

GROWING IN GOD'S LOVE



DAILY REFLECTIONS
ON THE 2025 LENTEN READINGS FOR MASS

INTRODUCTION

Lent is a grace-filled time when we draw nearer to God through our daily encounter with God's Word which unleashes the presence of the one who draws near to speak that Word to our minds and hearts. We sometimes forget that the first Christians always heard the Gospel story read aloud to them since very few of them could read. For them, the Word of God was not inert and lifeless ink scratches on a page, but the living voice of God speaking to them, sharing the hidden depths of God's own self and inviting them to take this word into their minds and hearts and let it change them (Heb 4:12-13). So be confident that as you work on God's Word, God's Word works on you! And if you wish to have similar reflections for each day of the year consider the quarterly editions of *Words of Grace: Daily Reflections & Prayers for Catholics* available from AllSaintsPress.com.

— Steve Mueller, Editor

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Jesus Draws Near to Us Now

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

Today too, Jesus lives and walks along the paths of ordinary life to draw near to everyone, beginning with the least, and to heal us of our infirmities and illnesses. I invite you to listen to and follow Jesus, and to allow yourselves to be transformed interiorly by his words, which “are spirit and life” (Jn 6:62). Let us dispose our hearts by listening, receiving and living out the word, and thus bearing fruit. The more we unite ourselves to Jesus through prayer, sacred scripture, the eucharist, the sacraments celebrated and lived in the Church and in fraternity, the more there will grow in us the joy of cooperating with God in the service of the kingdom of mercy and truth, of justice and peace.

—Pope Francis

Message for World Vocation Day (May 11, 2014)

*When and where have I most experienced
Jesus' presence in my life?*

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.

OUR DESTINY IS TO BE UNITED WITH CHRIST

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

Our destiny is to be one in Christ, and in order to love others as ourselves, we must first love ourselves. But in order to love ourselves we must find something in ourselves to love. This is impossible unless we find, both in ourselves and in others, the likeness of Christ. Once again, in order to find Christ we must give up our own limited idea of Christ. He is not what we think He is. He is not, and cannot be, merely our own idealized image of ourselves. The Christ we find in ourselves is not identified with what we vainly seek to admire and idolize in ourselves.

—Thomas Merton
The Monastic Journey

*What limited or idealized idea of Christ might
I need to give up to find the real Christ?*

Fasting is partaking of only one full meal and two smaller meals that do not equal the main meal. **Abstinence** is the voluntary self-denial of meat or of foods prepared with meat on those days prescribed by the Church as penitential (Ash Wednesday, all Fridays of Lent, and Good Friday).

RADICAL CHANGES NEEDED

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

Metanoia is the process by which you enter the kingdom. Jesus asks for a deep shift in worldview. He asks for such a profound change that a sincere, thoughtful man like Nicodemus can hardly make sense of it. Nothing is more challenging. On the other hand, once this change takes place, nothing could be more vitalizing. Truly, it's as if you are born a second time. Your eyes open to a different world. If you don't go through this deep change of heart and mind, you aren't in the kingdom. It's as simple as that. If you don't escape from default reality and enter a new level of existence then you are outside the kingdom. You have missed the central theme of the Gospels.

—Thomas Moore
Writing in the Sand

*What changes do I most need to make
this Lent to become a better Christian?*

“We can only approach the Kingdom of Christ by *metanoia*. This is a profound change of the whole person by which one begins to consider, judge and arrange one's life according to the holiness and love of God, made manifest in God's Son.”

—*The Catholic Rite of Penance*

CALLING US TO CONVERSION

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

The prophet uses every resource at his or her disposal. Weeping, raging, crying out, criticism, blessings and curses, storytelling, singing, dramas acted out, possessions and even cities destroyed, food eaten or left to rot, ingenious set-ups and insults—all serve only one purpose: the conversion of heart and the doing of restitution to rebalance and heal the world again. However prophets may prophesy, their integrity is shown by how they give up their very lives as testimony and witness as they side with the forgotten and the lost ones and loudly proclaim that God, who is aware of their pain and feels their suffering as God's own, will not allow that pain and suffering to continue. God is not indifferent but rather draws near to those who know pain.

—Megan McKenna
Prophets: Words of Fire

*What might I do this Lent to let God
draw near to heal my pain and that of others?*

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.

LOOKING BEHIND THE MASK

Dt 26:4-10 | Rom 10:8-13 | Lk 4:1-13

We grow up in a world in which the devil's ways of "doing good" are lavishly praised and practiced. Before we took up with Jesus, these ways seemed to work well enough, so well that we were only transiently aware that there even was a devil. But now we discern illusion behind the mask of goodness. We discern lies woven into the fine rhetoric of the pursuit of happiness. We discern incongruities between pretense and performance. We discern a disorienting extravagance in a promise that temporarily blind us to the details involved in our dailiness. It is a temptation, as all temptation is, to embrace illusion, to believe a lie. Time to become aware of the immense but hidden abyss between the way of Jesus and the ways of the devil.

—Eugene H. Petersen
The Jesus Way

*How has my behavior most changed
when I discovered evil masking itself as good?*

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.

GOD SUFFERS WITH US

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

God is not indifferent to the pain of the victims of history. Out of love and solidarity (Jn 3:16), God becomes poor, is condemned, crucified and murdered. God has taken on a reality that objectively contradicts God. Why does God do so? Because God does not wish some human beings to impoverish and crucify other human beings. Thus are we shown that God's preferred mediation is the concrete, real-life suffering of the oppressed. To draw near to God is to draw near the oppressed (Mt 25), and vice versa. To say that God took up the cross shows how much God loves. God loves sufferers so much that he suffers and dies along with them.

—Leonardo Boff

Passion of Christ, Passion of the World

What response can I make today to Christ's love for me?

Holiness describes the unique quality that makes God to be divine and thus wholly other or separate from all created realities. Thus unlike other descriptions of God there is no human counterpart to holiness. We only know what it is not, and must wait on God's appearance in our world to experience it.

FORGIVE AS YOU HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN

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

Among the most powerful of human experiences is to give or to receive forgiveness. I am told that two-thirds of the teaching of Jesus is directly or indirectly about this mystery of forgiveness: God's breaking of God's own rules. That's not surprising, because forgiveness is probably the only human action that reveals three goodnesses simultaneously! When we forgive, we choose the goodness of others over their faults, we experience God's goodness flowing through ourselves, and we also experience our own goodness in a way that surprises us. That is an awesome coming together of power, both human and divine. Let's ask for the grace to let go of those grudges and hurts to which we cling. How else will we ever be free?

—Richard Rohr

The Wisdom Pattern: Order, Disorder, Reorder

*How have I responded to God's repeated
forgiveness in my life?*

"If you have anything against anyone, forgive it. You come here to receive the forgiveness of sins, and you, too, must forgive one who has sinned against you. Or how will you say to the Lord, 'forgive me my many sins,' if you have not forgiven your fellow-servant's little sins."

—St. Cyril of Jerusalem

GOD-CENTERED FASTING

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

Physical fasting, essential as it is, is not only meaningless, it is truly dangerous if it is disconnected from the spiritual effort—from prayer and concentration on God. The entire Lenten worship is a constant reminder of the difficulties, the obstacles and the temptations that await those who think that they may depend on their willpower and not on God. It is for this reason that we need first of all a spiritual preparation for the effort of fasting. It consists in asking God for help and so in making our fast God-centered. We should fast for God's sake. We must rediscover our body as the temple of God's presence. We must recover a religious respect for the body, for food, for the very rhythm of life.

—Alexander Schmemmann

Great Lent

*How might I make my Lenten fasting
a more deeply spiritual experience?*

Nineveh was a large Assyrian city located on the eastern bank of the Tigris River across from the modern city of Mosul in Iraq. From the 11th century on it was the royal residence of the Assyrian kings until its destruction in 612 BC by the conquering Babylonians.

THE COURAGE TO ASK

Est C:12, 14-16, 23-25 | Mt 7:7-12

Cowardice keeps us “double-minded”—hesitating between the world and God. In this hesitation, there is not true faith—faith remains an opinion. This hesitation is the death of hope. We never let go of those visible supports which, we well know, must one day surely fail us. And this hesitation makes true prayer impossible—it never quite dares to ask for anything, or if it asks, it is so uncertain of being heard that in the very act of asking it surreptitiously seeks by human prudence, to construct a make-shift answer. What is the use of praying if at the very moment of prayer, we have so little confidence in God that we are busy planning our own kind of answer to our prayer?

—Thomas Merton
Thoughts in Solitude

*What must I most let go of to let God's Spirit
work in and through me?*

“If we look forward to receiving God’s mercy, we can never fail to do good so long as we have the strength. For if we share with the poor, out of love for God, whatever God has given us, we shall receive according to God’s promise a hundredfold.”

—St. John of God

GROWING IN LOVE

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

Love of neighbor is a fundamental attitude for Jesus and our relationship with God cannot be honest if we are not willing to make peace with our neighbor (v. 23-24). We must reconcile with our neighbor before showing our devotion to the Lord in prayer. Jesus does not give importance simply to disciplinary compliance and exterior conduct. He goes to the Law's roots focusing on the intention and the human heart, from which our good and bad actions originate. To obtain good and honest conduct, legal rules are not enough. We need a deep motivation, an expression of a hidden wisdom, God's wisdom, which can be received through the Holy Spirit. Through faith in Christ, we can open ourselves to the Spirit's action which enables us to experience divine love.

—Pope Francis

*With whom do I most need to be reconciled
in order to pray better?*

Located west and south of Jerusalem, **Gehenna** (Hebrew, valley of Hinnom) had been used for idolatrous human sacrifices and so incurred God's wrath. Jeremiah cursed it and called it a place of death and destruction. It became a synonym for the place of God's punishment of the wicked after death—hell.

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?

The idea of God as **"perfect"** does not appear in the Old Testament and in any case is rather abstract. The connection might be to God's holiness, which has no counterpart in our earthly experience. The word for "perfect" refers to the wholeness of God who cares for all people.

THE VOICE FROM HEAVEN

Gn 15:5-12, 17-18 | Phil 3:17—4:1 | Lk 9:28b-36

Discerning the future is not simply a process of weighing pros and cons and seeing how a choice might affect us financially, psychologically or professionally. It is also about recognizing that while the voices of culture, self-interest, politics and our professions may be good, they must also be put into perspective so they don't drown out the voice of God. God's voice is not often a booming one, but it can still be heard if we take steps to be attuned to it. When we have a sense of expectancy and openness, we may hear God's voice during quiet prayer, in the midst of an encounter or through the voice of a mentor. Such occurrences awaken us to look for clarity in ways that we could not have previously imagined.

—Robert J. Wicks
No Problem

*What most helps me to be attentive to God's
whispering voice in my prayer?*

A **covenant** is an agreement between two persons or parties identifying the mutual obligations for both parties in their relationship. In the biblical world, the general expectations of a reliable covenant partner were modeled on the customs guiding "patron/client" relationships between persons of unequal honor, status and wealth.

BE MERCIFUL AS GOD IS

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

When God was merciful, when God revealed Jesus Christ to us as our brother, when he won our hearts by his love, this was the beginning of our instruction in divine love. When God was merciful to us, we learned to be merciful with our brethren. When we received forgiveness instead of judgment, we, too, were made ready to forgive our brethren. What God did to us, we then owed to others. The more we received, the more we were able to give; and the more meager our brotherly love, the less were we living by God's mercy and love. Thus God himself taught us to meet one another as God has met us in Christ. "Welcome one another, then, as Christ welcomed you, for the glory of God" (Rom 15:7).

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer
Life Together

*To whom do I most need to extend
forgiveness or mercy today? Why?*

"Prayer is nothing else than union with God. When our heart is pure and united to God, we feel within ourselves a joy, a sweetness that inebriates, a light that dazzles us. It is a happiness that we cannot understand."

—St. John Vianney, the Curé of Ars

ONE SPIRIT, MANY GIFTS

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

Like a dry tree which puts forth shoots when watered, the soul bears the fruit of holiness when repentance has made it worthy of receiving the Holy Spirit. Although the Spirit never changes, the effects of the Spirit's action, by the will of God and in the name of Christ, are both many and marvelous. The Spirit makes one person a teacher of divine truth, inspires another to prophesy, gives another the power of casting out devils, enables another to interpret Scripture. The Spirit strengthens one person's self-control, shows another how to help the poor, teaches another to fast and lead a life of asceticism, makes another oblivious to the needs of the body, trains another for martyrdom. This action is different in different people, but the Spirit is always the same.

—St. Cyril of Jerusalem
Catechetical Lectures

*What new work has the Holy Spirit
been doing most in me this Lent?*

The **Gifts of the Holy Spirit** are supernatural habits that dispose a person to respond promptly to the inspiration of God's grace through the Holy Spirit, especially in the sacrament of confirmation. They are wisdom, understanding, counsel, knowledge, fortitude, piety and fear of the Lord.

TRUSTING MORE IN GOD

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

In today's Gospel, Joseph cannot explain to himself Mary's pregnancy. In that moment of doubt, even anguish, God approaches him through his messenger and Joseph is enlightened about the nature of this maternity. Thus, in facing this extraordinary event, which surely gave rise to many questions in his heart, Joseph trusts totally in God who has drawn near to him, and after God's invitation, does not repudiate his betrothed, but takes Mary as his wife. In accepting Mary, Joseph knowingly and lovingly receives Jesus who has been conceived in her. Joseph, a just and humble man, teaches us to always trust in God, who draws near to us. When God approaches us, we must entrust ourselves to God and allow ourselves to be guided by God with willing obedience.

—Pope Francis

*How might God be drawing near
and guiding me to something new this Lent?*

“Let us allow ourselves to be infected by St. Joseph's silence! We need it greatly, in a world that is often too noisy, that does not favor meditation or listening to the voice of God.”

—Pope Benedict XVI

THE RICH MAN'S NEGLECT

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

The rich man, in purple splendor, is not accused of being greedy or of carrying off another's property, or of committing adultery, or, in fact, of any wrongdoing. The only evil he is guilty of is pride. When you see a fellow human lying there outside at your gate, have you no compassion? If God's laws mean nothing to you, at least take pity on your own situation and be in fear, for perhaps you might become like him. Give what you waste to your own fellow human. I am not telling you to throw away your wealth. What you throw out, the crumbs from your table, offer as alms. Lazarus's name means "one who has been helped." He is not a helper but one who has been helped.

—St. Jerome

*Who most needs my help today
and what can I do for them?*

"What good is it if the eucharistic table is overloaded with golden chalices when your brother or sister is dying of hunger. Start by satisfying his hunger and then with what is left you may adorn the altar as well."

—St. John Chrysostom

CHANGING OUR PRIORITIES

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

Discernment reveals new priorities, directions, and gifts from God. We come to realize that what previously seemed so important for our lives loses its power over us. Our desire to be successful, well liked and influential becomes increasingly less important as we move closer to God's heart. To our surprise, we even may experience a strange inner freedom to follow a new call or direction as previous concerns move into the background of our consciousness. We begin to see the beauty of the small and hidden life that Jesus lived in Nazareth. Most rewarding of all is the discovery that as we pray more each day, God's will—that is, God's concrete ways of loving us and our world—gradually is made known to us.

—Henri J.M. Nouwen

Discernment

*What new directions does God now seem
to be calling me to follow in my life?*

The **Pharisees** were a lay group, not priests, characterized by their zeal for the Jewish law. In Jesus' time, they were influential among the ordinary people because they were living examples of what every Jew was called upon to do.

PARABLE OF THE TWO PRODIGALS

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

Jesus was a great storyteller. The parable that we hear in today's gospel touches us in many ways. In the story of the Prodigal Son, we see the mercy of God beautifully expressed. It's a powerful story of forgiveness. We call it the story of the Prodigal Son, but it's really the story of a prodigal father. It's the father who is the main character in this story. In his actions, we see God's tremendous love for us even when we stray. We're reminded of when we have been forgiven and how we are called to forgive. We're invited to accept forgiveness and enter into the loving, merciful arms of God who waits patiently for us and to reach out with forgiveness and love to others.

—Angeline Hubert

*Who in my life is waiting for me
to open my arms in welcome?*

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 extorted more than what they needed to pay the Romans and shepherds who would pasture their sheep on other people's land, thus stealing food for their sheep.

THE EXTRAORDINARY ORDINARY

Ex 3:1-8a, 13-15 | 1 Cor 10:1-6, 10-12 | Lk 13:1-9

Here is Moses, defined by his work and family affiliation, driving a flock of sheep into the wilderness. And suddenly it happens: from out of this stupor something uncanny appears to the shepherd's eye. The common has become spectacle, and he decides to turn from his everyday tasks and behold the wondrous visage—at first out of sheer curiosity. An unexpected manifestation takes shape out of the vastness, revealing something of the mystery that can transfigure the natural world and set it off as holy. Stopped in his tracks by this vision, Moses then hears a voice calling out of the depths. He is called by name. Transfixed, Moses is entirely the person called. His response of “Here I am” confesses to being just there, at that moment.

—Michael Fishbane
Sacred Attunement: A Jewish Theology

When has God drawn me closer through ordinary things or events? With what results?

“O my God, Trinity whom I adore, help me forget myself entirely that I may be established in you, still and peaceful, as though I were already in eternity. May nothing trouble my peace, or lead me away from you. May each minute draw me further into the depth of your mystery.”

—St. Elizabeth of the Trinity

READ TO GROW IN GOD'S LOVE

2 Kgs 5:1-15b | Lk 4:24-30

You should read not in order to acquire learning nor to indulge curiosity, but for the sole purpose of growing in divine love. To read for the sake of knowledge is not spiritual reading, but is, at the time of spiritual reading, a study unprofitable to the soul. It is still worse to read out of curiosity. What profit can be expected from such reading? All the time devoted to such reading is lost time. St. Gregory says that many read and read a great deal, but, because they have read only through curiosity, they finish reading as hungry as if they had not been reading. Sometimes it may happen that you draw more fruit from reading a single verse than from reading an entire page.

—St. Alphonsus Liguori
The True Spouse of Jesus Christ

*How is my daily spiritual reading
most helping me grow in God's love?*

The Israelites thought the sky was like a large inverted clear glass-type bowl with waters above it (so the sky is blue!) with doors God opened to allow rain and snow to fall. So it would take a divine power to **close up the sky** so no rain could fall.

MARY, MODEL OF PRAYER

Is 7:10-14; 8:10 | Heb 10:4-10 | Lk 1:26-38

Mary attunes herself to God's word and trusts that it is speaking truth to her. By participating in that dialogue with reality, she allows the truth which is spoken to become real. She does not hide from truth; she faces it. She does not run from truth; she embraces it. She sees the truth of what is, and in doing so, she lets it be. Mary is therefore the model of prayer for all Christians. Prayer is getting in touch with reality, letting it speak to us, and incarnating the word which comes to us. We let it happen; we don't make it happen. For saying "yes" to God in prayer does not just mean acknowledging that we heard it. It means changing our lives in accordance with that word.

—Richard Rohr & Joseph Martos
The Great Themes of Scripture: New Testament

*How has my Lenten prayer helped me face reality
and change my life?*

There are 3 named biblical angels. **Michael** is a warrior against evil (Rev 12:7-9) and protector of Israel (Dan 12:1). **Gabriel** is a messenger who announces the Messiah's coming (Dan 9) and the births of John the Baptist and Jesus (Lk 1). **Raphael** guards and protects Tobiah on his journey (Tob 5-12).

THE COMMANDMENTS ARE FOR COMMUNITY LIFE

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

The commandments are one of the earliest attempts to lay down rules and guidelines to sustain community. They were for the ancients, and are for us, the rules that, when honored, hold us together and when dishonored lead to discord and violence. The commandments guide us toward relationships built on trust rather than fear. Only through trust can there be love. Those who ignore the commandments diminish the possibility of love, the single force that keeps us connected, whole and saved. A life where the commandments are routinely dishonored becomes a life of solitude, anger, and remorse. The commandments do not protect us from evil but from committing evil. They lead us to love, the essence of life.

—Chris Hedges

Losing Moses on the Freeway

*Which commandment do I most need
to attend to in my life now? Why?*

In the Old Testament, **commandments** refers to the 10 basic “words” (Decalogue) that God speaks directly to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 20:1-17). Then the terrified people ask that in the future God not speak to them directly but only through Moses, whose indirect teachings are called **statutes and decrees**.

THE PERIL OF A HOUSE DIVIDED

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

Today's Gospel reminds us that "a house divided against itself cannot stand." This cautionary wisdom does not merely apply to families, communities, and nations, but also to individuals. Each of us is a house unto itself and at times we may find ourselves divided between our heads and hearts, wants and needs, self and others, or ideals and realities. We strive to do the right thing, but receive mixed messages from within and without. Even some teachings of Christ can sound contradictory when taken out of context. Prayer and discernment, dialogue and community, as well as reading and journaling are valuable spiritual tools that help us reconcile contradictions, expose pitfalls, differentiate integrity from duplicity, and distinguish selfishness from self-regard.

—Jerry Welte

*How can I reconcile my inner conflicts
to reveal and follow the way of Christ?*

In earlier biblical books like Job, the **satan** or accuser is a kind of Grand Inquisitor who tests human faith. After the Jewish exile, **Satan** was understood as an evil spirit, subordinate but hostile to God, struggling with God for domination of the earth, and tempting humans from following God's ways.

LOVING GOD AND NEIGHBOR

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

In today's Gospel, Jesus sums up in two sentences the entire Mosaic Law and the Prophets, that is, the duty of holiness and of prophetic mission in the world: to love God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself. Although these two commands are found in the Old Testament, what is original in Jesus' teaching is that he brings them together. They become a singular command. Jesus is saying that we cannot love God if we do not love others; God will not forgive us if we do not forgive them (Mt 6:14-15). In short, we shall be judged as we judge others. Anyone who sets limits toward loving one's neighbor raises a wall between oneself and the God whose love knows no limits.

—André Trocmé

Jesus & the Nonviolent Revolution

*What most needs my attention
in my loving God and loving others?*

In biblical times, only about 5% of the people could read, and 1% could write. Those who could write were called scribes (Latin, *scribere*, to write). The Jewish **scribes** were often biblical scholars (often called *Rabbi* or teacher) who were experts especially in interpreting the meaning of the Law (*Torah*).

LET US RETURN TO THE LORD

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

Mystics keep telling us that the goal of prayer and the goal of our hidden life is union with God. What does union with God mean? It is not a nice feeling we get in devout moments. Union with God means every bit of our human nature transfigured in Christ, woven up into his creative life and activity, absorbed into his redeeming purpose, heart, soul, mind and strength. And if men and women want to know what this means in terms of human nature, what it costs and what it becomes, there is only one way—contemplation of the life of Christ. Then we see that we grow in wisdom and stature not just for our own sakes—just to become spiritual—but that his teaching, healing, life-giving power may possess us and work through us.

—Evelyn Underhill
The Light of Christ

*What might bring me more into union with
God and let God work in and through me?*

“In your search for a closer union with God, you must allow yourself no rest, no slipping back. It is by the path of love that God draws near to us, and us to God. But where love is not found, God cannot dwell. If we possess love, we possess God, for ‘God is Love.’ (1 Jn 4:8)”

—St. Albert the Great

THE GIFT OF FREEDOM

Jos 5:9a, 10-12 | 2 Cor 5:17-21 | Lk 15:1-3, 11-32

Today's Gospel tells the parable of the merciful father and his two sons. This father is always ready to forgive and to hope against hope. Especially striking is the father's tolerance before the younger son's decision to leave home: he could have opposed it, knowing that he was still immature, a youth, or sought a lawyer not to give him his inheritance, as the father was still living. Instead, he allows the son to leave, although foreseeing the possible risks. God works with us like this. God allows us to be free, even to making mistakes, because in creating us, God has given us the great gift of freedom. It is for us to put it to good use. This gift of freedom that God gives us always amazes me!

—Pope Francis

*How might I better use and not abuse
the freedom God has given to me?*

Reconciliation is a common Christian image for the experience of salvation in which God overcomes the breakdown in our relationship caused by sin and makes the relationship right. Reconciliation presumes that an existing relationship has broken down, and describes the process by which it is restored or made right again.

I WANT TO BE THERE

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

Meditate for a minute on that new heaven and earth that God is creating. It's a joyful place, every day of the year. There are no memories of pandemics, or economic collapses, or probably even elections! Infant mortality is unheard of, and we feel sorry for people who die young, that is, at ninety-nine or so. Oh, how we need that vision. Oh, how we cling to the promise of healing, and renewal, and hope. Every age has needed it, which is, I suspect, why God gives it in such a beautiful, poetic way in Isaiah 65. When I think of what a new earth would look like, I remember with longing the clean oceans of my youth. I resolve once again to help bring that new creation back to life.

—Kathy McGovern

*What new creation am I helping
to re-birth in my life and relationships 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 6

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 BRINGS US TO LIFE

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

The time of emptiness is the preparation for the new influx of life, the new sweetness, which we cannot force. It will come when there is an empty heart and a receptive mind awaiting the inrush of Heaven's life. To be at rest means to accept God's plan of our nature and our limits with tranquility. This is in order that Christ may grow in us and that we may be made new in his way. We must accept this new spring when it comes. Gloomy Christians who repudiate joy and dwell exclusively on suffering cannot open their hearts in readiness for new life. They refuse to wait with open heart and mind while the life of the world to come already grows within, pointing to the flowering of everlasting joy that no one can take from us.

—Caryll Houselander
The Risen Christ

*When have I felt most enlivened
by God's life within me during this Lent?*

“You must change your life so that God out of mercy will pardon you. Be converted with a sincere heart. Then the peace of God will be with you always.”

—St. Francis of Paola

YOU SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES, BUT...

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

We grossly deceive ourselves in not allotting more time to the study of divine truths. It is not enough barely to believe them, and let our thoughts now and then glance upon them: that knowledge which shows us heaven, will not bring us to the possession of it, and will deserve punishments, not rewards, if it remain slight, weak, and superficial. By serious and frequent meditation it must be concocted, digested, and turned into the nourishment of our affections, before it can be powerful and operative enough to change them, and produce the necessary fruit in our lives. For this all the saints affected solitude and retreats from the noise and hurry of the world, as much as their circumstances allowed them. —St. Apollinaris

*What more can I do to understand
and live according to God's word?*

In the New Testament, the word **Scriptures** means the Jewish writings (our Old Testament), which could also be summarized using the three general categories of Jewish sacred texts: the Law (Hebrew *Torah*, instruction), the Prophets (*Nevi'im*) and the Writings (*Ketuvim*).

LET US CONDEMN HIM

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

God transforms all human suffering by identifying completely with the human predicament and standing in full solidarity with it from beginning to end. This is the real meaning of the crucifixion. The cross is not just a singular event. It's a statement from God that reality has a cruciform pattern. Jesus was killed in a collision of cross-purposes, conflicting interests, and half-truths, caught between the demands of an empire and the religious establishment of his day. The cross was the price Jesus paid for living in a "mixed" world, which is both human and divine, simultaneously broken and utterly whole. In so doing, Jesus demonstrated that reality is not meaningless and absurd, even if it isn't always perfectly logical or consistent.

—Richard Rohr
The Universal Christ

*Which of my sufferings do I most want
to unite with the suffering of Christ?*

Jesus attends the important seven day Jewish spring harvest festival celebrated at the beginning of their new year called the **feast of Tabernacles** (Latin, tent, Hebrew *sukot*), Ingathering or Booths. People lived in the fields in temporary dwellings (tents) commemorating the exodus and gift of the land.

DRAWING NEAR TO GOD WITHIN ME

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

Within my heart, within me, I am or should be constantly in God's presence. This is another way of saying that I live in a garden enclosed, where I walk and talk with God. It's as if I were sitting next to God in complete silence, although there are always many other people around. I go about God's business all day long, lifting humanity before God, with all its pain, sorrows and joys. I am forever immersed in the silence of God, forever listening to the word of God, forever repeating it to others in word and deed. Through this inner solitude, this immersion in the silence of God and this inner, total identification with humanity and with Christ, every Christian should be living in a state of contemplation.

—Catherine de Hueck Doherty
Poustinia

*How might I deepen my daily experience
of God's presence through my prayer?*

When Jeremiah calls Yahweh the **God of Hosts**, this has nothing to do with the little white wafers we receive at communion (Latin, *hostia*, a sacrificial victim). Instead, it identifies the angelic armies (Latin, *hostis*, a stranger or enemy, hence *hostile* soldiers) who carry out whatever God commands.

GOD OFFERS A NEW BEGINNING

Is 43:16-21 | Phil 3:8-14 | Jn 8:1-11

It is so human to hold onto guilt even after we have come to terms with our sin and asked for forgiveness and mercy. Obsessive guilt is not the message the Scriptures offer us. Think of the prodigal son, the good thief on the cross, or the woman caught in adultery. Over and over we are assured that God is forgiving and that we have only to come with a contrite heart and we will be washed clean from our past failures. “Being washed clean” means that there is a fresh, new start without the residue from the past. God offers us a new beginning. The problem is that too often we think God couldn’t possibly forgive us for this or that thing we did. We doubt the generosity of God’s heart.

—Joyce Rupp
Inviting God In

What new beginning do I need to make today?

“If we want to be always in God’s company, we must regularly pray and read Scripture. When we pray, we talk to God; when we read, God talks to us. We must first understand what we are reading before we are fit to proclaim what we have learned.”

—St. Isidore of Seville

SHOWING US THE WAY OUT

Dn 13:1-9, 15-17, 19-30, 33-62 | Jn 8:12-20

No way out! Suzanna knows her word against that of the holy elders will mean nothing, so she doesn't even try to tell her story. Instead, she cries out for help from God and she is saved. The woman caught in adultery has no way out, until, at the command of Jesus, the ones who are not without sin silently withdraw from her trial. There is no one left to accuse her. Jesus, who knows the meaning of the words *mercy, not sacrifice*, invites her to walk away from that which is entrapping her. Do you think that there is no way out for you, no vindication of your guilt or no escape from your own bad judgments? Draw near to Jesus, who knows the way out of the grave.

—Kathy McGovern

*From what situation or circumstance do
I most want Jesus to help me find a way out?*

For Biblical people, **light** was not produced by the sun but an independent reality that was associated with God, who created it (even before the sun, Gen 1:3) and gives it to human eyes (Ps 13:4). Seeing occurs when light goes out from the eye to illuminate objects.

LOOK, BUT DON'T TOUCH!

Nm 21:4-9 | Jn 8:21-30

Because it shed and renewed its skin, the snake was an ancient medical symbol of life, renewal and fertility. The background is usually attributed to the demigod Asclepius, who used a snake on a pole for a person to touch for healing when wounded. Moses does a similar thing at the command of the Lord. An important difference is that, in the scriptures, people only needed to look at the serpent and they would recover. They did not have to touch that symbol of healing. So for us to look and see how God is working in one's life is so important. Faith involves seeing from "above" and not from "below" where a sign is needed. Today let us try to see instead of touch, as Mary Magdalene was also commanded (Jn 20:17) when she encountered the risen Christ.

—Dorothy Jonaitis

*How have I most cultivated
the art of faithful seeing today?*

In John's gospel **the world** (Greek, *cosmos*, an ordered universe) usually refers to the anti-creation forces that we often experience resisting God's ordering power and opposing Jesus. Though the world is hostile to God, God is not hostile to the world but sends Jesus to save it.

THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE

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

The reality of death daily plagues us. Not just the end-of-life death, but also the quality-of-life death encouraged and caused by sinfulness in all its forms. So in the face of death, live humanly. In the middle of chaos, celebrate the Word. Amidst babel, speak the truth. Confront the noise and verbiage and falsehood of death with the truth and potency and efficacy of the Word of God. Know the Word, teach the Word, nurture the Word, preach the Word, defend the Word, incarnate the Word, do the Word, live the Word, and more than that, in the Word of God, expose death and all death's works and wiles, rebuke lies, cast out demons, exorcise, cleanse the possessed, raise those who are dead in mind and conscience.

—William Stringfellow

An Ethic for Christians & Other Aliens in a Strange Land

*How has God's Word most helped me
to expose and overcome the works of death?*

King **Nebuchadnezar** II was an historical figure who ruled Babylon from 605-562 BC. He conquered Judah, destroyed the temple and exiled the Jews (597, 587) and thus became synonymous with an evil king. In the book of Daniel, it is not this historic figure but rather the symbolic figure that is described.

GOD'S COVENANT INVITATION

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

God's relationship with Abraham is founded on the promise God had made. God chose Abraham to go on a journey. Then God promised him an inheritance and today, in the reading from Genesis, there is one more step. The covenant. A covenant that makes Abraham see his fruitfulness in the future: you will become the father of a host of nations. The election, the promise and the covenant, are the three dimensions of the life of faith. We also were chosen, the Lord gave us a promise, now asks us to enter into a covenant. You are a Christian if you say "yes" to the election that God has made of you, if you follow the promise that the Lord has made to you and if you live the covenant with the Lord: this is also our Christian life.

—Pope Francis

*How might I formalize my commitment
to Christ and his promises today?*

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.

TERROR ON EVERY SIDE

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

How is a God whose name is Love appropriated to justify violence, hatred, and enmity around the world? Unfortunately, religion is too often weaponized. Wars are waged and people are enslaved and terrorized in the name of religion. If humankind is to thrive, we need to let go of any religion that wounds and kills. Some of what we believe about God is actually about us; at times we create God in our own image. In other words, some of us imagine God as punitive, angry, and vengeful because these are aspects of ourselves that make us feel powerful and protected, rather than vulnerable. But we need to exercise a spiritual imagination free of fear and shed the constraints of unhealthy religion. Hate-filled religion needs an exorcism!

—Jacqui Lewis
Fierce Love

*How might I turn any residue of hate in myself
and imitate God's caring love?*

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 this reading, by claiming for oneself the honor and status due to God alone. It was punishable by stoning (Lv 24:16).

LIVING OUR HOLY WEEK

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

What does living Holy Week mean to us? What does following Jesus on his journey to Calvary on his way to the cross and the resurrection mean? This week begins with the festive procession with olive branches: the entire populace welcomes Jesus. The children and young people sing, praising Jesus. But this week continues in the mystery of Jesus' death and his resurrection. Above all it is a "time of grace" (2 Cor 6:2). God does not ask of us anything that he himself has not first given us. O cross of Christ, teach us that the apparent victory of evil vanishes before the empty tomb and before the certainty of the Resurrection and the love of God which nothing can defeat, obscure or weaken.

—Pope Francis

*What practical things might I do
to live this Holy Week more consciously?*

"Christians must lean on the cross of Christ just as travelers lean on a staff when they begin a long journey. They must have the passion of Christ deeply embedded in their minds and hearts, because only from it can they derive peace, grace and truth."

—St. Anthony of Padua

LUKE'S PASSION STORY

Lk 19:28-40 | Is 50:4-7 | Phil 2:6-11 | Lk 22:14—23:56

In an age when public Christian witness in the midst of suffering and death is a common experience for many churches throughout the world, Luke's Passion story has increasing importance. Martyrdom, understood as suffering and death on behalf of the Gospel, can be a profound expression of discipleship and is often the most eloquent proclamation of the Gospel possible. Luke's Passion narrative retains that important memory for the church. And even for those whose death may appear more passive and not the result of commitment to the Gospel, the Lukan story of Jesus' martyr's death reminds the church that goodness and patience and fidelity carried out over a lifetime and into the quiet mystery of death also proclaim the Gospel of Jesus' triumph and give a witness of hope.

—Donald Senior, CP

The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke

*How does Jesus' suffering and
witness most become a model for my own?*

In today's reading, to describe Jesus' gift of himself for us as Paul says he **"emptied himself"** (Greek, *kenosis*), thus renouncing the honors and benefits of his divinity and embraced completely his humanity, like us even to the final point of death on the cross.

OUR JOURNEY TO MEET GOD NOW

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

An undistracted life is one in which we want to lead all we see, hear, and do to the center, to the heart. But the heart to which we lead all things is not simply our heart. It is God's heart as well. When we take our world to the center, to the heart, we will find that the heart is where we meet God. From there all is transformed continuously into the image of him who is the suffering servant of Yahweh. God is not in the distant heavens or in the hidden depths of the future, but here and now. God has pitched a tent among us and has made a home in us so that we can make God's home our home. We find our way home to the heart by following Jesus.

—Henri J.M. Nouwen
A Spirituality of Homecoming

*How might I center myself and
my life more completely on God starting today?*

In 4 “Servant Songs” (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.

THREE EXAMPLES OF DISCIPLESHIP

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

In today's Gospel we meet three important characters in John's passion story: Judas, Peter and the Beloved Disciple. Jesus' predicts that one of his own will betray him. Fulfilling that prediction, Judas abandons the one who is light and goes out into the night to betray him. In his exchange with Jesus, Peter makes a brash promise that he will lay down his life for Jesus. But Jesus, knowing what is to come, predicts that Peter will deny him. The disciple whom Jesus loves reclines next to him, reflecting their close relationship. These three disciples show us three ways of responding to Jesus: to betray him and despair, to deny him and accept forgiveness, or to follow him lovingly to the cross.

—Angeline Hubert

*In what ways am I most like each
of these three disciples?*

In the biblical world, **betrayal** by a friend is the most shameful action because friends commit themselves fully by their word of honor to one another as reliable partners in their relationship and would be expected even to give their lives for the other if necessary.

APPROACHING OUR LENTEN DESTINATION

Is 50:4-9a | Mt 26:14-25 5

Even though we are baptized, what we constantly lose and betray is precisely that which we received at baptism. Therefore, Easter is our return every year to our own baptism whereas Lent is our preparation for that return—the slow and sustained effort to perform, at the end, our own “passage” or *pascha* into the new life in Christ as something valid and essential for us. For each year, Lent and Easter are, once again, the re-discovery and the recovery by us of what we were made through our own baptismal death and resurrection. A journey, a pilgrimage! Yet, as we have made it, we now draw close to the destination—the joy of Easter, the entrance into the glory of the Kingdom.

—Alexander Schmemmann

Great Lent

How might I most prepare myself to participate most fully in the coming Triduum rites?

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 and Holy Saturday) are a liturgical season in themselves and not strictly part of Lent.

WE ARE NOW THE BODY OF CHRIST

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

We are the body of Christ when we open ourselves to the spirit of Jesus and continue what he began. But let us be very careful that we do not limit Jesus. The one who welcomed everyone left us a challenging perspective as our legacy. He identified with those who are hungry and thirsty and lack proper clothes, with the sick, the felon, the stranger, saying: when we attend to their bodily needs, when we give food, drink, clothing, care, compassion, empathy, shelter, we are doing these things for him. Christ's body is one with embodied humanity. Here then is real presence. Here is his body. Here is his blood. Indeed, if we would be brutally honest, here among suffering humanity is authentic eucharist.

—Miriam Therese Winter
Eucharist with a Small "e"

*How has my prayer and participation
in the eucharist helped open me to the needs of others?*

“This holy Mass, this Eucharist, is clearly an act of faith. This body broken and blood shed for human beings encourages us to give our body and blood up to suffering and pain, as Christ did—not for self, but to bring justice and peace to our people.”

—Bishop St. Oscar Romero
(His last words before being murdered at Mass.)

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?

INRI is an abbreviation composed of the first letters of words in the Latin inscription atop the cross on which Christ was crucified: *I*esus *N*azaraenus, *R*ex *I*udaeorum—Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Judeans.

THE RISEN CHRIST CHANGES EVERYTHING

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 | Lk 24:1-12

The Resurrection story doesn't have the ring of great drama. It has the ring of truth. The narrative is as fragmented, shadowy, incomplete as life itself. When it comes to just what happened, there can be no certainty. That something unimaginable happened, there can be no doubt. The symbol of Easter is the empty tomb. You can't depict or domesticate emptiness. You can't make it into a pageant and string it with lights. He rose. A few saw him briefly and talked to him. If it is true, there is nothing left to say. If it is not true, there is nothing left to say. For believers and unbelievers both, life has never been the same again. For some, neither has death.

—Frederick Buechner
Whistling in the Dark

*How can I invite the risen Christ to come
and dwell in me today?*

The **empty tomb** was not a proof of the resurrection but a fact whose meaning needed to be discovered. Finding the empty tomb made Jesus' followers bewildered and confused until their experience of him as risen revealed it would remain empty forever.