days ago, I was contacted by a reporter at the New York Post. She was doing a story for Easter, all about being Catholic in 2010. She wanted to hear my thoughts, especially in light of some of the headlines that have been in the news lately. I agreed to talk with her, but we kept missing each other, and she was on deadline, and I had obligations here at church, so the interview never happened.

I don't know if she got the story she was looking for. But I wish she could be here tonight. You can't find a greater story than what we are witnessing in this church.

Here, and now, we are seeing the ongoing miracle of not just any story, but the Greatest Story Ever Told. You and I are a part of it. The seven people who are candidates and catechumens in our church tonight, about to join our faith, they are a part of it. Over a billion people around the world are a part of it.

The statistics are staggering. In 2008, 19 million people entered the Church. That's 2,169 every hour. 36 every second. And the numbers just keep growing.

We could speculate why that's so. But ultimately, it comes to this: they are drawn by hope. It is a hope that is stronger than despair... a truth that towers over a world of falsehood... the Light of the World that scatters every darkness.

That, in all its greatness and mystery and wonder, is our faith.

I've spent the last couple of days thinking about the question that reporter was seeking to answer. What does it mean to be a Catholic today?

It means, first of all, history. It is looking back across 20 centuries and remembering where we came from. And where we came from begins with the gospel we just heard, and the empty tomb, and the first bewildered witnesses who had to tell the story of what they saw. And they told others. And then they told others.

And the story goes on.

It is the story of faith on a mission: "The pilgrim church on earth." It is the story of a journey — from Jerusalem to Rome to Africa...to India and Asia and islands in the South Pacific. It is a mission that eventually brought people to America, and a place called Brooklyn.

It is about the people who made that mission happen: sisters and brothers, priests and religious and lay people by the millions who did the unsung, heroic work of building up the church, often at enormous sacrifice, sometimes paying with their lives. It is immigrants who gave spare change to build churches, and nuns who cared for the sick when no one else would, and who taught our parents and grandparents and great grandparents. It is priests who celebrated mass in auditoriums and gymnasiums, and who walked arm in arm through the south with Martin Luther King. It is standing in solidarity with the smallest, the weakest, the defenseless: the unborn.

What does being a Catholic today mean? It is parents giving up vacations so their kids can go to Catholic school.

It's those same kids giving up their weekends to be altar servers.

It is May Processions and First Communions and fish fries and bingo. It's the crèche at Christmas, and this candle at Easter.

It's the cry of a baby being baptized. It's the gentle voice of the priest offering absolution to someone who hasn't been to confession in 20 years – and offering a chance to begin again, and to be made new. And it is silence, the thundering silence of people who come here on any given weekday to light a candle, say a rosary, and pray.

It is the thousands who crowd into this church on an ordinary Wednesday in the middle of the winter to receive ashes.

It is the hundreds who came here just last night to behold the wounded, scarred face of Christ – and venerate his cross with a kiss.

It is the anonymous strangers who stop by the statue of the Blessed Mother outside the church, and leave roses, or folded scraps of paper with petitions. "Mary, pray for my son. Mary, help me find a job."

It is being the Body of Christ, continuing today what he began...with love, and with gratitude, and with a sense of pride. This is our Church. This is our faith.

Beyond what it may appear to the world out there, it is, most importantly, what we cherish in here. And that is — overwhelmingly — the Eucharist: Christ himself, placed before us, as small as a coin, as vast and limitless as the universe.

That is what I'd like to have told the reporter. But this night, I'm telling you. And maybe you can spread the word.

Because this is a headline the world needs to know: we are people of resurrection. Easter people. People of hope. People carrying within us, and into the world, the light of Christ.

And that is how we live out, in our own way, the Greatest Story Ever Told.

And this night — by the grace of God, with ‘Alleluias’ in our hearts and on our lips — the story goes on.

## APPENDIX

- Appendix 1 “*The True Catholic*”
- Appendix 2 *Fasting and Abstinence*
- Appendix 3 *A reflection by Fr. John Foley, S. J. of the Center for Liturgy*
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## APPENDIX 1

### *THE TRUE CATHOLIC:*

by Saint Vincent of Lerins

Very little is known about the details of the life of Saint Vincent or Vincentius of Lerins. This humble saint of the late 4<sup>th</sup> to mid 5<sup>th</sup> century AD was a Gaul (territory of modern France) who was a member of the famous monastery of Lerins on the island off the coast of southern France. Vincent is best known for his treatise known as the "Commonitory", subtitled "For the Antiquity and Universality of the Catholic Faith Against the Profane Novelties of all Heresies", written circa 434AD. The following is an excerpt from this great work.

"..he is the true and genuine Catholic who loves the truth of God, who loves the Church, who loves the Body of Christ, who esteems divine religion and the Catholic Faith above everything, above the authority, above the regard, above the genius, above the eloquence, above the philosophy, of every man whatsoever; who set light by all of these, and continuing steadfast and established in the faith, resolves that he will believe that, and that only, which he is sure the Catholic Church has held universally and from ancient time; but that whatsoever new and unheard-of doctrine he shall find to have been furtively introduced by some one or another, besides that of all, or contrary to that of all the saints, this, he will understand, does not pertain to religion, but is permitted as a trial, being instructed especially by the words of the blessed Apostle Paul, who writes thus in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, 'There must needs be heresies, that they who are approved may be made manifest among you:' as though he should say, This is the reason why the authors of Heresies are not forthwith rooted up by God, namely, that they who are approved may be made manifest; that is, that it may be apparent of each individual, how tenacious and faithful and steadfast he is in his love of the Catholic faith"

## APPENDIX 2

### **Lenten Fasting and Abstinence<sup>3</sup>**

*It is a traditional doctrine of Christian spirituality that a constituent part of repentance, of turning away from sin and back to God, includes some form of penance, without which the Christian is unlikely to remain on the narrow path and be saved (Jer. 18:11, 25:5; Ez. 18:30, 33:11-15; Joel 2:12; Mt. 3:2; Mt. 4:17; Acts 2:38). Christ Himself said that His disciples would fast once He had departed (Lk. 5:35). The general law of penance, therefore, is part of the law of God for man.*

*The Church for her part has specified certain forms of penance, both to ensure that the Catholic will do something, as required by divine law, while making it easy for Catholics to fulfill the obligation. Thus, the 1983 Code of Canon Law specifies the obligations of Roman Catholics:*

- *Canon 1250 All Fridays through the year and the time of Lent are penitential days and times throughout the entire Church.*
- *Canon 1251 Abstinence from eating meat or another food according to the prescriptions of the conference of bishops is to be observed on Fridays throughout the year unless they are solemnities; abstinence and fast are to be observed on Ash Wednesday and on the Friday of the Passion and Death of Our Lord Jesus Christ.*
- *Canon 1252 All persons who have completed their fourteenth year are bound by the law of abstinence; all adults are bound by the law of fast up to the beginning of their sixtieth year. Nevertheless, pastors and parents are to see to it that minors who are not bound by the law of fast and abstinence are educated in an authentic sense of penance.*

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<sup>3</sup> Colin B. Donovan, STL

- *Canon 1253 It is for the conference of bishops to determine more precisely the observance of fast and abstinence and to substitute in whole or in part for fast and abstinence other forms of penance, especially works of charity and exercises of piety.*

*The Church, therefore, has two forms of official penitential practices - three if the Eucharistic fast of one hour before Communion is included.*

**Abstinence:** *The law of abstinence requires a Catholic 14 years of age until death to abstain from eating meat on Fridays in honor of the Passion of Jesus on Good Friday. Meat is considered to be the flesh and organs of mammals and fowl. Also forbidden are soups or gravies made from them. Salt and freshwater species of fish, amphibians, reptiles and shellfish are permitted, as are animal derived products such as margarine and gelatin which do not have any meat taste.*

*On the Fridays outside of Lent the U.S. Bishops conference obtained the permission of the Holy See for Catholics in the US to substitute a penitential, or even a charitable, practice of their own choosing. **They must do some penitential/charitable practice on these Fridays.** For most people the easiest practice to consistently fulfill will be the traditional one, to abstain from meat on all Fridays of the year. **During Lent abstinence from meat on Fridays is obligatory in the United States as elsewhere.***

**Fasting:** *The law of fasting requires a Catholic from the 18th Birthday (Canon 97) to the 59th Birthday (i.e. the beginning of the 60th year, a year which will be completed on the 60th birthday) to reduce the amount of food eaten from normal. The Church defines this as one meal a day, and two smaller meals which if added together would not exceed the main meal in quantity. **Such fasting is obligatory on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.** The fast is broken by eating between meals and by drinks which could be considered food (milk shakes, but not milk). Alcoholic beverages do not break the fast; however, they seem to be contrary to the spirit of doing penance.*

**Those who are excused from fast or abstinence:** Besides those outside the age limits, those of unsound mind, the sick, the frail, pregnant or nursing women according to need for meat or nourishment, manual laborers according to need, guests at a meal who cannot excuse themselves without giving great offense or causing enmity and other situations of moral or physical impossibility to observe the penitential discipline.

Aside from these minimum penitential requirements Catholics are encouraged to impose some personal penance on themselves at other times. It could be modeled after abstinence and fasting. A person could, for example, multiply the number of days they abstain. Some people give up meat entirely for religious motives (as opposed to those who give it up for health or other motives). Some religious orders, as a penance, never eat meat. Similarly, one could multiply the number of days that one fasted. The early Church had a practice of a Wednesday and Saturday fast. This fast could be the same as the Church's law (one main meal and two smaller ones) or stricter, even bread and water. Such freely chosen fasting could also consist in giving up something one enjoys - candy, soft drinks, smoking, that cocktail before supper, and so on. This is left to the individual.

**One final consideration.** Before all else we are obliged to perform the duties of our state in life. Any deprivation that would seriously hinder us in carrying out our work, as students, employees or parents would be contrary to the will of God.

## APPENDIX 3

*Do this thought experiment with me.*

*Suppose you and I are walking, maybe last week, along a civilized road, and a stranger starts strolling with us.*

*“What are you discussing as you walk along?” he asks with ease.*

*We stop. One of us, maybe you, says to him, “Are you the only person in the world ignorant of these last decades and these centuries, the things that have happened in them?”*

*He replies, “What sort of things?”*

*You say, “We had promised to continue Christ’s works, to revere his presence, to preserve his love so it could overflow through us to everyone.” Your eyes shift away. “But now nations are at war, the Church is fragmented, its promises broken, and we have betrayed his mission.”*

*“Betrayed?” the visitor asks.*

*“Ah yes,” you reply. “A number of our own priests and even Bishops have gone against the very mission they were sent to preach. Predators, they have become, some of them. And churches are closing in our cities, and dioceses are going bankrupt! Only a few are entering the priesthood now—how are we going to have sacraments?”*

*I gesture to you with a “calm down” motion, but you go right on talking.*

*“We have crucified Christ all over again! Oh, we were hoping that he would make the*

*whole world come right! What are we to do?"*

*The stranger says quietly, "How slow of heart you are to believe all that the prophets spoke. Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and so bring the world into his glory?"*

*Silence.*

*You stutter a reply. "What do you mean, suffer these things—and do it again? Why would he get caught in the horrors of Nazi Germany, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Bosnia and Rwanda and Iraq and Afghanistan and Libya and. . ."*

*He raises his hand. He begins to tell you about references in scripture. He begins with Moses and the prophets. His voice is very kind. He shows how God had endlessly sought a loving relationship with his people, and that they would enter into it for a while but then would turn their backs on him and run away. Battles and wars, belief and unbelief, rich versus poor—and worst of all, neglect of the sick, the very ones who have been aching for love.*

*He tells us that there actually is a way for the human heart to say Yes to God and mean it. "One human being has done it on behalf of us all," he says, "one who is human as well as divine—to the core—and who will not stop trusting God. Not even when trapped in the depth, the mindless pool of suffering and death. As often as you and others like you join with God in this human being's faithfulness and love, the world will be changed."*

*He walks with us some more and even comes in to stay with us. We offer him food. He takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to us, along with wine. My body, he says. My blood.*

*You are calm now and so am I. You whisper, “Maybe the resurrection did happen!” We both nod. We have recognized him. We saw him in the breaking of the bread.*

*And now we see him in the breaking bones of the world.*

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*Fr. John Foley, S. J. of the Center for Liturgy*

**Questions and Answers about Lent**

**Q: What is Lent?**

A: Lent is the forty day period before Easter, excluding Sundays, which begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Saturday (the day before Easter Sunday). [This traditional enumeration does not precisely coincide with the calendar according to the liturgical reform. In order to give special prominence to the Sacred Triduum (Mass of the Lord's Supper, Good Friday, Easter Vigil) the current calendar counts Lent as only from Ash Wednesday to Holy Thursday, up to the Mass of the Lord's Supper. Even so, Lenten practices are properly maintained up to the Easter Vigil, excluding Sundays, as before.]

**Q: Why are Sundays excluded from the reckoning of the forty days?**

A: Because Sunday is the day on which Christ arose, making it an inappropriate day to fast and mourn our sins. On Sunday we must celebrate Christ's resurrection for our salvation. It is Friday on which we commemorate his death for our sins. The Sundays of the year are days of celebration and the Fridays of the year are days of penance.

**Q: Why are the forty days called Lent?**

A: They are called Lent because that is the Old English word for spring, the season of the year during which they fall. This is something unique to English. In almost all other languages its name is a derivative of the Latin term *Quadragesima*, or "the forty days."

**Q: Why is Lent forty days long?**

A: Because forty days is a traditional number of discipline, devotion, and preparation in the Bible. Thus Moses stayed on the Mountain of God forty days (Exodus 24:18 and 34:28), the spies were in the land for forty days (Numbers 13:25), Elijah traveled forty days before he reached the cave where he had his vision (1 Kings 19:8), Nineveh was given forty days to repent (Jonah 3:4), and most importantly, prior to undertaking his ministry, Jesus spent forty days in wilderness praying and fasting (Matthew 4:2).

Since Lent is a period of prayer and fasting, it is fitting for Christians to imitate their Lord with a forty day period. Christ used a forty day period of prayer and fasting to prepare for his ministry, which culminated in his death and resurrection, and thus it is fitting for Christians to imitate him with a forty day period of prayer and fasting to prepare for the celebration of his ministry's climax, Good Friday (the day of the crucifixion) and Easter Sunday (the day of the resurrection).

Thus the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states:

"For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sinning' [Heb 4:15]. By the solemn forty days of Lent the Church unites herself each year to the mystery of Jesus in the desert." (CCC 540).

**Q: When does Lent begin?**

A: Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, which is the day on which they faithful have their foreheads signed with ashes in the form of a Cross. It is also a day of fast and abstinence.

**Q: Is there a biblical basis for abstaining from meat as a sign of repentance?**

A: Yes. The book of Daniel states:

"In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia . . . 'I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over.'" (Daniel 10:1-3)

**Q: On what basis does the Church have the authority to establish days of fast and abstinence?**

A: On the authority of Jesus Christ. Jesus told the leaders of his Church, "Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:19, 18:18). The language of binding and loosing (in part) was a rabbinic way of referring to the ability to establish binding *halakah* or rules of conduct for

the faith community. It is thus especially appropriate that the references to binding and loosing occur in Matthew, the "Jewish Gospel." Thus the *Jewish Encyclopedia* states: "BINDING AND LOOSING (Hebrew, *asar ve-hittir*) . . . Rabbinical term for 'forbidding and permitting.' . . . "The power of binding and loosing as always claimed by the Pharisees. Under Queen Alexandra the Pharisees, says Josephus (*Wars of the Jews* 1:5:2), 'became the administrators of all public affairs so as to be empowered to banish and readmit whom they pleased, as well as to loose and to bind.' . . . The various schools had the power 'to bind and to loose'; that is, to forbid and to permit (*Talmud: Chagigah* 3b); and they could also bind any day by declaring it a fast-day ( . . . *Talmud: Ta'anit* 12a . . . ). This power and authority, vested in the rabbinical body of each age of the Sanhedrin, received its ratification and final sanction from the celestial court of justice (*Sifra, Emor*, 9; *Talmud: Makkot* 23b).

"In this sense Jesus, when appointing his disciples to be his successors, used the familiar formula (Matt. 16:19, 18:18). By these words he virtually invested them with the same authority as that which he found belonging to the scribes and Pharisees who 'bind heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but will not move them with one of their fingers'; that is 'loose them,' as they have the power to do (Matt. 23:2-4). In the same sense the second epistle of Clement to James II ('Clementine Homilies,' Introduction [A.D. 221]), Peter is represented as having appointed Clement as his successor, saying: 'I communicate to him the power of binding and loosing so that, with respect to everything which he shall ordain in the earth, it shall be decreed in the heavens; for he shall bind what ought to be bound and loose what ought to be loosed as knowing the rule of the Church.'" (*Jewish Encyclopedia* 3:215).

Thus Jesus invested the leaders of this Church with the power of making *halakah* for the Christian community. This includes the setting of fast days (like Ash Wednesday).

To approach the issue from another angle, every family has the authority to establish particular family devotions for its members. Thus if the parents decide that the family will engage in a particular devotion at a particular time (say, Bible reading after supper), it is a sin for the children to disobey and skip the devotion for no good reason. In the same

way, the Church as the family of God has the authority to establish its own family devotion, and it is a sin for the members of the Church to disobey and skip the devotions for no good reason (though of course if the person has a good reason, the Church dispenses him immediately).

**Q: In addition to Ash Wednesday, are any other days during Lent days of fast or abstinence?**

A: Yes. All Fridays during Lent are days of abstinence. Also, Good Friday, the day on which Christ was crucified, is another day of both fast and abstinence. All days in Lent are appropriate for fasting or abstaining, but canon law does not require fasting on those days. Such fasting or abstinence is voluntary, like a freewill offering.

**Q: Why are Fridays during Lent days of abstinence.**

A: This is because Jesus died for our sins on Friday, making it an especially appropriate day of mourning our sins (just as Sunday, the day on which he rose for our salvation is an especially appropriate day to rejoice) by denying ourselves something we enjoy. During the rest of the year Catholics in this country are permitted to use a different act of penance on Friday in place of abstinence, though all Fridays are days of penance on which we are required to do something expressing sorrow for our sins, just as Sundays are holy days on which we are required to worship and celebrate God's great gift of salvation.

**Q: Are acts of repentance appropriate on other days during Lent?**

A: Yes. Thus the *Code of Canon Law* states:

"All Fridays through the year and the time of Lent are penitential days and time throughout the universal Church" (CIC 1250).

**Q: Why are acts of repentance appropriate at this time of year?**

A: Because it is the time leading up to the commemoration of Our Lord's death for our sins and the commemoration of his resurrection for our salvation. It is thus especially appropriate to mourn the sins for which he died. Humans have an innate psychological need to mourn tragedies, and our sins are tragedies of the greatest sort. Due to our

fallen nature humans also have a need to have set times in which to engage in behavior (which is why we have Sundays as a set time to rest and worship, since we would otherwise be likely to forget to devote sufficient time to rest and worship), it is appropriate to have set times of repentance. Lent is one of those set times.

**Q: What are appropriate activities for ordinary days during Lent?**

A: Giving up something we enjoy for Lent, doing of physical or spiritual acts of mercy for others, prayer, fasting, abstinence, going to confession, and other acts expressing repentance in general.

**Q: Is the custom of giving up something for Lent mandatory?**

A: No. However, it is a salutary custom, and parents or caretakers may choose to require it of their children to encourage their spiritual training, which is their prime responsibility in the raising of their children.

**Q: Since Sundays are not counted in the forty days of Lent, does the custom of giving up something apply to them?**

A: Customarily, no. However, since the giving up of something is voluntary to begin with, there is no official rule concerning this aspect of it. Nevertheless, since Sundays are days of celebration, it is appropriate to suspend the Lenten self-denial on them that, in a spiritual and non-excessive way, we may celebrate the day of Our Lord's resurrection so that that day and that event may be contrasted with the rest of the days of Lent and the rest of the events of history. This heightened contrast deepens the spiritual lessons taught by the rest of Lent.

**Q: Why is giving up something for Lent such a salutary custom?**

A: By denying ourselves something we enjoy, we discipline our wills so that we are not slaves to our pleasures. Just as indulging the pleasure of eating leads to physical flabbiness and, if this is great enough, an inability to perform in physically demanding situations, indulging in pleasure in general leads to spiritual flabbiness and, if this is great enough, an inability to perform in spiritual demanding situations, we when the demands of morality require us to sacrifice something pleasurable (such as sex before

marriage or not within the confines of marriage) or endure hardship (such as being scorned or persecuted for the faith). By disciplining the will to refuse pleasures when they are not sinful, a habit is developed which allows the will to refuse pleasures when they are sinful. There are few better ways to keep one's priorities straight than by periodically denying ourselves things of lesser priority to show us that they are not necessary and focus our attention on what is necessary.

**Q: Is the denying of pleasure an end in itself?**

A: No. It is only a means to an end. By training ourselves to resist temptations when they are not sinful, we train ourselves to reject temptations when they are sinful. We also express our sorrow over having failed to resist sinful temptations in the past.

**Q: Is there such a thing as denying ourselves too many pleasures?**

A: Most definitely. First, God made human life contingent on certain goods, such as food, and to refuse to enjoy enough of them has harmful consequences. For example, if we do not eat enough food it can cause physical damage or (in the extreme, even death). Just as there is a balance between eating too much food and not eating enough food, there is a balance involved in other goods.

Second, if we do not strike the right balance and deny ourselves goods God meant us to have then it can generate resentment toward God, which is a spiritual sin just as much as those of engaging in excesses of good things. Thus one can be led into sin either by excess or by defect in the enjoyment of good things.

Third, it can decrease our effectiveness in ministering to others.

Fourth, it can deprive us of the goods God gave us in order that we might praise him.

Fifth, it constitutes the sin of ingratitude by refusing to enjoy the things God wanted us to have because he loves us. If a child refused every gift his parent gave him, it would displease the parent, and if we refuse gifts God has given us, it displeases God because he loves us and wants us to have them.

**Q: Is that balance the same for all people?**

A: No. For example, with the good of food, people who are by nature physically larger need more food than people who are physically smaller. Similarly, people who have higher metabolisms or who do manual labor for a living need more food than people with slower metabolisms or who have less active lifestyles. The same is true with regard to other goods than food. The St. Paul speaks of this in regard to the good of married life:

"I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own special gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain single as I do. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion" (1 Corinthians 7:7-9).

Thus some are given the gift of being able to live without the good of married life in order that they may pursue greater devotion to God (1 Cor. 7:32-34) or to pursue greater ministry for others (2 Timothy 2:3-4), as with priests, monks, and nuns. God gives these people special graces to live the life which they have embraced, just as he gives special graces to the married to live the life they have embraced.

**Q: Aside from Ash Wednesday, which begins Lent, what are its principal events?**

A: There are a variety of saints' days which fall during Lent, and some of these change from year to year since the dates of Lent itself change based on when Easter falls. However, the Sundays during the Lenten season commemorate special events in the life of Our Lord, such as his Transfiguration and his Triumphal Entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, which begins Holy Week. Holy week climaxes with Holy Thursday, on which Christ celebrated the first Mass, Good Friday, on which he was Crucified, and Holy Saturday—the last day of Lent—during which Our Lord lay in the Tomb before his Resurrection on Easter Sunday, the first day after Lent.

## APPENDIX 5

### I. Historical and biblical references to the Gospels

#### A. Gospel of Matthew

1. Believed to be the first of the Gospels to have been written, probably in Antioch, the capital of the Roman province of Syria
2. Links the story of Jesus to the history of Israel
  - (1) Frequently refers to Old Testament quotations and the Jewish law
3. Focus on the universal mission of the Church
4. Harshly criticizes Pharisees, calling them “hypocrites” (Matt 6:2, 5, 16)
5. Criticize those who claim to be His disciples while disobeying him (Matt 7:21-23, 26-27)

#### B. Gospel of Mark, “the Gospel of Conversion”

1. It has no Infancy Narrative/Nativity story
2. It begins: “The Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”
  - a) No ambiguity of the pronouncement that Jesus was the Son of God
3. It is believed to have been written about 64 A.D. to Roman Christians during the time of the great persecution in Rome under Nero.
4. It has a focus on Jesus’ disciples; He continuously asks them “Do you understand? Where am I taking you?”
  - a) The disciples were never certain of their missions; they were obtuse with regard to the miracles of Jesus.

(1)     Mark 4:40 After calming the stormy waters, Jesus asks: “Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?” 9:18-19 ( In healing the boy possessed by a demon, after the disciples cannot or do not heal the boy Jesus says: “O faithless generation, how long will I be with you? How long will I endure you? Bring him to me.” Jesus later explained to the disciples the reason for their failing: “When he entered the house, his disciples asked Him in private, ‘Why could we not drive it out?’ He said to them, ‘This kind can only come out through prayer.’”) Mark 9:28-29

### C. Gospel of Luke

1.     First of Luke’s two volume works, the second was the *Acts of the Apostles*
  - a)     Early Christian tradition identifies Luke as a Syrian from Antioch
2.     Luke tells us that he *was not* a firsthand observer of the events recounted in the Gospel (Luke 1:1) but rather is a describing the “history” of salvation
  - a)     Documents the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies in Jesus’ life (e.g. Luke 4:21, 18:31, 22:37,24:26-27,44)
  - b)     Luke’s Gospel related the story of Jesus to the Roman world at the time
3.     Throughout the Gospel, Luke calls upon Christian disciples to identify with Jesus and conform their conduct to His
  - a)     Caring for poor, lowly, outcast, sinner and the afflicted who recognize their dependence on God (e.g. Luke 4:18, 6:20-23, 7:36-50, etc.)

- b) Severe toward the proud and righteous especially those who place material wealth before service to God and God's people (Luke 6: 24-26, 12: 13-21, 16: 12-15, 19-31, 18: 9-14 etc.)

**D. Gospel of John, the Gospel of "Signs"**

- 1. Different from the three synoptic Gospels, very literary and symbolic
  - a) Synoptic Gospels have the same or similar stories and chronology; John's Gospel doesn't follow the same time line or repeat the same stories
  - b) Believed to have been written in the 90's, probably in Ephesus (some also believe Antioch and others Alexandria)
  - c) Places women on an even plane with men
    - (1) Woman at well in Samaria as "prototype" missionary (Jn 4:4-42)
    - (2) First witnesses to the resurrection are women (Jn 20: 11-18)
  - d) Harsh on the Pharisees and Sadducees; attacks their authority and self righteousness as Jews
    - (1) Jn 3: 16 ("God so loved the world...") didn't limit the love of God to the Jews, *very controversial*
    - (2) References to "the Jews" is not a reference to the Jewish people, but rather to the Pharisees and Sadducees *in Jerusalem* who refuse to believe in Jesus
    - (3) The first reference to "the Jews" is when they send priests and Levites to interrogate John the Baptist (Jn 1: 19-28)

e) The narrative has seven “signs”-- the Gospel’s word for the wondrous deeds of Jesus and the Gospel reflects on the meanings of the signs (Seven signs)

- (1) First sign: Transformation of water into wine at Cana (Jn 2:1-11)
  - (a) Symbolizes and foreshadows the transforming ways of Jesus
- (2) Second sign, the cure of the royal official’s son (Jn 4: 46-54)
  - (a) Cure accomplished by the word of Jesus from a distance, signifying the power of Jesus’ life-giving word
- (3) Third sign, the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn 4:4-42) Jesus is the “living waters”
- (4) Forth sign, the cure of the paralytic at the pool (Jn 5:1-9) Theme of “living water” continues
- (5) Fifth sign, multiplication of loaves and fishes and walking on the water of the Sea of Galilee (Jn 6: 1-15, 7: 16-21) Jesus is the “bread of life”
  - (a) References to the Old Testament manna and crossing of the Red Sea in the Passover narrative
- (6) Sixth sign, man born blind (Jn 9: 1-41), Jesus is the “Light of the World”
- (7) Seventh sign, raising of Lazarus from the dead (Jn 11: 1-44), Jesus is the “resurrection and the life”



## SHORT MEDITATIONS ON THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS

(Blessed Cardinal John Henry Newman)

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*Begin with an Act of Contrition.*

### First Station:

#### **Jesus condemned to Death**

V. We adore thee, O Christ, and we bless thee.

R. Because by thy holy Cross thou hast redeemed the world.

THE Holy, Just, and True was judged by sinners, and put to death. Yet, while they judged, they were compelled to acquit Him. Judas, who betrayed Him, said, "I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood." Pilate, who sentenced Him, said, "I am innocent of the blood of this just person," and threw the guilt upon the Jews. The Centurion who saw Him crucified said, "Indeed this was a just man." Thus ever, O Lord, Thou art justified in Thy words, and dost overcome when Thou art judged. And so, much more, at the last day "They shall look on Him whom they pierced"; and He who was condemned in weakness shall judge the world in power, and even those who are condemned will confess their judgment is just.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be.

V. Have mercy on us, O Lord.

R. Have mercy on us.

May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

### The Second Station:

#### **Jesus receives His Cross**

V. We adore thee, O Christ, and we bless thee.

R. Because by thy holy Cross thou hast redeemed the world.

JESUS supports the whole world by His divine power, for He is God; but the weight was less heavy than was the Cross which our sins hewed out for Him. Our sins cost Him this humiliation. He had to take on Him our nature, and to appear among us as a man, and to offer up for us a great sacrifice. He had to pass a life in penance, and to endure His passion and death at the end of it. O Lord God Almighty, who dost bear the weight of the whole world without weariness, who bore the weight of all our sins, though they wearied Thee, as Thou art the Preserver of our bodies by Thy Providence, so be Thou the Saviour of our souls by Thy precious blood.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be, &c.

### The Third Station:

#### **Jesus falls under the weight of the Cross the first time**

V. We adore thee, O Christ, and we bless thee.

R. Because by thy holy Cross thou hast redeemed the world.

SATAN fell from heaven in the beginning; by the just sentence of his Creator he fell, against whom he had rebelled. And when he had succeeded in gaining man to join him in his rebellion, and his Maker came to save him, then his brief hour of triumph came, and he made the most of it. When the Holiest had taken flesh, and was in his power, then in his revenge and malice he determined, as he himself had been struck down by the Almighty arm, to strike in turn a heavy blow at Him who struck him. Therefore it was that Jesus fell down so suddenly. O dear Lord, by this Thy first fall raise us all out of sin, who have so miserably fallen under its power.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be, &c.

**The Fourth Station:**  
**Jesus meets His Mother**

V. We adore thee, O Christ, and we bless thee.

R. Because by thy holy Cross thou hast redeemed the world.

THERE is no part of the history of Jesus but Mary has her part in it. There are those who profess to be His servants, who think that her work was ended when she bore Him, and after that she had nothing to do but disappear and be forgotten. But we, O Lord, Thy children of the Catholic Church, do not so think of Thy Mother. She brought the tender infant into the Temple, she lifted Him up in her arms when the wise men came to adore Him. She fled with Him to Egypt, she took Him up to Jerusalem when He was twelve years old. He lived with her at Nazareth for thirty years. She was with Him at the marriage-feast. Even when He had left her to preach, she hovered about Him. And now she shows herself as He toils along the Sacred Way with His cross on His shoulders. Sweet Mother, let us ever think of thee when we think of Jesus, and when we pray to Him, ever aid us by thy powerful intercession.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be, &c.

**The Fifth Station:**  
**Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus to carry the Cross**

V. We adore thee, O Christ, and we bless thee.

R. Because by thy holy Cross thou hast redeemed the world.

JESUS could bear His Cross alone, did He so will; but He permits Simon to help Him, in order to remind us that we must take part in His sufferings, and have a fellowship in His work. His merit is infinite, yet He condescends to let His people add their merit to it. The sanctity of the Blessed Virgin, the blood of the Martyrs, the prayers and penances of the Saints, the good deeds of all the faithful, take part in that work which, nevertheless, is perfect without them. He saves us by His blood, but it is through and with ourselves that He saves us. Dear Lord, teach us to suffer with Thee, make it pleasant to us to suffer for Thy sake, and sanctify all our sufferings by the merits of Thy own.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be, &c.

**The Sixth Station:****The Face of Jesus is wiped by Veronica**

V. We adore thee, O Christ, and we bless thee.

R. Because by thy holy Cross thou hast redeemed the world.

JESUS let the pious woman carry off an impression of His Sacred Countenance, which was to last to future ages. He did this to remind us all, that His image must ever be impressed on all our hearts. Whoever we are, in whatever part of the earth, in whatever age of the world, Jesus must live in our hearts. We may differ from each other in many things, but in this we must all agree, if we are His true children. We must bear about with us the napkin of St. Veronica; we must ever meditate upon His death and resurrection, we must ever imitate His divine excellence, according to our measure. Lord, let our countenances be ever pleasing in Thy sight, not defiled with sin, but bathed and washed white in Thy precious blood.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be, &c.

**The Seventh Station:****Jesus falls a second time**

V. We adore thee, O Christ, and we bless thee.

R. Because by thy holy Cross thou hast redeemed the world.

SATAN had a second fall, when our Lord came upon earth. By that time he had usurped the dominion of the whole world—and he called himself its king. And he dared to take up the Holy Saviour in his arms, and show Him all kingdoms, and blasphemously promise to give them to Him, His Maker, if He would adore him. Jesus answered, "Begone, Satan!"—and Satan fell down from the high mountain. And Jesus bare witness to it when He said, "I saw Satan, as lightning, falling from heaven." The Evil One remembered this second defeat, and so now he smote down the Innocent Lord a second time, now that he had Him in his power. O dear Lord, teach us to suffer with Thee, and not be afraid of Satan's buffetings, when they come on us from resisting him.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be, &c.

**The Eighth Station:****The Women of Jerusalem mourn for Our Lord**

V. We adore thee, O Christ, and we bless thee.

R. Because by thy holy Cross thou hast redeemed the world.

EVER since the prophecy of old time, that the Saviour of man was to be born of a woman of the stock of Abraham, the Jewish women had desired to bear Him. Yet, now that He was really come, how different, as the Gospel tells us, was the event from what they had expected. He said to them "that the days were coming when they should say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that have not borne, and the breasts which have not given suck." Ah, Lord, we know not what is good for us, and what is bad. We cannot foretell the future, nor do we know, when Thou comest to visit us, in what form Thou wilt come. And therefore we leave it all to Thee. Do Thou Thy good pleasure to us

and in us. Let us ever look at Thee, and do Thou look upon us, and give us the grace of Thy bitter Cross and Passion, and console us in Thy own way and at Thy own time.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be, &c.

**The Ninth Station:**

**Jesus falls the third time**

V. We adore thee, O Christ, and we bless thee.

R. Because by thy holy Cross thou hast redeemed the world.

SATAN will have a third and final fall at the end of the world, when he will be shut up for good in the everlasting fiery prison. He knew this was to be his end—he has no hope, but despair only. He knew that no suffering which he could at that moment inflict upon the Saviour of men would avail to rescue himself from that inevitable doom. But, in horrible rage and hatred, he determined to insult and torture while he could the great King whose throne is everlasting. Therefore a third time he smote Him down fiercely to the earth. O Jesus, Only-begotten Son of God, the Word Incarnate, we adore with fear and trembling and deep thankfulness Thy awful humiliation, that Thou who art the Highest, should have permitted Thyself, even for one hour, to be the sport and prey of the Evil One.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be, &c.

**The Tenth Station:**

**Jesus is stripped of His Garments**

V. We adore thee, O Christ, and we bless thee.

R. Because by thy holy Cross thou hast redeemed the world.

JESUS would give up everything of this world, before He left it. He exercised the most perfect poverty. When He left the Holy House of Nazareth, and went out to preach, He had not where to lay His head. He lived on the poorest food, and on what was given to Him by those who loved and served Him. And therefore He chose a death in which not even His clothes were left to Him. He parted with what seemed most necessary, and even a part of Him, by the law of human nature since the fall. Grant us in like manner, O dear Lord, to care nothing for anything on earth, and to bear the loss of all things, and to endure even shame, reproach, contempt, and mockery, rather than that Thou shalt be ashamed of us at the last day.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be, &c.

**The Eleventh Station:**

**Jesus is nailed to the Cross**

V. We adore thee, O Christ, and we bless thee.

R. Because by thy holy Cross thou hast redeemed the world.

JESUS is pierced through each hand and each foot with a sharp nail. His eyes are dimmed with blood, and are closed by the swollen lids and livid brows which the blows of His executioners have caused. His mouth is filled with vinegar and gall. His head is encircled by the sharp thorns. His heart is pierced with the spear. Thus, all His senses are mortified and crucified, that He may make atonement for every kind of human sin. O

Jesus, mortify and crucify us with Thee. Let us never sin by hand or foot, by eyes or mouth, or by head or heart. Let all our senses be a sacrifice to Thee; let every member sing Thy praise. Let the sacred blood which flowed from Thy five wounds anoint us with such sanctifying grace that we may die to the world, and live only to Thee.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be, &c.

**The Twelfth Station:**

**Jesus dies upon the Cross**

V. We adore thee, O Christ, and we bless thee.

R. Because by thy holy Cross thou hast redeemed the world.

"CONSUMMATUM est." It is completed—it has come to a full end. The mystery of God's love towards us is accomplished. The price is paid, and we are redeemed. The Eternal Father determined not to pardon us without a price, in order to show us especial favour. He condescended to make us valuable to Him. What we buy we put a value on. He might have saved us without a price—by the mere fiat of His will. But to show His love for us He took a price, which, if there was to be a price set upon us at all, if there was any ransom at all to be taken for the guilt of our sins, could be nothing short of the death of His Son in our nature. O my God and Father, Thou hast valued us so much as to pay the highest of all possible prices for our sinful souls—and shall we not love and choose Thee above all things as the one necessary and one only good?

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be, &c.

**The Thirteenth Station:**

**Jesus is laid in the arms of His Blessed Mother**

V. We adore thee, O Christ, and we bless thee.

R. Because by thy holy Cross thou hast redeemed the world.

HE is Thy property now, O Virgin Mother, once again, for He and the world have met and parted. He went out from Thee to do His Father's work—and He has done and suffered it. Satan and bad men have now no longer any claim upon Him—too long has He been in their arms. Satan took Him up aloft to the high mountain; evil men lifted Him up upon the Cross. He has not been in Thy arms, O Mother of God, since He was a child—but now thou hast a claim upon Him, when the world has done its worst. For thou art the all-favoured, all-blessed, all-gracious Mother of the Highest. We rejoice in this great mystery. He has been hidden in thy womb, He has lain in thy bosom, He has been suckled at thy breasts, He has been carried in thy arms—and now that He is dead, He is placed upon thy lap. Virgin Mother of God, pray for us.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be, &c..

**The Fourteenth Station:**

**Jesus is laid in the Sepulchre**

V. We adore thee, O Christ, and we bless thee.

R. Because by thy holy Cross thou hast redeemed the world..

JESUS, when He was nearest to His everlasting triumph, seemed to be farthest from triumphing. When He was nearest upon entering upon His kingdom, and exercising all

power in heaven and earth, He was lying dead in a cave of the rock. He was wrapped round in burying-clothes, and confined within a sepulchre of stone, where He was soon to have a glorified spiritual body, which could penetrate all substances, go to and fro quicker than thought, and was about to ascend on high. Make us to trust in thee, O Jesus, that Thou wilt display in us a similar providence. Make us sure, O Lord, that the greater is our distress, the nearer we are to Thee. The more men scorn us, the more Thou dost honour us. The more men insult over us, the higher Thou wilt exalt us. The more they forget us, the more Thou dost keep us in mind. The more they abandon us, the closer Thou wilt bring us to Thyself.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be, &c.

**LET US PRAY**

God, who by the Precious Blood of Thy only-begotten Son didst sanctify the standard of the Cross, grant, we beseech Thee, that we who rejoice in the glory of the same Holy Cross may at all times and places rejoice in Thy protection, through the same Christ, our Lord.

*End with one Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory be, for the intention of the Sovereign Pontiff.*

### **WHY ASHES; WHAT DO THE ASHES MEAN?**<sup>4</sup>

*The liturgical use of ashes originates in the Old Testament times. Ashes symbolized mourning, mortality and penance. For instance, in the Book of Esther, Mordecai put on sackcloth and ashes when he heard of the decree of King Ahasuerus (or Xerxes, 485-464 B.C.) of Persia to kill all of the Jewish people in the Persian Empire (Esther 4:1). Job (whose story was written between the seventh and fifth centuries BC) repented in sackcloth and ashes (Job 42:6). Prophesying the Babylonian captivity of Jerusalem, Daniel (c. 550 B.C.) wrote, "I turned to the Lord God, pleading in earnest prayer, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes" (Daniel 9:3).*

*In the fifth century B.C., after Jonah's preaching of conversion and repentance, the town of Ninevah proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth, and the king covered himself with sackcloth and sat in the ashes (Jonah 3:5-6). These Old Testament examples evidence both a recognized practice of using ashes and a common understanding of their symbolism.*

*Jesus Himself also made reference to ashes: Referring to towns that refused to repent of sin although they had witnessed the miracles and heard the good news, our Lord said, "If the miracles worked in you had taken place in Tyre and Sidon, they would have reformed in sackcloth and ashes long ago" (Matthew 11:21).*

*The early Church continued the usage of ashes for the same symbolic reasons. In his book, "De Poenitentia," Tertullian (c. 160-220) prescribed that the penitent must "live without joy in the roughness of sackcloth and the squalor of ashes." Eusebius (260-340), the famous early Church historian, recounted in his "The History of the Church" how an apostate named Natalis came to Pope Zephyrinus clothed in sackcloth and ashes begging forgiveness. Also during this time, for those who were required to do*

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<sup>4</sup>Assembled from the works of Fr. Saunders is president of the Notre Dame Institute for Catechetics .  
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*public penance, the priest sprinkled ashes on the head of the person leaving confession.*

*In the Middle Ages (at least by the time of the eighth century), those who were about to die were laid on the ground on top of sackcloth sprinkled with ashes. The priest would bless the dying person with holy water, saying, "Remember that thou art dust and to dust thou shalt return."*

*After the sprinkling, the priest asked, "Art thou content with sackcloth and ashes in testimony of thy penance before the Lord in the day of judgment?" To which the dying person replied, "I am content." In all of these examples, the symbolism of mourning, mortality, and penance is clear.*

*Eventually, the use of ashes was adapted to mark the beginning of Lent, the 40 day preparation period (not including Sundays) for Easter. The ritual for the "Day of Ashes" is found in the earliest editions of the Gregorian Sacramentary, which dates at least to the eighth century.*

*About the year 1000, an Anglo-Saxon priest named Aelfric preached, "We read in the books both in the Old Law and in the New that the men who repented of their sins bestrewed themselves with ashes and clothed their bodies with sackcloth. Now let us do this little at the beginning of our Lent that we strew ashes upon our heads to signify that we ought to repent of our sins during the Lenten fast."*

*As an aside, Aelfric reinforced his point by then telling of a man who refused to go to Church on Ash Wednesday and receive ashes; the man was killed a few days later in a boar hunt. Since this time, the Church has used ashes to mark the beginning of the penitential season of Lent, when we remember our mortality and mourn for our sins.*

*In our present liturgy for Ash Wednesday, we use ashes made from the burned palm branches distributed on the Palm Sunday of the previous year. The priest blesses the ashes and imposes them on the foreheads of the faithful, making the sign of the cross*

*and saying, "Remember, man you are dust and to dust you shall return," or "Turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel." As we begin this holy season of Lent in preparation for Easter, we must remember the significance of the ashes we have received: We mourn and do penance for our sins. We again convert our hearts to the Lord, who suffered, died, and rose for our salvation. We renew the promises made at our baptism, when we died to an old life and rose to a new life with Christ Finally, mindful that the kingdom of this world passes away, we strive to live the kingdom of God now and look forward to its fulfillment in heaven.*

## PRAYERS FOR LENT

### **PRAYER TO SAINT MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL**

St. Michael the Archangel,  
defend us in battle.  
Be our defense against the wickedness  
and snares of the Devil.  
May God rebuke him, we humbly pray,  
and do thou,  
O Prince of the heavenly hosts,  
by the power of God,  
thrust into hell Satan,  
and all the evil spirits,  
who prowl about the world  
seeking the ruin of souls. Amen..



*O glorious prince St. Michael,  
chief and commander of the heavenly hosts,  
guardian of souls, vanquisher of rebel spirits,  
servant in the house of the Divine King  
and our admirable conductor,  
you who shine with excellence  
and superhuman virtue deliver us from all evil, , who turn  
to you with confidence  
and enable us by your gracious protection  
to serve God more and more faithfully every day.*

## **PRAYER OF ST. BONAVENTURE TO THE LORD JESUS**

"Pierce, O most sweet Lord Jesus, my inmost soul with the most joyous and healthful wound of Thy love, and with true calm and most holy apostolic charity, that my soul may ever languish and melt with entire love and longing for Thee, may yearn for Thee and for thy courts, may long to be dissolved and to be with Thee. Grant that my soul may hunger after Thee, the Bread of Angels, the refreshment of holy souls, our daily and supersubstantial bread, having all sweetness and savor and every delightful taste.

May my heart ever hunger after and feed upon Thee, Whom the angels the angels desire to look upon, and may my inmost soul be filled with the sweetness of Thy savor; may it ever thirst for Thee, the fountain of life, the fountain of wisdom and knowledge, the fountain of eternal light, the torrent of pleasure, the fullness of the house of God; may it ever compass Thee, seek Thee, find Thee, run to Thee, come up to Thee, meditate on Thee, speak of Thee, and do all for the praise and glory of Thy name, with humility and discretion, with love and delight, with ease and affection, with perseverance to the end; and be Thou alone ever my hope, my entire confidence, my riches, my delight, my pleasure, my joy, my rest and tranquility, my peace, my sweetness, my food, my refreshment, my refuge, my help, my wisdom, my portion, my possession, my treasure; in Whom may my

mind and my heart be ever fixed and firm and rooted immovably.  
Amen."

### **Prayer of St. Thomas Aquinas**

"Grant O merciful God, that I may ardently desire, carefully examine, truly know and perfectly fulfill those things that are pleasing to You and to the praise and glory of Your holy name. Direct my life, O my God, and grant that I might know what you would have me to do and for me to fulfill it as it necessary and profitable to my soul. Grant to me, O Lord my God, that I may not be found wanting in prosperity or in adversity and that I may not be lifted up by one nor cast down by the other. May I find joy in nothing but what leads to You and sorrow in nothing but leads away from You. May I seek to please no one or fear to displease anyone save only You. Grant to me O Lord God a vigilant heart that no subtle speculation may ever lead me from You; a noble heart that no unworthy affection may draw me from You; an upright heart that no evil purpose may turn me from you. Give me a steadfast heart that no tribulation may shatter and a free heart that no violent affection may claim as its own. And finally, grant me O Lord my God a mind to know you, diligence to seek you, wisdom to find you. Give me a way of life pleasing to You; perseverance to trust and await You in confidence that I shall embrace You at the last. Amen"

**Daily Offering to the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ**

Every day of my life belongs to Thee, O my God, and every action of my life should be performed with the pure intention of honoring Thee alone.

From this moment I offer them to Thy Sacred Heart,  
and by this offering, I consecrate them without reserve to Thy glory.

What a motive for performing all my actions with all possible perfection!

Do not permit them, O my divine Savior, to be sullied by any motives unworthy of Thy Sacred Heart.

I renounce all that could lessen the merit of my offering.

I renounce all vanity, self-love and human respect.

Grant, O my God, that I may begin, continue and end this day in Thy grace, and solely from the pure motive and pleasing and honoring Thee.

Amen.

## **THE SEVEN PENITENTIAL PSALMS TRADITIONALLY RECITED DURING LENT**

(These Psalms bring comfort to a repentant heart. )

### **PSALM 6**

1 O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger

or discipline me in your wrath.

2 Be merciful to me, LORD, for I am faint;

O LORD, heal me, for my bones are in agony.

3 My soul is in anguish.

How long, O LORD, how long?

4 Turn, O LORD, and deliver me;

save me because of your unfailing love.

5 No one remembers you when he is dead.

Who praises you from the grave ?

6 I am worn out from groaning;

all night long I flood my bed with weeping

and drench my couch with tears.

7 My eyes grow weak with sorrow;

they fail because of all my foes.

8 Away from me, all you who do evil,  
for the LORD has heard my weeping.

9 The LORD has heard my cry for mercy;  
the LORD accepts my prayer.

10 All my enemies will be ashamed and dismayed;  
they will turn back in sudden disgrace.

**Psalm 32 Beati Quorum**

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven,  
whose sin is covered.

Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity,  
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

When I declared not my sin, my body wasted away  
through my groaning all day long.

For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me;  
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.

I acknowledged my sin to thee,  
and I did not hide my iniquity;  
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord";  
then thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin.

Therefore let every one who is godly  
offer prayer to thee;  
at a time of distress, in the rush of great waters,  
they shall not reach him.

Thou art a hiding place for me,  
thou preservest me from trouble;

thou dost encompass me with deliverance.

I will instruct you and teach you

the way you should go;

I will counsel you with my eye upon you.

Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding,

which must be curbed with bit and bridle,

else it will not keep with you.

Many are the pangs of the wicked;

but steadfast love surrounds him who trusts in the Lord.

Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous,

and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!

**Psalm 38 Domine, Ne In Furore**

O Lord, rebuke me not in thy anger,

nor chasten me in thy wrath!

For thy arrows have sunk into me,

and thy hand has come down on me.

There is no soundness in my flesh

because of thy indignation;

there is no health in my bones

because of my sin.

For my iniquities have gone over my head;

they weigh like a burden too heavy for me.

My wounds grow foul and fester

because of my foolishness,

I am utterly bowed down and prostrate;

all the day I go about mourning.

For my loins are filled with burning,

and there is no soundness in my flesh.

I am utterly spent and crushed;

I groan because of the tumult of my heart.

Lord, all my longing is known to thee,

my sighing is not hidden from thee.

My heart throbs, my strength fails me;

and the light of my eyes -- it also has gone from me.

My friends and companions stand aloof from my plague,

and my kinsmen stand afar off.

Those who seek my life lay their snares,

those who seek my hurt speak of ruin,

and meditate treachery all the day long.

But I am like a deaf man, I do not hear,

like a dumb man who does not open his mouth.

Yea, I am like a man who does not hear,

and in whose mouth are no rebukes.

But for thee, O Lord, do I wait;

it is thou, O Lord my God, who wilt answer.

For I pray, "Only let them not rejoice over me,

who boast against me when my foot slips!"

For I am ready to fall,

and my pain is ever with me.

I confess my iniquity,

I am sorry for my sin.

Those who are my foes without cause are mighty,

and many are those who hate me wrongfully.

Those who render me evil for good

are my adversaries because I follow after good.

Do not forsake me, O Lord!

O my God, be not far from me!

Make haste to help me,

O Lord, my salvation!

**Psalm 51 Miserere Mei, Deus**

Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to thy steadfast love;  
according to thy abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.  
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
and cleanse me from my sin!  
For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is ever before me.  
Against thee, thee only, have I sinned,  
and done that which is evil in thy sight,  
so that thou art justified in thy sentence  
and blameless in thy judgment.  
Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,  
and in sin did my mother conceive me.  
Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward being;  
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.  
Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;  
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.  
Fill me with joy and gladness;

let the bones which thou hast broken rejoice.

Hide thy face from my sins,

and blot out all my iniquities.

Create in me a clean heart, O God,

and put a new and right spirit within me.

Cast me not away from thy presence,

and take not thy holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of thy salvation,

and uphold me with a willing spirit.

Then I will teach transgressors thy ways,

and sinners will return to thee.

Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God,

thou God of my salvation,

and my tongue will sing aloud of thy deliverance.

O Lord, open thou my lips,

and my mouth shall show forth thy praise.

For thou hast no delight in sacrifice;

were I to give a burnt offering, thou wouldest not be pleased.

The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;

a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

Do good to Zion in thy good pleasure;

rebuild the walls of Jerusalem,

Then wilt thou delight in right sacrifices,

in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings;

then bulls will be offered on thy altar.

**Psalm 102 Domine Exaudi**

Hear my prayer, O Lord;  
let my cry come to thee!  
  
Do not hide thy face from me  
in the day of my distress!  
  
Incline thy ear to me;  
answer me speedily in the day when I call!  
  
For my days pass away like smoke,  
and my bones burn like a furnace.  
  
My heart is smitten like grass, and withered;  
I forget to eat my bread.  
  
Because of my loud groaning  
my bones cleave to my flesh.  
  
I am like a vulture of the wilderness,  
like an owl of the waste places;  
I lie awake,  
  
I am like a lonely bird on the housetop.  
  
All the day my enemies taunt me,  
those who deride me use my name for a curse.

For I eat ashes like bread,  
and mingle tears with my drink,  
because of thy indignation and anger;  
for thou hast taken me up and thrown me away.

My days are like an evening shadow;  
I wither away like grass.

But thou, O Lord, art enthroned for ever;  
thy name endures to all generations.

Thou wilt arise and have pity on Zion;  
it is the time to favor her;  
the appointed time has come.

For thy servants hold her stones dear,  
and have pity on her dust.

The nations will fear the name of the Lord,  
and all the kings of the earth thy glory.

For the Lord will build up Zion,  
he will appear in his glory;  
he will regard the prayer of the destitute,  
and will not despise their supplication.

Let this be recorded for a generation to come,  
so that a people yet unborn may praise the Lord:  
  
That he looked down from his holy height,  
from heaven the Lord looked at the earth,  
to hear the groans of the prisoners,  
to set free those who were doomed to die;  
  
That men may declare in Zion the name of the Lord,  
and in Jerusalem his praise, when peoples gather together,  
and kingdoms, to worship the Lord.  
  
He has broken my strength in mid-course;  
he has shortened my days.  
  
"O my God," I say, "take me not hence in the midst of my days,  
thou whose years endure  
throughout all generations!"  
  
Of old thou didst lay the foundation of the earth,  
and the heavens are the work of thy hands.  
  
They will perish, but thou dost endure;  
they will all wear out like a garment.  
  
Thou changest them like raiment, and they pass away;

but thou art the same,  
and thy years have no end.

The children of thy servants shall dwell secure;  
their posterity shall be established before thee.

**Psalm 130 De Profundis**

Out of the depths I cry to thee, O Lord!

Lord, hear my voice!

Let thy ears be attentive  
to the voice of my supplications!

If thou, O Lord, shouldst mark iniquities,

Lord, who could stand?

But there is forgiveness with thee,  
that thou mayest be feared.

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,

and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord  
more than watchmen for the morning,  
more than watchmen for the morning.

O Israel, hope in the Lord!

For with the Lord there is steadfast love,  
and with him is plenteous redemption.

And he will redeem Israel  
from all his iniquities. Glory...

## **Psalm 143 Domine Exaudi**

Hear my prayer, O Lord;

give ear to my supplications!

In thy faithfulness answer me, in thy righteousness!

Enter not into judgment with thy servant;

for no man living is righteous before thee.

For the enemy has pursued me;

he has crushed my life to the ground;

he has made me sit in darkness like those long dead.

Therefore my spirit faints within me;

my heart within me is appalled.

I remember the days of old,

I meditate on all that thou hast done;

I muse on what thy hands have wrought.

I stretch out my hands to thee;

my soul thirsts for thee like a parched land.

Make haste to answer me, O Lord!

My spirit fails!

Hide not thy face from me,

lest I be like those who go down to the Pit.

Let me hear in the morning of thy steadfast love,  
for in thee I put my trust.

Teach me the way I should go,  
for to thee I lift up my soul.

Deliver me, O Lord, from my enemies!

I have fled to thee for refuge!  
Teach me to do thy will,  
for thou art my God!

Let thy good spirit lead me  
on a level path!

For thy name's sake, O Lord, preserve my life!

In thy righteousness bring me out of trouble!  
And in thy steadfast love cut off my enemies,  
and destroy all my adversaries,  
for I am thy servant.

## Other Recommended Scripture Readings

- *The four Suffering Servant Songs: Isaiah 42:1-4, Isaiah 49:1-7, Isaiah 50:4-11, and Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12.*
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## **The trials of Jesus by the Jews (Hebrew (Messianic) jurisprudence) and Romans**

I. Trial by the Jews: If the biblical accounts of the Sanhedrin actions are accurate, the trial of Jesus was against substantive and procedural rabbinical (Jewish) rules for “criminal” trials:

A. In the four Gospels the legal proceedings against Jesus are dated to the eve of the Sabbath. In John the actions of Annas and Caiaphas against Jesus take place on the day before the Passover meal was eaten; in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke), the trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin takes place on the day that began with the eating of the Passover meal. Rabbinical law forbids the trying of capital cases on the eve of the Sabbath or the eve of a feast day.

1. In John, the high priest Annas alone interrogates Jesus, seemingly without other judges present. This contradicts rabbinical law prohibiting judging alone.

a) Both the interrogation described in John and the Sanhedrin trial before Caiaphas narrated in Mark and Matthew takes place at night. In Mark and Matthew the verdict is given at night. Rabbinical law *requires* that capital cases must be tried by day and a decision reached in the daytime. (See, Acts 4:3-5)

b) In Mark and Matthew, the trial begins with the Chief Priest and the whole Sanhedrin seeking testimony against Jesus (false testimony according to Matthew) so that they may put Jesus to death. The witnesses are not admonished to speak the truth, nor are witnesses for Jesus brought forward. Indeed, nothing is offered on His behalf. Rabbinical law *requires* that capital cases begin with reasons for acquittal. Further, witnesses are required to be admonished to tell the

truth and the harshness of the actions of the judges is sufficient to disbar them.

c) In Mark and Matthew, although the testimony of the witnesses is false and does not agree, no action is reported against them by the Sanhedrin. Rabbinical law *requires* that when witnesses contradict one another, their evidence is nullified. (See, Mark 14:55-59)

d) In Matthew and Mark, the words Jesus speaks about Himself are blasphemy which the Sanhedrin members have heard themselves. According to Rabbinical law, one is not guilty of blasphemy *unless* one has expressly pronounced the divine name (something Jesus has not done). Hearing such blasphemy would cause the Sanhedrin members to become witnesses, and they could no longer act as judges in cases where they are witnesses.

e) In Matthew and Mark (see also John 11:49-53), the High Priest speaks first in finding Jesus guilty and urging the other judges to find him so, with the immediate result that “they all judged against him as being guilty, punishable by death.” Mark 14:64. Rabbinical law provides that in all capital cases judges with less seniority should vote before those who have more seniority (obviously to prevent undue influence).

f) Rabbinical law states that unanimity of judges voting for condemnation nullifies the conviction in a capital case (in order to prevent collusion or “railroading”).

g) Pursuant to Rabbinical law, a verdict for condemnation in a capital case cannot be arrived at on the same day of the trial (to allow maturity of decision) (Lev 24: 11-12; Num 9:8; 15:34). This verdict was instantaneous

## 2. Hebrew punishments

- a) The prescribed punishment for Blasphemy was stoning; not turn over to others.
- B. The ultimate injustice: Jesus was accused and convicted of Blasphemy; for anyone else, they would be guilty. But Jesus was innocent. He is the Son of God.

## II. "Trial" of Jesus by the Romans (Roman jurisprudence)

- A. No entitlement to "trial"
- B. Roman punishments
  - 1. The death penalty was kept under Roman control, although Romans gave some deference to the Jews respecting Temple violations and violations of Mosaic Law. (See Jn 18:31 wherein the Jews exclaim "It is not permitted us to put anyone to death.")
    - a) See, Acts 21:27: Paul was seized by the Jews in the Temple who would have killed him for violating Mosaic Law and defiling the Temple. A Roman tribune stopped them and commanded the Chief Priests and entire Sanhedrin to try Paul's case. Acts 22:30 (See, also, Acts 25)
    - b) But the Jews were also apparently not without some power to execute or demand execution: See the story of the adulterous woman (Jn 7:53-8:11: Jesus said "Let the man among you who has no sin—let him be the first to cast a stone at her.")
  - 2. Crucifixion
    - a) From early republican times the cross was most frequently used as an instrument of punishment, and amid circumstances of great severity and even cruelty. It was particularly the punishment for slaves found guilty of any serious crime.
    - b) According to Roman custom, the penalty of crucifixion was always preceded by scourging; after this preliminary

punishment, the condemned person had to carry the cross, or at least the transverse beam of it, to the place of execution, exposed to the jibes and insults of the people. On arrival at the place of execution the cross was uplifted. Soon the sufferer, entirely naked, was bound to it with cords. He was then fastened with four nails to the wood of the cross. Finally, a placard called the *titulus* bearing the name of the condemned man and his sentence was placed at the top of the cross. Death is by suffocation and extremely painful. It often happened that the condemned man did not die quickly, but rather of hunger or thirst; some lingered on the cross for several days. To shorten the punishment and lessen this terrible sufferings, the legs of the crucified were sometimes broken (*crurifragium, crura frangere*; Cic., XIII Philipp., xii). This custom, exceptional among the Romans, was common with the Jews. In this way it was possible to take down the corpse on the very evening of the execution.

C. Sequence of events from Jesus' arrest to the trial before Pilate

1. Arrest at Gethsemane, on the Mount of Olives. According to 1 Cor 11:23, the arrest occurred at night. In all Gospels, the denials by Peter occur at night.

- a) Mark 14:53-15:1: Jesus is lead away to the high priest
- b) Matt 26:57-27:2 : Jesus is lead away to the high priest Caiaphas
- c) Luke 22:54-23:1: Jesus is taken and lead to the house of the high priest
- d) Jn 18:12-28 : Jesus is taken by the cohort and tribune, bound, led first to Annas, father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year

2. Transfer of Jesus to Annas; first denial by Peter(Jn 18:12-18)

- a) Night interrogation of Jesus by the high priest (Annas); slapping of Jesus by attendant. (Jn 18: 19-23) There are no witnesses and it is not the trial by the Sanhedrin.
- 3. Transfer of Jesus to Caiaphas; second denial by Peter. (Jn 18: 24-27)
- 4. Night trial before Caiaphas
- 5. A Morning Sanhedrin trial
  - a) Each of Mark, Matthew, Luke and John indicate that the Sanhedrin trial takes place in the early morning. After the trial, they take Jesus to the praetorian, to the governor, Pilate. (Luke is the most specific respecting the morning hour for the Sanhedrin trial. “And as it became day, there was brought together the assembly of the elders of the people, both chief priests and scribes; and they led them away to their Sanhedrin.” Luke 22:66)
- 6. The timing of the arrest, trial and crucifixion of Jesus
  - a) As mentioned in Mark 13:35, there were four watches of the night:
    - (1) 1<sup>st</sup> watch: 6 P.M.-9 P.M.
    - (2) 2<sup>nd</sup> watch: 9 P.M.-12 Midnight
    - (3) 3<sup>rd</sup> watch: 12 Midnight-3 A.M.
    - (4) 4<sup>th</sup> watch: 3 A.M.-6 A.M.
  - b) The 3<sup>rd</sup> hour of the crucifixion was 9 A.M. (Mark 15:25)
  - c) The “sixth hour” (noon) marks the coming of the darkness (Mark 15:33); But John sets the hour of the trial before Pilate at noon. (John 19:14)
  - d) The “ninth hour” (3 P.M.) Marks the time of Jesus’ final cry. (Mark 15:34)

**7. Meditation questions: What happened during the time between the interrogation before Annas and the morning Sanhedrin trial? Where was Jesus? He surely knew of his fate.**

- a) Did He have a sense of abandonment?
- b) Did He have a communion of prayer with the Father?
- c) What did Jesus pray? Forgiveness? (“Forgive them Father for they do not know what they are doing?”)
- d) Clearly Jesus suffered a sleepless night, alone and with the knowledge of a certain death:
  - (1) What about our sleepless nights? Will we allow His strength by example guide us through the darkest of our nights? Like when we tend a sick child or await news from a doctor?
  - (2) Will we allow His example to gain a sense of what is really important? In those dark nights of our life, will we be able to see by the Light of the World what is important and what is not? It is a period when time and eternity come together.

**8. The sufferings of Jesus throughout Holy Week span the entirety of mans suffering:**

- a) He was abandoned by His friends and those who only a few days before, hailed him as king.
- b) He was betrayed by one of his closest friends.
- c) He was brutalized physically and mentally.
- d) He was insulted, spit on and crowned with thorns.
- e) He was humiliated when stripped naked in front of the crowds.
- f) He caused immeasurable grief to his loving mother.
- g) He had His meager possessions taken by the guards.

**h) He was caused to endure the knowledge that he would be killed.**

**i) He was the victim of a false “justice” system.**

**j) No one whom he healed came to his rescue or even testified for him even though he had cured them.**

**k) He may have doubted the love of God the Father.**

**9. What He suffered for us was because he followed the will of the Father to save us; *not His only Son*. Why? Because the love of God the Father, His Son, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, for us is boundless. How do we respond to that love?**

III. NOTES



