



*Following*  
JESUS

Daily Reflections  
on the 2024 Lenten Readings for Mass

## INTRODUCTION

This Lent might be a good time to recall the inviting command and commanding invitation that Jesus addressed to his disciples—and extends to us—“Follow me!” Though we often cannot identify the first moment we heard this invitation, still at some point we consciously decided to begin a relationship with Jesus that has deepened over the years and changed ourselves and our lives. Lent is our chance to assess our progress and consider further ways to grow in this relationship through our daily encounter with God’s Word, which continually invites us to reorient our lives by imitating more closely Jesus’ vision, values and actions.

And if this handy Lenten booklet helps you deepen your relationship with Jesus, we invite you to consider using similar reflections for each day of the year found in the quarterly editions of *Words of Grace: Daily Reflections & Prayers for Catholics available from AllSaintsPress.com*.

— Steve Mueller, Editor

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## CASTING OUT FEAR

Jl 2:12-18 / 2 Cor 5:20—6:2 / Mt 6:1-6, 16-18

The purpose of Lent is above all a preparation to rejoice in God's love. And this preparation consists first of all in casting out fear. Fear narrows the little entrance of our heart. It shrinks up our capacity to love. It freezes up our power to give ourselves. If we were terrified of God as an inexorable judge, we would not confidently await his mercy, or approach him trustfully in prayer. Our peace, our joy in Lent are a guarantee of grace. In laying upon us the light cross of ashes, the Church desires to take off our shoulders all other heavy burdens—the crushing load of worry and obsessive guilt, the dead weight of our own self-love. In a word, the ashes sign our whole being with the merciful blessing of God.

—Thomas Merton  
*Seasons of Celebration*

*What fears do I most need to cast  
away to enter better into Lent?*

**Lent** (from the Germanic word for *Spring*) is a period 40 days (excluding Sundays) to prepare for Easter. It recalls Jesus' 40 days of solitude in the wilderness and provides a time to refocus on our relationships with God and others through prayer, fasting and doing good deeds.

## WHAT MIGHT GOD BE DOING HERE?

Dt 30:15-20 / Lk 9:22-25

God's time has to do with opportunity and fullness of meaning, moments that are ripe for their intended purpose. When we see time in light of our faith in the God of history, the events of this year are not just a series of happy or unhappy events but part of the shaping hands of God, who wants to mold our world and our lives, working out his purposes in our days. Time becomes not just something to get through or manipulate or manage, but the arena of God's good work in us. Whatever happens—good things or bad, pleasant or problematic—we ask, “What might God be doing here?” We see our daily events as continuing occasions to change our hearts. Time points beyond itself and begins to speak to us of God.

—Henri J.M. Nouwen,

*Discernment: Reading the Signs of Daily Life*

*What has God been doing in myself  
and my life that I can deepen this lent?*

**Fasting** as explained by the US bishops means partaking of only one full meal and two smaller meals that do not equal the main meal. Catholics in good health between the ages of 18 and 59 are obliged to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.

## WHAT GOD ASKS OF US

Is 58:1-9a / Mt 9:14-15

When someone asks for a favor, what does that tell us? First, it says that they see us as able to respond, to give them what they hope for. It also shows us what is important to them, what they think they need or want. When we allow someone to ask for something instead of deciding what to give them, we are showing unique respect, giving their point of view priority over our own. Today we hear what God knows we can do and hopes we will do. It all has to do with caring for the needy: the oppressed, the hungry, the lonely, the homeless or unjustly imprisoned. God knows we can do it and hopes that we will. This is an invitation to share God's priorities.

—Mary M. McGlone, CSJ

*What can I do today to let go of my agenda  
and make God's priorities my own?*

**Abstinence** forbids the use of meat, but not of eggs, milk products or condiments made of animal fat. All Catholics 14 years old and older must abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday, Good Friday and all the Fridays of Lent.

## FASTING FOR GOD'S SAKE

Is 58:9b-14 / Lk 5:27-32

We need first of all a spiritual preparation for the effort of fasting. It consists in asking God for help and also in making our fast God-centered. We should fast for God's sake. We must rediscover our body as the temple of his presence. We must recover a religious respect for the body, for food, for the very rhythm of life. Fasting is cleansing. It cleans out our bodies. It lays bare our souls. It leads us into the arms of that One for whom we hunger. In the divine arms we become less demanding and more like the One who holds us. Then we experience new hungers. We hunger and thirst for justice, for goodness and holiness. We hunger for what is right. We hunger to be saints.

—Alexander Schmemmann

*Great Lent*

*What spiritual hunger do I most feel now in my life?*

**Sinners** were both those who led immoral lives and those whose occupations were considered sure to lead them into immorality—e.g., **tax collectors** who collected more than what they needed to pay the Romans and were viewed as both extortioners and traitors to their fellow Jews.

## OVERCOMING TEMPTATION

Gn 9:8-15 / 1 Pt 3:18-22 / Mk 1:12-15

In the wilderness, Jesus rejected the demons who told him, “You have to be successful” answering, “No, I don’t need that;” “You have to be on the right religious track” answering “Get lost. I don’t need this game” and finally “You can do God’s will best with the tools of power” but the price of power is falling down before Satan. We must realize that our path too leads into the wilderness and that we have to look these three demons in the eye: the need to be successful, the need to be righteous or religious, and the need to have power and get everything under control. Until we have stared down these three demons within us, there is no possibility of getting out of the wilderness and proclaiming the Kingdom of God.

—Richard Rohr  
*Simplicity*

*Which of the three tempting demons do I most need to reject with God’s help?*

**Temptation** is a test of our faithfulness and loyalty to God, whether arising from within oneself, from other persons, the circumstances of life, the action of the devil, etc. Temptation itself is not sin but rather an awareness of an alternate path with all its attractions that is to be rejected.

## THESE LEAST ONES

Lv 19:1-2, 11-18 / Mt 25:31-46

The judgment scene that we read today is found only in Matthew's Gospel. In it Jesus identifies with the least ones, the little ones, the poor ones. For centuries, this passage has been at the core of Catholic social justice teaching and of the understanding of our responsibility toward the poor and vulnerable. The poor and oppressed, the marginal and the suffering are the ones who reveal Jesus hidden in the world. The cause of the hungry, poor and oppressed has become the cause of Jesus. Welcoming the poor, the little ones is a sign of true love for Jesus. In meeting them we also meet him. As the U.S. Bishops say in *Economic Justice for All*, "In neglecting the poor, the outcast, and the oppressed, we are rejecting Jesus himself."

—Angeline Hubert

*How can I be more attentive to Jesus' presence  
in the most vulnerable among us?*

**The Easter Duty** is the serious obligation binding Roman Catholics to receive the eucharist sometime during the Easter season (in the U.S., from the first Sunday of Lent to and including Trinity Sunday, 10 days after Ascension Thursday).



## PRAYING AMIDST CONFUSION

Is 55:10-11 / Mt 6:7-15

The Gospels invite us to bring our requests to God. The Lord's Prayer is filled with petitions. Still, if we pay attention to what is happening in our world, we may wonder whether God does intervene in human actions or natural events. Does petitionary prayer make any sense? In fact, many people today, given our extraordinary exposure to events happening across the globe and our science-oriented mind-set, understandably question whether their prayer matters. Does our prayer actually change God's mind, drawing God to act in a way that God would not otherwise act? Or does prayer at least transform us, calm us down, foster compassion, shape our action? These are tough questions. But there in the mix of both conviction and confusion, our prayer is most real and earnest.

—Claire E. Wolfteich

*Lord, Have Mercy: Praying for Justice with Conviction & Humility*

*Which petition in the Lord's Prayer  
do I most want to pray today? Why?*

Isaiah illustrates the Israelites' belief that at creation God separated the heavenly waters from those below by creating a dome (sky) to make dry land and keep the waters above the heavens from inundating the earth except through openings through which **"the rain and snow come down"** to water the earth.

## HOW DOES YOUR GARDEN GROW?

Jon 3:1-10 / Lk 11:29-32

Lent is a season for spiritual gardening. Oddly, Jesus counsels disciples to leave the wheat and the weeds together until the harvest. Closer inspection reveals the method in this divine madness. Good and evil are closely related, for virtue is often the flip side of vice. Envy is the shadow of emulation, patience a mere stone's throw from lethargy, and stubbornness the downside of determination. Similarly, destructive rage is akin to prophetic anger and there is a fine line between self-love and selfishness. If we pull out the weeds of our souls, we risk uprooting the wheat. During Lent we prune our habits rather than plowing them under. Wise spiritual gardeners reap advocacy from ambition, cooperation from competition, and compassion from self-pity.

—Jerry Welte

*What are the weeds in my spirit  
that can be pruned into wheat?*

**Abnegation** is the spiritual practice of self-denial (or mortification), in order to atone for past sins or in order to join oneself to the passion of Christ. Mortification can be undertaken through fasting, abstinence, or refraining from legitimate pleasure.

## HOW BLESSED YOU ARE!

1 Pt 5:1-4 / Mt 16:13-19

What Jesus said of Peter, he also said of us. Don't we believe that Jesus is the Messiah? That he is the Son of God? Isn't that why we try to serve him and follow his way? The same God the Father who was in Peter must be in us. We are charged with God's Spirit. We are full of the Son's Spirit. God is in us. Look in a mirror and say, "I'm charged with God, full of the Spirit!" We often think of ourselves as totally negative, as nonparticipants in so many affairs, as in a sense good-for-nothing, just like his disciples did. Others are important. Others are leading the world. We forget the good in ourselves. We forget God in us. We overlook our potentialities, our dignity.

—Joseph G. Donders  
*Praying & Preaching the Sunday Gospel*

*What helps me most recall God's active presence in me through the Holy Spirit?*

The **bishop's chair** (Greek, *cathedra*) was the official seat from which the bishop taught authoritatively and presided over the community liturgy. *Ex Cathedra* (Latin, "from the chair") is a theological term identifying authoritative teaching and is more particularly applied to the dogmatic definitions promulgated by the pope.

## GIVING GOD OUR WOUNDS

Ez 18:21-28 / Mt 5:20-26

Once a retreatant said to me: “It was difficult for me to give up to the Lord my anger and hatred because I wanted to choose the gift I would give the Lord. I was so happy and proud to offer my patience, my care for people, my love.” We often think we will please God with what we consider our best gifts. We forget we are a sinful people, able to give only imperfect and ambiguous gifts. We forget that Jesus came to invite not virtuous people but sinners. So our best gifts are our wounds, even though we do not understand this. The best gift we can give to a doctor passionately concerned with our health is to show him our wounds and give them over to his hands.

—Pierre Wolff  
*May I Hate God?*

*What wounds do I most need to give  
to God for healing today?*

In order to stop the escalating pattern that often leads to killing, Jesus tells his listeners to avoid not only anger but also abusive and disrespectful name-calling like “you empty-head” (Aramaic, *raqa*) and “You fool” (Greek, *moros*, the root of our word *moron*).

## LOVE AS JESUS DID

Dt 26:16-19 / Mt 5:43-48

Do you want to know the secret of true happiness? Well, decide here and now to love things and people as Jesus loved them, that is, to the point of self-sacrifice. Don't bother with the bookkeeping of love, love without keeping accounts. If someone greets you and smiles, greet him and smile back, but if someone else treads on your feet, smile just the same. If someone does you a good turn, thank the Lord for it, but if someone else slanders you, persecutes you, curses you, strikes you, thank him and carry on. Do not say, "I'm right and he's wrong." Say: "I must love him as myself." This is the kind of love Jesus taught: a love which transforms, vivifies, enriches, brings peace.

—Carlo Carretto  
*Love Is for Living*

*What do I most need to do to love more as Jesus did?*

"Lord Jesus, our traveling companion, help our Christian communities to be more open to listening and accepting your word. May they draw from the eucharist a renewed commitment to spreading the signs and deeds of an attentive and active love in society by proclaiming your gospel. Amen." —Pope St. John Paul II

## IT'S OUR TRANSFIGURATION TOO

Gn 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18 / Rom 8:31b-34 / Mk 9:2-10

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses. If he is your Christian neighbor, he is holy in almost the same way, for in him also Christ truly hides—the glorifier and the glorified, Glory Himself is truly hidden.

—C.S. Lewis

*The Weight of Glory & Other Addresses*

*If I really notice the holiness in others around me,  
how will this most change my behavior?*

Although the Greek word here (*metamorphosis*) commonly described a change in form or appearance that a god might make to appear to humans, the gospel writers suggest a completely new meaning. Jesus' **transfiguration** is a glimpse of God's glory breaking forth from Jesus' human form.

## STOP JUDGING YOURSELF

Dn 9:4b-10 / Lk 6:36-38

Jesus came to open my ears to another voice that says, “I am your God, I have molded you with my own hands, and I love what I have made. I love you with a love that has no limits, because I love you as I am loved. Do not judge yourself. Do not condemn yourself. Do not reject yourself. Let my love touch the deepest, most hidden corners of your heart and reveal to you your own beauty, a beauty that you have lost sight of, but which will become visible to you again in the light of my mercy. Come, come, let me wipe your tears, and let my mouth come close to your ear and say to you, I love you, I love you, I love you.”

—Henri J.M. Nouwen  
*The Road to Daybreak*

*How can I show thanks to God today for loving me?*

The **Book of Daniel** combines examples of God’s care for faithful Jews in their hostile Greek environment and sections depicting God’s triumph over evil in our world. It offers hope in times of crisis by stressing that God will always deliver those who remain faithful to the covenant

## DARING TO LOOK WITHIN

Is 1:10, 16-20 / Mt 23:1-12

Much as we want to know ourselves, we do not really know ourselves. Do we really want to see ourselves as God sees us, or even as our fellow human beings see us? Could we bear it, weak as we are? You know that feeling of contentment in which we sometimes go about, clothed in it, as it were, like a garment, content with the world and with ourselves. We are ourselves and we would be no one else. We are glad that God made us as we are and we would not have had him make us like anyone else. We do not want to be given that clear inward vision which discloses to us our most secret faults.

—Dorothy Day  
*From Union Square to Rome*

*What inner secret faults do I most want  
to change with God's help this Lent?*

**Phylacteries** (Greek, *phylakterion*, Hebrew, *tefillin*) are two small cubic leather boxes containing certain scripture quotes written on small strips of parchment. During prayer time, a man wears them tied to his forehead and upper left arm as prescribed by Deuteronomy 6:8.



## THE RELUCTANT PROPHET

Jer 18:18-20 / Mt 20:17-28

Poor Jeremiah. Of all the prophets in the Old Testament, his life is the most similar to Jesus. Called from his mother's womb, he prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem to the kings and people of Judah. This was a terrifying thing to hear. The prophets who counseled calm and a continuation of the status quo were much beloved and ate in the palace. Jeremiah they tossed in a cistern. In retrospect, of course, we all wish we'd listened to the true prophets in our lives. We remember with humility the guidance we received from parents and teachers, and wonder why we never listened. And now we, like Jeremiah, stand before God on behalf of our own children, who aren't interested in listening to us. And so the world goes.

—Kathy McGovern

*What were the best words of advice I ever ignored?  
That others ignored from me?*

When used figuratively, a cup indicated one's portion or lot, such as the wine shared at dinner. Thus when Jesus asks the disciples whether they can **drink the cup (chalice)**, he means can they share in his portion of suffering instead of just expecting rewards and glory.

## PRACTING SILENCE

Jer 17:5-10 / Lk 16:19-31

Practicing silence to empty all kinds of noise within you is not a difficult practice. With some training, you can do it. In noble silence, you can walk, you can sit, you can enjoy your meal. When you have that kind of silence, you have enough freedom to enjoy being alive and to appreciate all the wonders of life. With that kind of silence you are more capable of healing yourself, mentally and physically. You have the capacity to be, to be there, alive. Because you really are free—free from your regrets and suffering concerning the past, free from your fear and uncertainty about the future, free from all kinds of mental chatter.

—Thich Nhat Hanh  
*Silence*

*How might I better use my silence to grow closer to Christ?*

For the ancients the universe had three distinct levels: heaven, earth and the underworld (below the earth, called *Sheol*). Each was separated by such a **great chasm** that only God (and those God sends as messengers like the angels or Jesus) can move from one level to the other.

## TREATING OTHERS WITH RESPECT

Gn 37:3-4, 12-13a, 17b-28a / Mt 21:33-43, 45-46

When Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery, they could not have known the future way Joseph would enter their lives. They never realized that Joseph would rise to power and serve others by eliminating famine in Egypt. On the other hand, the chief priests and the Pharisees who heard Jesus' parable knew the Joseph story. Yet, in the same way that Joseph's brothers did not respect him, they did not respect the owner's son (Jesus) who was sent to obtain the owner's share of the harvest. In both cases, the "stone that the builders rejected" became the "cornerstone" for new life. So likewise our actions will be fruitful only when we can let go of grudges and resentment and embrace loving respect for all those with whom we come in contact.

—Dorothy Jonaitis

*How might I show greater respect for others today?*

For biblical people, **dreams** were important because they served as an avenue of communication between heaven and earth during sleep when the borders between these worlds were more porous. Since dreams were often highly symbolic and needed interpretation, those like Joseph who had the gift and skill of interpretation become "master dreamers."

## GOD IS EAGER TO FORGIVE

Mi 7:14-15, 18-20 / Lk 15:1-3, 11-32

God is only too willing to forgive us. We do not even have to say we are sorry. We have only to desire to come back to him. He will not even let the prodigal son finish the little repentance speech he was making. Nothing is easier in all the world than attaining forgiveness from God. He is more eager to give forgiveness than we are to receive it. The problem is not with God but with us. Many people refuse to believe that forgiveness is something they can get so easily. Worse still, they refuse to forgive themselves. They develop a false sense of unworthiness. I know of no greater obstacle to progress in the spiritual life than this false sense of unworthiness.

—Anthony de Mello, SJ  
*Contact With God*

*How does my sense of unworthiness and guilt get  
in the way of my seeking God's forgiveness?*

Sacramental **absolution** is the act by which the priest, acting in Christ's place, grants forgiveness of sins in the sacrament of reconciliation. The essential formula of absolution is: "I absolve you from your sins; in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

## THE CONVENT DEMANDS

Ex 20:1-17 / 1 Cor 1:22-25 / Jn 2:13-25

The Sinai commands invite a radical reordering of social relations and the potentially life-giving role of social structures and institutions. Sinai unleashed a genuine alternative to hierarchical, stratified monopoly. The Bible does not make all this explicit at Sinai. Indeed, the Sinai commands are so terse and familiar that it is possible to hear them as simply flat rules that can be understood in legalistic ways, without seeing that they are a summons to, and authorization for, membership in a quite alternative society that dares to claim itself to be en route to the “kingdom of God.” Moses at Sinai thus states a deep either/or. When one embraces Yahweh, one embraces not only a very different God, but also membership in a very different social practice.

—Walter Brueggemann  
*The Covenanted Self*

*How has my faith invited me to a different life-style more fitted to God's kingdom?*

In the ancient world, **the temple** (Latin: *templum*, a consecrated space) and its surrounding area served as God's house (the sanctuary) where gifts (sacrifices) were offered and God was worshipped. The Jerusalem Temple was also a market where sacrificial animals were sold and a bank where the state treasury was kept.

## REJECTING THE PROPHETIC WORD

2 Kgs 5:1-15ab / Lk 4:24-30

In today's Gospel, to those who listened to Jesus's words in the synagogue at first it seemed a good thing and they accepted and marveled at it. But when Jesus began to speak the Word of God they became furious and they wanted to kill him. Thus they passed from one side to the other, because God's Word is different from human words. But how should we receive the Word of God? It must be received as one receives Jesus, that is, with an open heart, with a humble heart. So read a passage from the Gospels every day, not just to learn something, but mostly to find Jesus, because Jesus is present in and speaks to us through scripture. Every time I read the Gospel, I find Jesus.

—Pope Francis

*How might I take more time today to read  
and pray with the Gospels?*

“If we want to be always in God’s company, we must pray and read regularly. When we pray, we talk to God; when we read, God talks to us. Reading the Bible trains the mind to understand and turns our attention from the follies of the world to the love of God.”

—St. Isidore of Seville

## FORGIVE, THEN FORGIVE AGAIN

Dn 3:25, 34-43 / Mt 18:21-35

Few people, thank God, have to deal with forgiving someone who has murdered a loved one, or a beloved child who commits suicide. But all of us must deal on a regular basis with thoughts about people we feel have hurt us, abandoned us, spoken badly about us, hurt our feelings, damaged our reputations, manipulated, provoked or just plain annoyed us. They can be parents, relatives, friends, bosses, employees, even strangers. But it is not these people we need to forgive so much as our thoughts about them, the angry, unforgiving thoughts that gnaw at our consciousness, burn us, haunt us, won't let us go, because we can't let them go. I have learned that radical forgiveness, asked for and given, seventy times seven times, is the only way out of that prison.

—Antoinette Bosco  
*Radical Forgiveness*

*When has forgiveness most changed  
who I am and the way I live?*

**Confession** is a shorthand way of describing the sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation because the ritual requires that one tell or “confess” one’s sins to a priest who is authorized to forgive sins in the name of Jesus and the Church.

## PROUD TO BE HUMBLE

Dt 4:1, 5-9 / Mt 5:17-19

Years ago, someone told me that humility is central to the spiritual life. That made sense to me: I was proud to think of myself as humble! But this person did not tell me that the path to humility, for some of us at least, goes through humiliation, where we are brought low, rendered powerless, stripped of pretenses and defenses, and left feeling fraudulent, empty, and useless—a humiliation that allows us to regrow our lives from the ground up, from the humus of common ground. The spiritual journey is full of paradoxes. One of them is that the humiliation that brings us down—down to ground on which it is safe to stand and to fall—eventually takes us to a firmer and fuller sense of self.

—Parker J. Palmer

*Let Your Life Speak*

*How have my humiliations drawn me  
closer to the heart of Jesus?*

“O Loving Father, may we love one another as you love each one of us, more and more each day, and forgive each other’s faults as you forgive our sins. Help us to take whatever you give and give whatever you take with a big smile. Amen.”

—St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta



## STIFF-NECKED PEOPLE

Jer 7:23-28 / Lk 11:14-23

The prophet Jeremiah complains that God's people "stiffened their necks." Admonitions of stiff-necked people appear repeatedly in scripture, a trait marked by arrogance or obstinance. Practically speaking, a stiff neck confines one's range of vision to looking straight ahead. The poor, oppressed and disadvantaged, however, are typically found off to the side, having been marginalized, or to the rear, having been left behind. The gospel calls us to develop spiritual peripheral vision and pastoral hindsight. A stiff-necked disciple may not have seen Zacchaeus in the tree, the woman at the well, or the good thief on the cross. Popular wisdom bids us to "keep our eye on the prize," but the prize most valued by our Lord is often found by compassionately looking around.

—Jerry Welte

*How can I widen my vision to see the forgotten,  
displaced and abandoned?*

**Driving out evil spirits** was not something that Jesus claimed to do on his own power but only through a greater power given by God. He explains that the real meaning of his exorcisms is related to the cosmic struggle of God against the powers of evil affecting our world.

## THE CHALLENGE OF LOVE

Hos 14:2-10 / Mk 12:28-34

At the heart of parenting is denying self. A friend once said that she saw parenting as a journey in dying to self, a way in which she could enter Christ's journey. Family is where I learn the core of Jesus' words: "Take up your cross and follow me." "Find yourself by losing yourself," "Love God, love your neighbor...summing up the law." But so often it is easier to love your neighbor than it is to love your own family. We at least don't have to live with our neighbor, rub shoulders and feet day after day. Yet what closer neighbor can there be than those we live with: roommate, sister, brother, spouse, child, partner, parent. As family, we are beloved neighbors, learning love in the midst of covenant-dying to self.

—Celeste Snowber Schroeder

*In the Womb of God: Creative Nurturing for the Soul*

*Which family members most challenge  
my loving behavior at this time?*

For biblical people, **love** was not so much the romantic personal attachment we envision today but a fierce attachment to one's group, especially the family. This attitude was matched by actions. Love presumed intense loyalty and expected one to do good for those in one's group.

## BLESSED ARE THE HUMBLE

Hos 6:1-6 / Lk 18:9-14

In the family, humility helps us to appreciate each other and realize that we depend on and contribute to one another. Humility means we value each other for our existence, not for our accomplishments. We don't have to be perfect to be loved. When our families model this, they will be living out the best sort of domestic church, where all are welcomed, accepted, loved, and forgiven. Parents should be the models of servant leadership and train their children to work for the good of the family, not just of themselves. When those children grow up, parents need to step back and trust their now adult children to handle their lives. Humility makes the space for love to flourish in the family.

—Christine M. Fletcher

*24/7 Christian: The Secular Vocation of the Laity*

*How might I show greater appreciation  
for those in my household today?*

The Romans delegated the collection of import-export taxes, customs fees, and tolls for using roads, markets, and harbors to Jewish nationals. So **tax collectors** were considered traitors to their nation as well as crooks. These men and their families were barred from the synagogues and forbidden to give testimony in court.

## LOVE MEANS GIVING

2 Chr 36:14-16, 19-23 / Eph 2:4-10 / Jn 3:14-21

Love is a precious word which we ought to use precisely and with meaning, never carelessly or cheaply. God uses the word wisely and well, never in a shallow sense, never lightly, as we might when we say we “love” a good steak. One characteristic of true love is generosity, a generosity which knows no limit. Love and giving, when understood properly, are synonymous. How much does God love us? The answer is in today’s Gospel: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.” God had no gift to give more precious than his only Son. God’s gift is both immeasurably precious and eminently practical. The Gospel goes on to say that God gave his only Son that whoever believes in him may not die but may have eternal life.

—Charles E. Miller, CM  
*Opening the Treasures*

*How am I being called to give  
more generously because of my love?*

Today is called **Laetare Sunday**, from the Latin word for *rejoice*, which is the first word of the Entrance Antiphon of the Mass, “Rejoice, Jerusalem” (Is 66:10). It reminds us that the rigors of lent are now over half completed and encourages our anticipation for Easter.

## GOD IS DOING SOMETHING NEW

Is 65:17-21 / Jn 4:43-54

We are naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay. We want to skip the intermediate stages, impatient of being on the way to something new and unknown. But all progress is made by passing through some stages of instability—which may take a very long time. Your ideas mature gradually—let them grow and shape themselves, without undue haste. Don't try to force them, as though you could be today what time (i.e., grace and circumstances acting on your own good will) will make of you tomorrow. Only God could say what this new spirit gradually forming within you will be. Give our Lord the benefit of believing that his hand is leading you, and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete.

—Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ  
*in Praying with the Jesuits*

*How might I overcome my impatience  
to grow spiritually in my life now?*

Although we use the word miracles, the biblical writers used the terms “deeds of power,” “**signs**” and “**wonders**” to describe Jesus’ actions (cures, exorcisms, resuscitations and nature wonders) that reorder our world from the domination of Satan and evil powers to the kingdom governance of God.

## GOD'S HEALING EMBRACE

Ez 47:1-9, 12 / Jn 5:1-16

O Lord Jesus Christ, you who forgave the sins of the paralytic before you let him walk again, make me more aware of your forgiving presence in my life and less concerned about performing well in the eyes of my world. Let me recognize you in the depth of my heart where you dwell and heal me. Let me experience you in that center of my being from which you want to teach and guide me. Let me know you as my loving brother who holds nothing—not even my worst sins—against me, but who wants to touch me in a gentle embrace. Keep calling me into the light, where I can see not only my sins but your gracious face as well. Be with me every hour of my days.

—Henri J. M. Nouwen  
*A Cry for Mercy*

*For what do I most want  
God's loving forgiveness today?*

In ancient times, a **temple** (Latin, a consecrated space) was the place where heaven and earth met, thus making it holy because of God's presence. So, as for Ezekiel, it was the place from which earth's life-giving power, fertility and abundance (salvation) spreads out in all four directions.

## GOD DOESN'T FORGET US

Is 49:8-15 / Jn 5:17-30

The prophet Isaiah presents it as the image of maternal love full of tenderness. How beautiful is this! God does not forget us, not one of us! Everyone by name and surname. He loves us and doesn't forget. What a beautiful thought. However, thinking of the many people who live in precarious conditions, or even in a poverty offensive to their dignity, these words could seem abstract, if not illusory. But actually they are relevant, now more than ever! They remind us that you cannot serve two masters: God and wealth. As long as everyone seeks to accumulate for themselves, there will be no justice. Instead, by entrusting ourselves to God's providence, and seeking his kingdom together, no one will lack the necessary means to live with dignity.

—Pope Francis

*How can I reach out better to those  
who are most forgotten in my neighborhood?*

*Amen* is a Hebrew word used to affirm the truth of what is said. In John's Gospel, Jesus uses the curious double "**Amen, amen**" to stress the importance of what he is about to say and urge his audience to pay close attention to his message.

## MY GOLDEN CALF

Ex 32:7-14 / Jn 5:31-47

The first reading today lends itself to an ideal Lenten question: what is the golden calf in your life right now? In the accelerated society in which we live, it is so easy to get caught up in the necessity of “making it” by controlling our own lives. As a result, we may lose sight of Jesus, who “testifies on our behalf” before God. The challenge is to recognize the golden calf. Some possibilities could be: prestige, money, proving your talent, or getting that best grade. All of these things can pull us away from God if we try to accomplish our goals on our own. So, today, seek out the mercy of God for inadvertently straying away.

—Dorothy Jonaitis

*What “golden calf” now might be  
drawing me away from Jesus?*

“O Lord, my God, I am glad you have come to me because in your loving kindness you desire to dwell in me. You ask me to open the door of my soul so that you may enter into it with your loving kindness and dispel the darkness of my mind.”

—St. John Chrysostom



## YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU ALREADY HAVE

Wis 2:1a, 12-22 / Jn 7:1-2, 10, 25-30

There's nothing more beautiful than the uniqueness that God has created in us. It's just buried like a diamond underneath a pile of garbage. That is not God's fault, but the misuse of our freedom and all the negative forces in the environment and our social milieu. But all the work is in letting go of those influences and not reinforcing them. You don't have to create the beauty—you've got it. You don't have to create the freedom—you've got it. You don't have to create God's image in you—you have it. You don't have to win over God's love—you have more than you know what to do with. You don't have to become more beautiful—because nothing could be more beautiful than your own, particular uniqueness.

—Thomas Keating

*Heartfulness: Transformation in Christ*

*How might I better recognize  
and claim my God-given uniqueness?*

The **Jewish feast of Tabernacles** (Hebrew *sukot*, tent) also called the feast of Ingathering or Booths was a major seven day spring harvest festival at the beginning of their new year. People lived in the fields in temporary dwellings (tents) commemorating the exodus and gift of the land.

## A PRAYER WHEN I FEEL REJECTED

Jer 11:18-20 / Jn 7:40-53

Loving God, you made me who I am. I praise you and I love you, for I am wonderfully made, in your own image. But when people make fun of me, I feel hurt and embarrassed and even ashamed. So please, God, help me remember my own goodness, which lies in you. Help me remember my dignity, which you gave me when I was conceived. Help me remember that I can live a life of love, because you created my heart. Be with me when people make me feel “less than,” and help me to respond the way you would want me to, with a love that respects the other, but also respects me. Help me find friends who love me for who I am. Help me, most of all, to be a loving person.

—James Martin, SJ  
*Building a Bridge*

*How might I try harder to appreciate  
and accept the uniqueness of others?*

“O Christ, come and waken us from the grayness of our apathy and renew in us your gift of hope. Bring me into your presence, that I may listen to your voice, which is the source of all wisdom, and see your face forever.”

—St. Bede the Venerable

## UNLESS THE GRAIN OF WHEAT DIES...

Jer 31:31-34 / Heb 5:7-9 / Jn 12:20-33

For many of us it is scary to think of surrendering ourselves into the arms of God. “What might happen?” is the secret question that pummels our thoughts. We do not yet fully believe that God is always—yes, *always*—desiring our good and our happiness. We do not yet fully realize that God will be with us as a guiding power to love and to sustain us through whatever hardships and heartaches life may bring. To surrender is to live with a mind and heart that is open to the future and to trust that all shall be well. When we let go and when we surrender, we are most surely on the pathway to healing.

—Joyce Rupp, OSM  
*Praying Our Goodbyes*

*What fears keep me from giving myself  
totally to God and God's service today?*

In the biblical world, a **covenant** was a formal agreement between two persons or parties binding the parties in the mutual and reciprocal obligations of their relationship. These relationships were voluntary and freely entered into with open-ended obligations and were not to be confused with the specific obligations of legal contracts.

## “SIN NO MORE!”

Dn 13:1-9, 15-17, 19-30, 33-62 / Jn 8:1-11

In today's Gospel, Jesus is the only one without fault, the only one who could throw a stone at the adulteress. He does not do so but sends her on her way saying “sin no more.” He opens a new path to her, created by mercy, like he also does for us. When he forgives us, he always opens a new path on which to go forward. In this Lenten season, we are called to recognize ourselves as sinners and to ask God for forgiveness, which reconciles us, gives us peace and lets us start again, renewed. Every true conversion is oriented toward a new future, a new life free from sin. Let us not be afraid to ask Jesus for forgiveness because he opens the door to this new life for us.

—Pope Francis

*What new doors seem to be opening  
for me because of Jesus' forgiveness?*

“O Lord, by whose cross all enmity is ended, break down the walls that separate us, tear down the fences of indifference and hatred, forgive us the sins that divide us, free us from pride and self-seeking, overcome our prejudices and fears, give us courage to open ourselves to others.

—World Council of Churches Assembly, 1983

## BECOMING EMPTY TO BE FILLED

2 Sm 7:4-5a, 12-14a, 16 / Rom 4:13, 16-18, 22

Mt 1:16, 18-21, 24a or Lk 2:41-51a

There are times in our lives when we are led deeply into the experience of inner poverty. You know that you have no prayer, no feeling of love or power to care, no words to speak when it is your duty to speak, nothing to give. Why does it happen? The obvious answer is because we have sinned. Certainly this is true. If not, the experience would not be one of genuine personal poverty, but would remain outside our real life with God, something that did not bite deeply. God leads us into it because God wants to open us wider to the reality of divine salvation. Joseph was told, “You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (Mt 1:21). Until you know God as Jesus for you, you scarcely know God at all.

—Maria Boulding  
*The Coming of God*

*When have I felt most empty spiritually  
and in need of God's presence? Why?*

In the biblical world, **betrothal** was the formal process between families before marriage that legally bound the partners to be wed. Thus it could only be dissolved by a bill of divorce. During this time, the woman does not live with the man nor have sexual relations with him.

## THE TRUTH SHALL SET YOU FREE

Dn 3:14-20, 91-92, 95 / Jn 8:31-42

Today there are great battles waging between groups claiming to have unique access to “truth.” Political, religious, and philosophical ideologies are engaged in struggles for people’s hearts, influence and allegiance. How can we know the truth? I have learned that human certainty about knowledge or experience (which is truth from our human point of view) should be congruent with personal experience of God and what God desires for the world. The origin of truth is God. Truth must bring forth life and liberation. My commitment is to recognize truth wherever I find it and to embody truth in my words and actions. This is impossible unless I rely on my experience of God in the silence of personal prayer and the wisdom of my faith community’s experience of God.

—David Keller

*Come and See: The Transformation of Personal Prayer*

*How might I commit myself to be truthful  
in my thoughts and words?*

“Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth—in a word, to know God’s self—so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves.”

—Pope St. John Paul II

## No “YES, BUTS”

Gn 17:3-9 / Jn 8:51-59

Abraham, our father in faith, is not the only one for whom God did staggering things. He is also an invitation to believe and trust and risk and relinquish. He is the one who was fully convinced that God was able to do what God had promised (Rom 4:21). Abraham was, in an awesome moment of faith, prepared to receive God’s newness that was against all probability, but which set his life utterly new. Abraham might have said “Yes, but.” He might have, if he were embarrassed and sophisticated. Such faith, however, is not enacted by those who are embarrassed. Faith is enacted by those who trust God who imagines well beyond our resistant presuppositions. Such imagination requires a dying and yields utterly new life.

—Walter Brueggemann  
*The Collected Sermons*

*What “Yes, buts” have most weakened  
my faith in God’s newness?*

The “**I AM**” (put in capital letters in the translation) is God’s sacred personal name (4 consonant letters YHWH, pronounced *Yahweh* in English, see Exodus 3:14) which was closely related to the verb “I am.” LORD in small capital letters is now used in most Bible translations to indicate this personal divine name.

## BLASPHEMY!

Jer 20:10-13 / Jn 10:31-42

It takes great presence of mind to calmly question people who are frenziedly choosing rocks to stone you. But Jesus somehow put *them* on trial: “For which of the ways I have helped you are you doing this?” They replied: “Oh, it’s not for that, but for pretending to be like God!” What they didn’t admit was that everyone pretends to be like God, that is, to live up to their chosen ideals or hopes. The problem was that the way Jesus did it destroyed the security they preserved by confining God to the temple and works of religion rather than the limitless works of the Father. Jesus offered them an image of God that was so big and unruly that they were afraid. He would not tame God.

—Mary M. McGlone, CSJ

*Am I willing to let the Gospel challenge  
my concepts of who God is and what God does?*

In the biblical world, to **blaspheme** meant to dishonor God or something holy by speech, for example by calling God abusive names or telling lies (slander) or, as in today’s Gospel reading, by claiming for oneself the honor and status due to God alone. It was punishable by stoning (Lv 24:16).



## WALKING IN THE NEWNESS OF LIFE

Ez 37:21-28 / Jn 11:45-56

Christian faith in the death and resurrection is not simply faith in the promise of eternal life, but faith in the victory over death achieved in Jesus. Through baptism Christians participate already in this victory: “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in the newness of life” (Rom 6:4). The Christian is to be a witness in mission of the victory over death and the transforming power of the resurrection. The Christian walks in confidence that evil is not the Lord of life and that even death for the sake of others cannot separate a person from the love of God (Rom 8:28-39).

—John R. Donahue, SJ  
*What Does the Lord Require?*

*How has the transforming power of the resurrection most changed my life during this Lent?*

“Always give good heed to the Word of God, whether you hear or read it in private, or hearken to it when publicly preached. Listen with attention and reverence, seek to profit by it, and do not let the precious words fall unheeded but receive them into your heart.”

—St. Francis de Sales

## BROKEN OPEN TO INCLUDE OTHERS

Mk 11:1-10 or Jn 12:12-16 / Is 50:4-7 / Phil 2:6-11 / Mk 14:1—15:47

Each Gospel sought the meaning of Jesus' suffering and death, not only for Jesus' life but for all human life. For Mark, the death of Jesus is the climax of a life for others. In his passage from death to life, Jesus is proclaimed as the suffering yet triumphant son of man. His death reveals God's power at work in weakness. The way of the disciple must be the way of the cross. The church is, through the experience of the cross, to be a non-triumphant, reconciled church that must be open to outsiders. The church is called to be a living "temple," open to all people and suffused with the spirit of the crucified Christ. The passion reveals that the redemptive mission of the church is world-wide and costly.

—Donald Senior, CP

*The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark*

*How might I extend myself more  
to include others into my life today?*

**Blessed palms** are sacramentals (material objects, things or actions set apart or blessed) and thus are to be treated with reverence. They are blessed and distributed today in commemoration of the triumphant entrance of Christ into Jerusalem. Some of these are burned to make the ashes for Ash Wednesday.

## SHOWING OUR LOVE

Is 42:1-7 / Jn 12:1-11

One priest had his catechism class write us questions as to our work. The majority of them asked the same question: “How can you see Christ in people?” And we only say: It is an act of faith, constantly repeated. It is an act of love, resulting from an act of faith. It is an act of hope, that we can awaken these same acts in their hearts, too, with the help of God, and the Works of Mercy. The mystery of the poor is this: that they are Jesus, and what you do for them you do for him. It is the only way we have of knowing and believing in our love. The mystery of poverty is that by sharing in it, making ourselves poor in giving to others, we increase our knowledge of and belief in love.

—Dorothy Day  
*On Pilgrimage*

*How might my behavior most need to change  
because of Jesus’ presence in others?*

In 4 “Servant Songs” (Is 42:1-4, 49:1-7, 50:4-11, 52:13–53:12), the prophet Isaiah describes **God’s servant** who is called to be a misunderstood and ill-treated prophet to a sin-weary people. These songs helped Israel to interpret the suffering and humiliation of their exile and early Christians to understand Jesus’ suffering.

## COMMUNION AND LIBERATION

Is 49:1-6 / Jn 13:21-33, 36-38

Before leaving his disciples, Jesus gives them a “new commandment:” “Love one another; even as I have loved you.” His love for the world finds its highest expression in the gift of his life for mankind, which manifests the Father’s love for the world (Jn 3:16). The kingdom’s nature is one of communion among all human beings with one another and with God. The kingdom is the concern of everyone: individuals, society and the world. Working for the kingdom means acknowledging and promoting God’s activity, which is present in human history and transforms it. Building the kingdom means working for liberation from evil in all its forms. The kingdom of God is the realization of God’s plan of salvation in all its fullness.

—Pope John Paul II

*The Mission of Christ Our Redeemer (Redemptoris Missio, 1990)*

*How might I work to end evil in some small way today and so hasten God’s kingdom?*

“Never let the thought of Jesus leave your mind but meditate constantly on the mysteries of the cross and the anguish of his mother as she stood beneath the cross.” —St. Clare of Assisi

## BETRAYED BY HIS OWN

Is 50:4-9a / Mt 26:14-25

Today, midway through Holy Week, the liturgy presents us with a regrettable episode: the account of the betrayal of Judas, who goes to the leaders of the Sanhedrin to bargain for and deliver his master to them. At that moment, a price was set on Jesus. This tragic act marks the beginning of Christ's passion, which he chooses with absolute freedom. He says clearly: "No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord" (Jn 10:18). And thus by this betrayal Jesus' journey of humiliation and despoliation begins. As though he were an article for sale: this one costs 30 pieces of silver. Once he has taken the path of humiliation and self-abandonment, Jesus travels along it to the very end.

—Pope Francis

*How have I most betrayed Jesus in my actions and words?*

The most ancient and always the central event of the liturgical year is the Easter **Triduum** (Latin, three days) celebrating the passion, death and resurrection of Christ. These sacred three days (Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday) are a liturgical season in themselves and not strictly part of Lent.

## JESUS PRESENT IN POWER

Ex 12:1-8, 11-14 / 1 Cor 11:23-26 / Jn 13:1-15

In the mystery of the Eucharist, in the sacrament of the bread of life, Christ truly becomes everything to everybody. Everyone can see him, touch him, take him, eat him, contemplate him, locate him, and finally, if one wishes, spend as much time with him as love urges one to. Under the sign of bread he leaves us completely free. He acts only on our faith, of which it is the great mystery. He stimulates our hope, of which he is the “memorial.” He revives our charity, of which he is the nourishment and the model. Jesus, who shared completely our human life even to the point of suffering and death, went a step further: he gave us the gift of his very self in the Eucharist.

—Carlo Carretto  
*The God Who Comes*

*How might I renew my thanks today  
for Jesus' gift of himself in the eucharist?*

**Footwashing** was not part of the Passover ritual, but a common sign of hospitality upon entering a house. This was usually the task of a servant. So, when Jesus acts as a servant instead of the master that he is, what would normally be considered humiliating becomes a sign of his love.

## GAZING UPON THE CRUCIFIED

Is 52:13–53:12 / Heb 4:14-16; 5:7-9 / Jn 18:1–19:42

Gazing at the crucified one helps us see the lie in all its tragedy. Jesus the innocent one was condemned by the highest authorities of both “church and state” (Rome and Judea). This should make us suspicious of power. But those in power do not want us to see this, and that’s why religion has concentrated so much on the private sins of the flesh. More often we admire and accept public sins in our public figures: pride, ambition, greed, gluttony, false witness, sanctioned killing, vanity, etc. This is what Jesus exposed and defeated on the cross. He did not come to change God’s mind about us but to change our minds about God, about ourselves, and about where goodness and evil really lie.

—Richard Rohr  
*The Universal Christ*

*How have I been most changed this Lent about where good and evil are found? With what results?*

**Crucifixion** was the most painful torture the ancient world had devised. When one’s arms and legs were fixed to a cross by tying with rope or nailing, the victim began a slow process of asphyxiation, which could last days or be hastened by breaking the victim’s legs (Jn 19:31-32).

## JESUS IS OUR HOPE

**Easter Vigil:** Gn 1:1—2:2 / Gn 22:1-18 / Ex 14:15—15:1

Is 54:5-14 / Is 55:1-11 / Bar 3:9-15, 32—4:4

Ez 36:16-17a, 18-28 / Rom 6:3-11 / Mk 16:1-7

**Easter Sunday:** Acts 10:34a, 37-43 / Col 3:1-4 or 1 Cor 5:6b-8

Jn 20:1-9 or Mk 16:1-7

Today we acquire a new and living hope that comes from God. It is not mere optimism. It is not a pat on the back or an empty word of encouragement, uttered with an empty smile. Jesus' hope is different. He plants in our hearts the conviction that God is able to make everything work unto good, because even from the grave he brings life. The grave is the place where no one who enters ever leaves. But Jesus emerged for us; he rose for us, to bring life where there was death, to begin a new story in the very place where a stone had been placed. God is greater. Darkness and death do not have the last word. Be strong, for with God nothing is lost!

—Pope Francis

*When have I most experienced God  
working everything unto good in my life?*

Jesus' **resurrection** was the first great sign (the second was the gift of the Holy Spirit) indicating that the world's final transformation had begun. Though many Jews believed in a general resurrection at the end of time, an individual's resurrection before that end time was a complete surprise.