



lectio divina

*Lectio
Divina*

Praying the
Scriptures in
Lent and Holy
Week 2011

Year A

Contents

Introduction	2
<i>Lectio Divina</i> and <i>The Reflection</i>	4
<i>Lectio Divina</i>	5
<i>Lectio Divina</i> Alone.....	8
<i>Lectio Divina</i> Together	10
The Washpool... images for Lent, 2011	12
Ash Wednesday	19
1 st Sunday of Lent Year A	22
2 nd Sunday of Lent Year A.....	26
3 rd Sunday of Lent Year A	30
4 th Sunday of Lent Year A	34
5 th Sunday of Lent Year A	39
Passion Sunday	43
Holy Week	51
The Easter Triduum.....	53
Holy Thursday	54
Good Friday	56
Holy Saturday	61
Easter Sunday.....	62
Prayer.....	66
Footnotes.....	67



Introduction

The significance of the ancient tradition of prayerful mediation on the scriptures, *lectio divina*, was evident in the 2008 Synod on the Word and has become a favourite theme of Pope Benedict XVI. In his 2010 post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Verbum Domini*, he states clearly that more prayerful and spiritual reading of scripture will enhance both our appreciation of the Bible and our participation in the Church's liturgical life (86).

In the *lectio* reflection for the Third Sunday of Lent we read, "For years we knew only of a 'sunburnt country' withering away into desert because of lack of rain. Then this year the flood gates opened and what was parched, suddenly experienced the downpour of water." As a people of this 'great South Land', hope in the midst of tragedies invites us to move forward with confidence.

I offer three perspectives on this Christian virtue suggested by the spiritual writer, Richard Heffern.

- The novelist Barbara Kingsolver wrote: "The very least you can do in your life is to figure out what you hope for. And the most you can do is live inside that hope. Not admire it from a distance but live right in it, under its roof."
- The second comes from the former president of the Czech Republic, Vaclav Havel – "Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense regardless of how it turns out."
- Those familiar with a popular television series, *Xena the Warrior*, will recall Xena observing that "Hope has been and always will be safe. It's inside every one of us."

Hope is a virtue well worth keeping in mind as we journey through the weeks of Lent with God's Word as our guiding light. Because of Easter's reality and its promise, we are people characterised by hope. It is in

our very blood as followers of Christ. As a priestly people born of our baptism, we hold hope as a virtue that supports and informs our faith life.

The Easter season begins with Lent, a time of letting go, of being in the desert, as our weekly *lectio* reflections remind us, ending with the apparent hopelessness of Good Friday. Is not much of our experience but an extension of Lent, if we are alive, aware and looking around? Our broken world, filled with shadows, is the ground of our being. Where do we find hope in the midst of the darkness we see on the news each evening? Is there a reality greater than those shadows in which we can anchor our soul?

We believe the Christian story does not end on Friday. There is Sunday. And our daily encounter with the Word of God through our Lenten *lectio* deepens this conviction.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David L. Walker".

David L. Walker DD
Bishop of Broken Bay

Lectio Divina and *The Reflection*

Will you be doing The Reflection?

Make your journey towards Easter a special one this year.

Join thousands across Australia and the world in the wonderful online program, *The Reflection*.

An initiative of the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference Commission for Mission and Faith Formation, ***The Reflection***, is a free, online *lectio divina* exploration of the Scriptures undertaken by Bishops from across Australia.

By simply logging on to the website each week (<http://thereflection.vividas.com>), you will be able to participate in a *lectio divina* for Lent, working with it at your own pace and in your own time over the week.

The Bishops will provide their own insight into what strikes them about each upcoming Gospel and what the reading teaches us. Once the segment has been posted online, it will be archived – and so will remain accessible for you to pause or to revisit.

This booklet will work as a wonderful support tool for this innovative experience. Please use the sections inside the covers to guide you through the *lectio*, and to use as bookmarks during your journey.

The Reflection will run over 7 weeks during Lent, commencing the week beginning Monday 7 March. If you miss an episode, it will remain archived on the site for you to undertake in your own time.

There will be 6 weekly segments exploring the Gospels, with a special event planned for Holy Week.

We believe ***The Reflection*** will be a wonderful opportunity for people to gather, either in homes or in parish or family groups, and share the journey towards Easter.

If you would like to know more please contact:
Annie Carrett 02 9847 0724 or news@dbb.org.au

thereflection.vividas.com



Lectio Divina

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God... and the Word was made flesh”

The Word of God is Jesus. He is the human face of God. It is Jesus who gives meaning to the whole of God’s revelation, and brings to a climax the continuing testimonies of God’s love for us. Any understanding of the expression “Word of God” must be interpreted in the light of Jesus, the Word. The expression “the Word” came to signify the message that Jesus preached, his whole approach to humankind (Lk 8:12), and also the fledgling Christian movement as it began to spread under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 12:24, 6:7)

The Church also acknowledges as the “Word of God” the inspired writings recognised by the early Christian community. These inspired writings are God’s gift to the Church, and in them God’s overwhelming love shines through. They embody in human word what is embodied in the divine Word who became flesh; and through this inspired human word of the Scriptures we encounter personally the divine Word himself.

Since the beginning of the Christian movement, its members have read the Scriptures as God’s Word speaking to them. They found in them who their God is, the loving providence of their God, their own identity as God’s people, and the responsibilities that go with God’s choice of them to share the divine love with others. As Mary reflected on the unfolding mystery of her divine Son, Christians have continued to reflect on that same mystery which comes to us in the Scriptures. (Luke 2:51)

The reflective reading of the Scriptures leads us to know, understand and appropriate the fundamental Christian mysteries. It helps us to appreciate what we need to do to respond to God’s approach in them, and holds up to us a mirror of how we are responding and what we might need to do to improve and deepen our response. It humbles us and makes us realise that we need God to walk with us on this journey: we cannot walk it alone. It brings us to prayer, in which we implore the divine help. It leads, too, to the transformation of our life of response to God, and enables us, through our lives as disciples of Jesus, to share the divine love we have known with those around us.

This meditative, prayerful reading of the Scriptures has been referred to as *lectio divina*. It can take many forms, but it is necessary to keep in mind the essential aspects of it, lest we read into the Scriptures what we want to hear rather than

hear from them what God wants to tell us. St Augustine's words are relevant: the one who serves you best is not the one who listens for what he wants to hear, but the one who shapes his life according to what he hears. To help us focus on the essential, we will adopt in this book the practice as described by Guigo II, the fifth abbot of the Carthusian order, in his book "The Ladder of Monks (A Letter on the Contemplative Life) and Twelve Meditations."

Lectio divina then, is the meditative reading of a text of God's Word, the Scriptures, alone or with others, which leads to prayer, transformation of life, and, through that transformed life, the sharing with others of the mystery of God entrusted to us. This practice of prayer involves the whole person. Through our senses we read, we meditate using our reason and imagination, and we pray and transform our life with our will. It is not just an interior practice but one that engages with the issues of our Christian life and prompts us to work with them. At different times, the emphasis may be on different aspects of the prayer. But it would be unwise to omit any of them altogether.

In the light of what has been said, we can look at the presuppositions that underpin this form of Scriptural prayer. Firstly, it embraces the Scriptures as God's Word speaking to us. It emphasises that this practice is a personal encounter with the eternal Word, who is Jesus. It sees, as the source and goal of this prayer, the life of Christian discipleship.

The image of the arch is sometimes used to speak of prayer. Prayer is designated as the keystone of the arch, the stone at the top which takes the strain, and stops the sides of the arch from falling in. However, the keystone will not stay up there by itself: it needs the sides of the arch. The sides of the arch are working with our life; to root out the vices and to practice the virtues. The practice of *lectio* is not a discrete or isolated event, totally sufficient in itself: it takes place within the living of Christian discipleship. It arises out of the conscious determined effort to live as disciples of Jesus and has as its goal to strengthen that determination and effort. Transformation of life is an essential element of praying the Scriptures.

How we read the Scriptures will depend on how we understand them. If we recognise them as coming from the God who loves us, we could liken reading them to the beloved reading letters from her lover. It is the one who loves God deeply who is the most likely to appreciate the deepest dimension of the Scriptures. The Scriptures are not just a book, but a library, with many authors. Any one author may not have known the writings of any other. However, there is a unity here. This is the story of God's love for us, and this is so because the unifying author of all of the Scriptures is the Spirit of God.

This means that in reading the Scriptures we do need to appreciate that there are two senses: that of the historical author and that of the Spirit. The historical critical method helps us to appreciate the historical meaning, but we need another methodology to appreciate the “Spiritual” sense: the message that transcends the historical sense, and gives the Scriptures their unique character. Unless we recognise this divine spiritual sense, the Scriptures can be seen as a book of the past, just an historical work, to be explained simply in human terms. *Lectio divina* is always a theological reading of the text of Scripture.

The Scriptures, through the Spirit, emerged from the early Christian community. It was the Church that brought together these disparate books into one canon to make the Scriptures. The life of the early Church was the matrix into which the Scriptures were born. The Scriptures need to be understood and interpreted within the life of the Church. The covenant that God offers in the Scriptures is not with the individual, but with the people. The Church is the community of believers, the community of those who respond to the love of God. It is those that have faith, and are living a loving response to God’s love, who can be most open to the divine message of the Scriptures. Just as the Church was the matrix in which the Scriptures were born, so it needs to be the matrix within which we interpret them. The Scriptures need to be read within the faith community.

Lectio divina arises out of a faith relationship with Jesus and reaches its fulfilment in the transformation of that faith relationship. The Scriptures are more open to those active disciples who love God and who are endeavouring to transform their life in conformity with their faith. It is the heart filled with this loving faith that will be most open to the spiritual message of the Scriptures. Active effort to live a life of Christian virtue is an important preparation for reading the Scriptures.

Lectio Divina Alone

It is our life as disciples of Jesus that brings us to *lectio*: the desire to deepen our intimacy with Jesus in our common journey to the Father. As we begin our *lectio*, we set the scene with a prayer. It can be any prayer. Guigo's prayer was:

“Lord Jesus, you who are the Son of the Living God, teach me to listen to what you tell me in the holy Scriptures, and to discover your face there.”

Reading

We begin by focusing all our attention on the text: the whole text, not just any one word or phrase. We should try to know the text well. The reading can be done in a variety of ways: repeated, aloud, with a pencil in hand if it helps. Look at the characters, their actions and words; note the context, related texts and any quotes that might occur. Here, we are focusing on the text in itself, what the author is presenting. We are gathering food for thought. The reading is just the beginning of a process: it is meant to lead to meditation and prayer. It is their necessary presupposition.

Meditation

Meditation brings to bear our reason on the text. We look at the text in terms of ourselves. It is here that we come to understand, appreciate and appropriate the divine mysteries that we read about in the Sacred Scriptures. In Meditation, the divine Word and our personal faith life come together. There is an interaction, and integration, of the Word and the person. We not only learn about God but also about ourselves. Here we can learn about the God who loves us and calls us to love in return. Here we can look at our own life in terms of the expectations of our divine lover, and see what we need to do to transform our life.

We can ask four questions to help us in our meditation:

What does the text tell me:

- about the God who speaks to me?
- about how I should respond to that God?
- about my faith life?
- about what I need to do to transform my faith life?

The outcome of our meditation is what we need to do to transform our life according to the expectations of God. We are humbled in realising that we cannot do it without the help of God. Thus, the meditation flows naturally into prayer. Meditation moves the will to prayer and strengthens its resolve to transform the life of discipleship.

Prayer

The prayer arises from our reflection on the text. It is focused particularly on what we need to do to transform our life. We humbly ask God to give us the grace to do what needs to be done. This prayer is the climax of the process that began with the reading. It is this reading, meditating and prayer that are the normal way that God draws us to contemplation. The author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, writing about the way to contemplation, looks to the teaching of Guigo;

“So I want you to understand clearly that for beginners and those a little advanced in contemplation, reading or hearing the word of God must precede pondering it and with out time given to serious reflection there will be no genuine prayer.”

Contemplation

Since the word “contemplation” is used in a variety of ways, it is necessary to define it when we use it. We are following Guigo, for whom “contemplation” refers to a gift of God that is beyond what we can do by ourselves. We cannot alone achieve this contemplation; therefore we should not expect it to happen, as if it were a natural outgrowth of our own spiritual progress. It is a gift of God given when, where, and to whom God chooses to give it. If God bestows this gift, it will break into our prayer: God rushes to us as the father of the prodigal rushed to meet his son. We should not stop or dwell here, unless God intervenes.

Action

Lectio leads to transformation of life. Guigo puts it well, “What use is it to anyone if he sees in his meditation what is to be done, unless the help of prayer and the grace of God enable him to achieve it?” Our *lectio* needs to carry over into our life and affect it in the areas that have arisen in meditation. To achieve this it can be helpful to select from the text a word, phrase or sentence that can be repeated throughout the day. It reminds us of the experience of our prayer and helps us especially when the particular issue that arose is present. This simple practice extends our prayer throughout the whole day. It fulfils the advice given by John Cassian; “Daily and hourly till the soil of the heart with the Gospel plough.”

Lectio Divina Together

Lectio is especially useful when it is shared with others. The basic pattern is the same, but it is enriched by the sharing of the members of the group. It is still a uniquely personal thing, but there is an appropriate sharing of the personal experience. The following suggests a way of sharing *lectio*, but it should be applied according to the desires of the group. Groups will find their own unique way of doing *lectio* together. The following suggestions may be of assistance. If the members of the group have done a *lectio* on the text before the group meeting, the following suggestion could be followed. If not, there would need to be some times of silence for each member to process the particular stages.

1. The opening prayer could be said by all.
2. In the reading, it would be helpful for each member to comment on what they have seen in the text. It often happens that an individual see something that others have missed. It can help to get a better appreciation of the text.
3. In the meditation, it would be helpful to respond to the four questions proposed in this section. The comments of each should be seen as a personal sharing of faith, not a contribution to a discussion. A prayerful atmosphere needs to be maintained. Care needs to be taken that members of the prayer group are not pressured to share beyond what they wish to.
4. The prayer of each person is naturally very personal, but even that can be shared if the members of the group choose to do it. It can move the group to a deeper bond and create a context in which the group can more easily engage in *lectio*.
5. In the action stage, the members of the group could share the word, phrase or sentence they have chosen. It would not be necessary to explain why they have chosen it.
6. A concluding prayer could be shared by all.

“A necessary foundation to prayer is meditating and thinking on the great truths which God has revealed. We should be familiar with all the mysteries of Jesus Christ and the truths of his Gospel. Our souls should be coloured by them and penetrated by them as wool is by dye. These truths should become so familiar to us that we acquire the habit of forming no judgement except in their light, that they may be our only guide in what we do, as the rays of the sun are our only light in what we see. It is when these truths are inwardly incorporated in us that our praying begins to be real and fruitful.” (Fenelon)

“Meditation sustains our quest for spiritual growth by keeping before us the divine initiatives which draw us on, the essential truths that are the context of our journey, and the goals that are the object of our spiritual journey. Through meditation we deepen our understanding of and appreciation of, the mysteries of the Christian faith.”

“There are two ways in which we can find answers to our questions and guidance when we are alone with God in such a place as this. First, we can consider again His mysteries, rest in them, and humbly bathe our souls in their light. Secondly, in the light of the mysteries of God and His demands and love, we can overhaul our own religious and moral practices in order to discover our slack and disproportionate ways of life...” (Evelyn Underhill)

“Seek by reading, and you find meditating; cry in prayer, and the door will be opened in contemplation.” (John of the Cross)



The Washpool...

images for Lent, 2011

Below the farm, the Washpool Road, has been covered by a racing flooding river, three times since Christmas. Driving along the bitumen one usually sees only a glimpse of silver among the grass, of the wash from the pools of water strung along the little farm valley. Not so recently, as one year gave way to the new. It was not the scene of nightmare as with the avalanche down the Lockyer Valley, but still amazing and concerning as the white-water, surfing torrent tore through the creek bed and spread in a wide circle half a kilometer around the causeway. Each flooding has scored deeper into the creek sides, eroding the paddocks. Each time, the gravel shoulders of the road have been rutted and swept away. Each time, the bitumen has crumbled and potted, adding freshness to the locals' call for Council to construct a proper concrete causeway. The flood has stripped the road and changed the creek, posing a question of how water, field and road can return to an ordered mutuality. Or for musing, if such desired harmony is a mirage when, in truth, there will always be tensions and change as weather, water, land and people jostle along together.

We could do worse this coming Lent to consider the raging water image, which is deeply primal in the Christian worldview. The reality of baptism drowning us into the death and resurrection of Christ takes on a more awe-full awareness as we in Australia begin the days of Ordinary Time and move towards Lent. It is very worthwhile to reflect on this, not that we want to dwell on the recent horrors, but because we, as Christians, need to understand the tensions of the chaotic/orderly, the drowning/rising up, the pain/joy, the struggles/the security that is the reality of our human/divinised lives. Lent informs us again that, as the people of Queensland, the Philippines, and Brazil know so timely, we humans are co-dependents with a created world of limitations and uncertainties. Lent also urges us though to hang onto the Christmas Season we have just experienced for the coming of Christ as one of us, has made these limitations and uncertainties the ultimate mirage and that, in God's rainbow time, all will be well. Lent also moves us on to Easter, the celebration of the victory won, that now and to come, eternity in glory, homecoming to God, is assured.

The history of Lent, like any liturgical season, has had varying emphases in different eras.

Among these are:

- a simple time of fasting in the days before the Pasch (The Easter Triduum),
- a longer time of intense penance and instruction for penitents admitting to serious sin before they were re-joined to the faith community,

- an extended time of forty days of fasting, penance and prayer as practiced by the desert monks, reflecting on the days of Jesus in the desert after his baptism.
- a focused time of critical preparation by catechumens, those wishing to participate in the dying and rising of Christ, in Easter Baptism.

Our contemporary practice is made up of touches of this and that from the rich tradition which has evolved over centuries. Also, like all seasons in the liturgical cycle, it is molded by other concerns that emerge as signs of our times. One of these would be the development in the tradition of “doing good works” to our present focus on the demands of social justice, so that our giving and participation in charity is part of a wider picture of grass roots economic development, sustainability, freedom to grow and justice. Pro-active charity is the new “good works”. So much so that Lent without Project Compassion in our Australian Church would seem incongruous.

In 1955 and again in 1970, many changes were made to the liturgical celebrations of Holy Week, the Triduum and Easter; and in 1972, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults was introduced resurfacing the tradition of catechumens being prepared to be baptised at the Easter Vigil. With such rituals as the blessing of the Easter water, the renewal of baptism promises and sprinkling of Baptism water and the baptism/confirmation/communion of those asking to become Catholic Christians, our experience of Easter has been enriched by strong water symbols. It is not only candidates for Baptism who are involved, but all the Christian community is called to drink, to bathe, to drown, in the waters that incorporate us into the Paschal Mystery, Christ’s birthing, living, dying and rising.

It follows then that Lent can be experienced through the focus on Baptism, its renewal or its reception. The third Period of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is called the period of Purification and Enlightenment and coincides with Lent. In the ancient Church of Hippo in North Africa, Augustine called this *Time in the Womb*.¹ The catechumens who had asked for Baptism were called *competentes* (petitioners) and this time was one of growth and formation for their birth into Christian life. They gathered from the country and the town and stayed close to the Church for the time of Lent. They had special gatherings, but joined the whole community for daily liturgies and sermons. The Faithful (already baptised) were along for the ride also, being taught and refreshed, and by their words and living, giving witness to the *competentes*.

We can see through observing some of the practices of Augustine’s community, how our contemporary images of water can refresh our approach to Lent.

- There was a clear distinguishing of the *competentes* from the baptised: those who were thirsty hot and dry longing for the washpool of the font (Augustine likens them to “As the deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God” Psalm 41) and those who have been already plunged once and then drunk again and again, of the water of life that is Christ-in-Eucharist. Each has their role, but there is a particular challenge for those already baptised. Lent calls the Faithful to ask are we living out our baptism by drawing others to long for the flowing stream of faith and be baptised? Do we stand in solidarity of prayer and witness with those candidates who have asked for Baptism in our parish? Do we regard the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults as the primary form of evangelisation in our local community? Lent challenges us to spread our faith on the seas and rivers so that all can come to knowledge of Christ.
- The *competentes* were examined to see if their wish for Baptism was understood as necessitating a change of lifestyle, to the radical morality, justice and mercy of Christ. With photos of the past flood cleanup still in front of us, we can feel the relief when mud slimy and smelly is gurneyed out and the pipes and gutters run with clear water. We are told to boil the drinking water, lest the invisible e-coli invades our system with debilitating disease. The life of a Christian in Hippo was meant to be radically different from the pagans. They were to cleanse themselves from the dirt of sin and take precautions against the disease of temptations. We too are called to be counter-culture, swimmers against the tides of economic dominance, of gender, racial and status discrimination, of impatience, scandal, notoriety, of false gods and of self-indulgence.
- Lent was marked by particular observances, and we still use the term “Lenten Disciplines” to highlight the purifying nature of the season. The *competentes* and all who could, fasted, restrained from sexual intimacy and bathing, and gave serious time to prayer and listening to catechesis. Our culture might cringe at the thought of not bathing, but the emphasis in Augustine’s teaching was on simplicity, on frugality, on cutting back to essentials, so that those heading to baptism would be freed from old non-Christ habits, and those already baptised could reshape themselves, “dry-out” from addictions which kept minds and hearts from responding to God’s love. Hydration has been the buzz word of the past decade. Not only in sales of bottled water, but in classrooms, clinics, offices, factories and farms, the current wisdom stresses that regular, clean water intake is vital for wellbeing. It is such a simple thing (in our Australian society where water is generally clean and available) which cleans out toxins, maintains

bodily functions and gives sensory security. We function best when we drink plenty of water! But, more importantly, we function most fully when we drink deeply of the Word of God, when we wash away the sinful debris that floats in our lives, and when we bathe our minds in the mind of Christ.

- Certain liturgical actions coursed through the season of Lent in the Hippo community, giving an intensity, an enthusiasm, a fearfulness which stirred the *competentes* and the Faithful to a deep understanding that they were to be slaves of the Kingdom of justice and peace, sailors braving the storms to reach the harbour of Christ. The committed candidates were exorcised in the celebration of the Scrutiny. Heads bowed, they entered the church, stamped barefoot on a goatskin (a sign of the hope to be not numbered among the goats at the final judgment), were breathed over by the exorcist, to drive out the power of the devil, and then they formally renounced the power of Satan. Unfortunately, though the three Sundays of scrutinises are retained in our contemporary rite for the Elect (our term for the *competentes*), they are often whitewashed into blandness and celebrated only at one Mass. Many of the local community would never have come across the emotionally charged call to conversion that the scrutiny delivers. We have not allowed, generally, these dramatic liturgical moments to both buffet us as with raging wave in the surf or scour us as with a gushing channels that cuts and smooths. We have tamed what could be a white water event!
- Over the whole Lenten period, the *competentes* had listened to Augustine open the scriptures intensively to draw them into the mind of Christ and the Christian lifestyle. It came to a point when all that they had imbibed needed to be become dammed into a holding force, to form a reservoir feeding their total outlook on life, an anchor to secure them in their practice of the Faith. They were handed a summary of all they had learnt, the Creed. They were to learn it 'off by heart' and be able to repeat it in the presence of the Faithful as the last week of Lent approached. Within a slightly different time frame, we do the same today. We hand over the Creed to the Elect, for them to learn. At the preparation Rites on the morning of Holy Saturday, they 'hand it back' by reciting it in the presence of the community. Hopefully, it has become washed into their hearts by the exercise of repeating it again and again. Today, there is a concern that these ceremonies are not more widely experienced by the parish and fully celebrated as the ritual indicates. This is not a private moment for the candidates. Rather, it is a time of very public witness

by the community handing over its precious beliefs and a commitment, again publicly, by the Elect that their hearts affirm what the tenets of the Creed announce. Lent is an opportune time to immerse ourselves in this identity-giving storage of essential Christian beliefs. Let the flow of the words of the Creed confirm and assure us this Season. Don't let this precious resource be emptied out by half-hearted and mindless repetition.

- Having received the Creed, the 'what' of the Faith, the *competentes* lastly were given the Lord's Prayer, the 'how' of the Christian life. Praise of God, petitioning to God and concern for right relationships, as expressed by this model prayer, are indicators of how effectively we live as Christians. Augustine laid on a challenge. When praying the Lord's Prayer, the custom was (and is) to hold the hands outstretched in what is called the *orans* gesture. To pray with integrity meant that the *competentes* and the Faithful had to have their whole selves, heart and minds and hands, outstretched... to include and welcome all, to live forgiveness, to give charity. The theme of forgiveness is critical to the major Lenten focus on conversion to the loving reality of God. In our parishes, as the catechumens have struggled over the many months of their journey to Baptism and as the baptised continue to live up to their life-long promises, the action of asking for and of giving forgiveness is a steady life-giving grace for the Christian person and community. It is commonly recognised that without forgiveness, societies lack the energy and freedom to heal, restore and grow in peace and plenty. As a result of recent rains, many parts of our country have artesian water basins replenished. The repletion of this system was vital to the land. Now, the promise is there for a restoration of a land and water balance, which affects all aspects of the ecology and the daily life of all of us for years to come. Yet the basin system is a hidden resource, a quiet achiever, a maker of balance, a well-spring quietly feeding a continent. So with forgiveness: fundamental, active, gentle, liberating.

The Washpool road is clear now; the creek fast flowing but contained. Its bed remains the same, but contours have changed in places. It has left behind on paddocks its rich sediment, promise for future crops to replace those immediately lost. Downstream, it joins the wider branch that streams into the local dam, now full for the first time in twenty years. Well, that's the cycle of making, breaking down, and restoring that is the stuff of the earth and of our lives. It's an image of our Lenten task each year and of our Baptised life as a whole... of birth, of Cross, and rebirth. Augustine, the traveler, can leave us with this image and way forward in the water.

“For it is as though the shipwrecked sailor could see his homeland from afar, and a sea lay in between; he sees where to go but has not the means to go... and what has God done? God has provided the wood by which we may cross the sea. For no one can cross the sea of this world unless carried by the cross of Christ.”²

Lent Year A

May you live these Lenten days
not in purple penitential denial
but in the joyfulness of the
intimate embrace of your Blessed God.

May you hear on the Lenten winds
your Beloved calling you daily
to go apart from your routine time
to spend desert time with your God.

Then your heart can be freshly aflame
with a lover's delight in your God.

May you have a blessed and grace-filled
Lenten season so as to be a new person
in Christ in alleluia joy on Holy Easter.



Ash Wednesday

Marked by Ashes

Ruler of the Night, Guarantor of the day...

This day – a gift for you.

This day – like none other you have ever given, or we have ever received.

This Wednesday dazzles us with gift and newness and possibilities.

This Wednesday burdens us with the tasks of the day, for we are already halfway home halfway back to committees and memos.

This day has become a virtual sacrament of Catholic identity, as people throng churches to “get ashes,” which, paradoxically, is just what the Gospel counsels against – external signs of devotion.

Still, Karl Rahner has captured eloquently the meaning of this sign: “When on Ash Wednesday we hear the words, ‘Remember, you are dust,’ we are also told that we are brothers and sisters of the incarnate Lord. In these words we are told everything that we are: nothingness that is filled with eternity; death that teems with life; futility that redeems; dust that is God’s life forever” (*The Eternal Year*, p.62)

Joel 2:12-18

¹²Yet even now, says the LORD, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; ¹³rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing. ¹⁴Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD, your God? ¹⁵Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; ¹⁶gather the people. Sanctify the congregation; assemble the aged; gather the children, even infants at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her canopy. ¹⁷Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep. Let them say, “Spare your people, O LORD, and do not make your heritage a mockery, a byword among the nations. Why should it be said among the peoples, ‘Where is their God?’”

¹⁸Then the LORD became jealous for his land, and had pity on his people.

2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2

²⁰So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

¶As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. ²For he says, “At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you.” See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

¶“Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. ²“So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ³But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

⁵“And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ⁶But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

¹⁶“And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.



*1st Sunday of
Lent Year A*

Lent is a time of preparation by prayer, fasting and good works. What are we preparing for? We are making ourselves ready to celebrate the culmination of the earthly mission of Jesus the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, the New Adam.

The Lenten season commences with Ash Wednesday when we receive the ashes of the palms from Palm Sunday of the year before. In days gone past the words spoken over us as we received those ashes were, “Remember man that thou art dust and unto dust thou shalt return.” A sobering reminder of our humble beginnings.

In today’s first reading from Genesis we are told that God “formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.” In Genesis 1:27 we read, “So God created mankind in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” Mankind, man and woman, were formed by God out of dust and God breathed life into us. When we die God will take back that breath and we will return to dust. From dust to dust, that is our journey.

In the second reading, Paul’s letter to the early Roman Church, Paul with a lot of words makes the point that the first man, Adam, “trespassed”, offended against God, which trespass carried the consequence of death. That consequence was born by all humanity from the time of Adam. Why? Because we continue to trespass, to do what we want rather than what God wants.

Paul reminds us that the New Adam, Jesus the Christ, by following the will of God without demur won back for humanity what was lost by Adam, by ourselves. We enjoy a loving relationship with God, Abba, our Father because the New Adam lived a God-centred life, not a self-centred life. We are called to live as Jesus lived, and to love as Jesus loved, to remain in that right relationship with God.

Remembering that we are dust, that God has breathed life into our nostrils and continues to breathe life into our very souls, we reflect on the earthly mission of Jesus who saves us by saying yes to God. In the Gospel Matthew recounts how that mission started.

Having been baptised in the Jordan by John, Jesus was driven into the desert where he fasted for 40 days. Not surprisingly after 40 days Jesus was hungry. Who wouldn’t be?

It was when Jesus was hungry that he was tempted by Satan. The evil one knows when to approach us, when we are at our physical or mental low. That is the time to strike.

The temptations were three. They all speak of power, power over nature, power over other people and power over God.

Satan tempted Jesus to change stones into bread. We are tempted to waste the limited resources of our planet, to take more than our daily bread. Jesus reminds us that we don't live by bread alone. That it is in sharing what we have, sharing our daily bread that we truly live.

Satan tempted Jesus to rule the nations. In our relationships at work, home, school, life we are tempted to have others do what we want, to rule them. Jesus reminds us we are to serve God by serving each other, not seeking to dominate each other.

Satan tempted Jesus to jump from the Temple and so test God. We are tempted to bargain with God. If you, God, do what I want, I will worship you. We try to manage God, thinking if we live a good life then we deserve to be rewarded by God. We can't earn God's love. Thankfully we can't lose it either. Jesus reminds us that God loves us because God loves us and for no other reason.

As we follow the example of Jesus by sharing what we have, by serving others not enslaving them, by following God's will not ours, we walk with the New Adam in right relationship with God. We remember that we are dust and that it is God who breathes life into our souls. We start our Lenten journey following our Lord to the Cross and beyond.

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

⁷Then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.

⁸And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. ⁹Out of the ground the LORD GOD made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Romans 5:12-19

¹²Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned.¹⁷If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man,

Jesus Christ. ¹⁸Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. ¹⁹For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

Matthew 4:1-11

⁴Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ²He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." ⁴But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" ⁵Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" ⁷Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" ⁸Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; ⁹and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." ¹⁰Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" ¹¹Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.



*2nd Sunday of
Lent Year A*

As we continue on our Lenten journey we reflect on the message of this week's readings, that Abraham was called by God, that Jesus abolished death and brought life through the Gospel and that the Son of Man was lifted up so that we who believe may have eternal life.

In our first Reading from Genesis God calls Abraham, then known as Abram to go to Canaan where God would make of Abram a nation. God called and Abram went. In our lives do we respond as willingly to the call of God? Do we go where we are sent?

God promised Abram the land of Canaan. A land we now know as Palestine. A land called Holy because God dwells in that land as God dwells everywhere. A land troubled by war and strife from the time Joshua (God has provided) led the Israelites into the land to take it as their rightful inheritance. Do we see the land in which we live as our rightful inheritance, a land from which others must be excluded?

In our second reading Paul tells Timothy that he worshipped God with a clear conscience, **as his ancestors did**. What a curious statement. Paul was a Pharisaic Jew. Paul's ancestors included Abram, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and Joshua. Paul's ancestors occupied the land of Canaan considering that land to be their God-given right. I wonder if God saw the worship of Paul's ancestors as being from one clear of conscience.

How do we see how we worship God? Are we like the Pharisee standing at the front of the Temple telling God how good he was? Or are we like the Publican, standing at the rear of the Temple, not even lifting our eyes asking forgiveness for being a sinner?

In our Gospel Nicodemus, "a leader of the Jews", came to Jesus by night to find out more. Nicodemus is thought to have become a silent follower of Jesus, who did not vote with the other leaders to have Jesus killed, who with Joseph of Arimathea buried Jesus, who became a public disciple of Jesus after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Nicodemus started his journey of faith on this clandestine visit to Jesus. Initially too afraid to be seen with Jesus in the day, Nicodemus grew in courage as he grew in faith finally coming out as a follower of Jesus the Nazarene who died that we may live and who rose from the dead that we may have eternal life.

Where are we in our faith journey? Is the flame of our faith burning gently in the night hidden by the dark of our uncertainty as was the faith of

Nicodemus when he first encountered Jesus? Or like Paul do we profess our faith in God by “suffering for the Gospel”? Do we go where God leads us as Abram did? Or are we afraid to leave the safety of our comfort zones?

Are we prepared to be lifted up as was the Son of Man? Or will we stand at the foot of the Cross weeping? Or worse will we run away?

Jesus told Nicodemus that, “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” Do we believe?

Genesis 12:1-4

¹Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. ²I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

⁴So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

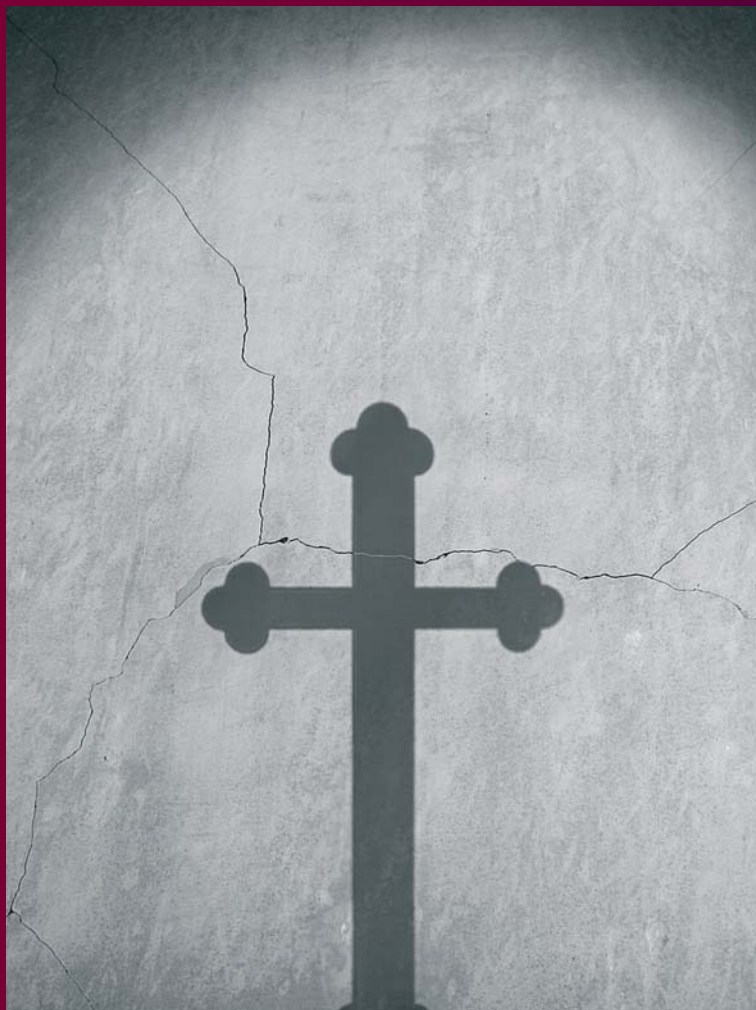
2 Timothy 1:8-10

⁸Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, ⁹who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, ¹⁰but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Matthew 17:1-9

¹Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. ²And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. ⁴Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁵While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the

cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" ⁶When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. ⁷But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." ⁸And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. ⁹As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."



*3rd Sunday of
Lent Year A*

This third Sunday in Lent offers living water as its theme. Water gushing forth from unexpected places. In the Reading from Exodus, God promises to send gushing water from the rock at Horeb (v6). In Romans it is the Holy Spirit, 'poured into our hearts' (v5), while in the Gospel of John, we read how Jesus promises living water in which one will never be thirsty (v14), right there in a forlorn place, at noon, in the sun's heat. This gushing forth of promised living water in unexpected places, captures something of the ways of God, whose grace takes us by surprise.

Lent is a Season that commences with Jesus tempted in the dry harsh desert. It is a Season of penance, dryness and ascetism. We are in the third week and there is still the rest of Lent ahead of us, calling us to resist temptation, to journey the long road to Calvary, bearing our Crosses. To reflect in sombre mood the unjust trial and horrific crucifixion of Christ, who would redeem us.

Yet in the midst of the desert experience of Lent, our Readings open the flood gates, and allow water to gush forth. Is it a reminder that God is ever near? Is it an invitation to wash our sins? Does the refreshing water beckon us to renewed energy?

Lent maybe a sombre time in the Church Season but it is also a time of unexpected grace that is poured into our hearts, which has been emptied of pride, and stands thirsty for new life. The purpose of the journey through Lent is to experience the presence of God reawakened in our lives, little by little, like drops of rain on parched land. The final pouring at the Resurrection will then become all the more invigorating to us, who have been transformed by the harshness of the Lenten desert experience.

A final thought as we end this reflection. How very much a reality has been the Lenten experience in this Great Southern Land. For years we knew only of a 'sunburnt country' withering away into desert because of lack of rain. Then this year the flood gates opened and what was parched, suddenly experienced the downpour of water. Maybe as a Nation we may experience something of a Resurrection this Easter, which gathers us as one.

Exodus 17:3-7

³But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" ⁴So Moses cried out to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." ⁵The LORD said to Moses,

“Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink.” Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the LORD, saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?”

Romans 5:1-2, 5-8

⁵Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our LORD Jesus Christ, ²through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. ⁵ And hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. ⁶For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person – though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. ⁸But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

John 4:5-42

⁵So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. ⁷A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” ⁸(His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) ⁹The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) ¹⁰Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” ¹¹The woman said to him, “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? ¹²Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?” ¹³Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” ¹⁵The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.” ¹⁶Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come back.” ¹⁷The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; ¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your

husband. What you have said is true!”¹⁹ The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet.”²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.”²¹ Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.”²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.”²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him.”²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”²⁵ The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.”²⁶ Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

²⁷Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you want?” or, “Why are you speaking with her?”²⁸ Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people,²⁹ “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?”³⁰ They left the city and were on their way to him.³¹ Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, “Rabbi, eat something.”³² But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.”³³ So the disciples said to one another, “Surely no one has brought him something to eat?”³⁴ Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work.”³⁵ Do you not say, ‘Four months more, then comes the harvest’? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting.”³⁶ The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together.”³⁷ For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’³⁸ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.”³⁹ Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I have ever done.”⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days.⁴¹ And many more believed because of his word.⁴² They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.”



*4th Sunday of
Lent Year A*

Some sighted people are fascinated, dazzled by artificial suns. They act like the characters in the Leunig cartoon, who watch a beautiful sunset on TV while outside the window beside them is an ongoing sunset of indescribable beauty! They will never see the dawn come up in the early morning of the soul.

We can all live with varying degrees of sight when it comes to hiding behind bad decisions, closing our eyes to the inequalities in our society, avoiding those crying around us. And don't we all keep our eyes focused on the rules – when they suit our selfishness, or our inability to cope? By tacit acceptance, by letting things go, we enter the twilight zone – that cultural homeland which is characterised by the night of confusion and doubt, indifference to others, and inability to hope and believe. Blindness is a terrible affliction.

Without being asked, Jesus entered the life of the man blind from birth, at his very core. He spoke with the man, fashioned eyes for him, requested him to wash in the pool of Siloam, a name, which the evangelist tells us, means 'sent'. Then Jesus went on elsewhere. The man immediately did as he was asked and was gifted with sight. How simple, how profound....

The time of Jesus' absence proved not to be one of dazzling light! The man returned to the community with a new sense of presence. His reappearance in the old neighbourhood created no joy, no celebration, no welcome, only questions and doubts. The blind people around him did everything possible to avoid being disturbed by what they saw – they questioned the man's very identity, physically and socially. They hid behind the 'rules' around observation of the Sabbath, and when the disturbance became too heavy for them to handle, they drove him out. The Pharisees slowly lost their sight, while the man gained his. Jesus' presence sat in the middle exposing them both. Jesus reappeared at the end of the passage to receive, confirm and vindicate the life and the soul of the healed man.

Anthony Gittins Cssp entitled one of his early books "A Presence That Disturbs". He says that authentic Christianity is marked by a centrifugal force or impulse: it is outreaching and encountering; it communicates and it ministers; It cannot do otherwise. True Disciples are challenged to go beyond the experience of Jesus. They must not only have **felt** a presence that is disturbing; to become true disciples they must actually **themselves** become a presence that disturbs.

The once blind man encountered Jesus, first as an unbidden healer, then as Lord. The presence of Jesus he experienced so richly was confirmed as he was able to say 'I believe'. His simple presence would forever be a disturbing one in his vulnerable community. He would continue to be for them the face of a

Jesus whose presence proved too dazzling, and too confronting to encounter, because it nudged them out of their complacency, out of their comfort zones into the realm of divine possibility. A disturbing presence, in the name of Jesus, is not a role which brings popularity! As we approach Holy Week it is fitting to remember the old adage that to be a Christian you need to look good on wood!

“Sleeper awake, arise from the dead, open your eyes,
and Christ will shine through you!”

Who are the blind people in this gospel story?

Are you prepared to be disturbed in the name of Jesus?

Who is a disturbing presence in your life?

For whom are you a disturbing presence?

(Anthony J. Gittins, *A Presence That Disturbs: a Call to Radical Discipleship*,
St Paul's Publications, Sydney 2002.)

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

¹⁶The LORD said to Samuel, “How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons.” ⁶When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, “Surely the Lord’s anointed is now before the LORD.” ⁷But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.”

¹⁰Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, “The LORD has not chosen any of these.” ¹¹Samuel said to Jesse, “Are all your sons here?” And he said, “There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep.” And Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here.” ¹²He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The LORD said, “Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.” ¹³Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

Ephesians 5:8-14

⁸For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—⁹for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. ¹⁰Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹²For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; ¹³but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, ¹⁴for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, “Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

John 9:1-41

⁹As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ²His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ³Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. ⁴We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” ⁶When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, ⁷saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

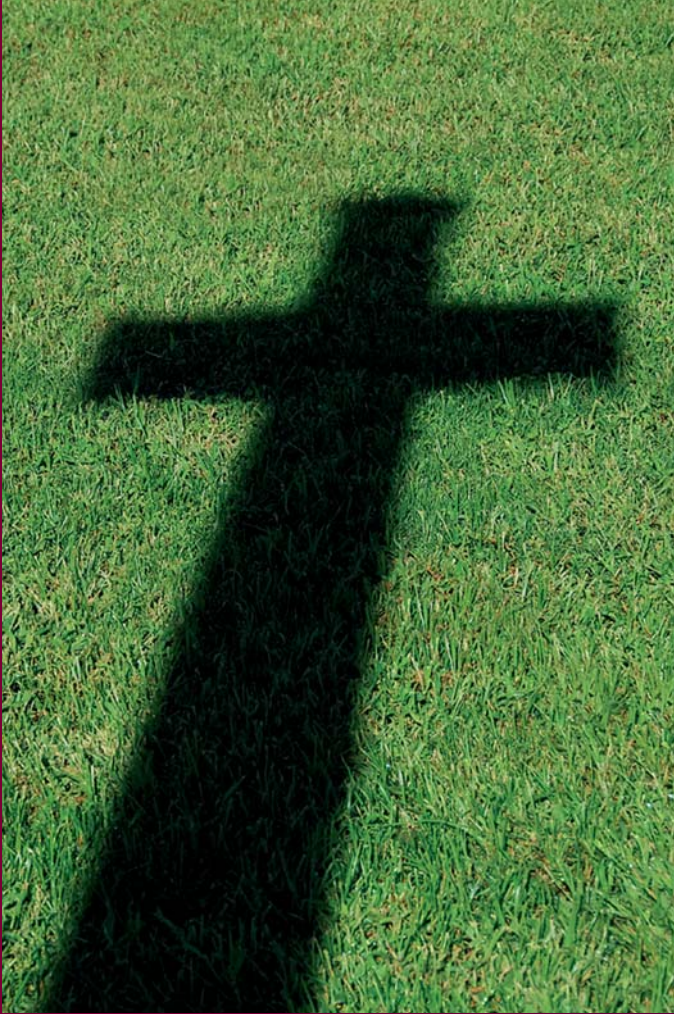
⁸The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” ⁹Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” ¹⁰But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” ¹¹He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight.” ¹²They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

¹³They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, “He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.” ¹⁶Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And they were divided. ¹⁷So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” He said, “He is a prophet.” ¹⁸The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” ²⁰His parents answered, “We

know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; ²¹but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” ²²His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.” ²⁴So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, “Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.” ²⁵He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” ²⁶They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” ²⁷He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” ²⁸Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” ³⁰The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³²Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” ³⁴They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out.

³⁵Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” ³⁶He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.” ³⁷Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.” ³⁸He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him.

³⁹Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.” ⁴⁰Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?” ⁴¹Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.



*5th Sunday of
Lent Year A*

We are now only a week away from Palm Sunday and the start of Holy Week, the most significant week in the Christian calendar. Have you done anything different over the last month or so in preparation for Jesus' death and resurrection?

In the Gospel this week, we hear of Lazarus. We probably have heard or read the story many times, and we know that Jesus brought Lazarus back to life. Was this just another miracle Jesus performed, or does it tell us a lot more about the person of Jesus and the relationship he had with his Father?

It is interesting to note that when Jesus answered Mary and Martha's call to come to Lazarus – he did not attend to them straight away – he took his own time. Why did he not come straight away? Here, Jesus shows his authority of life over death. It is interesting to note the parallel with Jesus' first public miracle, at the wedding at Cana. He tells his mother that "My hour has not yet come". Jesus is showing us that he is following his Father's plan – everything happens at the appropriate time.

This miracle is powerful as a sign that Jesus is God, by bringing Lazarus back to life. If we look further into John's Gospel, because Jesus performed this miracle, Caiaphas, the High Priest, instigated the death of Jesus (11:53)

We also hear Jesus saying to Martha that "I am the resurrection and the life." He is the Son of God. Martha has great faith and states that she does believe in God. Jesus himself believes in God the Father and he shows this by praying publicly to God the Father just before Lazarus comes out of the tomb – this shows his complete dependence on God the Father? At times in our lives, it is sometimes hard to have complete dependence on God and trust that everything will happen according to God's timing and plan.

Even though Jesus is God, he is also very much human and we still see the human side of Him. This story with Lazarus shows Jesus crying – he is visibly upset about what has happened to Lazarus; and he knows what is about to happen to him.

We can see that Mary and Martha trusted Jesus completely. It is important for us to do the same.

Ezekiel 37:12-14

37 ¹²Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. ¹³And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴I will

put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act,” says the LORD.

Romans 8:8-11

8 ⁸Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ⁹But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

¹⁰But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

John 11:1-45

11 Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ²Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. ³So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” ⁴But when Jesus heard it, he said, “This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” ⁵Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, ⁶after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. ⁷Then after this he said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.” ⁸The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?” ⁹Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. ¹⁰But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.”

¹¹After saying this, he told them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.” ¹²The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.” ¹³Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. ¹⁴Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” ¹⁶Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

¹⁷When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, ¹⁹and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. ²⁰When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary

stayed at home. ²¹Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²²But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." ²³Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." ²⁵Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, ²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." ²⁸When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." ²⁹And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. ³²When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

³³When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. ³⁴He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵Jesus began to weep. ³⁶So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" ³⁷But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" ³⁸Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." ⁴⁰Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. ⁴²I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." ⁴³When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" ⁴⁴The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

⁴⁵Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.



Passion Sunday

On Palm Sunday a few years ago a young family came out of church and were on their way home via the newsagents. The little four year old girl was dancing along in front of her parents carrying the palms and singing at the top of her voice: “Hosanna to the Son of David”. Reaching the newsagents she led the small procession in and seeing a young man standing waiting to buy his paper, ran up to him, held up the palms as near his face as she could get and chanted her refrain. The poor lad did not know what had hit him! They then went home and as soon as she got into the house the child sat herself at the table and said “Show me how to make the cross.”

The palm and the cross are so close – in Jesus’ life just a week between the two. The switch from “Hosanna” to “Crucify him” in such a short time is frightening; this is fickleness, not a pleasant word but we are all capable of it.

Two weeks ago there was a reading at Mass from the prophet Hosea:
Through him God is lamenting the fickleness of his own people:

“What am I to do with you, Ephraim?
What am I to do with you, Judah?
This love of yours is like a morning cloud,
like the dew that quickly disappears.”

Was Jesus remembering these words as the crowd yelled “Crucify him!”?

Welcome – Rejection
Support – Betrayal
Joy – Sorrow
Palms – Hyssop stick
Procession – Way of the Cross
Donkey – Cross

But not Life – Death because in that very death there was the triumph of Love and, therefore, of Life. The Palm and the Cross are both signs of Victory – let us hold both high with pride and love.

The prophet Isaiah reminds us what we may face as we live the life of a disciple, one who hears the Word and does God’s will. This description comes to fruition in the way Jesus faces his death, confident in Abba’s promise to be with him and to raise him up. He does not ‘turn backward’, he is whipped and beaten. He does not ‘hide my face from insult and spitting’ but faces all insults without retaliation. This is the action of God’s servant.

In the letter to the Philippians we hear Paul calling us to glorify 'Jesus Christ as Lord', to 'bend our knees' at the very name of Jesus because he became fully human in order to suffer and die for our human sinfulness. Jesus was the most humble of all because he did not 'cling' to his divinity to avoid experiencing the pain of humanity. Jesus became the 'slave' to God's will. God raised him on high.

In the familiar story of the Passion we hear Paul's words echoed as Jesus accepts his death as the obedient and humble servant of God.

As we enter into our *lectio* reflection and through it into the mystery of Jesus suffering and death, what do we say when we see what has happened?

Isaiah 50:4-7

⁴The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens— wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. ⁵The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward. ⁶I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. ⁷The Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame.

Philippians 2:6-11

² Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, ⁷but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, ⁸he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross. ⁹Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Matthew 26:14-27:66

¹⁴Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests ¹⁵and said, "What will you give me if I betray him to you?" They paid him thirty pieces of silver. ¹⁶And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

¹⁷On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying,

“Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?”

¹⁸He said, “Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, ‘The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.’”

¹⁹So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal. ²⁰When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve; ²¹and while they were eating, he said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.” ²²And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, “Surely not I, Lord?” ²³He answered, “The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. ²⁴The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.” ²⁵Judas, who betrayed him, said, “Surely not I, Rabbi?” He replied, “You have said so.”

²⁶While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” ²⁷Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; ²⁸for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” ³⁰When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

³¹Then Jesus said to them, “You will all become deserters because of me this night; for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’” ³²But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.”

³³Peter said to him, “Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you.” ³⁴Jesus said to him, “Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.” ³⁵Peter said to him, “Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.” And so said all the disciples.

³⁶Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” ³⁷He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. ³⁸Then he said to them, “I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me.” ³⁹And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.” ⁴⁰Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, “So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? ⁴¹Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” ⁴²Again he went away for the second time and prayed, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.”

⁴³Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴So leaving

them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. ⁴⁵Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."

⁴⁷While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. ⁴⁸Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him." ⁴⁹At once he came up to Jesus and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him. ⁵⁰Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you are here to do." Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him. ⁵¹Suddenly, one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. ⁵²Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. ⁵³Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen in this way?" ⁵⁵At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. ⁵⁶But all this has taken place, so that the scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled." Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

⁵⁷Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest, in whose house the scribes and the elders had gathered. ⁵⁸But Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest; and going inside, he sat with the guards in order to see how this would end. ⁵⁹Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for false testimony against Jesus so that they might put him to death, ⁶⁰but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward ⁶¹and said, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.'" ⁶²The high priest stood up and said, "Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?" ⁶³But Jesus was silent. Then the high priest said to him, "I put you under oath before the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God." ⁶⁴Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven." ⁶⁵Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has blasphemed! Why do we still need witnesses? You have now heard his blasphemy. ⁶⁶What is your verdict?" They answered, "He deserves death." ⁶⁷Then they spat in his face and struck him; and some slapped him, ⁶⁸saying, "Prophecy to us, you Messiah! Who is it that struck you?"

⁶⁹Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant-girl came to him

and said, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean." ⁷⁰But he denied it before all of them, saying, "I do not know what you are talking about." ⁷¹When he went out to the porch, another servant-girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth." ⁷²Again he denied it with an oath, "I do not know the man." ⁷³After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you." ⁷⁴Then he began to curse, and he swore an oath, "I do not know the man!" At that moment the cock crowed. ⁷⁵Then Peter remembered what Jesus had said: "Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

27 When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus in order to bring about his death. ²They bound him, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate the governor. ³When Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. ⁴He said, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." But they said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself." ⁵Throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself. ⁶But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since they are blood money." ⁷After conferring together, they used them to buy the potter's field as a place to bury foreigners. ⁸For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. ⁹Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the one on whom a price had been set, on whom some of the people of Israel had set a price, ¹⁰and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me."

¹¹Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You say so." ¹²But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer. ¹³Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?" ¹⁴But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed. ¹⁵Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted. ¹⁶At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Jesus Barabbas. ¹⁷So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?" ¹⁸For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over. ¹⁹While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him." ²⁰Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. ²¹The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for

you?" And they said, "Barabbas." ²²Pilate said to them, "Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" All of them said, "Let him be crucified!" ²³Then he asked, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!" ²⁴So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." ²⁵Then the people as a whole answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!"

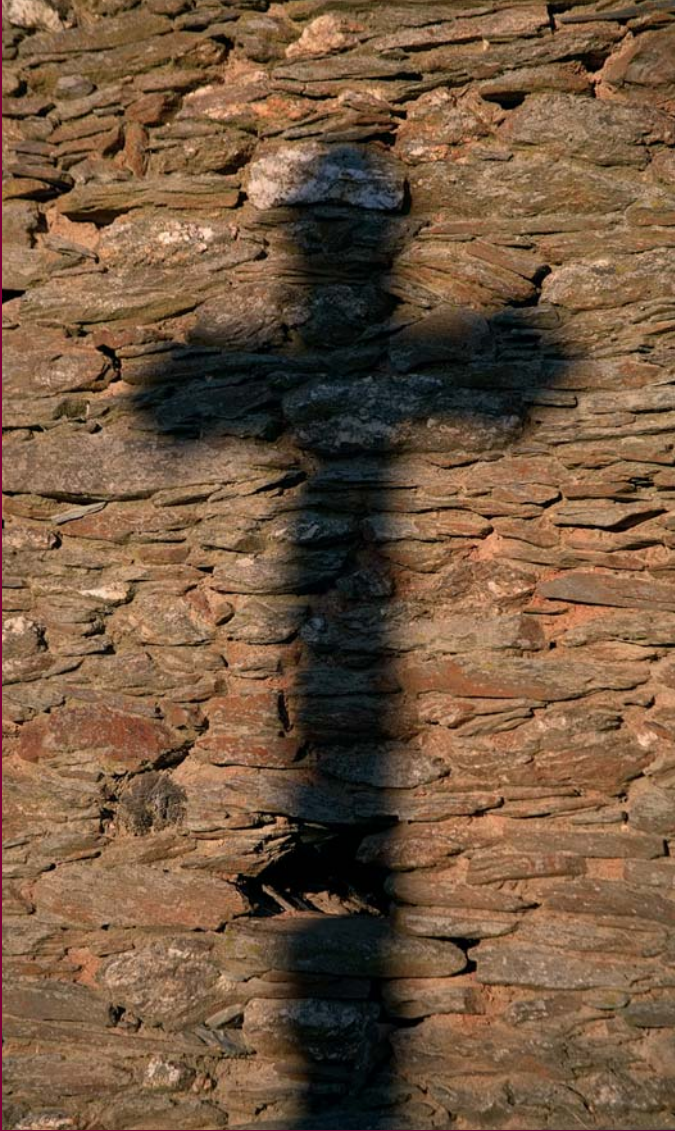
²⁶So he released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified. ²⁷Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. ²⁸They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, ²⁹and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" ³⁰They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. ³¹After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him. ³²As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross.

³³And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), ³⁴they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. ³⁵And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; ³⁶then they sat down there and kept watch over him. ³⁷Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." ³⁸Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁹Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads ⁴⁰and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." ⁴¹In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, ⁴²"He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. ⁴³He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, 'I am God's Son.'" ⁴⁴The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way. ⁴⁵From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. ⁴⁶And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" ⁴⁷When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "This man is calling for Elijah." ⁴⁸At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. ⁴⁹But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him."

⁵⁰Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. ⁵¹At that

moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. ⁵²The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. ⁵³After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. ⁵⁴Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, "Truly this man was God's Son!" ⁵⁵Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him. ⁵⁶Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

⁵⁷When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. ⁵⁸He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. ⁵⁹So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth ⁶⁰and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. ⁶¹Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb. ⁶²The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate ⁶³and said, "Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again.'⁶⁴Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He has been raised from the dead,' and the last deception would be worse than the first." ⁶⁵Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can."⁶⁶So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.



Holy Week

All week, we remember how he loved us. Whatever we do, no matter how busy or “distracted” we might be, we can let the power of this week be in the background of our daily reflections.

Jesus entered into our life – with its profound joys and its punishing evils – that we might never experience those struggles alone.

So, no matter what we experience this week, we can let it become a “holy” week, letting it all be touched by the graces of this week.

From the humble, yet triumphant, entry into Jerusalem, to our standing together at the foot of his cross, this can be a week which helps us bring all of the elements of our lives, all our experiences of sin and death, into the font of his redeeming, liberating death and resurrection.

We enter into a week made “holy” forever by the self surrendering love of Jesus – for us all.

Monday: (Is 42:1-7; Jn 12:1-11)

Judas chastised Mary at Bethany when she anointed the feet of Jesus with costly oil instead of using the money for the poor. But he said this, the evangelist notes parenthetically, not because he cared for the poor but out of other motives. How often do we help the poor out of “political correctness” rather than dedication to gospel values?

Tuesday: (Is 49:1-6; Jn 13:21-33, 36-38)

Like Isaiah, we have been called by God to be polished arrows in the service of the Lord. In these last few days of Lent, clarify your goals. What has thrown you off course? How can you readjust your sights so you hit the target you set 40 days ago?

Wednesday: (Is 50:4-9; Mt 26:14-25)

“Surely it’s not I, Lord?” Judas asked in chorus with the other disciples. Jesus knew, Judas knew—even though the betrayer’s words and attitude suggested otherwise. Choose as your model today not Judas but Isaiah, who realized how important it was to raise up the weary with true, faith-filled words.



*The Easter
Triduum*

Our long journey to the font culminates in the Easter Triduum. These three days draw us into the mystery of our salvation. Whatever we are doing, these prayers and resources can help us be open to the graces offered to us. Each morning, we can pause to acknowledge the meaning of the day ahead. Each night, we can give thanks.

Even if we can't celebrate these days liturgically, we can reflect upon the symbols and rituals, and let the prayers of the liturgies draw us in. All, that we might know the depth of the love being offered us, and power of the gift of life won for us.

We celebrate Easter each day this week. We keep celebrating so that we might continue to enter into the meaning of the resurrection. In the early Church, the newly baptised would be at each liturgy this week, wearing their white garments. We go through our everyday lives this week conscious of the "white garments" we all wear – the waters of our baptism certainly do not dry off! We are renewed as a priestly people, committed with Jesus to give our lives for others.

The resurrection stories, which we read this week, come from communities that are proclaiming the good news. The tomb is empty – Jesus' tomb and every tomb that tries to claim us in death. These are not believers who, in their deep desire, just made up the resurrection. These are people who can hardly believe what they are seeing and experiencing. They, like us now, had trouble recognising his presence with them.

We let the prayers of this Easter week draw us into the joy. Jesus is with us. He is not dead, but alive. And, that makes all the difference in the world in how much hope and courage we have, before any struggle, any possible fear of death.

Holy Thursday

Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14

12 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: ²This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. ³Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. ⁴If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbor in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it. ⁵Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. ⁶You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then

the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. ⁷They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. ⁸They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. ¹¹This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the LORD. ¹²For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. ¹³The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. ¹⁴This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

²³For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, ²⁴and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

John 13:1-15

¹3 Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ²The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper ³Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. ⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" ⁷Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." ⁸Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." ⁹Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" ¹⁰Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the

feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you.” ¹¹For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, “Not all of you are clean.” ¹²After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? ¹³You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.

Good Friday

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

52 ¹³See, my servant shall prosper; he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high. ¹⁴Just as there were many who were astonished at him – so marred was his appearance, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of mortals – ¹⁵so he shall startle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which had not been told them they shall see, and that which they had not heard they shall contemplate.

53 Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? ²For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. ³He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account.

⁴Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. ⁵But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. ⁶All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. ⁷He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. ⁸By a perversion of justice he was taken away. Who could have imagined his future? For he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people. ⁹They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.

¹⁰Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him with pain. When you make his life an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days; through him the will of the LORD shall prosper. ¹¹Out of his anguish he shall see light; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge. The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. ¹²Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Hebrews 4:14-16, 5:7-9

¹⁴Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

⁵ ⁷In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. ⁸Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; ⁹and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.

John 18:1-19:42

¹⁸ After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. ²Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples. ³So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. ⁴Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, 'For whom are you looking?' ⁵They answered, 'Jesus of Nazareth.'* Jesus replied, 'I am he.'* Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. ⁶When Jesus* said to them, 'I am he',* they stepped back and fell to the ground. ⁷Again he asked them, 'For whom are you looking?' And they said, 'Jesus of Nazareth.'* ⁸Jesus answered, 'I told you that I am he.* So if you are looking for me, let these men go.' ⁹This was to fulfil the word that he had spoken, 'I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me.' ¹⁰Then Simon Peter, who

had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. ¹¹Jesus said to Peter, 'Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?'

¹² So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him. ¹³First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. ¹⁴Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people.

¹⁵ Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, ¹⁶but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. ¹⁷The woman said to Peter, 'You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?' He said, 'I am not.' ¹⁸Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing round it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself.

¹⁹ Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. ²⁰Jesus answered, 'I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. ²¹Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said.' ²²When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, 'Is that how you answer the high priest?' ²³Jesus answered, 'If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?' ²⁴Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

²⁵ Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, 'You are not also one of his disciples, are you?' He denied it and said, 'I am not.' ²⁶One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, 'Did I not see you in the garden with him?' ²⁷Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed.

²⁸ Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters.* It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters,* so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. ²⁹So Pilate went out to them and said, 'What accusation do you bring against this man?' ³⁰They answered, 'If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you.' ³¹Pilate said to them, 'Take him

yourselves and judge him according to your law.' The Jews replied, 'We are not permitted to put anyone to death.'³² (This was to fulfil what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.)

³³ Then Pilate entered the headquarters* again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?'³⁴ Jesus answered, 'Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?'³⁵ Pilate replied, 'I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?'³⁶ Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.'³⁷ Pilate asked him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.'³⁸ Pilate asked him, 'What is truth?'

After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, 'I find no case against him.'³⁹ But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?'⁴⁰ They shouted in reply, 'Not this man, but Barabbas!' Now Barabbas was a bandit.

19 Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged.² And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe.³ They kept coming up to him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' and striking him on the face.⁴ Pilate went out again and said to them, 'Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him.'⁵ So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, 'Here is the man!'⁶ When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, 'Crucify him! Crucify him!' Pilate said to them, 'Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him.'⁷ The Jews answered him, 'We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God.'

⁸ Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever.⁹ He entered his headquarters* again and asked Jesus, 'Where are you from?' But Jesus gave him no answer.¹⁰ Pilate therefore said to him, 'Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?'¹¹ Jesus answered him, 'You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.'¹² From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, 'If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor.'

¹³ When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat* on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew* Gabbatha. ¹⁴Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, 'Here is your King!' ¹⁵They cried out, 'Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!' Pilate asked them, 'Shall I crucify your King?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but the emperor.' ¹⁶Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

So they took Jesus; ¹⁷and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew* is called Golgotha. ¹⁸There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. ¹⁹Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, 'Jesus of Nazareth,* the King of the Jews.' ²⁰Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew,* in Latin, and in Greek. ²¹Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, 'Do not write, "The King of the Jews", but, "This man said, I am King of the Jews."' ²²Pilate answered, 'What I have written I have written.' ²³When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. ²⁴So they said to one another, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.' This was to fulfil what the scripture says, 'They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.' ²⁵And that is what the soldiers did.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' ²⁷Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

²⁸ After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfil the scripture), 'I am thirsty.' ²⁹A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. ³⁰When Jesus had received the wine, he said, 'It is finished.' Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

³¹ Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified

men broken and the bodies removed. ³²Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. ³³But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. ³⁴Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. ³⁵(He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows* that he tells the truth.) ³⁶These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, 'None of his bones shall be broken.' ³⁷And again another passage of scripture says, 'They will look on the one whom they have pierced.'

³⁸ After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. ³⁹Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. ⁴⁰They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. ⁴¹Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. ⁴²And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Holy Saturday

Lamentations 3:1-24

³ I am one who has seen affliction under the rod of God's wrath; ²he has driven and brought me into darkness without any light; ³against me alone he turns his hand, again and again, all day long. ⁴He has made my flesh and my skin waste away, and broken my bones; ⁵he has besieged and enveloped me with bitterness and tribulation; ⁶he has made me sit in darkness like the dead of long ago. ⁷He has walled me about so that I cannot escape; he has put heavy chains on me; ⁸though I call and cry for help, he shuts out my prayer; ⁹he has blocked my ways with hewn stones, he has made my paths crooked. ¹⁰He is a bear lying in wait for me, a lion in hiding; ¹¹he led me off my way and tore me to pieces; he has made me desolate; ¹²he bent his bow and set me as a mark for his arrow. ¹³He shot into my vitals the arrows of his quiver; ¹⁴I have become the laughingstock of all my people, the object of their taunt-songs all day long. ¹⁵He has filled me with bitterness, he has sated me with wormwood. ¹⁶He has made my teeth grind on gravel, and

made me cower in ashes; ¹⁷my soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is; ¹⁸so I say, “Gone is my glory, and all that I had hoped for from the LORD.” ¹⁹The thought of my affliction and my homelessness is wormwood and gall! ²⁰My soul continually thinks of it and is bowed down within me.

²¹But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: ²²The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; ²³they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. ²⁴“The LORD is my portion,” says my soul, “therefore I will hope in him.”

Easter Sunday

Years ago, Easter was a feast of riotous joy because it signalled the end of fasting, abstaining from meat, and from doing other Lenten penances. You can rejoice today in the resurrection of Christ and in the fact that you are leaving the hospital of Lent with a healing prescription for the unparalleled drug of wellness and wholesome living. Your prescription is for Triduum, which is Latin for “a space of three days.” This is what we call sundown on Holy Thursday through Easter Sunday evening. The Galilean pharmacist’s recipe for making Triduum is to mix a compound of three healing ingredients: the Supper of the Lord, his Passion and Death, and his Resurrection.

Medicines frequently carry the instruction, “Take with food,” and this is especially true for your Triduum prescription. At each meal, take a moment of your time before you begin eating to relish the memory of Jesus, who by his love transformed all meals into occasions of holy communion. Before your family Easter dinner, you might want to renew an old table ritual. A parent blesses a hard-boiled Easter egg and then cracks open the shell and cuts the egg into pieces that are divided among the members of the household. Each person then eats a section of the egg in silence, aware of the Easter promise of safety. The tradition says that if later in life any member of the household should get lost, all she or he has to remember the ritual of the shared egg. The rest of the household would then think of the lost member and their love-filled thoughts would guide that person safely home again.

Like a good pharmacist, next mix into the Triduum medicine the healing ingredient of Jesus’ death on the cross. Remembering the innocence of the crucified Jesus can give us the grace to endure all the undeserved, excruciating pain that may be our fate in life. Enduring all our struggles is elevated to a state of grateful communion when our suffering is made meaningful by being wedded to the cross of Christ. Pour into this mixture a pint of Easter joy and stir it with

the knowledge that the resurrection of Jesus proved that death does not have the last word! This Easter ingredient of faith that death and sin are not the end treats the great lifelong disease that plagues us all, the insatiable cancer of sin – that spiritual death – that slowly, inexorably nibbles away at body and mind. Sin deforms our souls as it kills our dreams of richly fulfilling marriages and our ideals of social and religious reform. Whenever you face any deaths like these, mark upon yourself the Easter cross, the Tau cross of those who already live fully in the promised age of God where sin and death have been destroyed.

The third medicinal ingredient that completes the prescription for Triduum is the mystery of God resurrecting Jesus. The crucified carpenter wasn't slumbering in his tomb. He was dead and decaying. In the great Easter Mystery, the Spirit of Life breaks open the stone egg of Jesus' tomb. Bursting forth from the shattered shell of this tomb-egg came new creation, a new earth, and a new Jesus who arose in stunning splendour. The power of that Easter event continues to transform the past, saturate the present, and create the future. Easter isn't merely a holy historical remembrance; it is a sacred encounter with the risen Christ who continues to heal as the ever-gentle saviour.

Today we seek healing for our Easter itch, a subterranean doubt that we shall experience resurrection because of our failures and stumbling efforts to live the gospel. Before his death, Jesus gave a promise reassuring all who have struggled to live as he wanted to live: "This is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day" (John 6:39). To reinforce these reassuring resurrection words of Jesus, I conclude with an ancient prescription: the medicine of a good story or parable. I am grateful to author Patricia Sanchez for the following story as a curative for the Easter itch.

After committing suicide for betraying Jesus, Judas found himself in pitch-black darkness at the bottom of an endlessly deep pit. After weeping for a thousand years in sorrow for his sinful betrayal, and now empty of tears, he looked up to see a tiny speck of light way up at the top of the pit. After hundreds of years of contemplating that tiny glimmering glow, he attempted to climb up toward the light. For many more years he struggled to scale the slimy, slippery walls of that pit, only to lose his grip and come slithering down to the bottom.

Finally, after several more lengthy attempts, he was able to crawl inch-by-inch all the way up to the rim at the top. Climbing out of the dark pit, he found to his surprise that he was in a luminously brilliant room where twelve men were seated at a long table. "We've been waiting for you, friend Judas," said Jesus, who was seated at the far end. "We couldn't begin until you came."

This Easter, rest assured that Jesus waits for all of us with just as much patience and healing love. Let his all-powerful medicine of selfless love heal you and bring you to new life.

(– from *The Lenten Pharmacy* by Fr. Ed Hays.)

Acts 10:34, 37-43

³⁴Then Peter began to speak to them: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality. ³⁷That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: ³⁸how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. ³⁹We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; ⁴⁰but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, ⁴¹not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴²He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

1 Corinthians 5:6-8

⁶Your boasting is not a good thing. Do you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough?

⁷Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. ⁸Therefore, let us celebrate the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

John 20:1-9

²⁰ Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ²So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” ³Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. ⁴The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent down

to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

Prayer

We praise you, O Divine Keeper of Promises!
What you pledge you always bring about,
as the glorious resurrection of Jesus proves.
His freedom from death fills us with hope
since we his disciples are promised the same.

By our baptism we have become his body,
and we rejoice that the Risen One guarantees us
freedom from death and endless life.

O God, give us the grace to daily live out
this glorious life of the risen Christ.

– *The Pilgrimage Way of the Cross* by Fr. Ed Hays

Footnotes

- ¹ Research reference on the Hippo Church. William Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1995) 244-296.
- ² Augustine, *Tractatus in evangelium Ioannis 2.2* (as in W. Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*).



Journal
10070