IEXTRA

YOUR JOURNEY TOWARDS EASTER

47 DAILY REFLECTIONS and prayers

TRAVELIANG in hope



LINDA BORDONI:
"I HAVE HAD
THE PRIVILEGE
OF WITNESSING
POPE FRANCIS
IN ACTION."



Sally
McAllister:
"As they
slammed a
brick into
the base

of my spine, I thought, 'Forgiveness starts here'."



REV. KATE
BOTTLEY: "IN
THIS GOSPEL
READING, JESUS
IS TELLING IT
STRAIGHT."

WELCOME

"This time last year..." How many of us are saying or thinking such thoughts as we start our Lenten journey towards Easter? We all remember working from home, closed schools, lockdowns, daily statistics, trashed holiday plans, supermarket queues and online church services. The list seems endless.

Across the world, countless people also suffered the heartbreak of, directly or indirectly, losing a loved one to Covid-19. As never before, they – we – walked the Way of the Cross with Jesus with hearts which didn't stop aching just because, liturgically, it was Easter Sunday morning.

At the same time, many of us can also remember increased family togetherness, birdsong, sunshine, gardening, hobbies, exercises in front of the TV, Thursday evenings' solidarity in clapping for the NHS and other frontline heroes and heroines...

2020 changed us in ways we could never have expected. For this reason, each of us is approaching Lent 2021 with unplanned, challenging, sad and happy memories. Many unknowns still lie ahead.

At the height of the pandemic, a 28-year-old wrote a beautiful poem from his prison cell in the south of England. Instead of giving in to despair, he looked at the signs of life and hope which he glimpsed through the bars and in the people around him. He wrote:

"I choose to see these things, I choose to see the good, I choose to live in hope. As everyone should."

This edition of *Lent Extra* is also about travelling on in hope. We carry with us the experiences, the losses and the gains of 2020, holding on to hope.

Lent is about one man's journey – through jealousy, misunderstanding, betrayal, rejection, abandonment, agony, despair, friendship, loyalty, compassion and courage – towards the new life and hope of Easter.

His journey is ours.

Lent is about travelling with Jesus towards Easter. Perhaps, in Lent 2021, we can allow him to travel with us, filling us with hope.

All of us at Redemptorist Publications would also like to accompany you and everyone you know and love with our prayers that Easter will be a time of hope, of joy and of blessing.

May God bless you, now and always, Sr Janet Fearns FMDM Editor



Children will love Celebrate: Lent a magazine just for them.

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When you have finished with this magazine, please recycle it. Thank you.

Your journey to Easter starts here...

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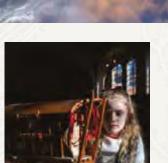
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Cover photo: Kate Bottley @ John Mannell; Cover photo: @ Sally McAllister and p5 Gen Verde www.genverde. it; pp 1, 26, 27 © Mazur/cbcew.org.uk; P6 Sr Leonella Sgorbati CM - catholicsaints.info/blessed-leonellasgorbati and Sr Dorothy Stang SND - courtesy of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur; p7 Redemptorist Publications are grateful to the Redemptorist General Council in Rome for permission to use the official photo of the restored icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour in the church of St Alphonsus, Via Merulana 26, Rome.

JESUS CARRIES HIS CROSS

Ouring Lent we remember, in a special way, the way in which Jesus accepted and carried his cross. Perhaps this has a new resonance in our own lives at present.

Fr Denis McBride C.Ss.R. reflects...

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the Gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?"

Mark 8:34-36

You accepted the cross, dear Lord, long before it was laid on your shoulders, didn't you? To you it came not as surprise but as destiny. You sensed that this instrument of torture would somehow not only test you but define you. Not long into your ministry you seemed sure that you would have to pay a price for who you are, the awkward people you loved in your spendthrift way, the authorities you castigated and the values you cherished. And the price would be high – yourself.

At the beginning of your ministry it looked possible that the authorities would violently dismiss you; then as your mission developed it looked highly likely; now, of course, it is inevitable. You knew you would have to suffer for the choices you made and you shared that quite openly with your disciples: that your kind of love would make its way with a cross on its back.

I must say I sympathise with Simon Peter when he took you aside that day in Caesarea Philippi to admonish you for all this distressing talk of suffering. To me he sounds like a reasonable road manager giving advice to the principal performer, worrying that people would be confused if that particular speech were ever to be repeated. He must have thought: it is hardly an enticement to follow the master when he reveals that his destination is the killing fields outside Jerusalem. Who is going to leave the security of home and family to follow your forecast of sure turbulence ahead?

And, of course, events would prove Peter right on that score: none of them did follow you to the killing fields, did they?

I admire you for many things, dear Lord, but this especially: what people rarely mention in ordinary

conversation is the cost of things – not materially, I mean, but the physical and mental and spiritual heartache and grief that can follow from the choices we all make as we struggle to find a purpose and direction in our lives.

You decided to bring to the fore in conversation what most people choose to hide: that suffering is part of everyday life and every relationship, and if people never mention it, they are kidding you.

You have, if I may say so, this annoying habit of attending to what we all want to wish away. For you, suffering is part of everyone's agenda, which is why you challenged all of us to take up our own cross and follow you.

Did you know, dear Lord, that you would bear not only a wooden cross on your shoulders but a world of fatigue and misery and iniquity on your back? You take it all on personally as you criticised your opponents for doing the opposite:

They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them.

Matthew 23:4

You know that some authorities have a compulsion to diminish their subjects; they are experts in restricting people's modest freedom to move with dignity and purpose, by imposing needless burdens on them. Not all, but some authorities are sadistic by nature, taking delight in how their fitful demands are unreachable, save for by a few perfectionists. And then, when these authorities are approached with pleas for mercy, they turn away and shrug, as if failure and vulnerability are foreign to their very nature. As the Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh observed: "Their hands push closed the doors that God holds open."

By comparison you proclaimed one of the most beautiful messages I have ever heard:



"The Lord asks us from his cross to rediscover the life that awaits us, to look toward those who look to us, to strengthen, recognise and foster the grace that lives within us. Let us not quench the wavering flame that never falters and let us allow hope to be rekindled."

Pope Francis

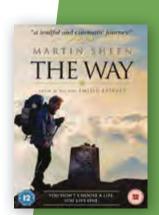
Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Matthew 11:28

Beloved Lord, what have we done to your yoke, the one you assured us was easy to shoulder? What have we done to your burden, the one you assured us was light?

This article is taken from Stations of the Cross: then and now. Fr Denis McBride's many other CDs, DVDs and books are available from Redemptorist Publications, www.rpbooks.co.uk





FILM REVIEW



A film for Lent: The Way (2010)

Starring: Martin Sheen, Deborah Kara Unger *et al*. Directed by: Emilio Estevez

This film is eleven years old, but as relevant today as when it was first released.

Unlikely pilgrims meet on their way to the tomb of St James at Compostela. Tom Avery (Martin Sheen), a New York dentist, carries the ashes of his son (Emilio Estevez), who died on his first day of the Camino. "Joost from Ansterdam" (Yorick van Wageningen) is an overweight, cheery drug supplier who says he wants to lose weight. Sarah (Deborah Kara Unger), a bitter, angry Canadian, is apparently walking to give up smoking – but actually had an abusive husband and an abortion which she regrets. Jack (James Nesbitt) is an Irish travel writer experiencing writer's block... and there's yourself, because you will quickly become a pilgrim travelling with them.

As they gradually change over the course of their Camino, so will you find yourself learning, asking questions and perhaps also making alterations in your personal life. You will be with the four as they grumble, laugh, think, cry and meet with other pilgrims. You will also see the "real" person beneath their exterior. Perhaps you might also glimpse yourself as God sees you: beautiful, vulnerable, hope-filled, questioning...

This is a film which can be watched again and again because something special emerges at every viewing. It will leave you thinking.

Editorial note: I've seen The Way six times so far and will definitely be watching it again. Sr Janet



Sally McAllister grew up in Belfast during "the Troubles" and, through the Focolare, learned that forgiveness makes changes and builds peace.

Growing up in the New Lodge Road, North Belfast during "the Troubles", I watched rioters stone and petrol-bomb the army, and the army respond with water cannons, and baton rounds of tear gas and plastic bullets.

Having witnessed injustice and cruelty from all sides, at the age of 17, I decided that, if I was authentic as a young person, I couldn't just sit on the fence condemning the violence around me – I had to do something to find a solution to Northern Ireland's problems.

But I honestly didn't feel as if I had many options. I had already given up on politics based on sectarianism and merely praying for peace seemed a cop-out.

Around that time there was an Anglican nun living in Ardoyne called Sr Anna. She had left her convent in Oxford to come to Northern Ireland to do cross-community work. She knew the Focolare spirituality and when she heard the young people were organising a big music festival in Loppiano (a small town of the Focolare movement) she contacted twelve large secondary schools and asked them each to send a representative. And so off we set – three Methodists, three Baptists, three Presbyterians and three Catholics. The atmosphere among us wasn't difficult but it was quite superficial – we had to keep it light in order not to stray into something which potentially could quickly become very divisive.

The law of Loppiano is mutual love and it had an incredible impact on us. In the two weeks we spent there, I saw the invisible but very real barriers among the group melt away. Certainly, seeing people from different races and religions united, gave me the

strength to change my life and to want to begin to make a difference to the situation around me.

I realised that the solution to Northern Ireland's problems began with me.

My first experiences were at home – building new relationships with my family, at school or every time I came across a foot patrol of soldiers, remembering that the measure of my love for God was how I treated them.

The real turning point for me came shortly after I returned from buying milk, thereby crossing the peace-line into another area. From inside the shop I noticed a big gang of young men hanging around outside, waiting for me – I couldn't believe it! I had changed but Belfast hadn't. They beat me very badly. As they slammed a brick into the base of my spine, I thought, if you believe in what you saw in Loppiano, now is the moment to put it into practice. Forgiveness starts here.

On another occasion I was stopped by a foot patrol of soldiers and taken in for questioning following a massive local explosion. I was absolutely terrified as I was taken to the army barracks in an armoured car at gunpoint. At one point I thought: what would the people from the Focolare say and do in a situation like this? They would say that the only thing that will remain of this moment is how much you try to love. So I talked to the soldiers – treated them as human beings, loved by God as he loved me – and I realised they were probably just as frightened as I was. I was held for several hours and then released. Walking home at about 3 a.m., I felt a tremendous sense of peace: I had taken on board a lifestyle I couldn't reject.

Now, based in Loppiano, I work and tour with Gen Verde, one of the Focolare's international performing arts groups.

A very important part of our current work is a workshop programme for young people called "Start Now". Its strapline is "Dialogue, peace, unity... It begins with me". The project began several years ago in the Holy Land with mixed groups of young Christians, Muslims





and Jews and has proved effective in countries across the world with young people from very diverse social backgrounds, races and religions. It presents ideas, but also an opportunity to put these values into practice. The young people see the results and recognise that this experience can continue in their everyday lives.

I recently spent time in Belfast and realised that the experience of the Troubles is still raw for some people. Great things have happened and I saw the impressive regeneration of areas which were very run-down when I lived there.

Other areas are still deeply affected by sectarianism and the ghosts of the past. That sort of regeneration requires something deeper if we are to win the minds and hearts of future generations, and give them hope that things can be different: to realise that they themselves can make a difference.

As an 18-year-old I thought my life was over and nothing would ever change. Focolare spirituality showed me that there was a way...

At that time someone told me that every time you do an act of love, every time you forgive and start again, you are putting a brick in the foundations of the peace that will one day come to Northern Ireland. I believed it then. I believe it still.

Sally McAllister is a member of the Focolare Movement (https://www.focolare.org/en) and the Tour Director of Gen Verde (https://www.genverde.it/index). This article is taken from a talk she gave in Belfast to an international gathering of Bishop Friends of the Focolare Movement.

A canticle of love

than falling in Love in a quite absolute, final way.

What you are in love with,

what seizes your imagination,

will affect everything.

It will decide

what will get you out of bed in the morning,

what you do with your evenings,

how you spend your weekends,

what you read, whom you know,

what breaks your heart,

Nothing is more practical than finding God,

and what amazes you with joy and gratitude.

Fall in Love, stay in love, and it will decide everything.

–Pedro Arrupe SJ



"I CHOOSE TO

LOVE"

"Love is our reason for living." Sr Janet Fearns FMDM reminds us of two people whose love, like that of Jesus, led to their deaths on behalf of others.



Sr Dorothy Stang SND

You are training student nurses. When you climbed out of bed in the morning, you did not stop to think that, by evening, you would be a martyr. Instead, you headed to the school of nursing, reasonably expecting your day to be surrounded by familiar people and familiar routines.

On the outskirts of the Somali capital, Mogadishu, on 17 September 2006, Al Qaeda-linked Islamists murdered an Italian Consolata Missionary sister. They killed 66-year-old Sister Leonella Sgorbati and a security guard, Mohamed Osman Mahamud, as they crossed the road between the school of nursing, which she had established, and the village in which the convent was located.

In the midst of increasing violence in Somalia and only six months before she died, Italian television interviewed Sr Leonella. She declared, "I know there is a bullet with my name on it. I don't know when it will arrive, but as long as it does not arrive, I will stay [in Somalia]." She later remarked,

"I cannot be afraid and at the same time love. I choose to love."

On the day they died, Sr Leonella and Mohamed were heading home from the Nursing Training Centre when gunmen fired on them, instantly killing the security guard. Sr Leonella, shot in the back and critically injured, was rushed into the hospital. In agony, she could say only one thing, "I forgive. I forgive." ("Perdono. Perdono.") These were also her last words.

Nineteen months before Sr Leonella's death, on 12 February 2005, hired assassins killed 73-yearold Sr Dorothy Stang, a sister of Notre Dame and a missionary to the landless peasants of Brazil, as she walked through the Amazonian rainforest on her way to a meeting in the village of Esperanza ("Hope"). Known as the "Angel of the Amazon" because of her wholehearted devotion to the poor, she had received death threats but remained undeterred in her struggle for justice. She herself declared, "I don't want to flee, nor do I want to abandon the battle of these farmers who live without any protection in the forest. They have the sacrosanct right to aspire to a better life on land where they can live and work with dignity while respecting the environment." Asked why she carried on fighting, the future martyr responded, "There are things you do because they feel right and they make no sense and they make no money and it may be the real reason we are here: to love each other (and to eat each other's cooking) and to say it was good!"

On 12 February 2005, two gunmen, hired by a local wealthy landowner, blocked Sr Dorothy's path and asked if she had any weapons. "This is my only weapon," she replied, showing them her Bible. She read them a passage from the Beatitudes, "Blessed are the poor in spirit..." They responded by shooting her six times, leaving her body sprawled on the path where she fell.

Sr Dorothy was posthumously awarded the 2008 United Nations Human Rights Prize. In the same year, the Sr Dorothy Stang Center for Social Justice and Community Engagement was established at Notre Dame de Namur University in Belmont, California.

Sr Leonella was beatified on 26 May 2018 at the Cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta e Santa Giustina in Piacenza, Italy, by Cardinal Angelo Amato.

Sr Janet Fearns is a Franciscan Missionary of the Divine Motherhood.

PERPETUAL HEROES

Katie Knight suggests that in the icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, when looking at Jesus and Mary, we are looking at perpetual heroes.

Six years old, terrified of thunderstorms and, dangerously, hiding in a wardrobe, my mother forced me to stand at the bedroom window. She held me tightly whilst we watched the lightning together – and ever since then, I have loved the noise and brilliance of a thunderstorm. You can probably think of similar situations.

More recently, travelling by plane, a scared toddler wailed and clung to his mother, unable to understand what was happening to his ears as the plane descended towards the runway and the atmospheric pressure changed.

There is nothing extraordinary about a child clinging to a parent for comfort and reassurance in a frightening situation. We've all done it.

Take a look at the familiar icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. The young Jesus sees two angels carrying the instruments of his future passion and death. Afraid, he holds tightly to Mary's hand. In his fear, his sandal comes undone and hangs from his right foot, ready to fall.

Why, in the icon, does Mary look, not at her son, but at us?

We are familiar with media photos of parents fleeing from conflict, carrying a small child, searching for safety, trying to avoid the next possible source of danger. A time of extreme anxiety is not the moment to gaze lovingly into the child's eyes as if nothing else mattered.

Of course, where there is no danger, the adult remains calm and unafraid, takes charge and responds to a

child's distress. Yet, even where both lives are threatened, many little ones will sleep soundly in the arms of a petrified parent, trusting that love will keep them both safe.

So why are Jesus and Mary so peaceful in this icon? Jesus appears more curious than terrified at the vision of his future suffering.

An icon proclaims spiritual, not physical, truths. Perhaps Mary looks towards us, pleading on Jesus' behalf. The calmness of mother and son might also encourage us to rise above our fear and anxiety – and to trust.

Courage and fear walk hand-in-hand. Those who are unafraid are not brave. The hero is probably also terrified but does what is right in spite of feeling petrified.

We had an amazing example of heroism during the terrorist attack on Westminster Bridge in June 2017. PC Keith Palmer, an unarmed police officer, was stabbed as he tried to stop a knife-wielding killer from entering the Houses of Parliament. Of course he was scared. Of course he knew he risked his life – but he placed the safety of others before his own and died in the process. He was brave. He was truly a hero.

The icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help shows a mother and child who place our peace and security before their own.

It could perhaps be renamed "Perpetual heroes".

Katie Knight is a mother, grandmother, great-grandmother and a former midwife.

A short prayer to Our Lady of Perpetual Help

O Mother of Perpetual Help, sweetest Mary, I ask you, with your motherly grace, to watch over me. Give me the strength to take one day at a time. Amen.



TRAVELLING WITH THE "POPE OF HOPE"

Linda Bordoni, a former ballet dancer, has worked as a Vatican Radio journalist for more than 25 years and, in that time, has accompanied three popes on their travels. She reflects on some very special journeys with Pope Francis.

The "Lampedusa cross", made with wood from wrecked migrant boats

It was the summer of 2017 when rumours of a possible papal visit to Colombia were promptly quashed in the usual Vatican circles. An unwritten rule decrees that the Pope never travels to a country where a presidential electoral campaign is underway to avoid any political exploitation. But on this occasion, hope trumped protocol: the war-torn country had just embarked on a difficult path to peace after the signing of a deal between the president and the FARC, Colombia's largest insurgent group. That's when Vatican Radio asked me to travel to Bogotá with Pope Francis to cover his six-day apostolic visit. He was visiting the nation to affirm the faith, but he clearly wanted to assure Colombians that after decades of death, destruction and division there was hope in sight for all, and he was there to support them. The people turned out in droves to welcome him. Everyone wore white, the colour of peace. His speeches and homilies were all woven with the silver thread of the theme of hope.

Over more than a quarter of a century working as a journalist, to help bring the Pope's message of Christian hope to every corner of the world, I have had the privilege of witnessing Francis in action in the most disparate contexts and situations. From the joy of slum-dwellers, as far apart as Nairobi and Asunción, to the "opulent" welcome of the sheiks in Abu Dhabi

where, together with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, he signed the *Document on Human Fraternity*, telling us to take action now if we hope for a world in which our children's children may even dare think of a future.

Then there was that intense, half-day visit to Strasbourg, when he solemnly urged the over 700 members of the European Parliament to keep hope alive in an increasingly barren continent...

But for me, the most poignant journey of hope was his very first venture outside Rome, to the Italian island of Lampedusa. He went there to honour the multitude of hopeful men, women and children who die crossing the Mediterranean in their quest for a better life. "I don't like travelling," the Pope told one of the journalists after that incredible day; but witnessing the effects that journey had on those present subsequently compelled him, he revealed, to embark on travels around the world "to visit churches and people" and "encourage the seeds of hope they all have within".

Every papal journey is an exhausting and exhilarating affair: you never stop working, capturing words and emotions as you do your best to tell the world what is going on. Only when it is over, do you realise, just like everyone else out there, thronging the streets, the churches, the meeting places, the sports stadiums and auditoriums, that you too have changed a little, thanks to those "seeds of hope" sown by the Pope in every step he takes.

Linda Bordoni works for the English Programme of Vatican Radio.



As we enter what the Church describes as "this joyful season of Lent" we may find ourselves still struggling with aspects of the coronavirus pandemic that have left us painfully bereaved with loss of income or recovering from ruptured relationships. Dare we hope in the reality of the resurrection when we find ourselves overwhelmed by painful memories?

As we reflect over the past year, where do we become aware of God's mysterious presence in our lives since Lent 2020? Stories have abounded in the media of courageous and generous outreach to the poor, sick and bereaved throughout the world in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Neighbourhoods showed unprecedented support to the housebound and those in need. These are surely signs of God's presence with us in the midst of turmoil. They provide us with reason for hope. God is truly Emmanuel, God with us. If we reflect on our personal experiences over the past year, do we find similar signs of God having accompanied us in the midst of turmoil? Did we encounter any gestures of goodwill and solidarity that helped us continue with another day of lockdown and uncertainty? Maybe we sometimes found ourselves able to be agents of healing for others. Perhaps we could thank God for these manifestations of God's love for us and rejoice in his constant presence with us in all our joys and sorrows. This sustains our hope.

Many of us were shaken by the closure of our churches with the public celebration of the Eucharist. However,

there was hope for us all in this desert experience. Services were livestreamed and people found they could pray in different contexts. The creativity of God in bringing life to our wilderness experiences gives us hope.

While Lent is a privileged time of grace it is not an end in itself. Its whole movement is towards the paschal mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

This is the foundation of our joy and hope as Christians. All our sufferings, tears and struggles have been swept up into Jesus' death on the cross and his triumph over all death and sin. Moreover, the hope offered to us as Christians is a hope for everyone. It is the story of the most incomprehensible love that has entered our world and radically affected the whole of history. We are redeemed by love. This overwhelming love is the foundation of our hope. All the signs of God's presence in our own lives, in good times and bad, are signs of his love and commitment to us. Lent is the Church's gift to us of a time when we can enter more deeply into the mystery of this love.

Tessa Sheaf is a psychotherapist and a regular contributor to Living Word and Weekday Living Word, available from Redemptorist Publications, www.rpbooks.co.uk

Lent Week One REPENT

Dr Neville Cobbe encourages us to seize opportunities to glimpse God's grace at work throughout our readings for Lent, giving us the impetus to travel in hope as we turn anew towards our Lord.



WEDNESDAY 17 FEBRUARY

ASH WEDNESDAY

Responding humbly to grace

Joel 2:12-18; 2 Corinthians 5:20 - 6:2; Matthew 6:1-6. 16-18

Our readings for Ash Wednesday remind us to return humbly to our gracious God. Joel 2:13 describes God's character in terms of steadfast loving-kindness, denoted by the Hebrew word "chesed". God abounds in such loving-kindness, as repeatedly echoed throughout the Bible. Mindful of God's gracious nature, Joel encourages us to turn to God in repentance. Similarly, the apostle Paul implores us to be reconciled to God and not to receive his grace in vain. The Greek word used here to describe God's grace or unmerited favour is charis, which roughly corresponds to chesed in Hebrew. Yet as Joel urges us to rend our hearts and not our clothes, so our Lord Jesus also cautions against intending to immodestly impress others rather than primarily pleasing God privately.

Loving Lord, you already know the desires of our hearts and you alone are our best reward, so help us to realise the sufficiency of your grace as we begin our journey through Lent with you. Amen.

THURSDAY 18 FEBRUARY

Choosing wisely

Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Luke 9:22-25

Our second day of Lent reveals a choice Of life or death, where those who disobey Choose diabolic death, or else rejoice In life by loving our Lord every day. Those saving selfishly their life may lose, Whilst others losing life, their selves may save; And so, let us be wise in what we choose, Consider carefully how we behave. Denying self, to daily heed God's voice, Consider what is better, which is worse -Does losing self to gain the world leave choice? So, will we choose the blessing or the curse?

Though, when we follow Christ, we may have strife,

Let us take up the cross and thus choose life.

Our loving Father in heaven, strengthen us by your life-giving Spirit as we seek to follow faithfully your Son Jesus and thus walk in the light of life, both today and throughout the days to come. Amen.

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Pope Francis



FRIDAY 19 FEBRUARY

Held fast

Isaiah 58:1-9; Matthew 9:14-15

An elderly lady whom I knew was asked by a student what she was giving up for Lent. Without hesitation, she replied "Mass" such was her humour!

Rather than focus on what we forsake when fasting, Isaiah proposes pleasing God by prioritising the needs of others. Whilst contemplating these verses, I found a worker honeybee struggling in a spider's web. The spider seemed too tiny to tackle such prey, so I cautiously disentangled the exhausted bee from entrapping silk and fed her diluted honey to recover her strength. "Is not this the sort of fast that pleases me: to break unjust fetters... to let the oppressed go free... sharing your food with the hungry... and not to turn away from your own kin?" If simple actions can help such fellow creatures, how much more should we serve God by tending to our kin created in his image?

Lord, you talked of a time for fasting and a time for feasting, so help us to give up our greed to serve those in need as we worship you. Amen.

SATURDAY 20 FEBRUARY

Mending to satisfy

Isaiah 58:9-14; Luke 5:27-32

The healthy need no doctor, but the ill, So Christ came not for righteous to

But rather to save sinners, hence his will In calling Levi, who then promptly went And followed Jesus, prompting a remark About his company with the convicted.

But Jesus let his light dawn in the dark To sate the appetite of the afflicted. For as Isaiah prophesied, God planned,

In promising to be our guide always, To sate our appetites in arid land, Giving a spring of water for all days.

His spring of living water never fails, Repairs the breach and over sin prevails.

Our loving Father in heaven, thank you that you sent your Son Jesus as repairer of the breach to call all of us who are unrighteous; guide us by your Spirit so we may delight in you by sharing both in word and deed with others whom we find in need. Amen.

SUNDAY 21 FEBRUARY 1ST SUNDAY OF LENT

Gracious opportunity Genesis 9:8-15: 1

Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:12-15

As Jesus entered Galilee, he proclaimed "The time is fulfilled". The specific Greek word for time denotes a critical opportunity to respond, thus entailing repentance while "the kingdom of God is close at hand". Regarding such portentous proclamations, there has been debate about the "spirits in prison" to whom Christ preached. Arguably influenced by the apocryphal book of Enoch, some identify these as fallen angels awaiting judgment whilst imprisoned in hell, to whom Christ presumably preached in triumph. Others interpret such spirits as lawless souls who perished in the flood, having tested God's patience "in Noah's time when the ark was being built". Accordingly, if the pre-incarnate Spirit of Christ inspired Noah's preaching to his corrupt contemporaries, this may reflect an earlier opportunity for repentance that was refused. Nevertheless, God graciously saved Noah and his family, sealing his covenant with an auspicious sign.

Loving Father in heaven, thank you that your Son died once and for all for our sins, the upright for the sake of the guilty, leading us to a new covenant with you. Amen.

MONDAY 22 FEBRUARY

A key question

1 Peter 5:1-4; Matthew 16:13-19

They came to Caesarea Philippi,

A pagan region north of Galilee,

Where Jesus let his own disciples try To work out whom they thought that he might be.

Who is the Son of Man? Well, some might say

That he is John the Baptist, others hold Him as Elijah coming back some day, Or Jeremiah, or some prophet old...

But Simon Peter's answer was inspired: Confessing Jesus as Messiah, then

Son of the living God. So he acquired The keys to bind on earth as in heaven.

Years later, writing to the Church, this rock Advises us in shepherding God's flock.

Loving Lord, help each of us to set an example to others in selflessly following you with eager trust, so that others may see how our chief shepherd who suffered for us is the Son of the living God. Amen.

TUESDAY 23 FEBRUARY

Go for God's will

Isaiah 55:10-11: Matthew 6:7-15

Much could be said about the prayer that Jesus taught us. However, let us consider today how we might seek God's will with complete integrity. As Pope Benedict XVI noted in his initial volume entitled Jesus of Nazareth. the reference to God's kingdom inevitably implies God's dominion, such that "his will is accepted as the true criterion". When we pray for God's name to be honoured and seek his dominion on earth as in heaven, then this entails that we quietly humble ourselves, rather than try to impress others with loquacious verbosity. Praying with integrity according to God's will also requires that we must be willing to forgive others, if we expect God to similarly forgive us. Prayer becomes truly powerful when we seek to align our room to manoeuvre with God's providential purposes. By prayerfully pursuing God's will, we may better glimpse how God's word does not return unfulfilled.

Our Father in heaven, may your name be held holy, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Amen.

WEDNESDAY 24 FEBRUARY

The sign of Jonah

Jonah 3:1-10; Luke 11:29-32

How apposite is it to seek a sign After the erstwhile mute is seen to speak, A demon thus cast out, and then opine That this the prince of demons seeks to wreak?

Is it a wonder if no further sign Is offered? This adulterous cohort With narrow minds sought Jesus to malign,

And credit Beelzebul in their retort! A contrast with the Ninevites, they who Believed God's word when Jonah had broadcast

Their city's overthrow, so their king too Sat in sackcloth and ash to likewise fast. Much more the Son of Man deserves our ear

For something greater than Jonah is here.

Lord God, as your living Word convicts us, help us to truly repent and turn from our sinful ways as the people of Nineveh did, knowing that you are graciously compassionate and faithful to forgive. Amen.

"Faith begins when we realise we are in need of salvation. We are not self-sufficient; by ourselves we founder: we need the Lord, like ancient navigators needed the stars. Let us invite Jesus into the boats of our lives. Let us hand over our fears to him so that he can conquer them."

Pope Francis



THURSDAY 25 FEBRUARY

Persevering in prayer

Esther 4:17; Matthew 7:7-12

The Septuagint, an ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, supplements the text of the book of Esther with petitionary prayers of both Mordecai and Queen Esther. However, the Hebrew text simply records how Mordecai complied with Esther's request to assemble all the Jews in the city of Susa and ask them to fast for her, foregoing food or drink for three days and nights, whilst she and the women with her would do likewise. Although the Hebrew text makes no overt reference to God, prayer seems to be implied by such fasting. Esther would be potentially risking her life when approaching the king without first being summoned. Nevertheless, pursuant to petitionary fasting, she asked and she received. Similarly, Jesus uses a sharply observant argument to encourage us to present our needs to our loving Father in heaven, who already has our best interests at heart.

Dear Lord, whatever we choose to go without this Lent, may it serve as a reminder to draw closer to you in prayer and petition with thanksgiving for all that you give us. Amen.

FRIDAY 26 FEBRUARY

Make peace with God

Ezekiel 18:21-28: Matthew 5:20-26

Is there a righteous person on the earth Who never sins but always does what's

Whenever one's desire to sin gives birth, One goes against the law of God's delight. One may not murder, but may say "You fool" And harbour hateful feelings deep within; Regarding former righteousness, such rule Of hostile hatred shows that this is sin. So, seek to settle matters with your brother Before you give to God your offering. And try to form a friendship with such other Potential plaintiffs promptly, peace to bring. Since every soul who sins must surely die, Make peace with God and malice pacify.

Lord God of justice and mercy, help us to see whenever and however our ways are not right, so that we humbly confess to you and seek to make amends with others, rather than profess pride in our presumptive principled past. Amen.

SATURDAY 27 FEBRUARY

Perfect obedience

Deuteronomy 26:16-19; Matthew 5:43-48

In Deuteronomy, we read the instruction to wholeheartedly obey all of God's commandments. Some thought they could claim to have done this, like the rich young ruler. However, our reading today from the Gospel according to Matthew shows us how Jesus tightens up God's law. Responding to a possible contemporary corruption of Leviticus 19:18 that apparently licenced hatred of enemies whilst loving one's neighbour, Jesus challenges us to prayerfully love our enemies. Whereas God repeatedly exhorted the Israelites to be holy, Jesus now tells us to be as perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. Clearly, this is impossible for us on our own. How can we hope to be either holy or perfect? Only through Christ fulfilling God's law.

Lord God, help us to demonstrate our love for you in following your commands, and whilst we confess our inability to do so on our own, help us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus who brings our faith to perfection. Amen.

DISCUSSION POINT

Speaking at St Peter's Square on 13 April 2016, Pope Francis declared, "There isn't a saint without a past, nor a sinner without a future".

How have we witnessed this in our readings so far during Lent?

Dr Neville Cobbe studied genetics at Trinity College Dublin and molecular cell biology at the University of Edinburgh, pursued a research career in biology and is now a theology student at Union Theological College and Queen's University Belfast.

REVEAL

Hope is beautiful, complex and, as Rev. Kate Bottley suggests, an absolute necessity in our daily lives, helping to make sense out of our many experiences of "non-sense". Hope helps us to live life to the full.



SUNDAY 28 FEBRUARY 2ND SUNDAY OF LENT

Hoping for change

Genesis 22:1-2. 9-13. 15-18; Romans 8:31-34; Mark 9:2-10

Sometimes when we've done something funny or kind, someone might say "Don't ever change!" I know what they mean: they'd like the good bits of me to stay the same. But while not all change is good, some is essential and something we should hope for. Our Gospel reading today is a story of change, the transfiguration. In a foretaste of his resurrected body, Jesus, while remaining himself, is transformed, recognisable to his disciples and yet entirely different. And he isn't the only one who is changed in this story. When the disciples went with him that day they couldn't have known what was going to happen, but one thing is certain, when they journeyed back down the hill they could not be the same people as they were.

Lord, transform us too, make the best bits of us even better and transfigure my failings with your love. Amen.

MONDAY 1 MARCH ST DAVID'S DAY

Hoping for others

Daniel 9:4-10; Luke 6:36-38

Our Gospel reading today has a rhythm and a poetry, very fitting for the poet-saint we remember today, St David. It's not the only thing that fits. The Gospel speaks of our collective responsibility to behave without judgement and condemnation to others, to be forgiving and to act mercifully, in the hope that we might receive the same. Life in St David's monastic rule was austere, but the life of the individual was inseparable from the life of the collective. In the fields, monks pulled the ploughs themselves and possessions were held in common. We sometimes talk about an individual's independence, but God's kingdom is one of interdependence, a mirror of the Trinitarian nature of God. No-one's journey of life is alone.

Lord, fill us with forgiveness and mercy, quick to love and slow to judge, help us to hope for the best for others and in return grant us your grace. Amen.

TUESDAY 2 MARCH

Hoping to be unsettled

Isaiah 1:10. 16-20; Matthew 23:1-12

According to reports, the artist Frida Kahlo's last words were "I hope the exit is joyful and I hope never to return." Charlie Chaplin, on hearing the priest at his bedside say "May the Lord have mercy on your soul", replied "Why not? It belongs to him." Sometimes you never forget the last words someone said to you. In our Gospel reading today, Jesus is saying some of his final words. It's the last week of his life so there's an urgency to his instructions: this is what matters, what counts. His words are not comfortable, though: they are warnings against hypocrisy. "Don't be the kind of people who say one thing but do another," he warns. "Lift up the lowly and stay humble." He speaks the same words to us; our faith can bring comfort, but it also stirs us up into unsettled holiness.

Lord, unsettle us with your Holy Spirit, stir us into acts of life-changing love, never afraid to speak even if the words are hard to hear. Help us to be everhopeful for your kingdom. Amen.

WEDNESDAY 3 MARCH

Hoping for the unexpected

Jeremiah 18:18-20; Matthew 20:17-28

There's a road in Derbyshire that, when I was a child, my dad loved to drive us along. It's called "Surprise View". Around the corner of an ordinary country lane, suddenly, the vista opens and you get a great eyeful of the most amazing valley below. Jesus was a surprise. Not really the kind of Messiah that was expected. The hoped-for Messiah was perhaps going to be a great military or political leader, not a carpenter's lad from Nazareth. And here in our Gospel reading Jesus keeps the surprises coming, identifying himself as a servant, not a king. He is the Messiah on a donkey, not a warrior on a chariot, the one who kneels to wash feet and touch the "untouchable". Jesus might not have quite been what was expected but he was what was needed: fully God, fully human. The kingdom of God and its Messiah are full of surprises.

Lord, help us to never limit the work of your Holy Spirit in the world to our own expectations. Keep us ever hopeful of holy surprises. Amen.

FRIDAY 5 MARCH

Hoping to be self-aware

Genesis 37:3-4. 12-13. 17-28; Matthew 21:33-43. 45-46

Gentle Jesus meek and mild? As if! In this Gospel reading, Jesus is telling it straight. If the chief priests and Pharisees were in any doubt before, they can't be now, Jesus is holding them to account and it doesn't take a theology degree to work out who is supposed to be who, in this parable. But wait a minute, who are we in the story? We'd like to be the servants, working hard and doing as they're asked but what if we are the tenants? The tenants reject the Son, steal and kill, and while we might not go to such extremes, there are times when we deny Jesus through our words and actions, behaving more like the Pharisees. But even if we do, it isn't hopeless: redemption is offered limitlessly through Jesus. He offered it then and he offers it now.

Lord, thank you for the sure and certain hope you give of forgiveness, despite the times we deny you and fall short. Help us to know your love. Amen.

"See what a Christ-shaped church looks like! It delights in God... It has the heart of God. It is the very presence of God, the hand of God, the wisdom of God. It is hope that springs out of what looked to be utter despair."

Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury

THURSDAY 4 MARCH

Hoping to hear

Jeremiah 17:5-10; Luke 16:19-31

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells a story of inequality run through with a warning to pay heed while there's still time. The rich man in Hades reflects on his life and the gulf between him and Lazarus, one that cannot be narrowed. The rich man wants to warn others not to make the same mistake as he did, but is told that the living have all the information they need. We sometimes say "If only I'd known! If only I'd realised!" But life is not a new journey: countless others have been here before us. And, like ignoring the travel reviews and guidebooks, and then complaining about the destination, the advice is there but sometimes we choose not to listen and think we know best. We rarely do.

Lord, who gives us ears to hear, help us, by the power of your Holy Spirit, to listen to your living word, Jesus, known through the written word of the Gospel. Help us to not think we know better. Amen.

SATURDAY 6 MARCH

Hoping for embrace
Micah 7:14-15. 18-20;
Luke 15:1-3. 11-32

There's nothing like coming home. The joy of seeing someone after a long time apart, a loved one walking through airport arrivals, or the car pulling up on the drive and glimpsing through the window, shouting "They're home!": the welcome back is priceless. My favourite bit of today's familiar Gospel is just eight little words, "While he was still a long way off". When the Father sees the Prodigal Son in the distance, he is moved by pity and compelled to journey towards him: he can't wait to hold him. Who can forget the first hug with their loved one as lockdown was eased? God waits for us to move closer, for the distance to narrow and the moment it does. we are embraced, loved and rejoiced over.

Lord, thank you for loving us, forgiving us and embracing us. Help us to move ever closer to you. Amen.

DISCUSSION POINT

Can you think of a time when hope has played an important part in your life?

What are some of the hopes in your heart this Lent?

Rev. Kate Bottley is a Church of England vicar in north Nottinghamshire. She is well-known for her part-time roles as a journalist and a presenter on radio and television where, amongst other things, she regularly presents Songs of Praise on BBC1.

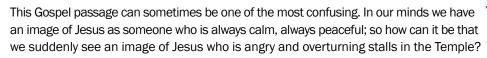
Lent Week Three SUNDAY 7 MARCH REBUILD

3RD SUNDAY OF LENT

Angry at injustice

Exodus 20:1-17; 1 Corinthians 1:22-25; John 2:13-25

Through his work at The Passage, Mick Clarke spends his life rebuilding vulnerable and broken lives. In this third week of Lent. can we also do some



Anger is a powerful emotion. However, unlike hate (of which nothing good can come) much good can come from appropriate anger. Jesus is angry at injustice, that the poor are being manipulated and those who are exploiting them are making a profit from doing so.

We too are called to be angry when we see injustice in our world; surely as Christians there is something wrong if we do not? But this anger must have a purpose: an anger that produces actions in us that lead to us getting involved (peacefully) to bring about change to address this injustice.

Lord, make my heart burn with love for those I see being exploited and give me the courage to speak out against injustice in our world. Amen.

MONDAY 8 MARCH

Who does he think he is?

2 Kings 5:1-15; Luke 4:24-30

One can imagine the scene: the local boy, son of a carpenter, having the audacity to talk with such authority about things that he possibly can't understand. There would be certain people to whom God may give a revelation, but not to a lowly carpenter's son. We in authority know better!

How often do we, perhaps even unconsciously, find ourselves thinking that we are better than someone else, that our opinion and understanding are worth more than theirs? How open are we to have our long-held and established views and thoughts challenged, in order that we may continue to grow and develop?

It is only by being open to hearing and learning from others that we grow and develop; we always have more to learn and we often find (when we reflect) that that learning comes from the most unlikely and unplanned situations, if only we have that spirit of openness in us to recognise it.

Lord, give me a spirit of openness to discern your voice in all situations and a spirit of humility in knowing that I can truly learn from everyone and every situation. Amen.

TUESDAY 9 MARCH

The liberation of forgiveness

Daniel 3:25. 34-43; Matthew 18:21-35

We all remember times we have been hurt. It's easier to forgive when things have been said in the heat of the moment, but so much harder when someone has really hurt us or betrayed our trust.

Jesus challenges us all to forgive others, not just in this Gospel passage, but also in so many others, including the Lord's Prayer "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." Jesus makes it clear that we will be judged by the way we judge others: how we choose to forgive others and show mercy to them.

When we forgive someone who has really hurt us, it does not mean that what they did was okay: that is for their conscience. However, to be able to move on with our life we often need to let go of that pain and anger, to be liberated by the gift of forgiveness.

Lord, give me the gift of forgiveness in order for me to be able to move on from pain and hurt, and live my life to the full. Amen.



WEDNESDAY 10 MARCH

Becoming Christ

Deuteronomy 4:1. 5-9; Matthew 5:17-19

Our Gospel passages this week are all linked and flow together. Tuesday's highlights a prophet not being accepted in his own town. Today's focuses on Jesus as the fulfilment of the scriptures. Friday's draws everything together into the greatest commandments of love.

This is radical stuff! But how radical is our response? Do we view the commandments as a set of rules and regulations that we try to follow, or do we fully embrace them and live them? As Christians we are called to become more and more like Christ. When looking at scripture, are we there as an observer, or there as a participant, actively living out its message and becoming more like Jesus?

Lord, help me enter fully into scripture to be an example to others in day to day life as I walk on my journey with you. Amen.

FRIDAY 12 MARCH

The greatest commandments

Hosea 14:2-10; Mark 12:28-34

In this Gospel passage we see Jesus asked which of the commandments is the most important. Jesus says, "'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. 'The second is this, "'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

Jesus calls you and me to get the balance right between these two commandments; it is no good saying we love God, yet, when it comes to our day to day interactions with each other, we behave poorly. In our interactions with other people, in our actions and choices in our areas of work and in our global views we must act in a way we would want others to act towards us.

As St Vincent de Paul once said, "You will go out to the poor ten times a day, and ten times a day you will see the face of God."

Lord, help me see you in those I encounter today and treat them as I would wish to be treated. Amen.

"The building of the kingdom requires not only the grace of God, but also the active willingness of humanity.

Everything is done by grace... but it takes 'my' responsibility, 'my' willingness."

Pope Francis

THURSDAY 11 MARCH

Time for God

Jeremiah 7:23-28; Luke 11:14-23

In this Gospel reading we see the power of Jesus manifest. Many are amazed and see it for what it is: God's glory and power in action. The Pharisees see an opportunity to discredit and sow doubt, and suggest that it is evil driving out evil. However, as Martin Luther King Jr once said, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

How do we react when God manifests his power in our lives? When we first fall in love with someone, we want to be with them all the time; when we are parted physically we text, chat on the phone and maybe even Zoom! What power would be manifest in our lives if we gave even just a small percentage of that time to listen to God each day?

Lord, help me find time each day to fully listen to your voice and experience your love for me. Amen.

SATURDAY 13 MARCH

Equal in God's eyes

Hosea 5:15 – 6:6; Luke 18:9-14

All of us have an ego. No one likes it when we have played by the rules, done the right things and then someone (who seemingly has done everything wrong) gets what we perceive to be preferential treatment!

We are all created equal in Jesus' eyes. He calls us to a personal relationship with him without calculating the degree of his relationship with others.

We are all, whoever we are and whatever role in life we play, unworthy of God's love and mercy; yet by grace we receive both. As the saying goes, "Every saint has a past and every sinner has a future."

Lord, in this season of Lent help me focus on my relationship with you, not on judging others. Amen.

DISCUSSION POINT

The theme of this Lent
Extra is Travelling in
Hope. What practical
and tangible steps
can we take to find
time each day to listen
to God's voice and
reflect on scripture to
better equip us for this
journey?

Mick Clarke is the Chief Executive of The Passage.

The Passage
provides services
that prevent and end
homelessness. It runs
the UK's largest resource
centre, as well as
outreach services and
accommodation. https://
passage.org.uk.

"If you are weak and fragile on the way, if you fall. Do not be afraid! God holds out your hand and says to you: 'Courage!' You cannot give it to yourself, but you can receive it as a gift. Just open your heart in prayer, just lift that stone placed at the mouth of the heart a little, to let the light of Jesus enter. Just invite him, 'Come, Jesus, into my fears and say to me too, Courage!"



Pope Francis

Lent Week Four SUNDAY 14 MARCH RESTORE All is not lost

4TH SUNDAY OF LENT

2 Chronicles 36:14-16. 19-23; Ephesians 2:4-10; John 3:14-21

God is gentle. Jesus is gentle. Natasha Pritchard suggests that, this Lent, we can trust in their gentleness and flourish in our faith, hope and love.

In today's first reading, we witness God's own people choosing to turn their back on him. It is a story of rejection and despair. We have all turned away from God at some point, defiling his temple in our own hearts through cruelty or even just apathy. Yet when we read this account alongside the second reading and the Gospel, we see that all is not lost. We see the journey of hope that God presents to each of us. With our God there is always hope of redemption.

God sent his only son to us, mortals and sinners, to bring us back to God. Lent is a time for coming to terms with the fact that we are sinners. We come to this realisation not to weigh us down, but to give us hope that God will welcome us back, no matter what mistakes we have made in the past.

Lord, help me to learn from past mistakes and to know that you love me in spite of them. Amen.

MONDAY 15 MARCH

God comes gently

Isaiah 65:17-21; John 4:43-54

How do we react when God answers our prayers in a way we were not expecting? Do we let our own pride and hurt feelings get in the way, or do we surrender and adapt to God's will? Naaman almost allows his pride to get in the way of his being healed of leprosy. He expects a great fanfare to accompany his miracle, and feels anger and disappointment when this is not the case.

Sometimes God comes to us gently, in the ordinary things. We think about miracles as great events, but often it is just a kind word from a stranger, or a simple meeting with a friend that gives us healing or draws us closer to God. We should open our eyes and hearts to notice God in the ordinary as well as the extraordinary.

Let me be open to you today, Lord, in whatever way you desire. Amen.



Forgive and be forgiven

Ezekiel 47:1-9. 12; John 5:1-3. 5-16

Forgiving someone who has wronged us is a real act of charity, something which allows us to grow and to move forward with our lives. Yet in practice, it can be a terrifying prospect. Jesus teaches us that we must forgive - but often it takes us time to work through the hurt that has been caused by another. Forgiveness should always be our goal, but we shouldn't be hard on ourselves if it takes us a long time.

Forgiving ourselves is not easy either. We must be patient with ourselves, as God is patient with us. We make the same mistakes over and over again, but God does not give up on us. We are flawed human beings - each and every one of us - and we need to recognise this and turn back to God with all our hearts.

Let me learn to forgive others, as you forgive me. Amen.





Share Jesus' love

Isaiah 49:8-15; John 5:17-30

Jesus is gentle. He does not come to sweep away everything that is familiar to us, or to change the way we worship. By saying that he has not come to abolish the law, Jesus tells us what the purpose of the law has been all along. In his words and his actions throughout the Gospels, Jesus reveals that the purpose of the law is to teach us how to love God and our neighbour. Of all the commandments, these are the greatest.

God's love is a thread which extends from the beginning of time until the present day and beyond. Jesus invites us to share in this love, and to share it with others. Lent is a journey of suffering and self-examination, but it is also a journey of love. At the heart of any sacrifice there is love and hope.

Enlighten me, Lord, so that I may show your love where it is most needed today. Amen.

THURSDAY 18 MARCH

See the goodness

Exodus 32:7-14; John 5:31-47

The world is full of goodness and yet we sometimes allow ourselves to be consumed by the news of evil in the world. We have been conditioned to see the bad rather than the good. Even when Jesus performs acts of goodness, such as in today's Gospel, man's suspicious nature leads to allegations of evil.

You may know how it feels to have your good intentions viewed in the wrong light. Jesus fought this battle many times during his ministry. Today we should reflect on how we view other peoples' actions. Do we dismiss someone's act of kindness because they are usually selfish? Do we suspect an ulterior motive when somebody does something kind for us? Everything good comes from God. To accept the goodness of others is to accept God, just as to love another person is to love God.

Lord, help me to see the goodness in everyone I encounter today. Amen.

FRIDAY 19 MARCH

ST JOSEPH, SPOUSE OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Follow in the footsteps

2 Samuel 7:4-5. 12-14. 16; Romans 4:13. 16-18. 22; Matthew 1:16. 18-21. 24 or Luke 2:41-51

Today's first reading reads almost like a love letter. God's people have turned their backs on him, but are coming back, repentant. He promises not to reject them and to shower them with love. This is our God – the One who calls us back time after time, forgives our transgressions and provides for us. Centuries later, the scribe in Mark's Gospel shows a deep understanding for the faith of his ancestors from the first reading. The essence of his religion is to love God with all his heart.

Today we celebrate the feast of St Joseph. He was a courageous man who listened to the Lord, at great personal risk. He knew that by taking Mary as his wife, he was loving God and his neighbour more than himself. Let us follow in the footsteps of St Joseph, the scribe and the ancient Israelites, fully aware that love is our vocation.

Let me come back to you today, with all my heart. Amen.

SATURDAY 20 MARCH

No need to hide

Jeremiah 11:18-20; John 7:40-52

For many of us, having sacrificed so much last year, it may feel hard to make sacrifices this Lent. We have already learnt how to live without family, friends, work, freedom and normality. God does not demand too much of us. His law is not to stack hardships upon his people, nor to test our faithfulness to him. Any sacrifices we make during Lent should give us freedom rather than burden us. They should offer us the chance to listen to God more, to love others more, to reflect on what really matters in life.

Luke's Gospel shows us that we should humble ourselves before God and never be afraid to acknowledge our sinfulness before him. Let us sit with God and be our true selves. With God there is no need for pretence and no need to hide. He knows us more than we know ourselves!

Speak, Lord, your servant is listening. Amen.

DISCUSSION POINT

This week's readings have centred on coming back to God. The story of the people of God is not a smooth one – we make mistakes, we fail to trust in him, we abandon God. We all fall short. Do I have faith that God will welcome me back with open arms? Do I know that I am truly loved and accepted by him, no matter what mistakes I have made in the past?

Natasha Pritchard, a lay Catholic chaplain in a Liverpool hospital, worked to support patients, families, carers and all who needed support during the Covid-19 lockdown.

DAILY REFLECTIONS

DAILY REFLECTIONS

DAILY REFLECTIONS

LENT EXTRA 2021

Lent Week Five

REAP

Live with integrity and hope, and we reap a harvest of joy. Eldred Willey reminds us that it is Jesus who draws us to himself.



The Augsburg prayer house

Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 5:7-9; John 12:20-33

As a Catholic teenager, Johannes Hartl found prayer boring. The idea of getting excited about prayer was not current in the German circles where he moved. However, an encounter with God flipped him around. In 2011 he gathered a group of friends who started praying day and night. Nine years on they had clocked up over 70,000 hours in an unbroken chain of prayer. Around 100 young people were pursuing a full-time Bible study course with Johannes.

In today's Gospel we see Greeks seeking Jesus, and running up against a language barrier, as Johannes had done. They get around it by approaching Philip, who was likely to have known Greek, and Jesus glimpses a vision of a kingdom spreading beyond the lands he had walked, to Greek and Germanic tribes. When we lift him up, we do not need to attract people: it is Jesus who will draw them to himself.

Holy Spirit, enflame my lukewarm heart, so that my prayer becomes a furnace which pulls in others by its heat. Amen.

MONDAY 22 MARCH

What is written?

Daniel 13:1-9. 15-17. 19-30. 33-62; John 8:1-11

A company lawyer once explained how he deals with people who attack his employer or infringe her rights. "I write them a polite letter, mentioning that I am a lawyer who works for the company. I don't need to say anything intimidating. The mere fact that a lawyer is involved is generally enough to make belligerents back off."

Confronted by belligerents in today's Gospel, Jesus does not raise himself to his full height in an intimidating fashion. Instead he settles down to write something, as any expert lawyer would. He does not need to come up with an argument for the defendant who is standing in front of him. He just mimes his usual question: "What is written?" He wins simply by who he is.

Jesus, sinless one, thank you that, although I may be weak, you are strong in me to defend those who are needy. Amen.



Look and live

Numbers 21:4-9; John 8:21-30

He had so wanted that job. For him it was a dream come true to lead an organisation like this. But she had refused to uproot and move across the country with him. As their marriage reached breaking point, he faced reality and resigned. But he carried a resentment in his heart which festered as the years went by.

One afternoon they went to see The Passion of the Christ at the cinema. Afterwards they went for a walk in the country - for hours, unable to say a word. All he knew was that when they got back to the car, all the resentment was gone.

The suffering of Christ on the cross destroys sin in the soul. All we have to do is look at it, as the Israelites looked at the bronze serpent in the desert and were healed. It's that simple. If you believe that Jesus is he, you will not die in your sin.

Jesus, Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, you are worthy of everything. Amen.





WEDNESDAY 24 MARCH

Life's point of no return

Daniel 3:14-20. 24-25. 28; John 8:31-42

"There is a point at which everything becomes simple," wrote Dag Hammarskjöld, "And there is no longer any question of choice, because everything you have ever staked will be lost if you look back now." For the Secretary-General of the United Nations his unhesitating action was to fly to peace talks to resolve the Congo crisis. For the young men in today's first reading it was to worship the true God and him alone.

Scripture is full of expressions of trust that God will deliver and it is rare to find a phrase like this one in Daniel: "even if he does not". Sometimes – like the young men – we will be delivered and sometimes – like Hammarskjöld, whose plane was shot down – we will perish in the furnace. Either way, the refusal to weigh up chances will leave a gift of courage and will inspire others to a dangerous obedience.

Father, there are no chances with you; help me to say the yes which gives meaning to my life. Amen.

THURSDAY 25 MARCH THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE LORD

The song of Kobane

Isaiah 7:10-14; 8:10; Hebrews 10:4-10; Luke 1:26-38

In autumn 2014 a famous Kurdish singer recorded a song called "Kobane" from a precipice on the top of one of Iraq's highest mountains. It was the name of a Syrian town where a handful of young Kurdish women were making a last stand against ISIS. To the world's astonishment, the women counterattacked and opened the border, across which a column of Iraqi Kurds, moved to action by the soul-stirring song, stormed across to rescue them.

In today's Gospel the angel Gabriel appears in Nazareth, a town built on the edge of a precipice. He stills the fear of a young woman and acclaims her readiness for the coming combat. Whatever God is asking of us, will we be stirred into action by the angel's song and respond with Mary's unhesitating assent? Sometimes it takes young women to believe that nothing is impossible with God.

Father, help me to take Mary as my example, and respond without hesitation to your call. Amen.

FRIDAY 26 MARCH

I bet you

Jeremiah 20:10-13; John 10:31-42

In 1981 the German actor Karlheinz Böhm appeared on a TV show. Appalled by images of starvation from Ethiopia which he had seen, he turned to the camera and held up a coin. "I bet you," he said, "that not one-third of you will go to the nearest post office on Monday morning and send one Deutschmark to the President. If you do, I will take it all to Africa at my own expense. And I hope I lose." Over a million Deutschmarks flooded in and Böhm went on to launch a hugely successful aid organisation for Ethiopia, which continues today.

Sometimes people simply don't respond to good intentions and good actions, as we see in today's Gospel, when Jesus is forced to cross the Jordan to go into hiding. But sometimes they really do. Let's never become cynical. There is more goodness in people that we often realise.

Father, help me always to believe in the potential for generosity of those around me and inspire me to draw it out. Amen.

"The Church is now the Word made flesh, the image of the living God - when it acts in humility, gives its life for the life of the world, when it serves and washes feet, when it looks like Jesus."

Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury

SATURDAY 27 MARCH

Viva Cristo Rev!

Ezekiel 37:21-28; John 11:45-56

After he was elected pope in 1978, St John Paul II travelled to Mexico. Over a million Mexicans turned out to meet him on what was supposed to be a private visit. Ten years later the Pope put aside political caution to beatify the Mexican Jesuit Miguel Pro, killed by firing squad in 1927.

Pro, who like the Pope was a former actor, had harnessed all his theatrical skills to appear in every imaginable costume, evading police so that he could be "everywhere and nowhere" distributing the sacraments. He was finally betrayed and executed – his last words being "Viva Cristo Rey" – long live Christ the King! Even the Lord spent a period of his ministry in hiding from the authorities. What an inspiration for all of his followers who are forced to do the same!

Jesus, thank you for the wonderful witness of your martyrs and may we catch some of their courage. Amen.

DISCUSSION POINT

This fifth week of Lent highlights the virtue of fortitude. Note down half a dozen times when you have done something brave because you knew it was right. Share them with a family member and ask if they will share a similar list with you. What gave you the courage to act on what you believed?

Eldred Willey works as a communications officer for the Diocese of East Anglia.

Holy Week

REDEEM

Dr Mabel Adhagiuno reminds us that Holy Week celebrates love beyond anything we can imagine but which we can try to imitate.



SUNDAY 28 MARCH

PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD

No twenty-first-century superhero

Procession: Mark 11:1-10 or John 12:12-16;

Mass: Isaiah 50:4-7; Philippians 2:6-11; Mark 14:1 – 15:47

You enter Jerusalem greeted by hosannas. Imagine the clapping and shouting of the crowd, the hope of the people, the surge to get close to you.

But the crowd I'm in today doesn't consist of the Jews of two thousand years ago but today's humanity. What do we hope for? Our world has experienced Covid-19. We haven't been in control. People have died. People we will never see again - at least not in this world. For some, Covid-19 is as nothing compared to abuse, terrorism, hazardous migration, social injustice, exploitation of nations and corruption. There is racism and strife. Our list of tribulations is endless, Jesus. We want suffering gone!

And as you draw nearer, I know a man on a donkey isn't the image of a twenty-first-century superhero. I see your face set like flint. Our eyes meet and I realise you don't work miracles in the way I imagine - in the way I would like.

Hosanna, Lord, we greet you! Transform our world. Amen.

MONDAY 29 MARCH

Justice is love

Isaiah 42:1-7; John 12:1-11

The reading from Isaiah speaks about the servant bringing true justice to the nations. You do not cry out or shout aloud. You do not waver until true justice is established on the earth. You are the light of the nations. What do these intriguing words mean to me? I think if we were to have a serious tête-à-tête, Jesus, your idea of justice would be different from mine. I mean, aren't you crazy to leave 99 sheep to go in search of one? Aren't you unfair to pay the vineyard workers the same when some laboured all day and others just for an hour? But then I can be blind to the fact that your justice, your light, is not a human one. I can be blind like the Pharisees who failed to marvel at the miracle of Lazarus' resurrection. Instead they sought to kill you. Your justice is love - generous, gratuitous, humble, gentle love.

Jesus, take the scales from my eyes; put new reasoning within me and make me Christ-like. Amen.

Hope speaks to us of a thirst, an aspiration, a longing for a life of fulfilment, a desire to achieve great things, things that fill our heart and lift our spirit to lofty realities like truth, goodness and beauty, justice and love.



TUESDAY 30 MARCH

Troubled in spirit Isaiah 49:1-6; John 13:21-33. 36-38

John's reading starts with you being troubled in spirit. You know one of the disciples will betray you. I wonder what bothered you more, Jesus? The fact that the betrayal was a catalyst for a chain of events which would lead to your killing or the fact that you were betrayed by a friend? Let's face it, Jesus, I betray you too. It can even happen within hours of being reconciled with you at the sacrament of confession. Where are you tangible? You identify totally with each person so whatever I do to the least, I do to you. It's daunting to think my betrayal distresses you. I have the capacity to upset God. Your distress spurs me to be more attentive to my neighbour but it also moves me because it shows how much we, I, mean to you.

Jesus, help me remember that when I hurt another, I hurt you and if I do hurt you, help me to redouble my efforts quickly so that I can make amends. Amen.

WEDNESDAY 31 MARCH

Mysterious logic Isaiah 50:4-9; Matthew 26:14-25

In the reading from the prophet Isaiah, what strikes me is the suffering servant's absolute trust that God will intervene. I'm struck by your confidence to be exposed

in all your naked vulnerability. You exposed your face to insult and spittle, your beard to assault. You say, "I shall not be shamed." "I am untouched by the insults." The reality is that people are shamed. They are trampled on. They are spat upon. Rights are abused. I know how I want to react if someone offends my pride, belittles me, ignores me. Yet you ask me a different response. You are asking me to trust in the face of actual mistreatment, misuse, abuse. You don't protect me from the pain. You use it to edify me. This is mystery. Your logic is different from mine. When others cause me pain, I'm hurt. Perhaps offering the other cheek is saying

Lord, help me have unbounded trust in your love. My confidence sometimes oscillates like a weathervane whereas you want me always to point upwards to you. Amen.

not so much "this insult does not

touch me" but rather "this cannot

separate me from your love".

THURSDAY 1 APRIL MAUNDY THURSDAY

Fix on the feet

Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper: Exodus 12:1-8. 11-14; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-15

John presents the tableau of you washing the disciples' feet during the last supper. There is the fine detail of you removing your outer garment then tying a towel around your waist. I can imagine the disciples' stinky, sweaty and dirty feet. You had strong carpenter's arms. I think you hunkered down and gave those feet a good scrubbing. You asked us to copy your example.

The word "serve" derives from the Latin servus: slave. You're asking me to be a slave to each person. You expect me to serve and love each person as I would like to be treated were I in their place. And if I find it hard to behave like this because if someone annoys me, has offended me, unnerves me or has an antipathy for me (which might be mutual), I'll try to fix metaphorically on the feet. If I concentrate on the feet and not the faces. I'm not conditioned by the memories of negative behaviour and treat everyone equally.

Jesus, help me be your carbon copy in every situation life brings me. Amen.



FRIDAY 2 APRIL GOOD FRIDAY

X-ray vision needed

The Celebration of the Passion of the Lord: Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12; Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9; John 18:1 – 19:42

Good Friday: the celebration of your passion. Hope embodied in a carpenter's son riding a donkey only a few days before is now crushed with suffering. There is nothing attractive about you. You are despised and rejected. The Son of God is dead, crucified as a common criminal and evil seems to play the winning ace. And this is your answer to the past and present crowd who welcomed you on Palm Sunday? You tell me, your kingdom is not of this world. It's the kingdom of heaven and in that kingdom, suffering has immense value because you have redeemed it.

You've passed through the tunnel, taken up everything negative and transformed it through your own suffering. Only at night do we see the stars. The night of suffering helps me to see you. It gives me x-ray vision and eyes to see everything in its true perspective.

Jesus, you say to follow you I have to renounce myself and take up my cross. Tough words, but you want me to experience like you the transformative power of suffering. Amen.

SATURDAY 3 APRIL HOLY SATURDAY

The story of hope
The Easter Vigil:
Exodus 14:15 – 15:1;
Romans 6:3-11;

Mark 16:1-7

The beautiful readings of the Easter Vigil show how you never give up. We have thrown and still throw everything at you - infidelity, ingratitude, insubordination, indifference - but you're always faithful to the point of madness. The salvation story is not so much a story of our hope in you but one of your unending, unconscionable, unquenchable hope in us. I marvel at your constant patience when you come up against the brick walls of our lack of belief in your love, our not seeing that vou can unravel the mess of our lives. Our thick skulls don't comprehend that your promise is not empty rhetoric. You really will make everything, EVERYTHING, work together for the good of those who love you. I start off the day with good intentions and sometimes I fall - a cross word here, a judgement there, a failure to imitate your example of love. I need a new heart and new spirit.

Dear Jesus, break down my walls and remove my fossilised heart. Give me a new heart and new spirit. Amen.

DISCUSSION POINT

Holy Week is Christ's journey from death to resurrection. He calls me to be a participant not a spectator because it is my story too.

What cross do I carry?
Is suffering the best way
to show him my love?
Have I experienced
that through the cross
he wants to share
his resurrection?

Dr Mabel Adhagiuno is a member of the Focolare Movement, a doctor and is currently working in Nigeria.



"Christ, my hope, is risen!' This is no magic formula that makes problems vanish. No, the resurrection of Christ is not that. Instead, it is the victory of love over the root of evil, a victory that does not by-pass suffering and death, but passes through them."

Pope Francis



Alleluia!

Acts 10:34. 37-43; Colossians 3:1-4 or 1 Corinthians 5:6-8; John 20:1-9

Peter explains your resurrection to Cornelius and how God "allowed you to be seen not by the whole people but only by certain witnesses". I have sometimes wondered why you didn't appear to the chief priests, the Pharisees and Pilate. You would certainly have been vindicated! They would have had to believe then. But you don't force us. You respect our freedom. It's up to us to take the first baby steps in faith which you watch solicitously.

You also want us to experience the resurrection not just at the end of time, but now in our everyday life. I remember one of the first times I experienced it. At sixteen I was invited to an international youth gathering in Rome. Mum refused her consent and I was terribly upset. Life stopped for me... Then I gradually stepped outside of my pain to help others around me with homework, the dishes, shopping. I felt inexplicable joy. Suffering deepened my relationship with you. You were all that mattered.

Lord, help me die with you and rise with you in the little and not so little sufferings of daily life. Help me be an Easter child. Amen.

Hiloluia

TRAVELLERS



IN HOPE

Regularly marginalised and criticised, Fr Dan Mason stresses that people from a Traveller background live in hope and celebrate their traditions.

When I tell people that I am the National Catholic Chaplain for Gypsies, Roma and Travellers (GRT) I tend to get a variety of responses.

Some people are fascinated and ask lots of questions about what my role as a chaplain entails. Others, particularly those who have had negative experiences with members of the Travelling Community or who have been exposed to critical stories in the media, tend to be much more circumspect.

While people are entitled to their opinions, what saddens me about my work is how members of GRT communities are routinely labelled and talked about in a way that would be completely unacceptable if the same labels were applied to any other ethnic minority.

The Traveller Movement, a charity which supports people from a Travelling background, regularly does an exercise where they take newspaper headlines about Travellers and swap the word "Traveller" or "Gypsy" for another group. When you do this the results are enlightening. Headlines like: "Stamp on the camps: war on Gypsy free for all" or "Prisoners, Terrorists and Gypsies should be handed more human rights declares Equality Quango" are seen in a different light when the word "Gypsy" or "Traveller" is replaced by another religious or ethnic group.

The effect of all of these headlines is corrosive. As Bridget McCarthy, an Irish Traveller, put it: "They [the media] say 'Gypsies' and 'Travellers' when they are speaking about a single Gypsy or Traveller. If a single Traveller breaks the law they write about it and say

'Travellers' - meaning all Travellers. I mix with people from the settled community at all levels. When a big story about a Traveller doing wrong is in the papers and they say 'Travellers are doing this'; I wonder about what the people I meet that day will be thinking."

It was for this reason that it was decided in February 2020 that the theme of that year's Racial Justice Sunday should be on celebrating the positive contribution that Travelling Communities make to the Church in England and Wales. The resources that were produced highlighted a statement that Pope (now St) Paul VI made in 1965, when celebrating Mass at a Roma Traveller site just outside of Rome, the first pontiff in history to do so.

In his homily St Paul VI declared to the thousands of Roma Travellers who were in attendance: "You are not on the margins of the Church... you are at the centre... You are at the heart of the Church."

Lent is a season when we are encouraged, not to turn inwardly on ourselves but instead to begin with ourselves and then to work towards bringing about a transformed life in community and relationship with God and with each other.

During Lent 2019 I was fortunate to be able to attend a debate which was held at the General Synod of the Church of England. The motion that was being debated was for all members of the Church to speak out publicly against racism and hate crime directed against Gypsies, Irish Travellers and Roma, and to urge the media to stop denigrating and victimising these communities.



During the debate one of the speakers reminded us of a passage from St John's Gospel where Jesus says: "There are many rooms in my Father's house." The speaker pointed out that in the original Hebrew "rooms" can also be translated as "caravans" or "stopping places".

In the Christian tradition, hope is one of the three theological virtues along with faith and charity. Hope is defined as being a combination of the desire for something and the expectation of receiving it.

My experience working with members of the Travelling Community is that despite everything, despite the obstacles that they have to face and the prejudices they have to overcome, there is still a hope that the traditions and ways of living that have been handed down through the generations may continue to be passed on to future generations.

As we celebrate this Lenten season, commemorating the journey that Jesus made into the wilderness for forty days and forty nights, my prayer is that, just as there are many stopping places in heaven, so our churches should also be stopping places, beacons of hope for all of those who are weary and in need of a place to rest.

Fr Dan Mason is the National Catholic Chaplain for Gypsies, Roma and Travellers.

Celtic Blessing: "The Path"

God bless the path on which you go, God bless the earth beneath your feet. God bless your destination, God be a smooth way before you; A guiding star above you, a keen eye behind you this day, this night, and forever.

God be with you whatever you pass. Jesus be with you whatever you climb. Spirit be with you wherever you stay.

God be with you at each stop and each sea, at each lying down and each rising up, in the trough of the waves, on the crest of the billows. Each step of the journey you take.

This prayer is often used at Masses with Travellers





ASONG OF THE EARTH

As we approach Easter, a time of singing, perhaps it's a moment to listen to the music in the world around us. Mary Colwell suggests, "the birds are putting into songs what we most deeply feel but cannot express".

I asked a musician friend recently why he composed and sang. "I have to, to make sense of the world. Music connects my head to my heart." Simply and beautifully put. We open our mouths and sing because we need to express what is innermost. It is a mysterious process. Our private feelings of joy, sorrow, love, despair, hope, and myriad others, are translated through song into vibrating molecules of air that enter our brains through our ears. A mystical transformation takes place, one which defies simple analysis and the physical becomes spiritual. Our hearts are filled with emotion. Music captures that which is deeply felt, and the rising, falling tumbling stream of tone and melody find every nuance between discord and harmony. It is a cliché to say music is another language, that music takes over where words end, but is undeniably true.

"There is nothing more musical than a sunset," said composer Claude Debussy, who dedicated so much of his life to turning the experience of nature into compositions that took the established musical world by storm. "Music expresses the motion of the waters, the play of curves described by changing breezes." The conductor, Leopold Stokowski, described the process of

composing as painting notes onto silence in much the same way as an artist fills a canvas with colour. "After silence, that which comes nearest to expressing the inexpressible is music," said author Aldous Huxley.

Physiologists can explain what physically happens to the human body when we sing, pointing to the engagement of a range of muscles and the release of hormones which then have a beneficial effect on our psyche. Psychologists can tell us how this rush of chemicals produced by music acts as a social binder to create communities that are united by conviction and emotion. It is the feeling of togetherness and shared purpose we experience when singing anthems and hymns.

Musicologists pick apart the intricacies of sound to discern how individual components create a whole experience. They read music as if it were a book, extracting and dissecting the form and structure of phrases and movements. There are many ways to intellectualise the act of creating music, all of which are fascinating and enlightening, but exactly why we have this relentless drive to create music to express ourselves is beyond knowing: it is raw and primaeval.

We compose out of a need to communicate emotion, but we also react to the world of sound around us. We drink in nature, absorbing its tempo and rhythms. We bathe in the lyricism of birdsong, accompanied by a gentle underscore of the wind in trees. We are lulled into contemplation by the rhythmic lapping of waves, and are drawn to the dancing interplay of sunlight on water. This performance of the vitality of the natural world, the constant creation and re-creation of meaning, transports us to an inner place – to God.

Imagine a world where the only sounds left were those of the human world. A large part of us would die.

We find birdsong so beautiful because it works like a piece of music. It can be simple and pure or a complex flurry with phrases, rhythms and pitches. It can transition between sadness and joy, energy and quietness. Like any great composition, the song of a bird like a wren fires our emotions, and we are swept along by expectation, anticipation, tension, tension release and surprise. One small, feathery body can take us on a journey of delight. The birdsong we admire and love the most are those with a similar tone to the human voice. It is as though the birds are putting into songs what we most deeply feel but cannot express. The almost toopainful wail of a great northern diver is perhaps the most intense soul-song on earth. It drifts across misty lakes, the singer hidden from view, and

it is as though the waters themselves are crying out to us. Ancient folklore says it is the sound of those who had drowned and can find no peace in their watery depths. Yet, the sudden, commanding songs of thrushes, like the nightingale or song thrush, pulsate with energy and power. They demand we listen and pay homage to their maestro performances.

Birdsong, though, is not simply a wall of sound. The pauses between phrases are just as poignant. They are full of meaning, as all quiet spaces are. They build up an arc of suspense, confirming or overturning our expectations of what is about to come next. The silences that are dotted through birdsong are the essential gaps that give the phrases a place in our hearts. Many phrases together tell us a story with a beginning, middle or end, but they must be separated by a moment of silence.

The Japanese have a word for the meaningful gaps between objects or sounds - "Ma". It is the nothingness, the empty space, the negative that gives definition to the positive. In other words, Ma is the recognition that the story is in the gaps as much as in the notes. The spaces in birdsong are for the heartbeat to be heard, the grappling with feelings to find some purchase, the sliver of light that give a glimpse of the divine. This is how we speak and sing, how we have always told each other about the things that matter most, through songs and tales full of phrases interspersed with meaningful silence. Shakespeare used silence and the song of birds to add seasoning to his work. The nightingale, owl, raven or dove flit through his plays adding meaning and poignancy to lines already laden with emotion. We know this form of singing language well.

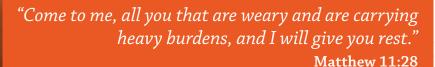
Loud or soft, gentle or forceful, we understand it because music is a common language we share with the birds.

God dwells in birdsong, in the sweet notes and the gentle phrasing, in the power and the glory of full-throated song. God also sits in the silence, in those most precious moments between the sounds. God wraps his presence in song and as the notes fall away, our souls have been made ready to meet him.

Mary Colwell is an award-winning wildlife broadcaster, writer and environmental campaigner.

PILGRIMAGE OF HOPE

Sickness can become a pilgrimage of hope and discovery. Claire Wright suggests that it can even be a journey of hope and gratitude.



I know what it is to be weary. Having struggled through cancer, postnatal depression, chronic fatigue syndrome and adrenal insufficiency, I know it more than many. I know what it is to feel weighed down by exhaustion, to feel burdened.

But don't we all?

You may not have felt the same physical exhaustion I have felt, because everyone's experience of life is different. But we all face pain, sickness and weariness in our lives. It can be so hard to see the good in the burden. To find rest in the pain.

Jesus' arms are always open, just waiting for us to rest in them. He knows burdens – he carried your burdens, and mine, and everyone's. No one has ever been nor will ever be as weighed down as he was as he walked that steep path to the cross.

If you are feeling weary and burdened today, try sitting with two stories: the Last Supper and the agony in the garden. In the garden, feel his pain, hear his cries, taste his tears. And listen to his words: "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

"My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me." Jesus begged his heavenly Father as we beg God with our most anguished, and perhaps most honest, prayers.

"Yet not as I will, but as you will." Jesus ultimately found his strength, and rest for his soul, when he surrendered to the will of God. He knew his Father would bring good from this suffering.

Sitting with Jesus in his pain, knowing his heart broke and his body hurt for you, can bring great peace. And to pray the words that allow you to stop trying so hard to control the situation yourself: to surrender to God brings rest.

Just before the garden, Jesus was at the Last Supper with his friends. He laughed, he shared, he ate. And he gave thanks.

"When he had given thanks, he broke [the bread] and gave it to his disciples."

Jesus did two amazing things in this moment, with the weight of the world on his shoulders and the hardest night of his life to come: he gave thanks and he broke the bread, wholeheartedly giving himself to us.

Gratitude has been shown over and over again to bring rest, peace and joy. Giving thanks in the hardest of times truly lifts burdens. It may not take away the pain. The sickness or suffering may still be there tomorrow. But giving thanks makes the breaking easier, the struggle simpler, the burden lighter.

If you are struggling this Lent, sit with Jesus at the Last Supper, and in the garden. Give thanks, cry out, surrender. And know that the broken way doesn't always mean the unhappy way. Lent 2020 was a strange one, full of pain and sickness. But we look forward in hope, just as we look forward to Easter every Lent.

We give thanks, we cry out, we surrender. We hope.

Claire Wright is a Brighton-based freelance writer who runs a faith blog and a healthy family food website, all while taking care of two lively toddlers.



Flowers Flowers Flowers Flowers WEEK

The Judas Tree

This tree (Cercis siliquastrum) with its abundance of purple flowers is very familiar in Mediterranean areas around the Holy Week and Easter period. Italian tradition says that the buds wait for Holy Week in order to blossom.

Tradition also tells that the flowers were white before Judas hanged himself from the tree, at which point the flowers blushed for shame. From that point in time, the tree became known as the "Judas Tree" and chose to flower in Holy Week in order to remind us of the part that Judas played in Jesus' passion, death and resurrection.

Passion flowers



This flower (*Passiflora*) is full of symbolism.

- The three stamens represent:
- the three nails which pierced
 Jesus' hands and feet
- or the three crosses of Jesus and the two thieves.
- The circle of ten petals symbolise:
 - Jesus' crown of thorns

- the leaves represent the spear that went into the side of Jesus.
- The passion flower normally lasts for three days and reminds us of the three days Jesus spent in the tomb.

Dogwood tree



According to legend, the dogwood tree (*Cornus florida*) at one time grew upright, tall and strong. Its wood had many uses – which was why it was apparently chosen to become the wood of the cross on which Jesus died.

In response, God both cursed and blessed the dogwood. It would never again be tall and straight so that it could never again be used in a crucifixion.

At the same time, for evermore, the tree would be a reminder of both Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

Its beautiful snowy-white blossoms:

- flower just in time for Easter
- have four petals in the shape of a cross

- have indented petals, reminiscent of the holes made by the nails
- may have spots of colour, reminding us of drops of Jesus' blood
- have tightly-grouped stamens and pistils resembling the crown of thorns.

Easter lily



Did you know that a cluster of Easter lilies (*Lilium longiflorum*) is sometimes described as "whiterobed apostles of hope"? The lily is sometimes also called a "trumpet lily" because it is thought to proclaim the resurrection.

The Easter lily is full of symbolism:

- trumpet shape herald of the resurrection, of rebirth and hope
- white flower purity and sinlessness of Jesus
- bulbs are buried underground for three years before they flower
 reminiscent of Jesus' three days in the tomb.



Celebrate Kids Magazine!!



Prayer inspiration

One of the important ways we can strengthen our relationship with God in Lent is through prayer. We don't always need to be in church to pray either. Prayer can be anywhere: school, the car, your room...

Scene 1: You're going for a walk in the

Have a look at the situations below, draw the scene and suggest a prayer under each picture that would help. We've done the first one for you:

Scene 2: Your best friend's granny is

countryside, the weather is beautiful and so is the scenery	sick in hospital
Prayer: Thank you, God, for creating such a beautiful world.	Prayer:
Scene 3: It's right before your maths test and you're really nervous	Scene 4: You can use your imagination
, ., .,	for this one!
	for this one!

Help Fr John

Easter is just around the corner and Fr John will be busy with all the special services. He's going to need some extra altar servers to help him this year and he'd like you to design a poster asking for children and their parents to get in touch.

So, what is an altar server? Well, Pope Saint John Paul II said, "you are much more than simple helpers of the parish priest. Above all, you are servers of Jesus Christ, of the eternal High Priest... you, altar servers, are called in particular to be young friends of Jesus."

Can you help
Fr John in his search
for responsible helpers
by designing a poster?



ON EARTH AND OUTER SPACE

Very few people have had the opportunity to travel beyond Earth's atmosphere and to look back at our planet from outer space. More than one of those who did found that their experience changed them - for ever...

"I felt the power of God as I'd never felt it before."

James Irwin, Apollo 15 lunar module pilot, The Home Planet

"Let me say... having walked on the Moon, that I am myself still awed by that miracle. That awe, in me and in each of us... must be the engine of future achievement, not a slow dimming light from a time once bright."

Buzz Aldrin, Apollo 11 astronaut, Daily News, May 1997

"The world itself looks cleaner and so much more beautiful. Maybe we can make it that way – the way God intended it to be – by giving everyone, eventually, that new perspective from out in space."

Roger B. Chaffee, Apollo 1 astronaut

"The biggest joy was on the way home. In my cockpit window every two minutes — the Earth, the Moon, the Sun, and a whole 360-degree panorama of the heavens. And that was a powerful, overwhelming experience. And suddenly I realised that the molecules of my body, and the molecules of the spacecraft, the molecules in the body of my partners, were prototyped and manufactured in some ancient generation of stars. And that was an overwhelming sense of oneness, of connectedness. It wasn't them and us, it was — that's me, that's all of it: it's one thing. And it was accompanied by an ecstasy, a sense of 'Oh my God, wow, yes,' an insight, an epiphany."

Edgar Mitchell, Apollo 14 lunar module pilot, In the Shadow of the Moon "The entire space achievement is put in proper perspective when one realises that God walking on the Earth is more important than man walking on the Moon. I believe that God walked on the Earth 2,000 years ago in the person of Jesus Christ."

James Irwin, Apollo 15 lunar module pilot

"I realised up there that our planet is not infinite. It's fragile. That may not be obvious to a lot of folks, and it's tough that people are fighting each other here on Earth instead of trying to get together and live on this planet. We look pretty vulnerable in the darkness of space."

Alan Shepard, Mercury-Redstone 3 and Apollo 14 astronaut, "What Does Moon Flight Mean Now",

The Seattle Times

"The view of Earth from space also shows a world without borders. There aren't any clashes. You just see this little tiny atmosphere that is the difference between life and death on this planet. It touches people in their soul, I think. I think nobody comes back without a sense of a higher being. Most come back thinking, 'Hey, God did an amazing job!"

Commander Randy Bresnik, Expedition 53, 8 June 2018

"Since that time, I have not complained about the weather one single time. I'm glad there is weather. I've not complained about traffic, I'm glad there's people around... boy we're lucky to be here. Why do people complain about the Earth? We are living in the Garden of Eden."

> Alan Bean, Apollo 12 astronaut, In the Shadow of the Moon

"To look at this kind of creation out here and not believe in God is impossible."

John Glenn, Friendship 7 astronaut and first American to orbit the Earth, circling it three times "I say my walk on the Moon lasted for three days and it was a great adventure. But my walk with God lasts forever."

Charles Duke, Apollo 16 lunar module pilot, In the Shadow of the Moon

A small selection of **Redemptorist Publcations** gifts and books, please visit **www.rpbooks.co.uk** for much, much, more!





The Real Easter Egg

The plastic-free design includes a large 24-page Easter story-activity book, a prize competition and a super thick milk chocolate egg (150g) with a lovely creamy taste. 35% cocoa – palm oil free.

Milk Chocolate **150g** Code: A1145 Price: £3.99

Easter Blessings Cards

This pack of five stunning cards contain an Easter prayer written by Fr Denis McBride C.Ss.R.

PACK OF **5** CARDS 160mm x 160mm Code: 1787 Price: £2.50



The Third Day

Discover Easter as you've never seen it before

Alex Webb-Peploe and Andre Parker

Stunning new edition of this graphic-novel-style book faithfully illustrating the unadorned NIV text of Luke's Gospel. It has a gritty, contempory feel to it that is far removed from the clean, bright, graphic versions of the Bible already available for younger children.

The Cros illus chilo

THE WAY OF THE CROSS

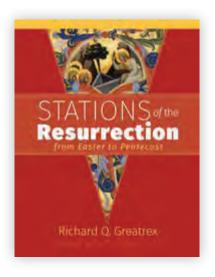
Let's Go the Way of the Cross

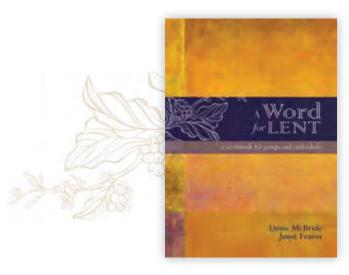
Ellen Teague

The traditional devotion of the Stations of the Cross made accessible for children with bright illustrations. The pages can be personalised by the child and are "wipe-clean".

Code: 1312 ISBN: 9780852312087 Price: £3.95

Code: 185564 ISBN: 9781910307557 Price: £4.99





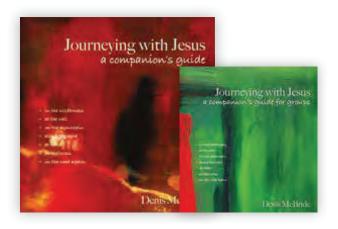
Stations of the Resurrection

From Easter to Pentecost

Richard Q Greatrex, Foreword by Fr Denis McBride C.Ss.R.

Stations of the Resurrection is a growing contemporary devotional, spiritual and liturgical practice. Encompassing both public worship and private prayer, this book travels with the reader from the sealed tomb to Pentecost through sixteen biblical episodes. Using readings, reflections, art and prayers in conjunction with suggested hymns and ideas for producing your own stations it offers a rich resource intended to refocus both congregations and individuals on the transformative joy, hope, grace and challenge of Eastertide.

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Journeying with Jesus A Companion's Guide

Fr Denis McBride C.Ss.R.

Journeying with Jesus is a deeply spiritual and lavishly resourced programme of study for those who want to journey side-by-side with our Lord during Lent, either individually or in small groups. We begin our journey in the wilderness and finally sit with him at the table before accompanying him to the cross. The main purpose of the book is to encourage the reader to think about Jesus' journey and their own. How can the story of Jesus throw light on your own?

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Journeying with Jesus A Companion's Guide for Groups

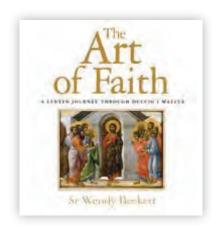
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Fr Denis McBride C.Ss.R. and Sr Janet Fearns

Whether alone or in a group, these Lenten Sunday Gospel reflections provide stimulating insights and ways into deepening personal prayer and commitment to Jesus. They are simple, practical, down-to-earth, heartwarming, challenging, and open up fresh possibilities for deepening discipleship and loving friendship with Jesus.

Code: 1863 ISBN: 9780852315682 Price: £4.95



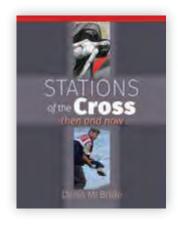
The Art of Faith

A Lenten Journey through Duccio's Maestà

Sr Wendy Beckett

In this inspiring series of reflections on episodes from the life of Jesus, Sr Wendy Beckett guides us around a selection of panels from the Maestà altarpiece. Duccio completed his great masterpiece for the high altar of Siena Cathedral in 1311 but rather than seeing these paintings as something from a bygone age, Sr Wendy challenges us to examine how Duccio's representations offer us new meaning in our lives today.

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Stations of the Cross Then and Now

Fr Denis McBride C.Ss.R.

The way of the cross is not confined to a lonely road in Jerusalem two thousand years ago: it is a busy highway winding through every village, town and city in our modern world. Fr Denis McBride guides us along the way of the cross. He contrasts the beauty and solemn simplicity of the more traditional stations, by artist Curd Lessig, with modern images that challenge us to link Jesus' story to the struggle of our everyday life.

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The fourteen Stations of the Cross, painted by artist Curd Lessig, and featured in Fr Denis McBride's bestselling Stations of the Cross - then and now are presented here has A3 posters, ideal for school halls, classrooms, parish rooms or Lent study groups.

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Stations of the Cross Framed Poster Set

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DVD Stations of the Cross

Then and Now

Fr Denis McBride C.Ss.R.

Due to unprecedented demand the fourteen Stations of the Cross have now been adapted for public use. In this DVD of the book, presented by Denis McBride, the voice and visuals open up new ways of thinking about Jesus' journey. You've never experienced the Stations of the Cross like this before; some of the images chosen may shock you but they will demonstrate how the passion story in all its savagery continues in our own time. The Gospel best comes alive when the story of

Jesus resonates deeply within our heart and our personal experience. Let The Stations of the Cross - Then and Now shine new light on your own journey and share the experience with your parish. Lasting about an hour, the DVD is ideal for use in parishes, schools and groups.







Set of 14 A3 posters

















Set of **14** Framed











1 See

"T" looks out of his cell window and sees, not the metal bars and barbed wire, but the glory of creation. He looks at his fellow inmates and sees brothers whom Jesus loves.

I don't look at the barbed wire and brick walls. I see the trees in the distance, standing tall.

The leaves on display, calling out, the branches calling out to the animals: "Come to me. I'll give you rest, I'll give you shelter. Rest in me: I am strong and able to bear you. Rest in me. Make your nest in me."

The trees swaying so gently in the breeze: one is still bare, still waiting to bloom. It will come, it will come: all things have their season.

The nest at the top, the very top: even on something so bare, life is still there.

Eggs waiting to hatch, or maybe they have already. Maybe they're just waiting to spread their wings to start their adventure that is life.

I don't look at the concrete and the metal railings. I see patches of grass poking out from where it can, squeezing its way through, bursting through like a nature warrior.

I see the dandelions popping up: yes, they have made it. That bright yellow in the corner, so small yet undeniable... nature prevails.

I don't look at the tin roof, the corrugated steel. I see a place of worship, where souls are saved and hearts are uplifted, where men gather together in unity and give God the praise, the oh, so beautiful praise.

I see a home to smiles, to friendships and brotherhoods, love for God, love for each other.

I don't see a metal sculpture. I see a beacon of hope, a ray of light, a reason to go on. The cross stands there for all to see, "Come to me all who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest." Life it gives.

Does the sacrifice not show? What Jesus did, this is love I know.

I was in a cloud of darkness but he took it from me there. I don't look at the cage on my cell or the window frame welded in.

I see the blue sky, covering the whole above. Nothing escapes it, it is vast. The blue sky sits so effortlessly, it sits with blue beauty. It spreads far as far as the eye can see. It enraptures me; nothing else is like it, nothing else.

I choose to see these things, I choose to see the good, I choose to live in hope.

As everyone should.

A 28-year-old prisoner