



Reflections for
Lent

2024



Transforming Love

Through the Cross of Our Only Hope

Dear Sisters, Associates, Family and Friends,

This year's Lenten reflections witness the love, prayer, and wisdom from life experience of our Saint Catherine by the Sea community in Ventura, California. They draw our focus toward a journey, our personal journey, and our journey as a Congregation.

The world realities of violence, polarization, discrimination, and accommodation with decisions that endanger the future of our planet urge us to pause and take a long, loving look at our own life path. With God's compassionate presence in each step, we will find new ways to engage the energy we have in God's transforming love.

The Ventura community women, who live tested faith, experienced trust and resistance, hesitation and hope, invite us to be recipients and agents of animating hope, perseverance and joyful love as we announce large and small glimpses of Resurrection in this world.

We are grateful to Holy Cross Sisters Mary Alice Bowler, Yvonne Hatt, Patricia Anne Clossey, Doreen Marie Vignassa, Mary Ellen Johnson, Jeanne Clennon and Lillian Sullivan, and candidate Leah Coming for this Lenten bouquet of reflections.

Blessings to everyone who participates in this Lenten prayer experience.

Sister Mary Tiernan, CSC
General Councilor

Ash Wednesday

February 14, 2024

2 Corinthians 6:1–10

Transforming Love: *Ave Crux, Spes Unica*

“In an acceptable time, I have heard you, and on the day of salvation I helped you. Behold, now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2).

We are living in liminal times, the space between that which no longer is and that which is not yet. Franciscan Richard Rohr defines a liminal time this way. He says, “It is when you have left or about to leave the tried and true but have not yet been able to replace it with anything else. It is a time between your old comfort zone and any possible new answer.”

Lent is a liminal moment in our spiritual journey, a time of transition and conversion of heart. Two important symbols give us a clue as to the importance of these 40 days. Lent recalls the desert journey of the Israelites from a land of slavery and bondage to the land of promise and hope. The number 40 in Hebrew signifies new growth and transformation, a change from one state to another.

Lent can be a time of change, reconciliation and transformation. The desert is where we discover new intimacies with God. As we journey through the wilderness, the Holy Spirit is accomplishing something within us. If we open ourselves up, fully trusting ourselves to be led in new directions, the unimagined can emerge. As we are transformed into deeper relationships with Divine Love, our “eyes will be opened, and our hearts moved as we stand witness to the needs of [God’s] people.” The desert is not a destination but a place for travelers going somewhere.

Sister Mary Alice Bowler, CSC

Reflection questions

Where do I believe the Holy Spirit is calling me this Lent?

What might I do to reach my destination?

First Sunday of Lent

February 18, 2024

Genesis 9:8–17
Psalm 25:1–10
1 Peter 3:18–22
Mark 1:9–15

This year our Lenten journey begins with Mark's Gospel. In this passage, Jesus comes from Nazareth and is baptized by John. Prior to this time, Jesus had been living a rather normal and obscure life. As he came out of the water, he heard a voice that said, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Jesus was being prepared by the Holy Spirit for his ministry to the people of Israel and to all people. At once, the Spirit sent Jesus into the wilderness. During those 40 days, Jesus had time to reflect upon and prepare for his future ministry. He was also tempted by Satan. His reflection gave him the strength to say "no" to that which was not of God. After John was put in prison, Jesus had the courage to begin to share the "Good News" in Galilee.

In our own lives, we share in the same baptism. We are called by name and given a mission. Our baptismal commitment also prepares us for the challenges of life. We can be tempted to give up, distrust our own mission, or be discouraged by the lack of positive results. When we go through difficult times, our faith tells us that God will give us the graces that we need. With that assurance, we too can share the Good News with others.

We need to make many decisions in our lives, some big decisions and many smaller ones on a daily basis. Lent is a good time to reflect on those decisions and the path that we are on. "Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths" (Psalm 25:4).

Sister Yvonne Hatt, CSC

Reflection questions

What decisions do I face at this time in my life?

How do I handle the small challenges that come every day and maybe many times a day?

Second Sunday of Lent

February 25, 2024

Genesis 17:1–7, 15–16
Psalm 22:23–31
Romans 4:13–25
Mark 9:2–9

During my years of ministry in both Peru and Mexico, I had the privilege of working with Father Daniel Panchot, CSC. During some challenging times that we faced in the 1980s in Peru and during our time in Mexico in the 2000s, he would offer me a heartfelt “Ánimo, compañera” or “Ánimo, Patricia.” The Spanish word “ánimo” means to “keep going,” or that “You can do this.” His offer of “ánimo” deeply touched me and gave me encouragement.

As I reflect on the transfiguration of Jesus in today’s Gospel, I imagine Jesus as he hears a voice saying to him, and to Peter, James and John: “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” Jesus knew that voice; he had heard that voice as he emerged from the waters of the Jordan in Mark 1:17. “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” Perhaps Jesus, who continued to grow in wisdom and grace, felt confirmed by this voice. Jesus had a sense of what he was facing as he soon headed toward Jerusalem. At the Transfiguration, God knew that Peter, James and John also needed some encouragement, some hope as they faced an uncertain future. As they witnessed Jesus transfigured, they witnessed a powerful moment of consolation that would aid them as they faced a future that included desolation, devastation and a horrible crucifixion. The apostles would never be the same after they came down from that mountain.

Our lives of prayer, service and community are meant to transform us. Blessed Basil Anthony Moreau says that we are called to be “another Christ” in the world. Today, there is so much suffering and despair in our world. We are called to be that compassionate presence in the world, to bring hope and encouragement to others.

Sister Patricia Anne Clossey, CSC

Reflection questions

In what ways am I being called to offer “ánimo” to others?

Third Sunday of Lent

March 3, 2024

Exodus 20:1–17
Psalm 19
1 Corinthians 1:18–25
John 2:13–22

The theme from this Sunday's Scripture readings that speaks to me is a strong connectedness to a loving God, one another, and all creation. In Exodus, this caring God seals a bond he had created with the people by telling them, "I am the Lord your God."

They are reminded how he brought them "out of the house of slavery." Now, he gives them a set of commandments to guide their faithful response to that relationship. Though fearful of failure at first, they begin to understand themselves as belonging to a jealous God. I'm drawn to ponder past times of doubt and fear from which God led me to a new place of trust.

Psalm 19 motivates me to interpret this law of the Lord in uplifting terms as "reviving the soul... making wise the simple... rejoicing the heart... and enlightening the eyes."

John's passage describes an angry Jesus driving out the more materialistic sellers and moneychangers from the temple. We now remember our jealous God's demand, "You shall have no other gods before me." The disciples recall Jesus' earlier description of his passion regarding the temple's true purpose. Our general chapter plans call for transformation of mind and heart. Pope Francis urges us toward positive and respectful relationships with one another and our earth. It seems we are thus challenged to scrutinize our culture's pull toward choosing "lesser gods." Where do we see examples of fear, egocentricity, materialism, and superficiality present in our culture? How have they sometimes robbed us of continuous life-giving connectedness to our God? We have the freedom to choose the quality of our connections and, thus, to choose life. The disciples witnessed Jesus' actions and remembered his words. Their openness enabled them to believe and to be filled by his loving presence.

Sister Doreen Vignassa, CSC

Reflection questions

How often do I ponder Jesus' actions, remember his words, and open myself to a deeper faith and more loving relationships?

Fourth Sunday of Lent

March 10, 2024

Numbers 21:1–17
Psalm 107:1–3, 17–22
Ephesians 2:1–10
John 3:14–21

“Yes, God loved the world so much that **he gave his only son** so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life” (John 3:16).

What a limitless gift God gives the world every day! Trying to comprehend such boundless love simply freezes my mind while warming my heart. Our God surely is amazing. Words disappear while love remains. God knows us and knows that love has always been needed in this broken world of ours. God’s love accompanies us as we stumble on day after day, year after year, generation after generation. In stillness and in chaos, God is there. God’s only son is there. All we need to do is fix our gaze on the beloved Father, Son and Holy Spirit within us.

In the words of today’s psalm: “God sent forth his Word to heal them...Let us make thank offerings and declare God’s works with shouts of joy.”

Sister Mary Ellen Johnson, CSC

Reflection questions

How have you been personally surprised by God’s limitless generosity in your life?

Where and when have you experienced God’s presence within you, even if just for a moment?

Fifth Sunday of Lent

March 17, 2024

Jeremiah 31:31–34
Psalm 51:3–4, 12-15
Hebrews 5:7–9
John 12:20–33

The Lord himself speaks today's oracle and declares he is going to make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, that is with all of God's people. The covenant will be new because it will be written on people's hearts, not on tablets of stone (like the old covenant). The newness will consist, not in a new law, but in the inner power humans will be given to fulfill his plan. They will be able to obey perfectly. God himself will intervene and teach his people so they will have no need for intermediaries like Moses, the priests or the prophets. How grateful I am that we live under the new covenant, having the Holy Spirit to guide us in fulfilling God's plan!

Right before this passage, the Pharisees are complaining to each other, stating, "You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the whole world has gone after him." Ironically, their words are fulfilled when some Greeks, i.e., God-fearing gentiles, come to worship on the feast of Passover and say to Philip, "Sir, we would like *to see Jesus*."

Philip gets Andrew—both have Greek names—and they go to present the Greeks' request to Jesus. Jesus agrees to let them see him on a profound level. The hour of his passion-death-resurrection has arrived, the hour in which he will glorify the Father and the Father will glorify him. Just as a grain of wheat on the ground dies in order to produce fruit, his death will produce spiritual fruit, a community of believers. Like him, these believers must be willing to lose their lives in order to bring life to the community. Meditating on this passage, I realize that the daily dying of advancing age is strengthening my desire "to see Jesus."

Sister Jeanne Clennon, CSC

Reflection questions

What feelings do you experience when you reflect on the passage from Jeremiah?

What do you see when you meditate on Jesus' prophecy, "When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself"?

Palm Sunday

March 24, 2024

Psalm 118:1–2, 19–29

John 12:12–16; Isaiah 50:4–90

Psalm 31:9–16; Philippians 2:5–11

Mark 14:1–15, 47

In the Garden of Gethsemane, as he contemplates his crucifixion, Jesus owns that his soul is “sorrowful even unto death” (Mark 14:34), and his spirit is arrested by grief. Yet, though facing destruction, he does not lose trust in the goodness of God. He prays: “Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Take this cup away from me, yet not what I will but what you will” (Mark 14:36). Jesus believed in God’s trustworthiness; he believed in God’s promise that his life was not over.

So too, Mary, the one who “held all these [mysteries concerning her son] in her heart,” was a woman of hope even at the cross. Not only at the Annunciation had she been “blessed” for “believing that what was spoken to her by the Lord would be fulfilled.” At the Cross, Mary must have believed, hoping against hope, that when Jesus three times said, “The Son of Man will rise from the dead after three days,” he was speaking the truth.

Were they insane for trusting in God’s goodness and believing God’s promise of resurrection in a time of devastation? Quite the opposite. Kierkegaard gives us language for those who, like Abraham, believe that God’s promises will be fulfilled even when they seem to be dashed; he calls such a person the Knight of Faith. Christian hope (even when it’s “absurd,” contradicting reason or experience) ennobles us.

Reflecting on Jerusalem’s heralding of Jesus as the chosen messiah, I experience a spiritual resonance between the Lord and the palm fronds they lay before him. Blessed are you, Christ Jesus, hoping, believing, and having confidence in the goodness of God. You, our life, are the verdant palm; you bear fruit in the desert.

Leah Nicole Coming, candidate

Reflection questions

Which promises of God — especially those from Scripture — do you hold on to?

Is there something that brings you so low that you want to surrender at Jesus’ cross this week?

Easter Sunday

March 31, 2024

Isaiah 55:1–11
Isaiah 12:2–6;
Romans 6:3–11
Mark 16:1–8

Alleluia! Alleluia! Christ is risen! Without the resurrection, Jesus' life and mission would have been a total fiasco, unknown among others and forgotten quickly.

In the Gospels, at first, the disciples were slow to recognize what had happened. In the original ending of Mark's Gospel, the first women at the tomb left afraid to tell anyone. And the Gospel of John relates that Peter and "the other" disciple left in disbelief. Eventually, the word was spread, as proven in the passage from Acts after Pentecost and with Paul's preaching and writing.

After 20 centuries of Christianity, what have we learned? Are we reluctant to share the Good News because we can't adequately explain it or fully live it? The Scriptures present various attitudes and ways of living that can open us to the new life in Christ that Easter celebrates in the resurrection of Jesus. We are reminded of what the early Christians did in how to put our faith into practice.

May we live in love and gratitude to Jesus for his sacrifices, which we recalled during Lent, so that our own resurrection will be a joyful "alleluia" of praise to God for all the wonders of this world and his life.

Sister Lillian Sullivan, CSC

Reflection questions

How am I nurturing new life and love for Jesus in myself?

What am I doing to bring new life to others?

Notes

