

Our Lenten journey

Into the Wilderness
Lenten Resources

Q: What is Lent?

A: Historically, Lent is the forty day period before Easter, excluding Sundays, it began on Ash Wednesday and ended on Holy Saturday (the day before Easter Sunday). In recent years, this has been modified so that it now ends with evening Mass on Holy Thursday, to prepare the way for Triduum.

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

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

Q: Why are the forty days called Lent?

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

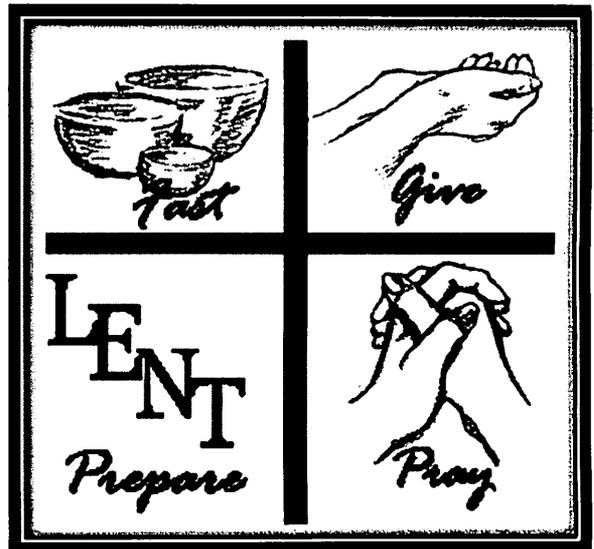
Q: Why is Lent forty days long?

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

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

Thus the Catechism of the Catholic Church states:

"For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every



respect has been tested as we are, yet without sinning' [Heb 4:15]. By the solemn forty days of Lent the Church unites herself each year to the mystery of Jesus in the desert." (CCC 540).

Q: When does Lent begin?

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

Q: What is a day of fast and abstinence?

A: Under current canon law in the Western Rite of the Church, a day of fast is one on which Catholics who are eighteen to sixty years old are required to keep a limited fast. In this country, one may eat a single, normal meal and have two snacks, so long as these snacks do not add up to a second meal. Children are not required to fast, but their parents must ensure they are properly educated in the spiritual practice of fasting. Those with medical conditions requiring a greater or more regular food intake can easily be dispensed from the requirement of fasting by their pastor.

A day of abstinence is a day on which Catholics fourteen years or older are required to abstain from eating meat (under the current discipline, fish, eggs, milk products, and condiments or foods made using animal fat are permitted in the Western Rite of the Church, though not in the Eastern Rites.) Again, persons with special dietary needs can easily be dispensed by their pastor.



THE ASHES that we receive on Ash Wednesday are an important symbol of our acceptance of the death of the old self, in order that we can let God through the Holy Spirit refashion ourselves and our lives in Christ. Lent is the season set aside by the Church to help and encourage this spiritual process

to take place. It is a sort of personal spring cleaning which takes place when the whole world of nature around us is in a kind of hidden preparation to burst forth in spring blossom and new life (spring is the original meaning of 'Lent').

The Gospel of John tells us, the wind of the Spirit '*blows where it pleases.*' How or even whether we choose to observe Lent and Easter is entirely up to ourselves. The Church does not make Ash Wednesday and our spiritual activities in Lent a matter of obligation. Our states of mind and heart do not conform either to seasons of nature nor to the liturgical seasons of the Church, especially for example if we are or have been ill or in distress, or are undergoing major changes in life. There is no disgrace in finding ourselves unready to enter into the spirit of Lent, and it is perhaps worth reflecting on what it is we are spiritually seeking to renew within ourselves. It is first and foremost the quality of our love - our capacity to love, whom or what we love, why we love, how we love, and perhaps most particularly whom or what we choose to exclude from our love, and why. Many people find that the sacrament of penance helps in this process, but even here we do have to *want* it to. Everything we do in Lent should be less a matter of duty, and more a real choice of our deeper selves made in the presence of God.

PENANCE FOR LENT



1. **Giving up sin.** God wants us to turn away from sin, laziness in prayer, and unwillingness to do better.

2. **Praying.** Jesus and his apostles tell us to pray always. Traditional times of prayer are morning, evening and meal times. We pray for ourselves, for our families and friends, for our leaders, for the Church and for the world.

3. **Fasting.** Fasting means cutting down on the amount and richness of our food and drink. Done as a

penance for sin it helps us to pray better. The money we save on food should be given in alms.

4. **Doing good works.** We are to help Jesus and come to his aid by helping other people in a spirit of love and goodness. Jesus went about doing good, so should we.

5. **Giving alms.** We give alms to help God's poor. We give cheerfully to God who has given us all we have.

6. **Abstinence.** This form of penance entails giving up some desirable food or drink on one or two days a week in Lent. Our abstinence is another way of sharing Christ's work of saving the world.

7. **Carrying out our duties of state.** This is perhaps the hardest and most unrecognised form of penance. We serve God by being a good mother, father, spouse, son, daughter, teacher, worker, student, priest.

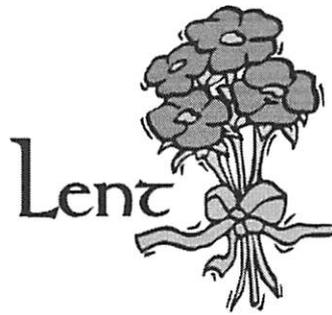
8. **Meditative reading.** Reading Christian books, newspapers and magazines to help us in our faith and right living.

9. **Controlling our desires for possessions.** Jesus reminds us that our heart will be wherever our treasure is, and to build up treasure for ourselves in heaven rather than on earth.

10. **Controlling our desire for entertainment.** Too much entertainment - by radio, TV, films, spectator sports, light reading, distractions - can dull our taste for the things of God, and lead us to have no time for the works of the Lord. When you watch T.V. or listen to the radio, ask yourself: is this uplifting my spirit, or is it taking my spirit away?

Quotation from St Augustine:

Those who allow themselves to have everything they want and do everything they want, will very soon have things they shouldn't have and do things they shouldn't do.



A Lenten Reflection

- Give up complaining----focus on gratitude.
- Give up pessimism----become an optimist.
- Give up harsh judgments----think kindly thoughts.
- Give up worry----trust Divine Providence.
- Give up discouragement----be full of hope.
- Give up bitterness----turn to forgiveness.
- Give up hatred----return good for evil.
- Give up negativism----be positive.
- Give up anger----be more patient.
- Give up pettiness----become mature.
- Give up gloom----enjoy the beauty that is all
around you.
- Give up jealousy----pray for trust.
- Give up gossiping----control your tongue.
- Give up sin----turn to virtue.
- Give up giving up----hang in there!

Unknown

First Sunday of Lent
Gospel reading: Mark 1:12-15

The Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness and he remained there for forty days, and was tempted by Satan. He was with the wild beasts, and the angels looked after him. After John had been arrested, Jesus went into Galilee. There he proclaimed the Good News from God. "*The time has come*" he said "*and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News.*"



Reflection:

At the beginning of Lent we hear the call that introduces the message of Jesus: 'Repent and believe in the Good News.' These next few weeks will be a time of refreshment, a time of repentance that prepares us for Easter when we will renew our commitment to believing in the Good News of God's love.

The proclamation of the Good News of God contains four points: i) The waiting is over. ii) The Kingdom of God has come. iii) A change of life. iv) Belief in the Good News.

The challenge that is put to us not just this week but every time we gather is to believe the good news. We are not being told to perform heroic deeds of self-sacrifice or to overcome and master our sinfulness; no, we are being challenged to really hear and believe that through baptism we have become children of God and that God says to each of us: 'You are my beloved.' It is hard to really accept this and there are many voices

that try to convince us that it is not the truth. So Lent is a wonderful opportunity to rediscover our worth and the wonder of coming to life in Christ.

Our Response:

Lord, we pray today for all those whom your Spirit has driven out into the wilderness:

- who have been betrayed by a loved one;
- who have lost their job with no hope of getting another;
- who find themselves in prison;
- who have just learnt that they are terminally ill.

The days seem long to them, they feel battered by demons, surrounded by wild beasts.

Lord, send them your angels to look after them.

Lord, during the course of the year we turn our eyes to many ugly things about ourselves:

- our meanness and envy;
- the hurts we have not forgiven;
- the desire to take revenge.

During this Lent, let your Spirit drive us into the wilderness and keep us there for forty days, where we will face up to the demons within us and the wild beasts tearing at us, knowing all the time that your angels are looking after us.



Lord, we thank you in the name of all those for whom this Lent will be a season of grace, when Jesus will come into their lives. They will know that the moment they were running away from has finally come, a life of holiness will seem within their grasp, they will turn away from their sin and give themselves trustingly to the new vision you have brought them to.

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank for the word that has enabled us to understand better the will of the Father. May your Spirit enlighten our actions and grant us the strength to practice that which your Word has revealed to us. May we, like Mary, your mother, not only listen to but also practise the Word. You who live and reign with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.

Turning Our Hearts to the Lord

Scripture Sharing Group Resource, Lent 2015, Week 1

Reader 1: A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Mark

Jesus was tempted by Satan, and the angels looked after him.

The Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness and he remained there for forty days, and was tempted by the Satan. He was with the wild beasts, and the angels looked after him.

After John had been arrested, Jesus went into Galilee. There he proclaimed the Good News from God. "The time has come" he said "and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent and believe the Good News."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Silence

Leader: Let us read the Gospel passage aloud together.

Everyone: A reading from the Holy Gospel

Silence

Leader: Let us listen to a short reflection on this Gospel passage.

Reader 2: Reflection on the Gospel

Did you ever wonder why Jesus might have needed to spend 40 days - a month + 10 days - out in the wilderness before he was ready to embrace his new life? When I think of 'wilderness' I think 'hostile' and indeed 'to be avoided' unless out for a nice walk. Yet it represents the great test: me versus nature – even human nature. There are several reality tv programmes based on this at present. But Jesus, like us in all things except sin (Heb 4:15), why had he need of such an extended stay? Could it be that he was about to leave behind a lifestyle he had known for 30 years: a carpenter no doubt in demand, a home, the company of his Mother and friends, and was to become homeless, jobless and mistrusted – and therefore needed a space in which he could refocus his priorities, his identity, his purpose?

Why are you giving up what you will this Lent? It must all be for love of God, so as to live the Kingdom now, and like the rainbow, be a reminder that God is with us, and is for us. Like Jesus, over these 40 days we are called to opt in, to become what we were baptised to be!

Silence

Leader: I invite you to share any thought or consideration prompted by the Gospel passage and /or the reflection.

Sharing

Leader: Let us return to our Lenten Prayer.

Group returns to Lenten booklet.

Dioceses of
Achonry, Ardagh & Clonmacnois, Armagh, Clonfert, Elphin, Kerry, Killala,
Kilmore, Limerick, Ossory, Tuam & Waterford & Lismore.

2nd Sunday Lent B Mark 9:2-10

Jesus took with him Peter and James and John and led them up a high mountain where they could be alone by themselves. There in their presence he was transfigured: his clothes became dazzlingly white, whiter than any earthly bleacher could make them. Elijah appeared to them with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus. Then Peter spoke to Jesus. 'Rabbi', he said it is wonderful for us to be here; so let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.' He did not know what to say; they were so



frightened. And a cloud came, covering them in shadow; and there came a voice from the cloud, 'This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him.' Then suddenly, when they looked

round, they saw no one with them any more but only Jesus. As they came down the mountain he warned them to tell no one what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They observed the warning faithfully, though among themselves they discussed what 'rising from the dead' could mean.

Reflection

The gospel for the Second Sunday of Lent each year is the account of the transfiguration of Jesus. In Mark we have just passed the half way point and Jesus has revealed to the disciples that he is the Messiah but he wishes them to come to understand this not in terms of glory and esteem but in being faithful to God's will and so he has mentioned to them for the first time that he will have to endure his passion in Jerusalem. Peter is appalled at the idea but Jesus does not shrink from telling him that those who want to follow must take up their cross. This is the background to today's gospel. Peter, James and John who were present at the raising of the daughter of Jairus (chapter 6) are now invited up the mountain where they behold him quite literally in a whole new light. At this key moment of revelation of who he really is they are invited to '*listen to him*'. However, as the story continues we learn that they are

poor listeners and they fail to take on board his message of the self-emptying love of the kingdom. The next time these three are invited to come aside with him is at the foot of a mountain, the Mount of Olives, in the Garden of Gethsemane, and there too Jesus is revealed to them, not in glory but in suffering and, because they have not listened, they will run away.

Lent is a time for letting go and these readings make the point very well. If we are to come to know God and the meaning of real love, then we must learn to let go of our certainties and insisting on having things our own way. Abraham and Jesus both learned to entrust everything into the hands of God the Father, even when this appeared to lead to the end of everything they had hoped for. God in Jesus would have us understand that he is with us in every moment of our lives and each moment, whether at the top of the mountain or in Gethsemane, is sacred. If we are to understand this, we must develop the art of doing what the Father has asked us and that is the art of listening, really listening to his Son.

Today too, many people suffer because they are Christians and because they live the Gospel.

How do we approach the cross?

What does it mean?

Lord, from time to time you give us beautiful experiences, moments which bind us to a person or a cause. But it is only when we have come down from the mountain and seen that person or cause die and rise from the dead that we will be able to speak about what happened on the mountain

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank for the word that has enabled us to understand better the will of the Father. May your Spirit enlighten our actions and grant us the strength to practice that which your Word has revealed to us. May we, like Mary, your mother, not only listen to but also practice the Word. You who live and reign with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.

Turning Our Hearts to the Lord

Scripture Sharing Group Resource, Lent 2015, Week 2

Reader 1: A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Mark.

This is my Son, the Beloved.

Jesus took with him Peter and James and John and led them up a high mountain where they could be alone by themselves. There in their presence he was transfigured: his clothes became dazzlingly white, whiter than any earthly bleacher could make them. Elijah appeared to them with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus. Then Peter spoke to Jesus. "Rabbi", he said "it is wonderful for us to be here; so let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah". He did not know what to say; they were so frightened. And a cloud came, covering them in shadow; and there came a voice from the cloud, "This is my son, the Beloved. Listen to him". Then suddenly, when they looked round, they saw no one with them anymore but only Jesus.

As they came down the mountain he warned them to tell no one what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They observed the warning faithfully, though among themselves they discussed what "rising from the dead" could mean.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Silence

Leader: Let us read the Gospel passage aloud together.

Everyone: A Reading from the Holy Gospel

Silence

Leader: Let us listen to a short reflection on this Gospel passage.

Reader 2: Reflection on the Gospel

The Gospel of Mark is not for the faint of heart. It offers a difficult portrait of Jesus and a difficult portrait of what it means to be a disciple of this Jesus. There are no part easy answers to the problem of the cost of being true to Jesus and to the Gospel he proclaims and lives.

Sure the disciples left everything and followed him – including Peter, James and John, who feature in today's Gospel reading. But throughout the Gospel they fail to understand what Jesus is about. They are weak and fallible in the extreme. They show a deep-seated desire for the easy road, and power and glory. The idea of Jesus as crucified and abandoned is not something they can easily stomach.

Today's Gospel confirms that this is the way things will pan out. 'This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him.' Still they want to stay on the mountain and enjoy the beauty of the moment. But go down they must.

It is in the struggle to be true to his Father that Jesus finds his own destiny. Only when we acknowledge our own weaknesses, fallibilities and self-seeking can we find ours. In the end that is what all disciples have to do.

Silence

Leader: I invite you to share any thought or consideration prompted by the Gospel passage and /or the reflection.

Sharing

Leader: Let us return to our Lenten Prayer.

Group returns to Lenten booklet

Just before the Jewish Passover Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and in the Temple he found people selling cattle and sheep and pigeons, and the money changers sitting at their counters there. Making a whip out of some cord, he drove them all out of the Temple, cattle and sheep as well, scattered the money changers'



coins, knocked their tables over and said to the pigeon-sellers, 'Take all this out of here and stop turning my Father's house into a market.' Then his disciples remembered the words of scripture:

Zeal for your house will devour me. The Jews intervened and said, 'What sign can you show us to justify what you have done?' Jesus answered, 'Destroy this sanctuary, and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews replied, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this sanctuary: are you going to raise it up in three days?' But he was speaking of the sanctuary that was his body, and when Jesus rose from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and the words he had said. During his stay in Jerusalem for the Passover many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he gave, but Jesus knew them all and did not trust himself to them; he never needed evidence about any man; he could tell what a man had in him.

Reflection:

In 20 BC Herod the Great began a massive rebuilding of the temple on a grand scale as a sign of his own Jewish piety and to impress his overlords, the Romans. Herod's temple — its ruins can be seen today in Jerusalem — stood till its destruction by the Romans in 70 AD. Jesus worshipped there, while it was still being built.

Jesus' cleansing of the temple, which three gospels report, was a startling and provocative act. Certainly, his words about destruction triggered an alarm for the guardians of this venerable place and caused them to take steps to stop this trouble-maker from Galilee. If he overturned the tables in the entranceway and drove

people out, what would he do next?

But Jesus claimed he himself was the new temple; he was the new lawgiver who came to fulfill God's command of love. He is God's presence; the Word dwelling among us and in whom we dwell.

The true temple of God is no longer to be found in some holy and far away place but is within, as Jesus has made us all temples of the Holy Spirit and in the process challenges us to know God not through mere ritual observance but 'in Spirit and in truth'

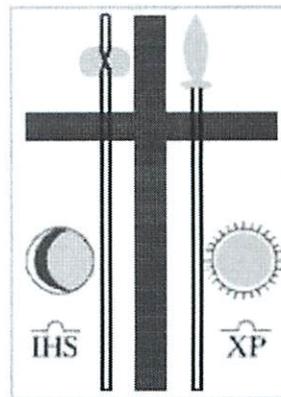
Three questions to ask yourself:

what are the temples that people turn into market places today?

Why is Jesus cleansing these temples?

How is he doing it?

Prayer:



As once you came into the temple, come to us, Lord Jesus, and cleanse us from all that makes us unholy.

Silence the noise that prevents us hearing you, and help us see when we are blind.

Turn over the barriers that

block your word,
drive away the distractions that stop our awareness of you.

Give us the wisdom of your commandments.

For you command only what is good,

We are temples of the living God,

help us to know who we are.

Spirit of truth, sent by Jesus to guide us to the whole truth, enlighten our minds so that we may understand the Scriptures.

You who overshadowed Mary and made her fruitful ground where the Word of God could germinate, purify our hearts from all obstacles to the Word.

Help us to learn like her to listen with good and pure hearts to the Word that God speaks to us in life and in Scripture, so that we may observe the Word and produce good fruit through our perseverance.

Turning Our Hearts to the Lord

Scripture Sharing Group Resource, Lent 2015, Week 3

Reader 1: A reading from the Holy Gospel according to John (Jn 2:13-25)

Destroy this sanctuary and in three days I will raise it up.

Just before the Jewish Passover Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and in the Temple he found people selling cattle and sheep and pigeons, and the money changers sitting at their counters there. Making a whip out of some cord, he drove them all out of the Temple, cattle and sheep as well, scattered the money changers' coins, knocked their tables over and said to the pigeon-sellers, "Take all this out of here and stop turning my Father's house into a market." Then his disciples remembered the words of scripture: Zeal for your house will devour me. The Jews intervened and said, "What sign can you show us to justify what you have done?" Jesus answered, "Destroy this sanctuary, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this sanctuary: are you going to raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking of the sanctuary that was his body, and when Jesus rose from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and the words he had said.

During his stay in Jerusalem for the Passover many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he gave, but Jesus knew them all and did not trust himself to them: he never needed evidence about any man; he could tell what a man had in him.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Silence

Leader: Let us read the Gospel passage aloud together.

Everyone: A Reading from the Holy Gospel

Silence

Leader: Let us listen to a short reflection on this Gospel passage.

Reader 2: Reflection on the Gospel

We've reached the mid-point of our Lenten journey and whom do we meet? We meet an angry Jesus, turning over tables, driving out the moneychangers, ejecting the marketers and all of this with a home-made whip in his hand! It's probably not our usual image of the Lord but it's an important one nonetheless.

The whole point of Lent is for us to be able to free our hearts from all the things that get in the way of a deep and intimate relationship with the Risen Lord. So let's think of our hearts as the temple. Have they become crowded with the commerce of everyday living? Have we allowed our hearts, the centre of who we are and where we encounter the Father, to be turned into a marketplace with no room for the God who created us in love?

If we feel that our hearts have been overtaken by the cares and worries of our daily lives then perhaps we need the Jesus we meet in today's gospel to enter in and turn the tables on us. Jesus is burning with zeal to enter the temple of our hearts. Have the courage to let him drive out the spiritual moneychangers and let Jesus turn your heart into a heart of prayer on fire with his love.

Silence

Leader: I invite you to share any thought or consideration prompted by the Gospel passage and /or the reflection.

Sharing

Leader: Let us return to our Lenten Prayer.

Group returns to Lenten booklet

4th. Sunday of Lent B John 3:14-21

Jesus said to Nicodemus:

'The Son of Man must be lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.

Yes, God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life.

For God sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world, but so that through him the world might be saved.

No one who believes in him will be condemned; but whoever refuses to believe is condemned already, because he has refused to believe in the name of God's only Son.

On these grounds is sentence pronounced: that though the light has come into the world men have shown they prefer darkness to the light

because their deeds were evil.

And indeed, everybody who does wrong hates the light and avoids it, for fear his actions should be exposed; but the man who lives by the truth comes out into the light, .

so that it may be plainly seen that what he does is done in God.

Reflection

On three occasions Jesus speaks about himself being 'lifted up'. The Greek word behind this can mean a literal or physical lifting and also an exaltation, a being raised up or glorified. By means of this deliberate play on words the evangelist explains to us that the passion, for all its injustice and brutality, is a glorious revelation of God's love.

In our day-to-day struggle just to get on with the business of living it is unlikely that we go around with the image of ourselves as 'God's work of art'. There are many forces at work both within us and outside us which tend to pull us down and to leave us with negative feelings about ourselves and those around us. By contrast, at the heart of the gospel message is the wonderful assertion that we are the handiwork of a God who does not make mistakes. This is the God who so loved the world that he gave his only Son not to bully us

into obedience or to threaten us with hellfire but to bring us to life in its fullness. This is terrific news indeed, so let us take steps to ensure that other messages do not drown it out.

Prayer:

Lord, we thank you for the journey to grace that many of us are making during this Lent.

For many years you were calling us, inviting us to look honestly on our addictions, our vanity, our envy.

We hated the light, avoided it for fear that the truth about ourselves should be exposed.

During these days we were brought to look at ourselves and come out into the light, feeling inner peace because we knew that what we were doing we were doing in you.

Shaddai, God of the mountain, You who make of our fragile life the rock of your dwelling place,

lead our mind to strike the rock of the desert, so that water may gush to quench our thirst.

May the poverty of our feelings

cover us as with a mantle in the darkness of the night and may it open our heart to hear the echo of silence

until the dawn, wrapping us with the light of the new morning, may bring us, with the spent embers of the fire of the shepherds of the Absolute who have kept vigil for us close to the divine Master, the flavour of the holy memory.



Turning Our Hearts to the Lord

Scripture Sharing Group Resource, Lent 2015, Week 4

Reader 1: A reading from the Holy Gospel according to John (Jn 3:14-21)

God sent his Son so that through him the world might be saved.

Jesus said to Nicodemus:

"The Son of Man must be lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert,
so that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.

Yes, God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son,
so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life.

For God sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world,
but so that through him the world might be saved.

No one who believes in him will be condemned; but whoever refuses to believe is condemned already,
because he has refused to believe in the name of God's only Son.

On these grounds is sentence pronounced:

that though the light has come into the world men have shown that they prefer darkness to the light
because their deeds were evil.

And indeed, everybody who does wrong hates the light and avoids it, for fear his actions should be exposed;
but the man who lives by the truth comes out into the light,
so that it may be plainly seen that what he does, is done in God."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Silence

Leader: Let us read the Gospel passage aloud together.

Everyone: A Reading from the Holy Gospel

Silence

Leader: Let us listen to a short reflection on this Gospel passage.

Reader 2: Reflection on the Gospel

It's dark, it's late, nobody is around, nobody except Nicodemus. He has heard and seen the remarkable things that Jesus is doing. Concerned that his friends might see him, yet unable to stay away Nicodemus comes; "How could anyone do what this Jesus does unless God has sent him", he says to himself.

"I'm not religious", "Catholics? Oh no sure they're behind the times", "look at the priests, no sign of poverty there", "I suppose you could say that I am spiritual"....

How quickly the Gospel has been abandoned, how quickly God's teaching has been ridiculed, how often the faults and failings of priests have been used as the excuse to wipe out the eternal message of Christ. Where is Christ? Where are the Sacraments? Where are the commandments of God in my home? Do I, like Nicodemus, come secretly and silently to Church? Do I keep my beliefs hidden, or do I come half-heartedly, coming but with the same old criticisms and negativity of those who don't come at all?

Still, I come. What is the attraction of this Jesus for me? What keeps me coming? Perhaps, at least, by just coming my Faith might be strengthened and like Nicodemus Jesus' love for me and my somewhat half-hearted desire to love him will help me and mine to be, someday, his loyal followers.

Silence

Leader: I invite you to share any thought or consideration prompted by the Gospel passage and /or the reflection.

Sharing

Leader: Let us return to our Lenten Prayer.

Group returns to Lenten booklet

Dioceses of

Achonry, Ardagh & Clonmacnois, Armagh, Clonfert, Elphin, Kerry, Killala,
Killmore, Limerick, Ossory, Tuam & Waterford & Lismore.

5th. Sunday Lent B

John 12:20 -30

Among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. These approached Philip, who came from Bethsaida in Galilee, and put this request to him, 'Sir, we should like to see Jesus.' Philip went to tell



Andrew, and Andrew and Philip together went to tell Jesus. Jesus replied to them:

'Now the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you, most solemnly, unless a wheat grain falls on the ground and

dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest.

Anyone who loves his life loses it; anyone who hates his life in this world will keep it for the eternal life.

If a man serves me, he must follow me, wherever I am, my servant will be there too.

If anyone serves me, my Father will honour him.

Now my soul is troubled.

What shall I say:

Father, save me from this hour?

But it was for this very reason that I have come to this hour.

Father, glorify your name!

A voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.

People standing by, who heard this, said it was a clap of thunder; others said, 'It was an angel speaking to him.'

Jesus answered, 'It was not for my sake that this voice came, but for yours.

'Now sentence is being passed on this world; now the prince of this world is to be overthrown. And when I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all men to myself.'

By these words he indicated the kind of death he would die.

Reflection:

It is now during Jesus' last week before his death on the cross. He and his disciples are in Jerusalem for Passover when some Greeks approach Philip. Why Philip? The clue is found in that John makes it a point to tell us Philip was from Bethsaida in Galilee. That was very near the Decapolis, a heavily-populated area for Greeks. Because of having lived near them, Philip would no doubt know their language and be at least somewhat familiar with Greek customs. 'Sir, we should like to see Jesus.' They ask. He then went and told Andrew. Why Andrew? Well, every time Andrew is mentioned in John's gospel he's introducing someone to Jesus, so evidently he was very good at it. Together, they bring the Greeks to Jesus and Jesus begins talking about the inevitability of what is going to happen while they are in Jerusalem.

Jesus has already made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem and never, at any point in his ministry, is he more popular than right now. So popular, in fact, that the Pharisees say, "Look, the *whole world* has gone after him!" "The *whole world*." And to prove just how true that is, these Greeks, who represent the whole world, come to have an audience with Jesus. And that is exactly what Jesus wanted. The point is clear, according to the way John frames this story. The gospel embodied in the Nazarene is not just for the Jews but for the *whole world*. John 3:16 — "For God so loved the world" — is finding its fulfilment at Calvary. "The hour has come," Jesus says, "for the Son of Man to be glorified." "The hour has come."

As we make our journey with Christ to the cross, God continues to whisper in our ear. And if we listen very carefully, what we will hear are words of love. When our time is fulfilled, whatever and whenever that may be, we will find ourselves wholly and completely in the presence of the One who loves us beyond all others. Seems to me, that's a good word for us to hear. Let us hope and pray that indeed God will whisper in our ear in God's own good time.

Prayer:

Lord, whisper to us your will, and find us willing and receptive to hear what you have to say. Better yet, find us faithful in taking your hand and walking with you into a time and place we have yet to know.

Turning Our Hearts to the Lord

Scripture Sharing Group Resource, Lent 2015, Week 5

Reader 1: A reading from the Holy Gospel according to John (Jn 12:20-30)

If a grain of wheat falls on the ground and dies, it yields a rich harvest.

Among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. These approached Philip, who came from Bethsaida in Galilee, and put this request to him, "Sir, we should like to see Jesus".

Philip went to tell Andrew, and Andrew and Philip together went to tell Jesus. Jesus replied to them:

Now the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

I tell you, most solemnly, unless a wheat grain falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest.

Anyone who loves his life loses it; anyone who hates his life in this world will keep it for the eternal life.

If a man serves me, he must follow me, wherever I am, my servant will be there too.

If anyone serves me, my Father will honour him.

Now my soul is troubled.

What shall I say: Father, save me from this hour? But it was for this very reason that I have come to this hour.

Father, glorify your name!"

A voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again."

People standing by, who heard this, said it was a clasp of thunder; others said, "It was an angel speaking to him."

Jesus answered, "It was not for my sake that this voice came, but for yours.

"Now sentence is being passed on this world; now the prince of this world is to be overthrown.

And when I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all men to myself."

By these words he indicated the kind of death he would die.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Silence

Leader: Let us read the Gospel passage aloud together.

Everyone: A Reading from the Holy Gospel

Silence

Leader: Let us listen to a short reflection on this Gospel passage.

Reader 2: Reflection on the Gospel

Has the life and teaching of Jesus, as presented here, anything to teach us? One suggestion, very apt for Lenten Reflection, is Jesus affirmation of the biblical "what-we-sow-we-reap" principle.

For three years, despite resistance and many hardships, Jesus devoted himself to the proclamation of the kingdom in word and deed. One fruit of this total self-giving was the bonding of a group of disciples around him, including Philip and Andrew. Another was the spreading of news about him beyond the Jewish community – "Sir, we wish to see Jesus" – right down to the present day. Two thousand years on we, through the forthcoming Holy Week ceremonies, will mark the ultimate self-giving of Jesus on the cross and profess our praise and our thanks.

We are also all mature and experienced enough to know that following Jesus in self-giving remains challenging and can demand great inner resolve. But look again to the words of Jesus, especially the line "If anyone serves me my Father will honour him". What an amazing word of encouragement, affirmation and promise! Yes, the Gospel demands forbearance, perseverance and humility, but has God ever been untrue to his word? Could a greater honour be bestowed on any of us?

Silence

Leader: I invite you to share any thought or consideration prompted by the Gospel passage and /or the reflection.

Sharing

Leader: Let us return to our Lenten Prayer.

Group returns to Lenten booklet

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PALM SUNDAY Mark 11:1-10 (Extract)

The soldiers led Jesus out to crucify him. They enlisted a passer-by, Simon of Cyrene, father of Alexander and Rufus, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross. They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha, which means the place of the skull. They offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he refused it.

Then they crucified him, and shared out his clothing, casting lots to decide what each should get.

It was the third hour when they crucified him. The inscription giving the charge against him read: "The King of the Jews". And they crucified two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left.

The passers-by jeered at him: they shook their heads and said, "Aha! So you would destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days! Then save yourself: come down from the cross!"

The chief priests and the scribes mocked him among themselves in the same way: "He saved others," they said "he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the king of Israel, come down from the cross now, for us to see it and believe." Even those who were crucified with him taunted him.

When the sixth hour came there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachtani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you deserted me?" When some of those who stood by heard this, they said, "Listen, he is calling on Elijah." Someone ran and soaked a sponge in vinegar and, putting it on a reed, gave it him to drink saying, "Wait and see if Elijah will come to take him down." But Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last.

And the veil of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The centurion, who was standing in front of him, had seen how he had died, and he said, "In truth this man was a son of God."

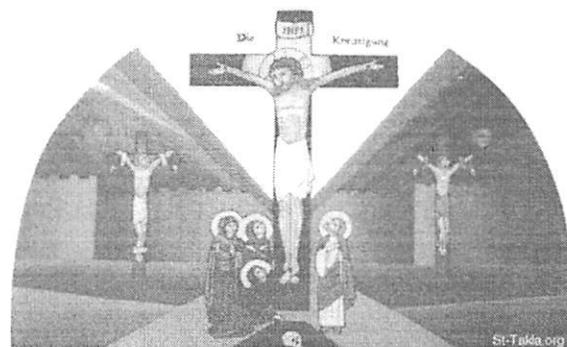
There were some women watching from a distance. Among them were Mary of Magdala, Mary who was the mother of James the younger and Joset, and Salome. These used to follow him and look after him when he was in Galilee. And there were many other women there who had come up to Jerusalem with him.

Gospel Commentary : Mark writes for the communities of the 70's. Many of these communities, whether in Italy or Syria, were going through their own passion. They were faced with the cross in many ways. They had been persecuted at the time of Nero in the 60's and many had died devoured by wild beasts. Others had betrayed, denied or abandoned their faith in Jesus, like Peter, Judas and other disciples. Others asked themselves: "Can I bear persecution?" Others were tired after persevering through many trials without any

results. Among those who had abandoned their faith, some asked themselves whether it was possible to rejoin the community. They wanted to start their journey again, but did not know if it was possible to rejoin. For them, as for us, the answer is in chapters 14 to 16 of Mark's Gospel, which describe the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus, the time of the greatest defeat of the disciples and, in an hidden way, their greatest hope. Let us look into the mirror of these chapters to see how the disciples reacted to the Cross and how Jesus reacts to the infidelity and weaknesses of the disciples. Let us try to discover how Mark encourages the faith of the community and how he describes the one who is truly a disciple of Jesus. The account of the passion in Mark is very stark. Jesus is portrayed as alone, abandoned by his closest friends and perhaps even by God. He dies on the cross with a loud cry on his lips and darkness covers the whole earth. Yet at this precise moment the Roman centurion who was guarding him, having seen how he died, makes the great confession of faith: 'Truly this man was God's Son.' Throughout his ministry Jesus had tried to teach his followers that the way of the kingdom was the way of self emptying love. They had to become servants, slaves to one another and forget about greatness as the world understands it. Repeatedly they failed to understand him and eventually they ran away. So we are left with this foreign outsider to tell us the meaning of Calvary. Through his faithfulness to the kingdom Jesus finally tears away the veil that separates God and suffering humanity. By his prayer of abandonment Jesus has shown us that, far from abandoning us, God has identified totally with our struggle.

Reflection

Suffering is part and parcel of being human and, while we must readily acknowledge this fact, it is also true that we usually do all in our power to avoid it. Our Saviour may be seen in these texts as a model of patient endurance and of faithfulness. We are not asked to believe that suffering is good in itself but to see that good can come of it and to recognise in Jesus God's solidarity with all those who endure suffering for doing what is right.



Turning Our Hearts to the Lord

Scripture Sharing Group Resource, Lent 2015, Week 6

Reader 1: A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Mark (Mk 11:1-10)

Blessings on him who comes in the name of the Lord.

When they were approaching Jerusalem, in sight of Bethphage and Bethany, close by the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go off to the village facing you, and as soon as you enter it you will find a tethered colt that no one has yet ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone says to you, "What are you doing?" say, The Master needs it and will send it back here directly". They went off and found a colt tethered near a door in the open street. As they untied it, some men standing there said, "What are you doing, untying that colt?" They gave the answer Jesus had told them and the men let them go. Then they took the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on its back, and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, others greenery which they had cut in the fields. And those who went in front and those who followed were all shouting, "Hosanna! Blessings on him who comes in the name of the Lord!" Blessings on the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest heavens!".
The Gospel of the Lord.

Silence

Leader: Let us read the Gospel passage aloud together.

Everyone: A Reading from the Holy Gospel

Silence

Leader: Let us listen to a short reflection on this Gospel passage.

Reader 2: Reflection on the Gospel

The entrance into Jerusalem is one of the very few events in Jesus' life which is mentioned in all four gospels. It is the only time that Jesus accepts and encourages public acclaim as Messiah. He even goes as far as organising his entrance by telling the disciples to go and fetch the donkey. The key moment in God's great plan of salvation is about to unfold and Jesus knows exactly how it will unfold.

With this passage we are not only remembering and celebrating a past triumph but we are also celebrating and acknowledging a present and future triumph. We are celebrating a triumph already achieved through Christ's dying and rising, a triumph being achieved through our participation in that saving mystery, and a triumph yet to be achieved through Christ's coming in glory.

As we reflect upon this passage we know that the initial victory is won and the ultimate victory assured but we must commit to completing that victory. Let us joyfully join ourselves to Christ, so that we may "fill up (in our bodies) what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ, for the sake of his body, the Church" (Col. 1:24). We move towards the heavenly Jerusalem only because Christ himself has already made that journey for us and now he offers to make it with us. The Palm Sunday procession is not just a procession for Christ, but one with Christ; the Church in procession is Christ in the world.

Silence

Leader: I invite you to share any thought or consideration prompted by the Gospel passage and /or the reflection.

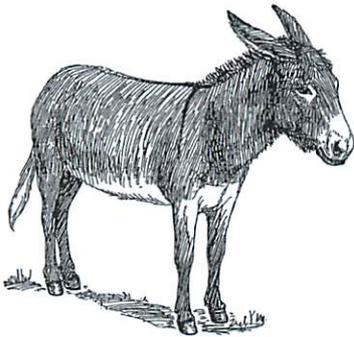
Sharing

Leader: Let us return to our Lenten Prayer.

Group returns to Lenten booklet

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The Day After Palm Sunday



The donkey awakened, his mind still savouring the afterglow of the most exciting day of his life. Never before had he felt such a rush of pleasure and pride.

He walked into town and found a group of people by the well. "I'll show myself to them," he thought. But they didn't notice him. They went on drawing their water and paid him no mind.

"Throw your garments down," he said crossly. "Don't you

know who I am?"

They just looked at him in amazement. Someone slapped him across the tail and ordered him to move.

"Miserable heathens!" he muttered to himself. "I'll just go to the market where the good people are. They will remember me."

But the same thing happened. No one paid any attention to the donkey as he strutted down the main street in front of the market place. "The palm branches! Where are the palm branches!" he shouted. "Yesterday, you threw palm branches!"

Hurt and confused, the donkey returned home to his mother. "Foolish child," she said gently. "Don't you realize that without Him, you are just an ordinary donkey?"

Without him you are just an ass!"

Max Lucado reminds us that each of us has got a donkey that the Lord needs. Here is his reflection on using our donkey for the service of the Lord:

"Sometimes I get the impression that God wants me to give him something and sometimes I don't give it because I don't know for sure, and then I feel bad because I've missed my chance. Other times I know he wants something but I don't give it because I'm too selfish. And other times, too few times, I hear him and I obey him and feel honoured that a gift of mine would be used to carry Jesus to another place. And still other times I wonder if my little deeds today will make a difference in the long haul.

Maybe you have those questions, too. All of us have a donkey. You and I each have something in our lives, which, if given back to God, could, like the donkey, move Jesus and his story further down the road. Maybe you can sing or hug or program a computer or speak Swahili or write a cheque. Whichever, that's your donkey.

Whichever, your donkey belongs to him. It really does belong to him. Your gifts are his and the donkey was his. The original wording of the instructions Jesus gave to his disciples is proof: "If anyone asks you why you are taking the donkeys, you are to say, 'Its Lord is in need.'"

So, what is the name of your donkey? The Lord has need of it.

Washing Feet:

The whole thing started with an odd young man who was told to take his shoes off. A Burning Bush was talking to him. Moses looked quizzically at the Burning Bush, then down at his sandaled feet, then back at the Burning Bush, which, clearly, was God, so what else could he do but take off his shoes, for as the Bush said, "You are standing on holy ground. Now, go and lead your people to freedom." That's how this thing with feet and freedom first got started.

Feet and Freedom? Well, yes, actually. You see, there has been a rather long relationship between the human foot and the long-standing efforts of the God of Abraham, the God of Moses and, yes, the God of Jesus to set us free. Feet are always coming up in these Slavery to Freedom stories that our old Bible specializes in telling.

Moses has to bare his dirty feet before he dare approach the Burning Voice of God. And it is with their feet that the horde of Joseph's Sons and Daughters make their daring exit from the slave camps of Egypt. No chariots and charioteers for these poor folks; no, they put everything they can on their backs and they hoof it across the Red Sea and through the Desert of Sinai and after forty years of wandering, they finally walk themselves into the Promised Land. Feet and freedom.

And the Jesus story has plenty of feet in it too. He is a man who foots it from village to town and back to village in poor Galilee. Great crowds come to him and cast their ills at his feet for his healing blessing. Sinners looking for forgiveness fall at his feet to make their plea. His feet are washed by the sinful woman with her tears and dried with her hair. Mary, the sister of Lazarus, sits at his feet to listen to his every word while here grumpy sister toils in the kitchen. And when the time is right, Jesus uses his own two feet to walk up to Jerusalem for his dark date with Herod and Pilate and the high-priest, Caiaphas. It is not to be forgotten that Jesus' feet, his dusty, flesh and bone feet, are the last to receive the nails of crucifixion.

In each case where Jesus' feet appear in the gospels, there appears with them the extraordinary gift of freedom. The sick who are placed at his feet are healed, the sinners who fall in a heap at his feet are forgiven, Mary sitting at his feet in her home hears the word of life spoken, and in his own feet nailed to the cross, the promise of salvation is fulfilled on Golgotha.

Might we then claim something rather odd then? Might it be possible that our lowly human feet are a forgotten tool of divine liberation? Do they not daily move us toward our destiny with God? Do they not humbly carry us forward to the Holy City? Do these feet of ours not patiently support us every step of the way in our life-long pilgrimage to the Kingdom where we shall finally and fully be free?

If this be the case, then when Jesus wraps a towel around his waist, takes a pitcher of water and on the night before he dies, begins washing the feet of his disciples, he is performing a messianic act of liberation. He is certainly acknowledging in gratitude the courage of his disciples in having walked with him for three years to this dark night. He is surely proclaiming that in such walking, despite all that will happen on Good Friday, they have arrived nevertheless at the threshold of new life. But most of all, Jesus is teaching them that this new life is gained not in presiding over multitudes from royal thrones, and not in slaughtering lambs by the hundreds on temple heights; it is gained, however, in walking with the humble and in humbly serving this world's walkers. When he tells his disciples to do as he has done in washing their feet, he is commissioning them to walk as he has walked, to heal as he has healed and yes, to free as he has freed.

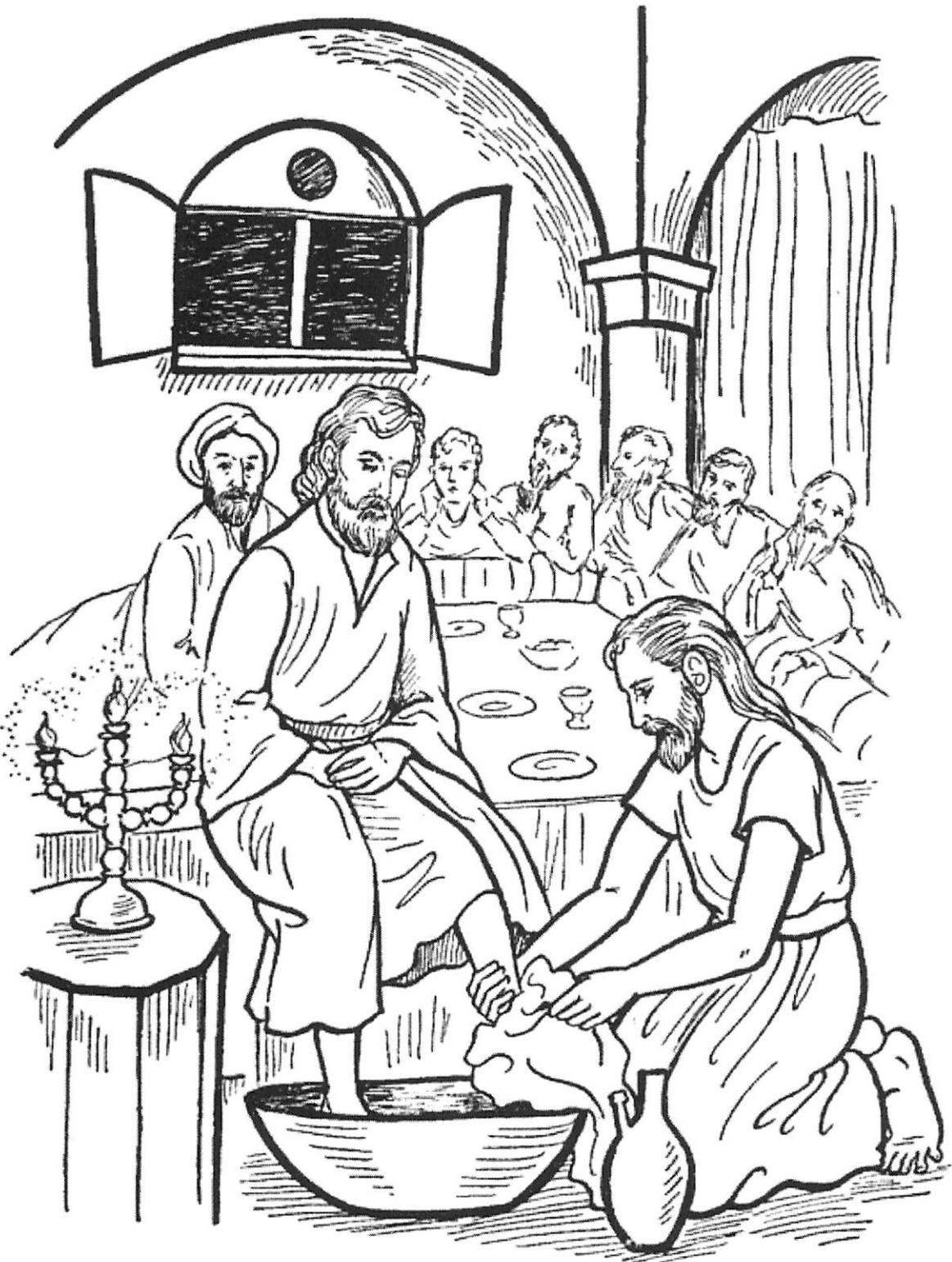
They are to liberate at the level of the road, they are to proclaim the truth next to the homely fireside, and ultimately, they are to change the world by getting down on their knees and washing the feet of God's poor.

This is the authentic mark of the follower of Jesus Christ: that he and she wash the feet of the beggar, the leper, and those rejected by everyone else.

Isn't it wonderfully odd what we see tonight? The whole history of salvation ends as it begins: with bare feet and the voice of God speaking: "*As I have done for you, so you must also do.*"



HOLY THURSDAY



At the Lord's Supper before the crucifixion, Jesus washed the apostles' feet to teach them humility.

JESUS WASHES THE FEET OF THE APOSTLES

Jesus knew on the evening of Passover Day that it would be his last night on earth before returning to his Father. During supper the devil had already suggested to Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, that this was the night to carry out his plan to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had given him everything and that he had come from God and would return to God. And how he loved his



disciples!

So he got up from the supper table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his loins, poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel he had around him. When he came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, ``Master, you shouldn't be washing our feet like this!'' Jesus replied, ``You don't understand now why I am doing it; some day you will.'' ``No,'' Peter protested, ``you shall never wash my feet!'' ``But if I don't, you can't be my partner,'' Jesus replied. Simon Peter exclaimed, ``Then wash my hands and head as well--not just my feet!'' Jesus replied, ``One who has bathed all over needs only to have his feet washed to be

entirely clean. Now you are clean--but that isn't true of everyone here.'' For Jesus knew who would betray him. That is what he meant when he said, ``Not all of you are clean.''

After washing their feet he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, ``Do you understand what I was doing? You call me `Master' and `Lord,' and you do well to say it, for it is true. And since I, the Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. I have given you an example to follow: do as I have done to you.



We see in the Gospel of John, Jesus' example of a servant as he takes time to wash the feet of His disciples. After washing their feet, Jesus tells them that "if I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you should do as I did to you." (John 13:14-15)

One thing that struck me the most in this passage was not the fact that Jesus performed the act of a slave by washing His disciples feet, but that He did it in the face of horrendous suffering. Stay with me here.

Jesus knew His hour had come. He knew that his struggle in Gethsemane was just around the corner and after that was coming unimaginable physical, and perhaps, emotional pain. It was a terrifying situation, I'm sure. But John says that "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God, got up from supper, and laid aside His garments and taking a towel, He girded Himself. Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded."

3 things stood out to me in this passage:

First of all, Jesus was a servant in spite of His circumstances. If anyone had a reason not be around people or to run away, it was Jesus. He was about to endure torture and humiliation to redeem us for the Father. I'm blown away by the fact that God chose to create us *knowing* that we would sin and that even after providing a way of redemption for us that we would reject His Son Jesus had a long road ahead of Him, yet He still gave of Himself to His disciples and showed them how He wanted them to serve others. I think the key here is Jesus knew it was in God's hands.

How many times do we miss an opportunity to serve others because it is inconvenient or doesn't fit into our schedule? How often am I so wrapped up in my circumstances that I miss opportunities to serve?

Secondly, Jesus had to get wet. The scriptures tell us that Jesus got up from His supper and took off His garments. I'm guessing that means he took off his outer clothes and was basically informal. He was going to have to be able to get on the floor and get to the disciples feet so he could wash and dry them. I don't know if any of you have ever participated in a "feet washing" service, but if you have, you know there's a good possibility you're going to get wet. Same thing happens when we serve others. We get involved in their lives. Our hands get "dirty". There will always be some cost to us when we "take up the basin and the towel."

Last but not least - Jesus took His time with each disciple while washing their feet. Not only did Jesus wash their feet, He took the time to wipe them dry. He could have had them all line up in a row and pour water over their feet as they stood there, and then tossed them a towel with a "here ya go, fellas!" But no..... He went to each person individually and washed and dried their feet.

What does this mean for us? Serving others takes time and our attention. Jesus could have hurried through washing their feet. After all, He was about to die on the cross. But He personally ministered to each disciple - including Judas. Now that's something to think about - Jesus was a servant to the very man who would betray Him.

The Basin and The Towel.

a song by Michael Card

*In an upstairs room
A parable is just about to come alive
And while they bicker about who's
best
With a painful glance He'll silently
rise
Their Savior Servant must show
them how
Through the will of the water
And the tenderness of the towel*

CHORUS

*And the call is to community
The impoverished power that sets
the soul free
In humility to take the vow
That day after day we must take up
The basin and the towel

In any ordinary place
On any ordinary day
The parable can live again
When one will kneel and one will yield
Our Saviour Servant must show us
how
Through the will of the water
And the tenderness of the towel*

CHORUS

*And the call is to community
The impoverished power that sets
the soul free
In humility to take the vow
That day after day we must take up
The basin and the towel

And the space between ourselves
sometimes
Is more than the distance between
the stars
By the fragile bridge of the
servant's bow
We take up the basin and the towel*

CHORUS

*And the call is to community
The impoverished power that sets
the soul free
In humility to take the vow
That day after day we must take up
The basin and the towel*



Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.

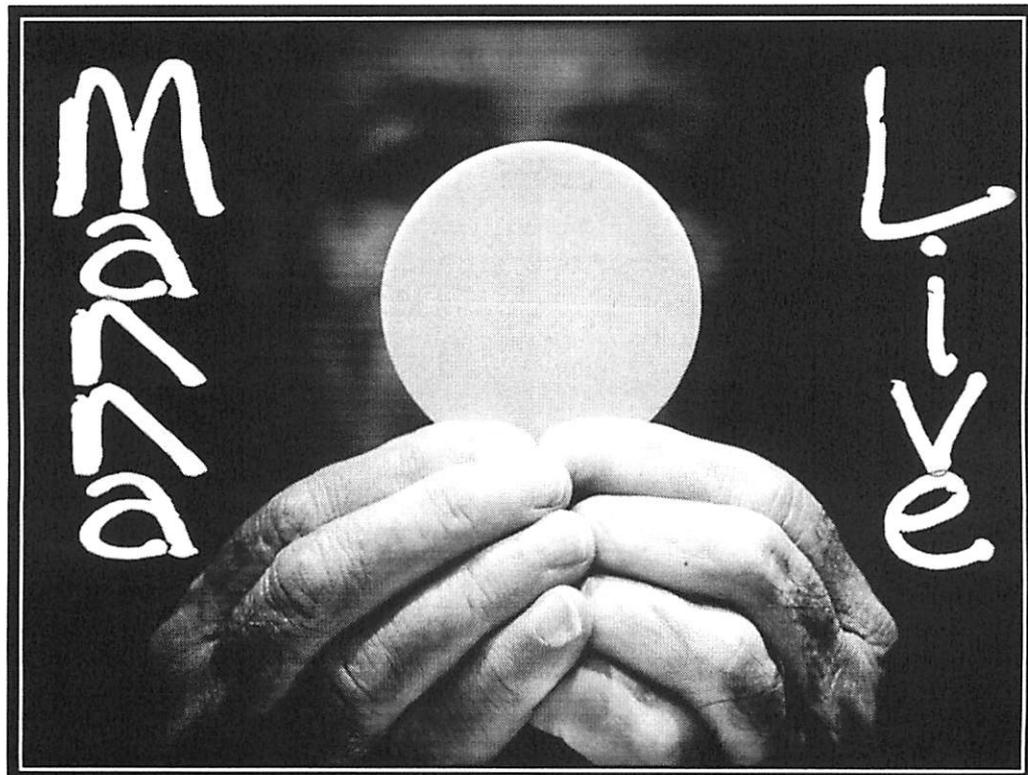
I, just a handful of dough, am asked to be the leaven for a whole batch of people so that faith will rise in hearts. It is humbling to be your leaven. It is risky to be your holy. It is goodness to be your dough.

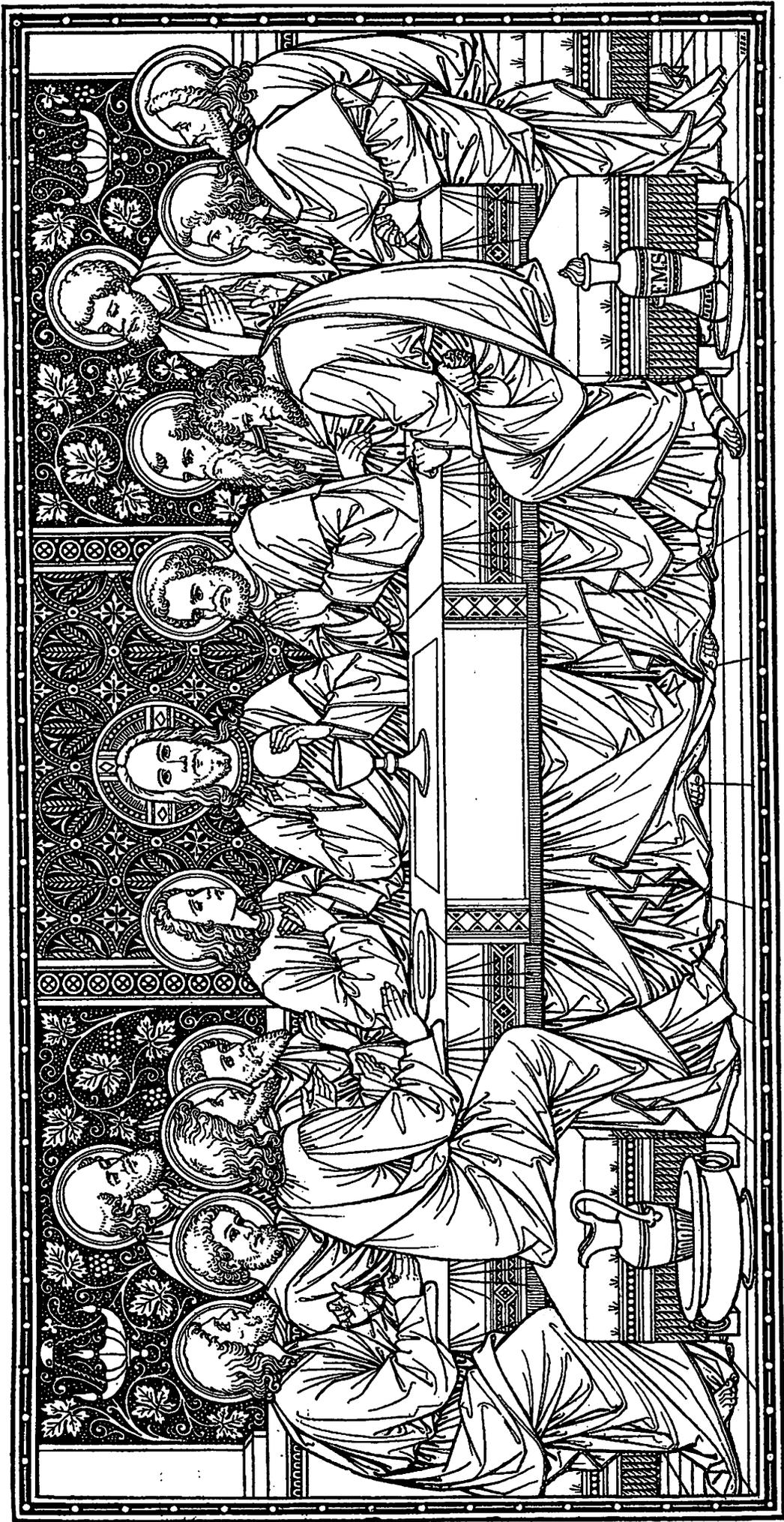
I, just a handful of dough, am called by you to be kneaded, to bear the imprints of trust, giving life shaped by daily dyings.

I, just a handful of dough, know so little about being leaven. Yet, you lift me up repeatedly, telling me that you love me, assuring me with the truth that you are my rising strength.

Jesus, first one blessed and broken, make of me a good handful of dough, one who trusts enough to be kneaded, one who loves enough to be shared.

- Joyce Rupp





This is my Body
This is my Blood

I AM

THE BREAD

of LIFE



I am the Bread of Life.
No one coming to Me will ever
be hungry again. Those believing
in Me will never thirst.

But the trouble is you haven't
believed, even though you have seen
Me. For I have come here from
Heaven to do the will of God.

For it is my Father's will that every-
one who sees His Son and believes on
Him should have Eternal Life - that
I should raise him at the Last Day.

How earnestly I tell you this -
anyone who believes in Me already
has Eternal Life.

Yes, I am the Bread of Life.

JOHN 6: 35

We Have This Treasure

"But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from US." II Corinthians 4:7

"**WE** have this treasure in clay jars...."

"We **HAVE** this treasure in clay jars...."

"We have **THIS TREASURE** in clay jars...."

"We have this treasure **IN CLAY JARS**...."

We all have treasures. Go in to any home and you will find the family's treasures. They will be hanging on the wall or stashed in china cabinets or placed attractively for all to see, somewhere on coffee tables, mantelpieces and so on. Or maybe the treasure is sitting in the driveway or parked in the garage or down at the marina. It could be that the treasure is the house itself.

A story is told about a family in the Far East who found a pearl, a beautiful priceless pearl of fantastic size and unparalleled beauty, a treasure. They made a small box to hold it and hid it away. As each new generation came along they were taken to the hiding spot, the box was brought out to be looked at and the story told about the treasure within. After a long time, as people died and the treasure was passed on in its little box, many details of the story were forgotten and the story gradually changed. The box itself came to symbolize the treasure within. The box was decorated and became more and more elaborate. The treasure was completely forgotten. Then along came a generation who did not care about family traditions and who questioned everything. Even the tabu about the little box. They decided to open it. What did they find? The pearl or a pile of dust? You decide.*

Is the treasure that the box was created to contain still there, or has it turned to dust? This is a question which confronts us as individual Christians and as members of the church, the Body of Christ. Century after century the church

has handed down this treasure to us. In a box. The box itself has become more and more ornate and unwieldy. Does it still contain the treasure that was entrusted to her? Do you contain this treasure?

On the night Jesus was betrayed he talked with his disciples and shared some of his last thoughts with them. He gave them what he called a new commandment. "Love one another, as I have loved you." Is this not the treasure we carry as the church, as individual members of it? A love so profound that it radically changes us and changes the world we live in? This treasure that we carry around in clay jars, in our fragile and imperfect humanity; this treasure is nothing less than the love of God for us and for his creation. Imagine what would happen if we didn't keep it locked up and hidden away, stashed in ornate buildings or in hearts held tight in an embrace with the treasures of this world. Imagine. A love let loose on the world and in our lives. A love without strings attached. A love stretched wide open to hold the whole creation in a new embrace! Imagine! And then go open up that box and let the treasure loose!

Prayer

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, king of love. Your love is so much more than we can imagine, so perfect, so beautiful that we have hugged it to our bosom and hidden it away to admire in secret. When what you have wanted was for us to let it loose upon this earth. For us to be extravagant and magnanimous with it, following the example of she who poured out the precious ointment on Jesus. Help us O Lord. Pry the box loose from our hands and open it wide that we may be bathed in your love and thus anointed, go out into all the world to share this treasure. In Jesus' name we ask. Amen.

Scraping off the dirt.

Where we walk, we walk in the cess
left by others, by ourselves, the
mess of human lives, the comings and
goings of a wasteful, corrupt and
selfish world, we wallow in the dirt
and the hurt, oblivious to the stink
and the stains that we carry with us.
God stripped off all finery, stepped
in our mess, knelt in it, touched it,
held our ugliest bits in the very
hands that made us and washed them
clean.

hands which formed matter, pulse
which set the rhythm of the planets,
breath which stirred life into being,
mind which dreamt the diversity of
the species, eyes which bore deep
into the heart of humanity, heart
which yearns for us to choose peace,
feet that walk each step with us,
mouth which chides and comforts,
arms which embrace the hurting,
strength which sustains the weak,
life which was given up for love,
creator who scrapes the dirt off my
feet, God who serves.

wash me clean

where I judge others
where I dismiss others
where I abuse others
where I ignore others
where I ridicule others
where I use others

wash me clean

where I elevate myself
where I think only of myself
where I want only for myself
where I gather to myself
where I hold to myself
where I value only myself

wash me clean

where I seek for power
where I seek for control
where I seek for praise
where I seek for status
where I seek for fame
where I seek for wealth

wash me clean

**may we be at all times, both now
and forever
a protector for those without
protection
a guide for those who have lost
their way
a ship for those with oceans to
cross
a bridge for those with rivers to
cross
a sanctuary for those in danger
a lamp for those without light
a place of refuge for those who
lack shelter
and a servant to all in need.**

those who are abused and those who abuse the goods of our earth?

Dancers remain in place, holding hands out. After a period of silence, Leader continues:

Leader: Our hands enable us to touch our world, support the good and resist the destructive. Our hands are lifted up in prayer. We God ask for what we need. We offer God the work of our hands. We wholeheartedly accept whatever sufferings or joys, disappointments or blessings may come our way.

Dancers put hands at side and eyes down; leader continues:

After confessing your sin this evening and receiving absolution, you are invited to come to the centre space and place your hands around and lift up a prayer bowl. You might make it a begging bowl and ask for what you need, or what you know the world needs. You might make that bowl an offertory bowl and offer up the fruits of your life and the good of our earth. Or you might use the bowl as a Gethsemane bowl and join the prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Olives. Our hands embody our prayer this evening.



LENTEN SERVICE:

Leader: Hands can help us embody prayer.

(gesture of "praying hands")



We join our two hands together so that we can bring our entire selves to prayer. With our hands we bless ourselves with water, receive the Eucharist, pray the rosary, make the sign of the cross.

How has my prayer enabled me to be a minister of reconciliation this Lent? Am I spending time? Seeking guidance for my prayer life? Joining whole-heartedly in liturgical and communal prayer for our church and our world?

Hands can help us reach out to the world.
(gesture of reaching out)

Reaching out literally shifts attention away from ourselves. With our hands we can practice, loving kindness, compassion, welcome, "work" as a form of prayer.

How have my hands been used to reach out to the needs of others? Am I willing to offer support and guidance to those around me? Seeking those who need a helping hand, or a reassuring touch? Do I enter generously into whatever work is at hand for us?

Hands enable us to protest, to resist, to protect.
(gesture of protest)

Hands and arms raised in protest speak clearly of resistance to evil or domination. These hands speak often of solidarity with others in working for justice.

How do I link arms with others to promote a better world? Have I written letters? Read and spoken about current issues? Do I pray with

THE CROSS PRAYER

Oh. Adorable Lord and Saviour
Jesus Christ, You have suffered
death on the Cross for our sins.
Oh Holy Cross of Jesus. be my
true light! Oh. Holy Cross fill my
soul with good thoughts, Oh Holy Cross ward off from me
all things that are evil. Oh. Holy Cross ward off from me
all dangers and deaths and give me life everlasting! Oh.
Crucified Jesus of Nazareth have mercy on me now and
forever. In honour of the Precious Blood of Jesus, His
death, resurrection and ascen-
sion which lead to everlasting
life; true as Jesus was born
on Christmas Day; true as
Jesus was crucified on Good
Friday; true as Joseph and
Nicodemus took Jesus down
from the cross and buried Him;
true as Jesus ascended into
Heaven, may He preserve me
from my enemies visible and in-
visible forever. Oh, Lord Jesus
Christ have mercy on me! Mary
and Joseph, pray for me. Lord
Jesus Christ through Your suffering the
Cross grant me strength to bear the Cross without fear or
dread and give me the grace that I may follow You. AMEN.

THIS prayer was found in the Sepulchre of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in the year 803 and was sent by the Pope to the Emperor Charles on the evening of his departure as he went to battle for his safety.

Jesus is the Light that shines in the darkness. Today's Liturgy reminds us of the darkness in which that light shone. It puts before us the courage and conviction of Jesus. Jesus faces the malevolence of his enemies, the betrayal of friends, the mockery and torture of the legal power, the miscarriage of justice, and the agony of death by crucifixion. From the cross, he can see who is there. From the cross, he can also see who is *not* there.

The Resurrection is not a cheap grace. The world and all its hatred had the full run of Good Friday. Evil called for the destruction of the One who washed the Feet. Wickedness would make no room for the compassionate service of others

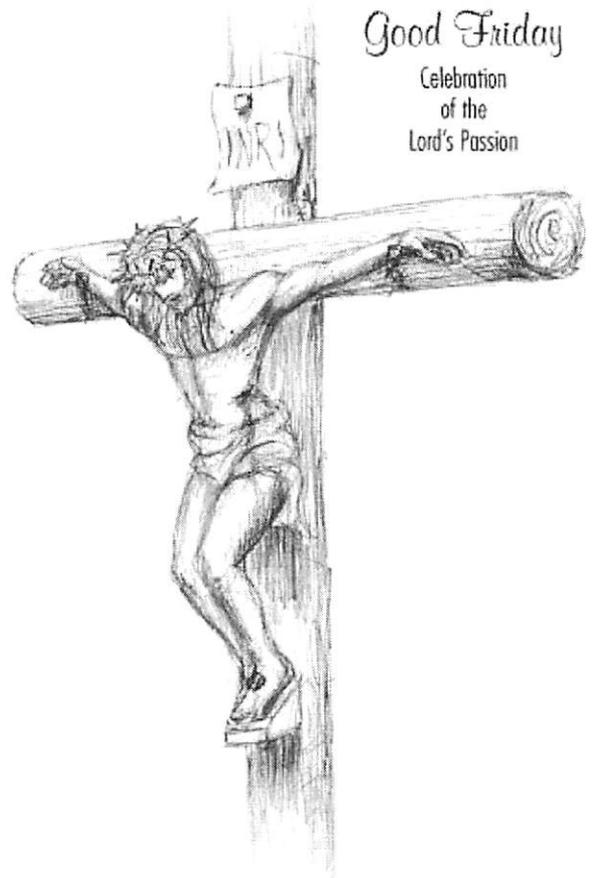
Jesus is the Light that shines in the darkness. And what darkness it was! 'Away with him, away with him, crucify him!' the crowd cries.

They reject Jesus, the Light. But, they do not just reject the light. They prefer the dark and they choose it.

'We have no king but Caesar!' they say. At that point, they are willing to believe in *anybody*, even sworn enemies.

The Gospel shows the religious leaders paying attention to any and every detail so as to sanctify their injustice. Many people have shared in the darkness that Jesus faced this day. Yet, Jesus is the light that darkness could not overpower. His light shone most brightly in the darkness of Good Friday.

The Resurrection shows how thoroughly he triumphed over darkness and death. That is why we call this day Good Friday. That is why today's vestment is the red of the martyr and not the purple of the mourner.

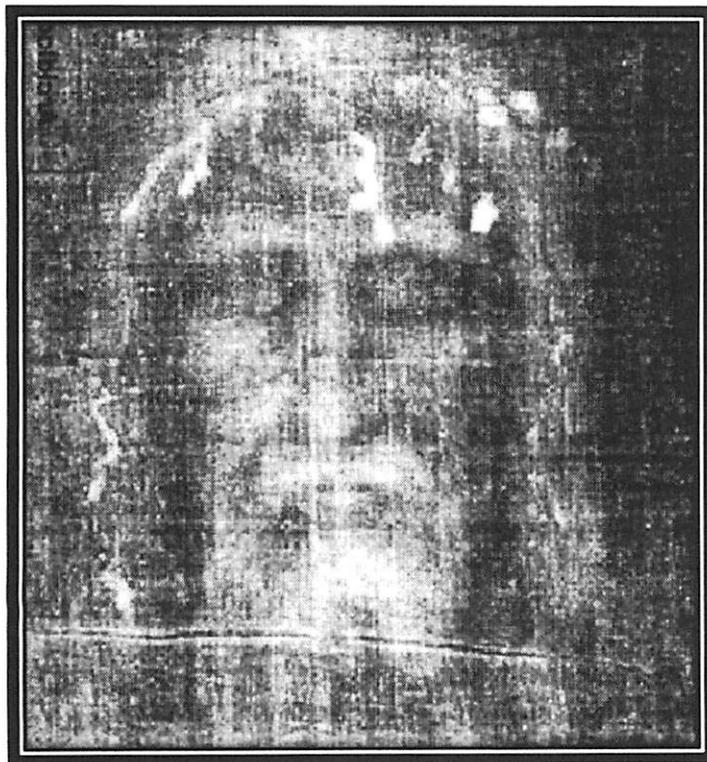


When we think of Jesus as light, we might be inclined to think of the star in the East, the worshipping Kings, and the choirs of angels. But John the Evangelist has seen the horror of the cross. Of all the evangelists, John especially sees the light of Jesus in his death on the Cross.

On Good Friday, the light truly shone in the darkness and the darkness could not overcome it. It was the wood of the Cross that revealed the Light of the World.

At the end when Jesus says, 'It is accomplished!' he had shown us what it means to say that 'God so loves the world.' He has given us a whole new light in which to see our life and our world. Words alone cannot do justice to the light that Jesus brought us. No wonder the liturgy of this day calls to us: Come let us worship!

PRAYER IN FRONT OF THE SHROUD



*Print Your Face in me, Lord,
so that the Father, in seeing You in me, could repeat: "You are the son /
the daughter that I love",
and so that whoever meets me could see a spark of the Father.*

*Print Your Face in me, Lord,
so that I could be a witness of Your Light and of Your Goodness,
and of the endless tenderness You have for every creature.*

*Print Your Face in me, Lord,
so that I could be a sign of Your Love for the little ones and the poor,
for the sick and the outcasts.*

*Print Your face in me, Lord, so that I could be a living image,
which bears in me the signs of Your Death and Resurrection.*

Amen.



Laid in the Tomb

BREAD WINE AND LOSS

A vigil for Easter

Lord Jesus, you left a table with crumbs of bread – and spills of wine...

You had touched them – blessed them – made them your Body – your Blood...
and left them behind as a sign of your Presence with us – for ever...

Help us to be aware of your Presence here with us tonight – as real as it was then

Teach our eyes to be instruments of our hearts – our souls – so that in Bread we find you.

Bread that was broken...

Reflect on the brokenness of the Bread – crumbs falling unnoticed to the table... Bread being handed out to those gathered – one who was to betray Jesus – one who was to deny knowing him – nine others who were to desert him – and one who was to follow, to stand at the foot of the Cross...

What does Jesus offer you in this sign of brokenness and self-giving?

What does he offer those who have been abused – betrayed – whose accusations have been denied – who have been deserted?

How can you be someone who stands alongside them at the foot of the Cross?

Wine poured – drunk – spilt

Reflect on the pouring out of the Wine – the pouring out of the Blood of Christ... Wine that speaks of the sacrifice of Christ and his invitation to his apostles – and us to be part of that life-giving sacrifice.

The spilling of innocent blood – innocence brutalised by human evil – Blood spilt – the ultimate sacrifice – but unrecognised...

What does Jesus offer you in this sign of pouring out his life-blood?

What do the injuries of Jesus – the shedding of his blood – offer to those who have been abused?

How can you become part of that libation – pouring out your own life for the healing of others?

Lord, you left the table to pray – to plead that God would not ask you to take a path through darkness and agonised suffering –

You were afraid... terrified

You were utterly alone – those whom you so wanted to be with you – to pray with you – did not understand.... they slept on while you wept and sweated blood

You begged God to stop it all – but your words seemed to go unanswered...

You knew agony – torment – despair – the ultimate dark night of soul – of mind and body...

In your agony, you have been where so many have been. You understand their suffering in ways we may not. Take their pain to yourself. Lead them to the trust that enabled you – when all seemed lost – to say, "Not my will but thine be done" knowing that God does not want suffering but that, through yours – the Passion and Death of his own Son, he could redeem the world from sin and death.

Reflect on what Jesus must have experienced in that Garden. What would you wish to say – to do – to ease the anguish? Or simply to be with him in it?

How does the agony of mind and soul speak to those who have been abused?

How can it help you to understand the suffering and deepen your prayer for them?

During this night, you met power – power used unjustly to condemn the innocent – unable – unwilling to listen to your story. The one who was innocent was made to be guilty. The one sinned against was the one to be punished.

Reflect on what you know of Jesus' "trials" – and consider the experience of so many people who have been abused in the light of what Jesus endured. See the suffering of the innocent at the hands of those who use power to suppress their story – of those who do not – or cannot bring themselves to – believe what they are hearing. Stand alongside those without power – without the words to convince – who know that the odds are

stacked against them. Think too of those who are afraid to listen for fear of what might be revealed – afraid of what others will think.

How do Jesus' experiences help you to understand the plight of children – young people and vulnerable adults who find themselves trying to explain what has happened – especially in circumstances in which they have not been believed?

During this night, you met brutality. There was nothing – and nobody – to stop you being ill-treated – and so you were... just because people could hurt you with impunity they did... they knew they could get away with it – and thought it was fun

Reflect on what you know of Jesus' suffering at the hands of soldiers – the physical – emotional abuse heaped upon him even before sentence was passed...

Consider his human feelings of helplessness – pain – humiliation – fear of what was yet to come – and love for those who were causing the suffering. (Part of the problem for those who are abused is that they do love their parents/ priests and don't want them to get into trouble... it may be uncomfortable but may be worth reminding people that the abuse takes place in a context of what could be seen as otherwise loving relationships)

How does Jesus' experience speak to that of those who have been abused?

How can he speak to them – perhaps in ways we can't?

Closing the Vigil

WE ARE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE END –
WHICH WILL ITSELF BECOME A NEW BEGINNING...
BUT WE ARE NOT THERE YET...

Some will go to bed tonight afraid of someone coming to their room...
afraid of someone coming in out of their minds with drink or drugs –
and for it all to begin again...

WE ARE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE END –
WHICH WILL ITSELF BECOME A NEW BEGINNING...
BUT WE ARE NOT THERE YET...

Some will still be unable to speak of what they have endured –
others – having spoken – will be living out the consequences

WE ARE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE END –
WHICH WILL ITSELF BECOME A NEW BEGINNING...
BUT WE ARE NOT THERE YET...

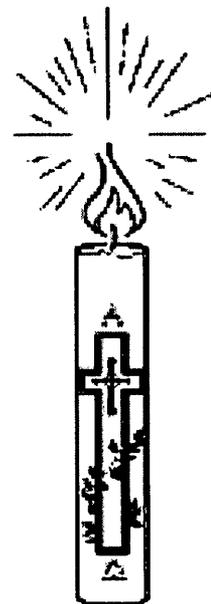
For some the worst feels yet to come...

WE ARE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE END –
WHICH WILL ITSELF BECOME A NEW BEGINNING...
BUT WE ARE NOT THERE YET...

For some the darkness is to grow yet deeper...

WE ARE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE END –
WHICH WILL ITSELF BECOME A NEW BEGINNING...
WE ARE NOT THERE YET...
BUT WE WILL NOT ALLOW THE DARKNESS TO
PREVAIL DURING THIS NIGHT...

As people leave they light a candle that can safely be left burning – if long-burning all the better so that the light can last until dawn.



Easter Morning



**The stone was rolled away.
The tomb was empty!**



Easter Morning

The little girl was out for a walk with her grandad. They took a short-cut through a cemetery. As they were walking along, the little girl was fascinated by all the crosses, statues, monuments, and floral wreaths on either side, so, like any such child, she had many questions to ask. 'What are those things?' she asked her grandad, pointing at the graves and tomb stones. The grandad was caught unawares. How do you explain the facts of death, let alone the facts of life to a four-year old? Anyhow, he had a go.

'These were people who lived in those houses down there, and one day Holy God came and took them away to live with him, in his house with all his angels.' The little girl thought about that for a while and, as most parents know, when you answer one question, you are sure to get another one. And did they go off to live in Holy God's house?' she asked. 'Yes, they did', said the granddad hoping that was the end of the matter.

Suddenly, the little eyes lit up, and she turned to her grandad with a smile of understanding, and, with complete conviction in her voice, as she said, "I bet you Grandad, when they went off to live with God and all his angels in his house, that this is where they left their clothes !.'

And she was right that's what the angel said on the morning of the resurrection if you're looking for Jesus, he's not here ... but come in and see where he left his clothes.

