

Welcome to the Jesuit School of Theology's online daily prayer experience for Lent: *A Heart Renewed*.

In the days to follow, you will receive an email with a link to the Scripture readings of the day and a reflection on those readings. The reflections are written by the students, faculty, staff, board members, and alumni of the Jesuit School of Theology, one of Santa Clara's six schools.

Consider these daily emails an invitation to a retreat-like experience. They are a concrete way to honor the Lenten discipline of prayer. Find some quiet in your day to review the readings and the accompanying reflection. Let the reflection inspire your own praying and thinking. Ultimately, our goal is to know Jesus Christ more deeply, so that we can love him more dearly and follow him more closely.

At JST, we are always attentive to the larger context in which we are learning and living. If the Spirit moves you, bring to your prayer what you experience in the very ordinary routines of daily life and what you read in the news. We can ask: *What is God trying to teach us or reveal to us at this moment?*

This journey is not a singular experience. First of all, the Lord walks with each of us, relating to us uniquely and offering divine friendship. Moreover, we make this retreat together, thousands of people in the wider Santa Clara community united virtually with a common desire to grow in faith, hope, and love. You might wish to reach out to a friend to share your experiences through the weeks. Or you might journal about what you are experiencing and learning.

St. Ignatius of Loyola insisted that the most important spiritual disposition as we begin a retreat is generosity, a largeness of heart that is open to God's creativity and activity in our lives. Signing up for this online retreat underscores the generosity of spirit and time that you now offer.

Godspeed on the adventure ahead!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kevin O'Brien S.J." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kevin O'Brien, S.J.
Dean
Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University

March 6

Ash Wednesday

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/030619.cfm>

Famously, Ash Wednesday is the day more people go to church than any other, including Easter. Countless more people will receive ashes this day than will receive the Eucharist. We are strangely attracted to the mark of the ashes, a stark emblem of the mortal flesh that we bear, and of the death that is the inevitable destiny of each of us. Like the fire that generates them, ashes are primordial. They literally represent the judgment of Genesis 3:19: “For you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” We will one day become the ashes we wear—a humbling thought. And to be marked with ashes this day can indeed be a profound spiritual experience.

Despite the beauty of this sacramental observance, the Scriptures of the day ironically point us in another direction: “Rend your heart, not your garments,” counsels Joel, “and return to the LORD your God.” Jesus is even clearer: Do not perform religious rituals in public or parade your religiosity so that people will notice: “When you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden.” These exhortations could well make a case against pridefully wearing ashes in public. They are certainly an indictment of fetishizing religious ritual. The Scriptures of this day nudge us toward internal renewal, not outward show.

For despite its name, the point of this day is not ashes. The point of this day is mercy—seeking the mercy of our God, who is rich in kindness, abounding in steadfast love. The Psalmist, evoking the mortification of David, opens his heart to the God of mercy, begging forgiveness, the renewal of a faithful spirit, and the restoration of hope and joy. The Lenten drama takes place not in public places or in religious ritual (Ps 51:18–19), but in the hidden corners of the human heart, those parts seen only by God and most in need of God’s forgiving love. Freed by that love, we can even face death itself without fear, knowing that beyond the ashes there looms the fulfillment of life in the promise of resurrection.



God of infinite mercy, enter into the crevices of my heart this day. Open it to the gifts of your forgiving grace which you offer in a heightened way in this holy season now upon us. In the ashen reminders of our mortality, may I discover anew the joyful hope that is your promise for those who love you. Renew in me a steadfast spirit that I might, through the hidden patterns of my life this Lent, come to manifest Christ.

Paul Crowley, S.J.
Religious Studies Department

March 7

Thursday after Ash Wednesday

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/030719.cfm>

Since I started the Master of Divinity program here at JST, my dad has taken to asking me theological questions. I love our conversations and appreciate how interested he is in what I am studying, but honestly, sometimes I do not know the answers. Recently he asked me why Jesus calls himself, “the Son of Man.” After doing some research, I gave him the simple answer of how this title is a sign of Christ’s humanity, and it is also a phrase we hear in the Old Testament. Even though my dad expressed contentment with my answer, I could tell that he was still yearning to know more.

Behind his questions there is a deep desire to get know who Jesus really is. Who was this “Son of Man” who in Luke’s Gospel healed the unnamed woman with a hemorrhage, rose Jairus’s sleeping daughter from the dead, and fed 5000 with five loaves and two fishes? Who is Jesus who asks us to take up our crosses and follow him daily?

We all have this deep desire, like my Dad, to get to know Jesus. We talk about Jesus all the time here at JST by analyzing the Gospels and critiquing Christological notions. But we sometimes fail to remember that underneath it all is this deep longing to get closer to Jesus in our own lives. We fill our heads with knowledge of God but forget that knowledge should lead to relationship. Life gets busy, but Lent allows us to dive into a personal relationship with God if we want it. Whatever you are giving to God this Lent, allow the reality of Jesus to marinate in your heart. Let our questions inspire us to grow deeper into relationship with God.



Loving God, be with us during this time of Lent so that we may get to know you more in our own lives. Allow us to take this journey one day at a time and let go of any expectations we may have. Give us strength and courage to be willing to lose ourselves in love to you and share that with the world. Thank you for everything. Amen.

Mary Reilly, M.Div. ‘19

March 8

Friday after Ash Wednesday

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/030819.cfm>

From fish fries to debates over what “two smaller meals that together are not equal to a full meal” really means, fasting on Lenten Fridays has a long history in our American Catholicism. But as traditional a spiritual practice as it is, it can still be turned to all kinds of ends.

I know why I’m supposed to be fasting today but, if I’m honest, I just as often turn Lenten Fridays into a Church-approved-diet as into a spiritual discipline. And, to the extent that that’s true, I have to admit that my own practice of fasting is much closer to that of the Pharisees – or of those against whom Isaiah is railing today – than it is to John the Baptist’s. And admitting that makes God’s words spoken through Isaiah’s mouth – *On your fast day you carry out your own pursuits! Your fast ends in quarrelling and fighting!* – particularly hard to hear. Because they are true.

As a spiritual discipline, fasts are meant to do one thing: perform the rupture that already exists between the Kingdom and our own collective and individual habits. Fasts are less a self-improvement program than a tactic through which we make visible and counteract the centripetal forces that pull us into the black hole of habitual injustice that is sin. Fasts are meant to be a recognition of the immense and terrifying distance that lies between us and the person of Christ – the one with whom we labor to realize a just world. Fasts are a public seeking after mortification, self-abnegation; after the humble heart which the Lord does not spurn.

If all this is true, however, it does more than simply stab us like a needle through the aorta. It also shines a light on what feast days – which we celebrate every single Sunday of our liturgical year – are as well: regular reminders that the Bridegroom has his hand on our shoulder and is asking us to rise up from the ashes, inviting us to drink the good wine; to come dance.



*God, on this Lenten Friday
Give us the grace of fasting:
That strange gift of feeling how far we are from you.
May it be painful, God.
May it not let us rest until we have acted, changed,
Become a light to the nations;
Felt our wound quickly heal.*

*Be with us today in that desert, we beg.
But tomorrow draw near to us and lift us up,
And invite us to celebrate
The wedding feast with your Son.*

Paddy Gilger, S.J., M.Div. ‘13

March 9

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/030919.cfm>

Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth (Psalm 86:11a). Today's readings are all about how to follow the Lord. In the readings, the instructions are clear. Jesus meets Levi the tax collector and simply states, "follow me" and Levi leaves everything behind and follows Jesus. It is a clear directive with a hard truth. Levi must leave his seemingly nefarious tax collecting days behind him. In response, Levi throws Jesus a great banquet with tax collectors and others in attendance. When the Pharisees and Scribes complain, we learn that Jesus is calling sinners to repentance like a doctor tends to the sick.

Lent is a season that reminds us that we are all sinners, through our individual actions and through our participation in sinful institutions. *Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth.* In the first reading, Isaiah sounds like he is writing to us now, in 2019. The systems we have created as a society make it more difficult for us to walk in the way of the Lord. By remaining complicit in oppressive systems, we put obstacles in the path of the most vulnerable among us, as well as our own paths – to walk in the path of righteousness is to actively work against these systems. The way to walk in the Lord's truth is to fight oppression, stop false accusations, remove malicious speech, give bread to the hungry, satisfy the afflicted, and keep holy the Sabbath. In short, we are to leave everything behind and follow the Lord. And the Lord gives us these clear instructions.



Lord, give us the strength and the courage to walk in your truth. Forgive us our sins, in our thoughts, in our words, in what we have done, and what we have failed to do. Help us as we fight oppressive structures and be with us as we give bread to the hungry. Let us be worthy to be called "Repairers of the breach."

Teresa Carino, M.T.S. '20

March 10

First Sunday in Lent

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/031019.cfm>

Maybe it comes from having lived in New Orleans, a city known for its pre-Lenten merrymaking, Mardi Gras, which comes abruptly to an end at midnight of “Fat Tuesday”, but I often find myself not looking forward to this season of penance. Easter yes, with its bursts of color and new life, Christ triumphant, but Lent, dark, dreary, initiated by a somber cross on Ash Wednesday which calls us to repent and believe the good news, and links us to our mortality? Then comes the yearly “What shall I give up for Lent this year?” Or, more appropriately spoken by a pastoral theologian: “This year how can I take more seriously the call to prayer, fasting, and almsgiving?”

The first reading from Deuteronomy, with the opening scene of the priest receiving the basket of first fruits from the people to place before the Lord’s altar, took me back to the recent 50th marriage anniversary of Gilbert and Tere, my brother and sister in law. As part of the presentation of the gifts, their grandchildren brought up treasured objects and gifts from their consecrated life of five decades. Amidst the assortment, one item stood out . . . not only because their tiny granddaughter, Evita, rushed it to her grandmother before time! There it was: a simple, worn, little metal pot, complete with many dents, which quietly spoke of years upon years of meals shared. I thought to myself: “God provided and will continue to do so through their love and sacrifice for their family and beyond.”

As this empty vessel reminds us, this season is not about our generous God wishing to deprive us of the fruits of the earth and the work of human hands, quite the contrary, like this little pot, the more we feel our need for God through prayer and abstinence, the more we are moved to be generous with others, viscerally aware that our Creator has blessed us beyond all measure. To live Lent is to rediscover our identity as believers. Like Jesus, we are led by the Spirit into a blooming Spring desert, as scary as that may seem sometimes. Have a blessed Lent and trust that God will never be outdone in generosity!



O Jesus, our faithful companion, you invite us, your children to embrace this holy season of prayer and penance as a community of believers. Let us embrace your good news, knowing that nothing but your presence can fill our emptiness, an emptiness and vulnerability which binds us together in solidarity.

Eduardo C. Fernández, SJ
Professor of Pastoral Theology and Ministry

10 de Marzo

Primero Domingo de Cuaresma

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/031019.cfm>

Posiblemente tiene que ver con el hecho de que viví en la ciudad de Nueva Orleans en Luisiana, un sitio reconocido por su famoso Mardi Gras, o carnaval, que termina abruptamente en la medianoche para empezar la temporada de cuaresma, pero, si digo la verdad, rara vez siento ganas de entrar en este tiempo de penitencia. La pascua, sí, con todo su color y nueva vida, Cristo triunfante . . . pero la cuaresma, con su sobriedad, gris, oscura e iniciada por una cruz de ceniza que nos habla de arrepentimiento y nuestra mortalidad . . . honestamente, no me atrae. Luego me pongo a pensar, ¿qué tipo de penitencia tengo que hacer durante esta larga cuarentena? O, mejor dicho por este teólogo pastoralista, ¿Cómo podré tomar más en serio el llamado a la oración, ayuno, y dar limosna?

La primera lectura de Deuteronomio, con la escena inicial del sacerdote recibiendo la canasta de las primicias del pueblo para colocarlo delante del altar del Señor, me hizo recordar el reciente 50TH aniversario de matrimonio de Gilbert y Tere, mi hermano y cuñada. Como parte de la presentación de dones en la misa, sus nietos trajeron objetos y dones atesorados de su vida consagrada de cinco décadas. Entre esa gran variedad, un elemento se destacó, no sólo porque su pequeña nieta, Evita, ¡se lo llevó corriendo a su abuela antes de tiempo! Fue algo supuestamente muy sencillo: una gastada, pequeña olla metálica, completa con muchas abolladuras, que hablaba silenciosamente de años y años de comidas compartidas. Pensé: "Dios fue generoso y lo continuará haciendo a través de su amor y sacrificio por su familia y los demás."

Como este recipiente vacío nos recuerda, esta temporada no se trata de un Dios generoso que desea privarnos de los frutos de la tierra y de la obra de la mano humana, al contrario, como esta olla pequeña, más sentimos nuestra necesidad de Dios a través de la oración y la abstinencia, más nos movemos a ser generosos con los demás, conscientes visceralmente de que nuestro creador nos ha bendecido más allá de lo que merecemos. Vivir la cuaresma, entonces, es redescubrir nuestra identidad como creyentes. Al igual que Jesús, somos guiados por el Espíritu a un desierto primaveral floreciente, aunque a veces no nos siembre así. ¡Tengan una cuaresma santa, llena de bendiciones, y confíen en que Dios nunca será superado en generosidad!



Oh Jesús, nuestro fiel compañero, tú nos invitas a abrazar esta temporada santa de oración y penitencia como comunidad de creyentes. Abramos nuestro corazón a tu buena noticia, confiando que solo tu presencia es capaz de llenar nuestro vacío, un vacío y una vulnerabilidad que nos une en solidaridad con la humanidad.

Eduardo C. Fernández, SJ
Profesor de teología pastoral y ministerio

March 11

Monday of the First Week of Lent

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/031119.cfm>

What ultimately separates the sheep from the goats, the righteous from the wicked, or the compassionate from the cruel is how we maintain our relationships. There is a connection between how we honor God and how we treat the least in our society. If we respect the name of God, we also act justly to our neighbor by performing the corporal acts of mercy, such as feeding the hungry and clothing the naked. When we can see Christ in the poor and the vulnerable, we no longer have hatred in our heart, but we indeed act from a place of empathy and love. This love allows us to taste and experience the richness of life that Christ promises all of us. Christ's commands to love God and our neighbor do not limit our happiness but lead us to freedom, joy, and a sense of peace that nourishes us on our spiritual journey. In this time of Lent, Christ reminds us that the path to redemption and resurrection originate from sacrifice and service, particularly to those most in need. May we have the courage and the humility to see, touch, and serve Christ in the poor and the neglected, so that our prayer and praise may give greater glory to God.



Christ, the Good Shepherd, may your Sacred Heart transform us to see and love those who suffer and are vulnerable. Grant us pure, open, and compassionate hearts so that we may place all our trust in you. Through humble service and prayer, may we offer lasting praise to your divine majesty. Amen.

Alex Llanera, S.J., STL '19

March 12

Tuesday of the First Week of Lent

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/031219.cfm>

When I first moved to Northern California, I was surprised by the length and severity of the dry season. The rains stop, the land dries up and grasses and shrubs die or go dormant. Seeds scattered wait in the dry earth for months and sometimes years upon end. Then, one day, the rains return. Miraculously, the barren ground starts to sport a haze of green as the new shoots crack open the earth's crust, stimulated by the first moisture. Within weeks, all is green and lush as the plants hurry to produce their next crop of seeds before the dry returns. The water seems to disappear, only to return months later in the refreshing, life-giving rain. The Isaiah writer counts on similar experiences in his hearers to construct a powerful metaphor for the effectiveness of God's Word: Like the great cycle that water travels, God's Word always does the work for which it came forth from God's mouth—whether or not we see it.

Caught in the midst of our personal or corporate experiences of drought, how easy it is to wonder: Can we count on God's Word? Is our prayer likewise effective? How do we pray in a dry season when all appears dead? Jesus offers us the model: We begin by attending to God, recognizing and honoring God's majesty and mystery. We ask that our way of perceiving and acting be subsumed into God's greater plan, far beyond our own ability to perceive. On that foundation, we then ask for what we need, here and now, placing it in that much larger frame of God's plan, God's Word. We recognize our limitations, indeed, our moral failures, and ask God to lead us forward, deeper into God's plan for us and for the world. Then we trust that something much bigger than we can see is going on.



Jesus, we do not know how to pray as we ought, as we deeply need, or as the world truly needs. Dwell in our attempts to pray, pray in us. Bring our prayers to completion in your time and by your Spirit. Amen.

Elizabeth Liebert, S.N.J.M.
Jesuit School of Theology Adjunct Faculty
San Francisco Theological Seminary Professor of Spiritual Life, emerita

March 13

Wednesday of the First Week of Lent

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/031319.cfm>

“This evil generation demands a sign.” What are the signs we are waiting for to jump start a change of heart and move us to action? For Chicagoan Candice Payne it was the weather report the last week of January: record-breaking cold temperatures were predicted for the Windy City. Candice put two and two together and was moved to compassion: she charged 20 hotel rooms to her American Express Card so that some of the city’s homeless would not freeze solid on the sidewalks. Her compassion snowballed into an avalanche of generosity from other Chicago dwellers! All it took was paying attention to the weather report...and taking note of the homeless.

Signs don’t have to be a vision in prayer, a bolt from the blue, or a jolt from deep within the Hayward Fault. Signs are all around us every day. We walk around them, step over them, surf past them on the internet, glance away from them on the front pages, but they follow us on our cell phones: information, images, events, faces, all day long that are signs that invite us, challenge us, compel us to change and to act.

Johann Baptist Metz wrote of a mysticism with eyes wide open. Mysticism is not fleeing from the world, or even retreating from the world, but wading into the world with eyes wide open, being attentive to every detail, being aware of what is around us: the sights, the sounds, the patterns, the people. The signs are there. Vatican II called them “the signs of the time”. We can’t miss them...unless we do our best to try! But, if we let them work on us, have their effect on us, conversion can begin.



Blessed are those who mourn in solidarity with the suffering of our world. Gracious God, source of life, stir within us your own Spirit of empathy and of compassion for this planet and its people, our brothers and sisters.

George Griener S.J.
Associate Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology

March 14

Thursday of the First Week of Lent

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/031419.cfm>

Like many, I was taught at an early age to ask for help if I needed it, especially in school. As I grew older, I fell into the trappings of this world and developed a false sense of independence that made it difficult to ask for help because I didn't want to seem weak or incompetent. Yet, the great teacher that it is, life has taught me that it is impossible to not ask for help in times of helplessness. Undoubtedly, there are moments in our lives that make us feel overwhelmed, helpless and alone. Whether it is the loss of a job, the loss of a loved one, the loss of health, a natural disaster, the burden of the social ills that we are subjected to daily, or some other crisis, feelings of helplessness can seem inescapable.

The lectionary readings for today assure us that as children of God, we are never without help for we have a very present Helper amid our helplessness. In our first reading, Queen Esther, "seized with mortal anguish" lays prostrate before the LORD. With her life on the line and the lives of her people in jeopardy, she seeks the only help she knows, the help of the LORD. Her response to her helplessness should be our response as well for our Responsorial Psalm engraves upon our hearts that, "Lord, on the day I called for help, you answered me." And just as the Lord answered the prayer of Queen Esther when she called for help, we, too, can have the faith and confidence in knowing the Lord will do the same for us. In fact, in Matthew 7:7-12, the Lord invites us to ask, to seek, and to knock. By doing so, our Heavenly Parent will answer us and meet us at the center of our need.



Heavenly Parent, as we embark upon this Lenten season and as we wrestle with the troubles of this world, I pray that we, Your children, will call upon You for help during our moments of helplessness. Please give us the strength we need to lay aside anything that may hinder us from seeking You and help us to remember that there is nothing too hard for You. In Jesus's name I pray. Amen.

Tanisha Sparks
Associate Director of Housing and Building Operations

March 15

Friday of the First Week of Lent

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/031519.cfm>

Through today's biblical texts, we are called to life. Prophet Ezekiel puts us before the God of life and mercy who does not "derive any pleasure from the death of the wicked." Being the source of life, God protects and maintains life; rescuing us from corruption and sin, God brings us back to life. Life in us is this gift from God that gets its full meaning when we practice virtue. In this way, "to live" goes together with "doing good." Whenever we accomplish life-giving actions towards others and towards nature, we follow Jesus' footsteps, Him who came "that we may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). Given our human nature, sometimes, if not often, it happens that we diminish and destroy life in so many ways; but still, redemption is always offered by a merciful God. We just need to acknowledge humbly our wickedness, repent and turn away from sins to regain life in abundance.

In the Gospel according to Matthew, Jesus, the New Moses, invites us to perfection. How is it possible? The perfection that Jesus shows us is not necessarily at the level of justice; it is not a question of wanting to perfectly exercise all the moral virtues; it is not simply a strict observance of the Law. It is rather about imitating God's merciful and unmeasurable love. Jesus attaches such importance to the fraternal love that he goes so far as to recommend that we leave our gift there at the altar and go first reconcile with our sister or brother. God wants us to forgive. Only God's infinite love poured into our hearts can make us capable of true love and mercy.



O Lord, loving God, you who search my heart and know my secret thoughts, tear the veil of lie that covers me, consume with the fire of truth the sin that embraces me. Your law, I know it, you engraved it in my heart, but I closed my eyes to your ways. I preached justice when you spoke of mercy and I abusively invoked your mercy to escape your justice. May my contrition and confession open wide the doors to your light, love and mercy. Amen.

Setibo Batuzolele Victor, S.J. S.T.L. '17, Th.M. '17

March 16

Saturday of the 1st week of Lent

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/031619.cfm>

For many of us, there are people in our lives who really know how to push our buttons. Who are these people for you? When I was a novice, I used to complain regularly about one of my brothers. One day my exasperated novice director finally said to me, “San, you don’t have to like him but you do have to love him.” This distinction has been important for me to remember as it has led me to realize that the very qualities I do not like in certain people can reveal so much about my own flaws and brokenness. And, if I am honest with myself, my flaws may very well make me a person who pushes other people’s buttons. Jesus knows all too well the innately human tendency to gravitate towards loving those who are easy to love while rejecting those whom we find difficult. If we are to call ourselves Christians, this behavior will not suffice in advancing the Kingdom of God.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus commands us to be perfect just as the heavenly Father is perfect. Of course we can never be perfect like God but we can strive to be a perfect lover like Jesus, who loves each person no more or no less than another person. We can begin in this season of Lent by being intentionally more gentle, patient, and kind to the people who push our buttons. With God’s grace, in time we may find ourselves loving them and even liking them. Imagine that.



Lord Jesus, how perfect is your love. In your compassion teach us to love one another as you do. Give us the grace to love every sister and brother through your eyes with mercy, tenderness, and lovingkindness. In your Spirit, we pray. Amen.

San Mai, S.J., B.S. '89, M.B.A. '94, M.Div. '20

March 17

Second Sunday of Lent

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/031719.cfm>

When I teach theology to college students, I ask them to think about moments when they have felt like God was there. Without fail, they always begin with the big moments. They tell of times where something out of the ordinary happened, “a-ha” moments, miracles, or things close to it. Surely, if Abraham were in my class, he would relate this experience of the creation of the covenant, God’s promises of descendants and land. The transfiguration would definitely qualify as one of these big moments. Certainly, these are moments where we can point to and definitely say, “God was present.” God revealed Godself in clear, intimate ways.

A few moments later, a student will introduce a concept that they are unsure about. They will propose that they felt God in an ordinary moment. It may be for reasons they cannot describe, and words fail to capture what made this ordinary moment distinct from other ordinary moments. While the readings today tell us about a few instances of grand encounters with God, they also hint at something more. When I hear of these big moments of theophany in scripture, my mind always turns to the question, “What happened next?” We know that Peter wanted to stay on top of that mountain, to build tents and remain in that moment. Yet the whole point of these encounters with God is to leave the mountain top, to go into the world and experience God in the ordinary. However tempting it may be to focus on the “big moments,” this season of Lent invites us to pause and reflect on the day-to-day. 11 days into the season of Lent, how are we experiencing God in the ordinary?



God, you drew near to Abraham through the covenant and revealed yourself to the disciples in the transfiguration. Help us be aware of the ways you are working in our lives, in the grand moments on top of mountains and the small ways that fill our daily lives. Amen.

Annie Selak, '05, M.Div. '09

March 18

Monday of the Second Week of Lent

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/031819.cfm>

Do you remember the *Jubilee Year of Mercy*? If you're like me, the Year of Mercy seems like a distant memory. With today's readings, Jesus reminds us to be merciful.

I recently experienced God's mercy. Two friends and I had not spoken for two years - save for the obligatory 'happy birthday' text. We spoke ill of each other behind each others' backs, all the while thinking that the other was angry at us. Mutual friends became vessels for venting. I don't remember who, but one of us broke the silence and asked if we could get dinner. On the appointed date, we convened at Dolores Park, admiring the view and the weather. Somewhere in the conversation, we anxiously spoke of our feelings, eventually asking for forgiveness from one another, and renewing our commitment to friendship. In the midst of our chaotic lives, we realized that we needed each other: we needed each others' mercy. James Keenan, S.J. said, "Mercy is the willingness to enter into the chaos of another." God's mercy is about restoring right relationship.

During the season of Lent, we prepare ourselves to renew our baptismal promises. It's like renewing our friendship with God. In just a few days, the Elect (*those preparing for the Sacraments of Initiation*), will stand before their communities and dare to reveal - to scrutinize - their own judgements and condemnations as they seek out God's mercy. And they, in turn, will look to us, the Church, for encouragement.

How are you living your baptismal promises to become more like Jesus? Where do you hope for mercy? May we live Jesus' words today, so that not only do we renew our baptismal promises for ourselves, but in the spirit of the *Year of Mercy*, for the life of the world.



*With you, God, there is mercy and redemption.
You offer the bread of life and living water to those who hear you with faith.
Fashion us into a people who are steadfast in hope,
and fearless in the search for justice and peace.
Walk with those who will soon be plunged into the life-giving waters of baptism,
and give all of us the courage to be true disciples of Jesus.
Amen.*

John Michael Reyes 2009, M.Div. 2013

March 19

Solemnity of St. Joseph

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/031919.cfm>

El sueño de José me recuerda las Palabras del fundador de mi comunidad VDMF, Rev. Jaime Bonet, “Me pregunto, ¿qué hubiera sido de nosotros si María hubiera dicho que no al plan de Dios?”. Recordando estas palabras me pregunto yo también, ¿qué hubiera sido de María si José hubiera dicho que no al plan de Dios?

José, descendiente de Abraham y David, como las lecturas de hoy nos recuerdan, fue elegido para ser el padre adoptivo de Jesús. Sin embargo, las circunstancias de esa elección no eran las mejores para José. Estaba confundido, angustiado, no comprendía cómo María su prometida estaba esperando un hijo. Sabemos que es una reacción humana comprensible, no había ninguna explicación lógica, puesto que Dios no lo preparó con anterioridad.

Probablemente se sintió herido, traicionado, decepcionado. Por lo tanto, decidió abandonar a María en secreto “no queriendo ponerla en evidencia.” Sin embargo, José era un hombre de oración, un hombre compasivo capaz de escuchar a Dios y de abrirse al misterio más allá de la contradicción. Dios quería cumplir la promesa que hizo a Abraham y a sus descendientes una promesa que no dependía de la observancia de la ley, sino de la justificación obtenida mediante la fe.

Dios toma en cuenta a José y le hace partícipe del misterio que se realiza por la fe más que por la ley, y la carta a los Romanos nos recuerda esta realidad. Por la fe José toma parte en el plan de Dios, se abre al misterio y deja que Dios actúe a través de él para la vida y la salvación de muchos. Hoy nos toca a nosotros aprender de la fe de san José para acoger el plan de Dios aun cuando hay contradicciones.



Dios que interrumpes, Dios de sueños, ayúdanos a crear un espacio en que puedas interrumpir e intervenir en nuestras vidas. Ayúdanos a ser como José y estar abiertos para dejarte cambiar nuestros planes. Ayúdanos a escuchar y actuar de acuerdo a tu palabra cada día. Cuando enfrentamos contradicción e incertidumbre concédenos la gracia de percibir los ángeles que nos envías, que nos recuerda tus mejores planes para nosotros.

Reyna Colimote, V.D.M.F., S.T.L. '18.

March 19

Solemnity of St. Joseph

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/031919.cfm>

When I pray with today's readings, I am filled with memories of Rev. Jaime Bonet, the founder of the Verbum Dei Missionary Fraternity, my religious community. He would say in his prayer, "I constantly ask myself, what would have happened if Mary would have said no to God's plan?" When I remember these words, I also think of Joseph. What would we be if both Mary and Joseph had said no to God's saving plan?

Joseph, as the descendant of Abraham and David, was chosen by God to be the adoptive father of Jesus, the Christ. However, the circumstances are contradictory for Joseph; he can't recognize how he has been chosen as the Lord did not inform him before Mary conceived. Perhaps he felt left out and betrayed and didn't understand. Therefore, he decided to leave Mary and divorce her quietly. But the Lord came to him in a dream with the words, "Son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that the child has been conceived in her." It is in a dream that the Holy Spirit gives Joseph the full understanding of Mary's pregnancy and he believes.

In the letter to the Romans, Saint Paul reminds us of the importance of faith over biological lineage. Both Matthew's Gospel and the letter to the Romans remind us of the importance of faith over the law. Joseph was chosen but he was probably not aware of this. How could Joseph know about God's plan, unless the Lord revealed it to him? His questions and his doubts are no different than those of any human being: how is it possible that Mary conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit?

But even then, Joseph's merciful heart does not let him expose her publicly. Therefore, God must act quickly, the Lord spoke to Joseph in a dream, and God's plans are revealed to him. Joseph was a man of prayer; he chose to listen to his dream. Now both Mary and Joseph are to take part in the greater plan of God. Joseph could have said no and simply walked away, find another wife and continue his life, leaving Mary in secret, but he didn't. He stayed and believed that he had a part in God's saving plan.



Interrupting God, God of dreams, help us to always make space for you to interrupt and intervene in our lives. Help us to be like Joseph and be open to let you change our plans. Help us to listen and to act upon your Word everyday. When we face contradiction and uncertainty grant us the grace to perceive the angels you send us, that always remind us of your greater plans.

Reyna Colimote, V.D.M.F., S.T.L. '18.

March 20

Wednesday of the Second Week of Lent

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/032019.cfm>

Today's readings invite us to want God's will over our own. In the first reading, Jeremiah laments to God how hard it is to prophesy in the middle of pressing injustices. He believes that he has been appointed by God to warn the people of Judah about the consequences if they continue to choose evil rather than good. These people are resisting the message of God. They have opted instead to persecute Jeremiah. Jeremiah is oppressed and turns to God for help. This account of Jeremiah's life in God gives us a good disposition to reflect also on our personal relationship with God in this Lenten season. Like Jeremiah, when in difficulty we should always learn to wait for further direction from God while doing good rather than evil.

In the Gospel, Jesus is talking to his disciples about their journey towards Jerusalem. For he knows that it is in Jerusalem where he will be persecuted by his enemies. He will be crucified and eventually will resurrect on the third day. However, Jesus is not afraid of the maltreatment awaiting him there. Meanwhile, the mother of Zebedee is busy looking for high positions of honor for her two sons in the kingdom of God. To her request, Jesus responds by saying that it shall not be this way among his disciples. Whoever wishes to be great among them shall be their servant (Mat 20:26). Like Jeremiah, Jesus also lamented to God at times, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not as I will, but as you will" (Mat 26:39). And even as he was facing death on the cross. Jesus called out: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Psalm 22:1). Nonetheless, Jesus allowed the will of God over his own until the end.



Let us pray to Almighty God that we may emulate the courage of Jeremiah and Jesus. They lamented at times, yet they remained focused on their missions by taking their hardships back to God in prayer. For we follow Jesus by imitating him in his life message of cross bearing, service and sacrifice. Amen

David Masikini, SJ

Pastor, Saint Patrick Church

Marzo 21 de 2019

Jueves de la segunda semana de Cuaresma

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/032119.cfm>

Continuando con nuestras reflexiones de Cuaresma, hoy estamos siendo invitados a abrir nuestro corazón hacia Dios y hacia las personas que están alrededor de nosotros. Un ejemplo concreto, se puede verse en la primera lectura correspondiente al libro de Jeremías y al Salmo 1; ambas se refieren a la vida del lector en el proyecto del Señor usando dos ejes: esperanza y confianza. Estos dos elementos fortalecen, estimulan y establecen una relación cercana con Dios. Así mismo, el relato bíblico nos cuenta que “*El Señor es como un árbol plantado junto a un yacimiento de agua que estira sus raíces hacia el arroyo.*” Por ésta razón, el árbol mantiene un abundante follaje y provee frutos de calidad. Si bebemos del agua del Señor (esperanza y confianza) podremos producir bastantes frutos y compartirlos con nuestro prójimo.

Además, el Evangelio según San Lucas trae a colación una contrastante historia. Por un lado está Lázaro, un hombre pobre con llagas en su piel, junto a él algunos perros que lamen sus heridas y comen las migajas o sobras que caen de la mesa del joven rico. Por el otro lado, un joven rico que no tiene nombre por ende no tiene identidad. Este joven viste con prendas de color morado (color de la realeza) y come abundantemente todos los días. Cuando ambos murieron, el joven rico fue enterrado mientras que Lázaro probablemente no tuvo ningún rito funerario. Sin embargo, el ángel vino y se llevó a Lázaro al seno de Abraham mientras que el joven rico terminó en inframundo sufriendo y atormentado. El joven rico no fue juzgado por haber sido un hombre explotador, él disfrutó su fortuna plenamente sin compartir e ignorando aquello que estaban en las márgenes y excluidos de la sociedad por su condición o estatus socioeconómico. La Palabra de Dios nos está llamando a ser conscientes, justos y sensibles ante el dolor ajeno. En otras palabras no ignoremos a quienes sufren, ¡no más indiferencia!



Buen Señor, en estos días de Cuaresma, reafirma nuestro espíritu de servicio, ayúdanos a recordar a quienes necesitan palabras y acciones concretas referentes a la esperanza y a la confianza. Adicionalmente, ilumina el camino correcto para nuestras vidas y de esa manera podamos ver como tú viste, oír como tú oíste, hablar como tú hablaste pero sobre todo amar así como tu amas. Amén.

Diego Salazar Galvis, S.T.L. – Th.M. ‘20
Bogotá-Colombia

March 21

Thursday of the Second Week of Lent

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/032119.cfm>

As we continue our Lenten journey, today we are invited to open our hearts to God and the people around us. The first reading and the Psalm address how each of us is called to experience hope and trust in a way that will help build God's kingdom. These two elements urge us to establish a close relationship with God. As the narrative tells us, those who place their trust in the Lord are "like a tree planted beside waters that stretches out its roots to the stream" (Jeremiah 17:8). If we drink the nourishing waters of the Lord (hope and trust), we can produce ample fruits and share them with our neighbors.

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells a parable of contrasts. On one hand, there's Lazarus, a poor, hungry man covered with sores, whose wounds are licked by dogs. On the other, there's a rich man (without a name: no identity) who dressed in purple garments (the color of royalty) and who dined richly every day. Both men die, and while an angel takes Lazarus to the bosom of Abraham, the rich man suffers and is tormented in the netherworld. The rich man plainly enjoyed his fortune without sharing with those at the margins, ignoring and excluding those of a lower socioeconomic status. The Word of God is calling us to be aware, righteous and sensible before the suffering of others. The readings call us to set aside our indifference; in other words, do not ignore the one who suffers.



Good Lord, in these days of Lent, firm up our service spirit, help us to remember those who need words and concrete actions inspired by hope and trust in You. In addition, enlighten the right path in our lives so that we can see as you saw, hear as you heard, speak as you spoke but above all love as you love. Amen.

Diego Salazar Galvis, S.T.L. – Th.M. '20
Bogotá-Colombia

March 22

Friday of the Second Week of Lent

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/032219.cfm>

Who are the wicked tenants in this story? What are the ways in which we abuse, marginalize and slaughter the image of the sons and daughters of God with whom Jesus, God incarnate, identifies himself? (Mt 25:40). What are the systems, practices, attitudes that hinder us as a Church community from producing fruits for the common good? We need introspection...we need renewal.

The Church, guided and permeated by the Spirit of Christ, is endowed with immense gifts to lead the people to the experience of God's love in Christ. We are aware of the abuse of these gifts in the history of the Church. There are numerous times we have not lived up to our call in our personal lives. This story calls us, personally and communally, to repentance and ongoing conversion.

As a Church, we need to name the harm done to peoples through an anti-semitic interpretation of this parable. We need to recall that Jesus lived as a faithful Jew and not as a Christian. Jesus is addressing fellow Jews, and so whatever criticism he may have engaged in is primarily an inner-Jewish debate, not one between Jews and Christians. The parable is best read as prophetic self-criticism, not as an unprophetic criticism of the Jews and an uncritical extending of all of God's promises to the Church. Hence, it is incorrect to suggest that God abandons an established covenantal relationship with the Jews and simply gives those prerogatives to the Church.

This parable is best served remembering God's initiative, faithfulness, and mercy in calling us to be disciples and faithful stewards of the Gospel. It does not call us to judge the Jewish leaders. Rather, we must ask, what does it say about us Christians? What is my vision of the reign of God? What does the parable teach me about God's vision for the Church, myself and others? How do I respond to the boundless mercy and goodness that God offers me each day?



God of abundant Life, God of new opportunities, God of enduring love, we humbly come to you today to listen to your words of eternal life and heed them deeply. Let us live as the Body of Christ and do justice and bring healing to this broken world, especially the Church. We ask your forgiveness for the many abuses in the Church and seek your mercy and compassion. Amen.

Beena Kallely, M.S.J., S.T.L. '16, Th.M. '16
Ph.D. student of Theology and Ethics

March 23

Saturday of the Second Week of Lent

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/032319.cfm>

Jerusalem, in today's first reading, likely thinks of the prophet Micah as an annoyance. He is from the country, but he travels to the Holy City to call the leaders of Judah back to the covenant. He identifies their failings with stark detail and for public consumption.

The prophet, though, does not content himself in identifying the wrongdoing of his leaders, who have both civic and religious obligations. He reminds them of the covenant and the demands it places on the nation of Judah for right living and care for the downtrodden, yet he also expresses a deep concern that the nation, with its leaders, remember God and what God has done for them.

Micah reminds his audience of God's character - "who does not persist in anger, but delights rather in clemency" (Micah 7:18) - and how far-reaching God's promise is, calling to mind Judah's memories of God, which they had outside of their small nation and before it even existed (Micah 7:14-15). God's promise is much bigger than their nation, and God calls them to act with the care God has had toward them.

Antagonisms and oppositions fall to the wayside in Micah's recollection of God's goodness and mercy. He includes himself with the rest of the nation when describing God, who "again will have compassion on us, treading underfoot our guilt" (Micah 7:19). In short order, Micah expresses that he, like Judah's leaders, is a sinner.

The reminders of God's goodness from Micah urge Judah to know that God's mercy grants them what they need to live rightly. They need no longer let fleeting national interests arrange their priorities. God has taught them how to live, and, moved by their encounters with God, they now must ask themselves how they can do anything *but* share God's promise.



*God, inspire me with the same spirit you gave to your prophet, Micah. Grant me the insight to know your call and the courage to proclaim it to my neighbors. Forgive our wrongdoings, and give us confidence in your promise. Lead us back to you.
We ask this through Christ, our Savior. Amen.*

Joseph Wotawa, S.J., M.Div. '19

March 24

Third Sunday of Lent

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/032419-yearc.cfm>

Sometimes when I'm spending time with friends, we take turns responding to a question or two from "[The 36 Questions That Lead to Love.](#)" A psychologist developed these questions to explore how mutual vulnerability fosters intimacy. Among friends, it is a great way to open up conversation, reflect on our lives, learn about each other and grow in friendship.

Question #19 reads: "If you knew that in one year you would die suddenly, would you change anything about the way you are now living? Why?"

In the Gospel today, Jesus likewise invites people to consider an impending death. "Repent or perish." He tells the parable of a fig tree that has been barren for three years. The landowner loses patience and tells the gardener, "Cut it down." In response, the gardener asks for more time: "Leave it for this year also, and I shall cultivate the ground around it and fertilize it; it may bear fruit in the future. If not, you can cut it down."

The parable reflects the theme in Luke's Gospel – and the Season of Lent – to repent and be fruitful. John the Baptist implored the crowds, "Produce good fruits as evidence of your repentance": clothe the naked, feed the hungry and practice economic justice (Luke 3:7-14). Jesus explained that "every tree is known by its own fruit" (Luke 6:44).

In today's parable, the fig tree cannot bear fruit on its own. The gardener must cultivate the ground and fertilize it. In light of Jesus' initiative, perhaps Question #19 can help lead us to deeper love with him. During this Lent, and in the next year, how can we open ourselves more and more to Jesus, the merciful and patient Gardener who enables our lives to bear fruit?



*Jesus, most merciful and patient Gardener,
cultivate the soil of my body, mind and heart,
and open me to your Spirit,
so that my life would always bear fruit
in the works of mercy, justice and peace.
Amen.*

Luke Hansen, S.J.
M.Div., STB 2017

March 25

Monday of the Annunciation of our Lord

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/032519.cfm>

How am I responding to the presence of God so far this Lenten season? That's the question reverberating for me through these passages from Isaiah and Luke. Today's readings present us with the familiar story of Mary's dialogue with Gabriel, and the perhaps less famous dialogue between King Ahaz and Isaiah. Without casting Ahaz as an overly simplistic foil to Mary, I find myself drawn to the contrast between each figure's response to invitations from God.

Ahaz, welcomed by God to request a sign--a guidepost in the difficult moment in history in which he finds himself--rejects the offer. As I imagine this interaction, my own stubbornness, illusions that I can manage everything on my own, and reluctance to sit in God's goodness come to the surface. When do I meet God's invitation to deeper life together with "I'll do it myself" or some other toddler-spirited variation of rejecting the support of my community or God? Where am I rejecting intimacy with God and neighbor on the grounds that I know what's best?

On the other hand, the well-worn encounter between Mary and Gabriel offers a different spirit of response to God's invitation. Presented with a bewildering revelation that will fundamentally alter both her body and the course of her young life, Mary stays in the conversation. She asks questions. She challenges. She allows the uncertainty and vulnerability that such a moment would surface to exist without rejecting the invitation to a deeper life with God that accompanies it.

Our spiritual lives aren't entirely Marian or Ahazian. I imagine many of us reside somewhere in the middle, striving for the openness and vulnerability to stay in God's presence and at other times rejecting that intimacy. May today's celebration offer us all a renewed courage to look over the past two and a half weeks of Lent, notice how we've responded to God's presence in our lives, and move into the remainder of this season with some of Mary's life-giving vulnerability.



Emmanuel, God-with-us, you come to us in countless faces and encounters. Grant us the tender courage to remain open to your ongoing invitation to deeper life with you. Help us cultivate lives committed to your justice. As we journey more deeply into this Lenten season, may we respond to you and to our neighbors with faithfulness and kindness, with lives that proclaim that we come to do your will.

Sara Brabec, M.Div. '13, M.A. '13

March 26

Tuesday of the Third Week of Lent

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/032619.cfm>

Our readings today help us seek God's amazing grace.

The first reading is from the Prayer of Azariah in the Furnace. For refusing to worship the golden image as commanded by King Nebuchadnezzar, Azariah (also known by his Babylonian name Abednego), Hanania (Shadrach), and Mishael (Meshach) were thrown into the blazing furnace. "Then Azariah stood and offered this prayer" in which he asks God to remember the covenant with Abraham. Azariah offered this prayer "with contrite heart and humble spirit," (Daniel 3:39) and the great faith of these three youths saved them. Then, "the angel of the Lord came down into the furnace to be with Azariah and his companions, and drove the fiery flame out of the furnace, and... the three, as with one mouth, praised and glorified and blessed God in the furnace" many times over.

Our responsorial psalm echoes this prayer as we implore God: "remember your mercies" and "teach [us] your paths". The psalm reminds us that God "guides the humble to justice." The Gospel Acclamation urges us to wholeheartedly turn to God for mercy. The Gospel according to Matthew tells of a "wicked servant" whose debt was forgiven but, when he failed to pay the favor forward and forgive his fellow servant, was reinstated. This parable is a valuable reminder; "for if you forgive others their trespasses, **your heavenly Father** will also forgive you" (Matthew 6:14).

Many of the most powerful people around the world today hoist up self-righteousness as a golden image that tempts others to vainglory, unforgiveness, and sin. God's Word today calls us to take the "high road" by bringing ourselves low. Let us ask for forgiveness, forgive wholeheartedly, and worship God together with grateful and renewed hearts!



*Lord,
You were sent to heal the contrite of heart;
Lord, have mercy;
Please forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us;
And grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change,
Courage to change the things we can,
And wisdom to know the difference.*

Albert D. Honegan, MABL '20

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/032619.cfm>

Hoy nuestras lecturas nos ayudan a buscar la gracia increíble de Dios.

Nuestra primera lectura es de la oración de Azarías en el horno. Por negarse a adorar la imagen de oro bajo la orden del Rey Nabucodonosor, Azarías (también conocido por su nombre babilonio Abed-negó), Ananías (Sadrac), y Misael (Mesac) fueron echados en el horno abrasador. “Entonces Azarías, en medio del fuego, empezó a orar”, pidiendo a Dios que recuerde de su alianza con Abraham. Azarías ofreció esta oración “con corazón afligido y espíritu humillado”, y la gran fe de estos tres jóvenes les salvó. Entonces, “el ángel del Señor bajó al horno para estar con Azarías y sus compañeros, y echó fuera del horno las llamas de fuego, y... los tres, dentro del horno, empezaron a cantar a una voz un himno de alabanza a Dios” varias veces.

Nuestro salmo responsorial se hace eco de esta oración mientras rogamos: “Sálvanos, Señor, tú que eres misericordioso” y “guíanos con la verdad de tu doctrina.” El salmo nos recuerda que Dios “guía por la senda recta a los humildes”. La aclamación del Evangelio nos exhorta a volver a Dios de todo corazón para su misericordia. El Evangelio según San Mateo habla de un “siervo malvado” cuya deuda fue saldada pero, cuando se negó a devolver el favor y perdonar a su compañero, fue restablecida. Esta parábola es un recordatorio valioso; “[p]orque si perdonáis a los demás sus ofensas, os perdonará también a vosotros **vuestro Padre celestial**” (Mt 6:14).

Hoy en día, muchas de las personas más poderosas del mundo levantan la soberbia como imagen dorada que tienta a los demás hacia la vanagloria, falta de perdón, y el pecado. La Palabra de Dios hoy nos llama para nuevas alturas por hacernos más bajitos. ¡Que pidamos el perdón, perdonemos de todo corazón, y alabemos a Dios juntos con corazones agradecidos y refrescados!



*Señor,
Tú que has enviado a sanar los corazones afligidos;
Señor, ten piedad;
Por favor, perdona nuestras ofensas,
Como también nosotros perdonamos a los que nos ofenden;
Y concédenos la serenidad para aceptar las cosas que no podemos cambiar,
El valor para cambiar las cosas que sí podemos,
Y la sabiduría para conocer la diferencia.*

Albert D. Honegan, MABL '20

March 27

Wednesday of the Third Week of Lent

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/032719.cfm>

Full disclosure: I have never had a good relationship with the idea of laws and rules. Growing up in a politically unstable environment in a post colonial culture, the words “law” and “rule” always seemed to be used to the benefit of those in power at the expense of the most poor and vulnerable. So when I saw the readings of the day, everything in me wanted to revolt.

However, looking past the political implications of the first reading, and understanding these readings with the *purpose and spirit* of the law in mind, I became more reflective. In the first reading, Moses says that the nations would declare God’s *closeness* to his people by way of their observance of the law. He also says that following God’s law will be evidence of the **gifts** of wisdom and intelligence. The law in this light becomes more about relationship and growth and not about “do this or else.” In the last lines of this reading, Moses exhorts the people to give witness to the things they have seen, and share the story of the relationship between them and God to future generations. The law, then, is rich with heritage, relationship and wisdom, and it was not given for God’s sake but rather for the nourishment of the people.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus seems to interrupt himself delivering the Sermon on the Mount to clarify that he has come to fulfill the law, not to do away with it. Moments before, he was declaring that the people were the salt and light of the world. After this passage, Jesus goes on to expand God’s law to exclude cursing and demeaning one’s brothers and sisters and instead encourages us to work towards reconciliation. So, as sentimental as this may end, I began to see the Law of God as Love At Work towards real relationships in efforts to fulfill the two greatest commandments: love of God and love of neighbor.



God of love; God who wants to be with us and wants the best for us, help us to see your truth with the eyes of your Holy Spirit so that we may joyfully be embraced by your presence and receive the gifts you so desperately want us to have. May we in response pass on the heritage and wisdom wrought by our relationship with you to those who are in most need and to future generations so that your Love may continuously be At Work in our world. In Jesus’ name. Amen

Dayne Malcolm, S.J., M.Div. ‘21

March 28

Thursday of the Third Week of Lent

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/032819.cfm>

The season of Lent invites us to “listen to the voice of God.” In today’s world, we hear many voices calling for our attention. We hear voices through digital and social media, calling us to like or dislike, subscribe or unsubscribe, tweet or retweet events and stories. We hear the voices of politicians around the globe making promises in order to increase their voter base. We hear the voices of leaders who separate children from their parents and build walls between countries. In the midst of these, we also hear the voices of refugees, the homeless, the suffering, and the sick who long for comfort, consolation, and protection. Today we also hear the voices of the victims of child sexual abuse perpetrated by clergy in our Church calling for justice and healing. Amid all these and many other voices, God reminds us to listen to God’s voice: “I will be your God, and you shall be my people.” How comforting and consoling to listen to this voice of God which helps us to discern our responses to all these other voices.

In the Gospel, we meet people who fail to listen to the voices of Jesus and the man who spoke after the demon came out of him. Instead of hearing the voice of the man who was mute before, they probably listened instead to the sound of the demon that was driven out. The Gospel presents the constant seeking for signs and miracles for confirmation, the refusal to accept the truth, sowing division, and deafening people to God’s voice through deception as demonic. During this season of Lent, we are invited to attentively listen to God’s voice which calls us into a deeper union with the divine. By listening to God’s voice, we as individuals and as a community are moved to discern a concrete and practical response to the voices of the poor, the refugees, and the victims of various abuses in the world today. For they are the bodies which echo forth the *authentic voice* and face of Jesus for us – in their needs and their hopes.



Lord, lead us to listen to God’s voice so that we are not carried away by the inauthentic voices of demons which draw us far from you. Guide us in moments of discernment so that we can effectively respond to the voices which are truly of you, calling us to join in your labor for consolation, reconciliation, and healing of the whole world.

Louis Leveil, SJ

March 29

Friday of the Third Week of Lent

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/032919.cfm>

Praying with the readings for today, what strikes me most is God's plaintive cry in the Psalms: "I am the Lord your God: Hear my voice" repeated over and over again in the refrain. In between these entreaties we hear of how God longs to "relieve our shoulders of burden," and "feed us with the finest wheat" if only we would hear God's voice. Oftentimes during Lent, the focus on sin and repentance can lead us to believe that God is angry with us, when, in fact, I think that God is mostly sad, heartbroken even, because sin means that we aren't listening anymore. In my own life, some of the hardest conversations with loved ones come when one of us is not listening to the other. It is incredible that the Creator of All Good Things can feel this longing to be heard as acutely as you and I.

In the Gospel for today, Jesus offers us an opportunity to listen to God once more. When asked for the first or greatest commandment he, ever the rebel, gives two. To love God with all our heart, mind, strength, and soul AND to love our neighbors as ourselves. I think that these two commandments aren't quite as distinct as one might think. For, as we begin to love, and in this way get to know God better, we learn the depth of God's infinite love for each human person. Learning this, how can we help but begin to try to replicate love as beautiful as that? When we see the divine love residing in every person, how can our response be anything other than love?



Lord, we pray that during this Lenten season you would open up our ears to hear Your voice calling us to participate in the love you hold for all that You have created. May we love ourselves, others, and You ever more with each coming day.

Sarah Ash, M.Div. '19

March 30

Saturday of the Third Week of Lent

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/033019.cfm>

It is easy to read today's gospel and immediately distance ourselves from the self-righteous Pharisee. "What a terrible person," we might tell ourselves. "I'm glad I'm not like *him*." Yet it is the very nature of self-righteousness that we are blind to it within ourselves, and the truth is we probably all have some of the Pharisee within us.

Today we are invited to reflect on those parts of ourselves that lead us to despise others. Who is the immoral other that we judge and condemn in the privacy of our own thoughts? "At least I'm not like *that* person or *those* people," we might unconsciously say to ourselves. "*They* are hypocritical, judgmental, close-minded, etc. If only *they* could change, then all would be well in our world, our country, our church."

But instead of fixating on the faults of others or our own perceived virtue, Jesus and the prophet Hosea offer us a different focus: God who always gazes upon our brokenness and shortcomings with compassion; God who desires not empty acts of sacrifice, but our striving for deeper knowledge and love of God; God who wants us to be merciful to one another.

Let us return to this God who desires healing for us and life in the divine presence.



God of Mercy,

Help us to be aware of the self-righteousness that blinds us to your presence in our midst.

Give us the humility to offer you our brokenness and sinfulness, as well as the grace to trust in your love and compassion. As sinners who are loved and forgiven, may we love and forgive others. Amen.

Andrew Laguna, S.J., M.Div. '19

March 31

Fourth Sunday of Lent

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/033119-yearc.cfm>

One of the most familiar themes of the preaching of Pope Francis has been that of mercy. Again and again, he has urged us to turn to God with whatever burdens and sins we carry and entrust ourselves to the compassion of God. The pontiff truly lives out his title by showing us the bridge between God and humanity. Today the Pope's message resonated with me in light of our Scripture readings that speak so vividly of the very nature of our God. Jesus shared the story of the Prodigal Son, though the pivotal figure is actually the prodigiously loving father.

This account from Luke's Gospel took me back in memory to an annual retreat at Redwoods Monastery in remote Whitethorn, California. After several days of reflection, I approached the Trappist chaplain of the monastery for the sacrament of Reconciliation. Truth be told, I had hesitated to be candid about my failings and had to force myself to overcome my pride and embarrassment to seek the sacrament. As had happened so often, however, the priest was amazingly compassionate. His understanding of my foibles and failures eased my mind so that I concluded with a sense of joyful release from my past.

What fixed this experience in my mind was what happened later that day. As we gathered in the chapel for Eucharist that afternoon, the chaplain passed me a torn piece of paper, said nothing, and smiled. The typed message was a quotation from Pope Francis, from early in his pontificate (June 9, 2013). Moved by the chaplain's thoughtfulness, I have re-read that quotation many times and kept that tattered paper at my bedside. I share the pope's words with you as a prayer for today.



“The Lord always looks upon us with mercy; ...let us not be afraid to approach him! He has a merciful heart! If we show him our inner wounds, our sins, he will always forgive us. He is pure mercy! Let us go to Jesus!”

Today, once again, without fear, let us go to Jesus.

Michael Engh, S.J.
President, Santa Clara University

April 1

Monday of the Fourth Week of Lent

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/040119.cfm>

Meditating on today's lectionary, I continually come back to the word "joy" in the first reading. "For I create Jerusalem to be a joy and its people to be a delight" (Isaiah 65:18). As a wise friend once said to me, "Rejoicing can be one of the hardest things that we're called to do." In our world - filled with violence, pain, and suffering - joy can perhaps be difficult to experience and embody. And yet, this is what we are called to do, to follow Christ's example and be a presence of God's joyful love.

This past November, I found myself in Baltimore for a Catholic conference, where I received an image with a prayer on the back. When I returned home, I quickly framed this gift. Multicolored flames and delicate, flowering vines climb around the phrase "It's gotta be the JOY," the bold, white, hand-drawn lettering jumping off the warm-hued page. This sunny reminder sits in my line of sight when I wake up in the morning, a small moment of prayer.

Whenever I look at this image, I am reminded as well of the prayer on the back of this print. The prayer, "It's gotta be the Joy," was written by Brendan Walsh, who, along with his wife Willa Bickham, was a founding member of the Viva House Catholic Worker in Baltimore.

This joy is not merely merry, and is not blithely innocent of the struggle and pain of our world. The words on the back, which capture the work of the Catholic Worker, serve as a reminder that our Christian joy is in the midst of suffering.

Brendan begins his prayer by describing the corporal works of mercy that the Catholic Worker may best be known for. "Some say working the soup kitchen best defines the Catholic Worker...But, deep down, really, in our heart of hearts, we know...It's gotta be the joy!"

"You lose the joy, you lose it all. No joy, no hope...no understanding of the suffering...no meaning to life..." Jubilantly he concludes, "Oh yeah - It's gotta be the joy!" This daily reminder of mine urges me to consider how joy makes all the difference.



God of Joy – Help me rejoice in the world as You rejoice in me, and help me to make manifest Your love and joy for Your creation. Amen.

Caroline Read, '12, M.A. '18
Marketing and Communications Specialist

April 2

Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Lent

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/040219.cfm>

Today's Gospel tells the story of the man, long ill, who was healed by Jesus within a portico, near a pool of water. We often forget about miracles. We know that they happened. That they happen. And yet, very often, they seem so distant.

In both readings today, we see the importance of a threshold. The space that signifies moving from one way of life into a new way. Sometimes these thresholds greet us by our own choosing, and many times indeed they are not our own choosing. Perhaps at these times we wish someone else would take up the reins of our life and figure out the path forward.

One point of interest in our Gospel is that Jesus instructs the sick man to "Rise, take up your mat, and walk". The man has to take up his own mat, has to walk out of that threshold. On his own. Though he has been healed. Miraculously.

In challenging times of life, we can identify with the sick man. We sit, and wait. We try to make our way to healing, on our own accord. We sit some more, and wait some more. Sometimes with patience. And then, a blessing. In this season, let's not forget about miracles. Let's not forget that Jesus is nearby, in our portico. Accompanying us. Sitting with us. Waiting with us. And at times, in His own way, healing us.



Dear Lord, thanks for all of the quiet moments in which I remember You, and seek Your company.

Elizabeth Kovats, M.T.S. '16

April 3

Wednesday of the Fourth Week of Lent

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/040319.cfm>

Growing up, my parents and relatives came from a culture that very much valued family, and family meant the world to me. So when I left home for college, in no way did I imagine that I would then live across the country from them for over a decade. However, it was through my longing and loneliness that God led me to discover my eternal and ever-present home in God.

Whether it's distance, broken relationships, illness, or death, we may find that our families, biological or chosen, no longer provide us with the love, sense of security, or guidance we long for. However, today's readings remind us that we have reason to rejoice, even in these realities. "Sing out, O heavens, and rejoice, O earth, break forth into song, you mountains. For the LORD comforts the LORD's people and shows mercy to the LORD's afflicted" (Isaiah 49:13). When we reflect and remember how God has been merciful with us, leading us through prayer to our home within ourselves, we cannot help but be filled with gratitude. We are never alone, because we have a divine mother and father who remembers and cares for us. "Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness of the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you" (Isaiah 49:15).

God promises to never forget God's children. Perhaps we are invited today to take some time to sit down with God and remember this together. In today's Gospel, Jesus speaks of being shown the works of the Father by the Father and co-laboring through the Father. In remembering and seeing how God has loved and cared for us in our lives, may our hearts be opened to hear the word of God that invites us to love and care for others. In what ways may God be inviting us to see the work God is doing and to co-labor with God?



Loving God, thank you for the many ways in which you pour out your love and mercy in our lives. Open our eyes and our ears if we cannot see or hear your loving presence with us always. Grant us the grace to respond generously to your example in the lives of those we encounter.

Silvana Arevalo, M.Div. '21

April 4

Thursday of the Fourth Week of Lent

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/040419.cfm>

The old aphorism “don’t miss the forest for the trees” usually signals a warning against a type of blindness, though perhaps not willful, that fails to appreciate the broader impacts of issues and challenges we face. “Stiff-necked” is the term Exodus uses for the willful disregard of the central revelation of God’s covenantal love communicated through Moses. In the Gospel today, Jesus seems to be building on Moses’ warnings against being blind, even “stiff-necked” to the heart of his preaching and ministry – the love of God that creates, sustains and redeems our world. Jesus cites all the often-overlooked witnesses to that love - creation, external wonders of God’s day-to-day care, presence in each one and all, the revelation of that love in scripture. These of course continue to express God’s love today. Jesus indicates that all these witnesses have only one source, the voice of God speaking like a parent’s love toward their children. However, Jesus ends with one of the most devastating assessments: “I know you and you do not have the love of God in your hearts” (John 5:42).

Lent is a time to examine how our lives have overlooked the many witnesses and ways that God’s love is present in our life and how it urges us forth to share it with others to transform our world by becoming who we were created to be – images and reflections of God’s love. Jesus is not angry because his listeners are not giving him the glory but because they fail to understand or are blind to the source of all - God and God’s love.



Loving God, open our eyes this Lent to your continued offer of love and companionship manifest each day in so many ways. Teach us to see your presence especially in the dark and difficult times of our lives. Bless us and our communities that we may become witnesses to your merciful love and its transformative power to bring peace, justice and love to all your creatures.

Joe Morris,
Director of the Graduate Program of Pastoral Ministries

April 5

Friday of the Fourth Week of Lent

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/040519.cfm>

Emotionally, in the Lenten readings these days, we can feel the buzz and tension that Jesus' signs and teachings are creating. In the surrounding Gospel passages we read that he fed the hungry thousands who gathered on the hill to listen to him; he walked on water to the astonishment of the disciples; and he even proclaimed himself to be God's nourishing life coming down from heaven - to the consternation and disgust of many. Particularly in Jerusalem with the Feast of Tabernacles approaching, the tumult among the people is ramping up. "Is Jesus of Nazareth the Messiah? *How could a Galilean be the Messiah?*"

However, it seems to me that these readings invite us to stay focused, rather than getting sidetracked by detractors and murmurers, by those who resent compassion and stoke cynicism. The first reading from Wisdom and the verses from John 7 parallel each other to highlight the way those who seek justice and live fully into God's promise are unfortunately vilified. The wicked resent the just person; the authorities in Jerusalem and the crowds in the city want to kill Jesus or at least provoke him to foolhardy acts of cheap glory. But the readings, and especially the psalm verses, call us back to witness justice because God is just. We are reminded, then, that the humble recompense of holiness is God's presence to the brokenhearted, the peacemakers and the justice seekers.

More pointedly, today's readings are an invitation to live with hope into God's steadfast truth of justice. When we bind up the wounds of those in distress as well as when we challenge unjust systems, we announce to all our trust in God's justice. Our actions will testify to our trust, like Jesus, in the One who sends us.



Prayer: God of Wide-Open Love, you are the wellspring of justice. We recognize you in Jesus, whom you sent to heal the brokenhearted. Bring us back. We ask you to bring us back into relationship with you. Send your Spirit to saturate us in your mercy so that we may be merciful. Animate us to seek justice in the world with courage, resting in trust upon your steadfast love and the life you promise.

Alison Benders
Associate Dean of the JST

April 6

Saturday of the Fourth Week of Lent

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/040619.cfm>

Today we end another week of our Lenten journey and are one week away from Holy Week. Have our resolutions, our spiritual agenda for this season, improved proportionally to this journey's progression? At the beginning of Lent, I promised to widen my circle of friends and allow more diversity into my world, and here I am still in my comforting old milieu. I planned to visit with people on the margins, but I have not kept this promise strictly. I thought I would find more important implications in my academic work, but I have lacked discipline in my research.

The length of the journey, and the need to pause and evaluate, can easily put our inner world into a spiritual upheaval - a smart but unhealthy desolation. Let us not downplay the efforts of our journey. Let us not say to ourselves: "I am from Galilee," or "I have failed in my last resolution," or "the Lenten season is almost finished, and I haven't accomplished enough," or "I'm a lay person and not heard by the Church," or "I am a cleric and just ashamed by the news," or "I am busy with work and have no time for changing the world right now." Today's readings present the Servant of God as the "Lamb led to slaughter," the cursed one from the unprophetic land of Galilee and yet He is the one that God shields and fructifies. Maybe this last day of the week gives us an opportunity to trust that God is in control of our journey.



I place my journey before you, O God, my shield. Give me the grace of trusting in you. Let me not get stuck in the sight of my failure but grant me the confidence that despite my hesitations I will experience the resurrection of your Son who is giving up his life for me.

Oke M. Robert Gbedolo, S.J.

April 7

Fifth Sunday of Lent

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/040719-yearc.cfm>

This story is almost too familiar to us. A woman who broke the law is brought to Jesus to trap him into saying something against the law. Jesus scribbles something in the dirt, everyone walks away, the two of them have a moment, and she disappears down the street never to be heard from again.

But this story, tucked into John's gospel where it doesn't exactly belong, should draw our close attention. Not just because of its unusual placement, but also because of what it offers - a view of what it looks like to be truly free.

The traps laid out before us are relentless, and opportunities to fall into them lurk around every corner. And there are days when we all do. But the good news is that only thing we're actually trapped by is the love of God. In Paul's words, the only thing that has taken possession of us is Christ Jesus. Living in that freedom does not mean the traps disappear entirely; we just get better at recognizing escape routes.

Like Paul, we may not be living fully in that freedom yet. "Already but not yet" is our constant refrain. Lent offers us the opportunity to take stock of where we are on that journey to holiness that takes a lifetime.

Like the woman in the story, trapped by injustice, blind patriarchy and used as a tool by those in power, she is set free to continue to her journey, hopefully to see opportunities for freedom when her first glance may only reveal cages and dead ends.



The Lord, even now, is opening a way, doing something new. We can continue our pursuit in hope and be filled with joy.

Erin Bishop, MDiv 2009

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/040819.cfm>

“Jesús les habló otra vez”. Con estas palabras abre el Evangelio de hoy. Es Jesús quien nos habla una y otra vez. Nos habla directamente a nuestra vida, nuestro contexto. Habla desde nuestras preocupaciones, miedos y fortalezas. Es Jesús quien toca nuestra puerta para decirnos, de manera clara e inequívoca: “Yo soy la Luz del mundo”, seguido de un llamado, una vocación, a seguirlo, porque quien lo siga tendrá “Luz de vida”. ¿Cómo seguir a Jesús en medio de nuestra vida ajetreada e instantánea? ¿Cómo escuchar al Dios que habla directamente a nuestra vida? Jesús da señales concretas: saber de dónde venimos y hacia dónde vamos e identificar dónde está el Padre.

Imaginémonos que esperamos en un aeropuerto un vuelo que podría llevarnos al lugar que tanto deseamos en nuestra interioridad. Muy distinto sería abordar la puerta que lleva a Londres o a México. Al corazón de África o la profundidad de la selva amazónica. Tener claro el destino de nuestro viaje es fundamental a la hora de emprender cualquier tipo de vuelo. Requiere discernimiento y sencillez de corazón. Escuchar los movimientos de Cristo en nuestro interior y cómo se manifiesta en nuestra cotidianidad.

Del mismo modo, navegando por el Atlántico, un ligero cambio de dirección puede significar la diferencia entre llegar a la costa española o la costa africana. De la misma manera, saber de dónde somos es igualmente importante. Cada viaje tiene un comienzo y trae consigo una parte significativa de nuestra identidad. Saber hacia dónde nos dirigimos requiere, inevitablemente, tener plena conciencia de dónde venimos: nuestra cultura y nuestras raíces. Lo que hemos aprendido en el pasado y traemos con nosotros en nuestro viaje.

Jesús nos invita a mirar nuestra vida y reconocer a dónde nos está enviando. Oremos por todos los que navegamos todos los días, buscando y encontrando a Dios que se manifiesta en cada uno de nuestros contextos. Oremos por brújulas claras, deseos profundos, comunidades unidas y la Gracia de apertura de nuestros corazones para escuchar a Cristo y su invitación a trabajar por la fe y la justicia.



Señor, haz que este tiempo de cuaresma, sea preparación para la vida.

Momento de encender nuestros corazones y llenarlos de nombres y rostros de todos aquellos que nos rodean.

Escuchar Tu voz y con ello disponer nuestra vida al encuentro del que sufre.

*Danos la fuerza y la libertad de orientarnos con humildad
al trabajo por un mundo más justo y solidario.*

April 8

Monday of the Fifth Week of Lent

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/040819.cfm>

"Jesus spoke to you again." These words open today's Gospel. Jesus speaks to us again and again. He speaks directly to our life, our context. He speaks to our worries, fears, and strengths. Jesus knocks at our door to tell us, in a clear and unequivocal way, "I am the Light of the world," succeeded by a call to follow him, because whoever follows him will have the "light of life." How do we follow Jesus in the middle of our hectic lives? How do we listen to God, who speaks directly to our lives? Jesus gives concrete suggestions: know where you come from, where you are going, with an awareness of where God is.

Imagine that we are waiting at an airport for a flight that could take us to the place we so desire in our interiority. It would be very different to approach the door that leads to London or Mexico, to the heart of Africa, or the depth of the Amazon rainforest. Being clear about the destination of our trip seems to be fundamental. It requires discernment and simplicity of heart; to listen to the movements of Christ in our interior and see how it manifests in our daily life.

In the same way to sailing across the Atlantic, when a slight change in direction can mean the difference between arriving at the Spanish coast or the African coast, knowing where we are from makes all the difference in our direction. Every journey has a beginning, which brings with it a significant portion of our identity. Knowing where we are going requires, inescapably, having full awareness of where we come from: our culture and roots, what we have learned in the past and bring with us on our trip.

Jesus invites us to look at our life and recognize where he is sending us. Let us pray for all of us who sail every day, searching and finding God who manifests in each of our contexts. Let us pray for clear compasses, deep desires, and united communities and the grace of openness of our hearts to listen to Christ and his invitation to work for faith and justice.



Lord, make this time of Lent a preparation for life: a time to light our hearts and fill them with names and faces of all those around us.

To listen to your voice and with it, arrange our life to meet the one who suffers.

*Give us the strength and freedom to guide us with humility
to work for a world of justice and solidarity.*

Sebastian Budinich, M.T.S. '20

April 9

Tuesday of the Fifth Week of Lent

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/040919.cfm>

Have you ever driven or walked through a tunnel? Recall when you were in that tunnel for the first time. When you were passing through the tunnel, what questions did you ask? Why is the tunnel so long? When will I see the light from the exit? When the children of Israel were on the road, it was like they were passing through a tunnel; the journey was long and they did not see the exit. If you were on a journey of a similar kind, what would be your response? Complaints? Lament? Perhaps to talk to other sojourners? Patience and Trust is often our “test” to finish the journey.

More and more, I encourage my clients in psychotherapy sessions or my directees in spiritual guidance to cry out. Crying out is a response to our uncomfortableness, our inner dryness, or simply to release energy. But whom do you cry out to? To our Lord, asking for help and guidance? To a friend for support? To family members for understanding? And when was the last time you cried out?

No matter what we have encountered in our journey, we know that we are not alone, like Jesus’s response to the Pharisees, “The one who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone.” We know God is with us when we are on a journey, in times of dryness, in our crying. The confidence of knowing God is with us will turn into a powerful strength as we face whatever comes during our journey!



Our loving Lord, I am crying out to you. Hear my cry! Help me to have patience and trust in my journey as I know you have never left me alone!

Marinda Keng Fan Chan, M.A '16, Ph.D. '21

April 10

Wednesday of the Fifth Week of Lent

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/041019.cfm>

“You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free,” surely ranks as one of Jesus’ most challenging promises. Neither part of the promise strikes us as being especially likely, at least not all the time. There are plenty of moments when the truth eludes even our best efforts to nail it down. And even if we somehow grab hold of the truth, the truth does not always feel like it makes us free. The truth can give a burden of knowledge, a sense of knowing what is real without the ability to do much about it.

But perhaps this is exactly the right moment for the kind of promise that we find hard to swallow. As these last days of Lent bring us closer to the cross, the readings are full of threat and tension. For Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, knowing the truth ended in a fiery furnace. For Jesus, proclaiming that the truth will set us free fuels a dispute that will end on Calvary. The danger is easy enough for us to sense. What lies beyond it is harder to detect.

The readings don’t allow us to dodge frightening realities or hard questions, which is good, since we rarely get to dodge them in our own lives. But Jesus’ promise, a promise that lies beyond our experience, does give us a chance to open our imaginations to start seeing not just the cross casting a shadow from next week but also to see the promise that lies beyond it.



Jesus, you are the way, the truth, and the life. Give us the gift of knowing the truth that you reveal to us, the courage to embrace the what you show, and the hope to trust in your promise that these truths will set us free.

Matthew Spotts, S.J., M.Div. ‘19

April 11

Thursday of the Fifth Week of Lent

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/041119.cfm>

Today's first reading from the book of Genesis brings us back to our shared Judeo-Christian heritage -- roots that extends across millennia and geography to the present day. While this passage from Genesis appears to have Abram as a main character, as readers we never actually hear a word from him.

Abram responds to God's declaration as *El Shaddai* (God Almighty) with a change in body posture. The text here says, "Abram prostrated himself;" other translations describe this reverential gesture as bowing to the ground, or that Abram fell on his face.

It is God who is the One speaking truth and declaring the terms of the covenant. Several times over, this passage has declarative statements attributed to God: "I will render..." "I will make..." "I will maintain..." and, most prominently, "I will be their God." In the midst of these declarations, God marks a change of trajectory for Abram when he is re-named Abraham. Given the Ancient Near East context, this name change is not merely an addition of letters but rather a marked shift in relationship between God and God's people, down through the generations.

With this window into our genealogical past, this passage invites each of us to consider how we take a reverential posture in God's presence. Are we to sit in awe? Stand in wonder? Face to the ground with patience?

We are in the final days of Lent and will enter the Holy Triduum in one short week. In what ways has your own posture or understanding of prayer deepened in these days?

How is God calling you by name, declaring to be your God for all of time, beyond this season of Lent?



*God, the One who lives and moves through all generations:
Open my heart and mind to the ways you are claiming me as your beloved in these days.
In this journey to Easter, I ask for the grace to move in this world with greater reverence for
your Presence,
attentive to the ways You are alive in other people and in all of creation.
Amen.*

Lisa Cathelyn, M.Div. '18

12 de Abril

El Viernes de la quinta semana de Cuaresma

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/041219.cfm>

En el capítulo 1, verso 18 del evangelio de Juan, se dice que “Nadie ha visto jamás a Dios; el Hijo único, Dios, que estaba al lado del Padre, Él nos lo dio a conocer”. Es decir, Jesús hace visible todo lo que creemos del Dios invisible. Dicho de forma más radical: Jesús es el rostro humano de Dios. Un Dios acogida, Dios perdón, Dios solidaridad, Dios compasión, Dios gratuidad, Dios amor, Dios justicia. Sin embargo, en el texto de hoy, las autoridades judías no escuchan ni a la razón ni a la revelación. Rechazan al Dios que Jesús revela con sus dichos y obras, declarándolo blasfemo. Prefieren un Dios del orden y de la ley. En definitiva, un Dios al que podrían manipular en interés propio.

En el pasado, profetas – como Jeremías – que hablaron y sirvieron al Dios de la justicia y el derecho, también se encontraron con la obstinación y odio por parte de quienes propiciaban crueldad humana y social. Terminaron calificándolo como el “profeta del terror”.

¿En qué Dios creemos? Esta es una de las preguntas clave que debemos profundizar frente a estos textos. San Óscar Romero afirmaba, en una de sus homilías, que hay un criterio para saber si el Dios [de Jesús] está cerca de nosotros o está lejos: “todo aquél que se preocupa del hambriento, del desnudo, del pobre, del desaparecido, del torturado, del prisionero, de toda esa carne que sufre, tiene cerca a Dios... La garantía de mi oración no es el mucho decir palabras, la garantía de mi plegaria está muy fácil de conocer: ¿cómo me comporto con el pobre? Porque allí está Dios” (5 de febrero de 1978).



Pongamos nuestra confianza absoluta y nuestra disponibilidad radical en el Dios de Jesucristo, que se revela como un Dios identificado con los pobres, que camina con su pueblo y que siente el sufrimiento de las víctimas.

Th.M. Carlos Ayala Ramírez

Profesor del Instituto Hispano de la Escuela Jesuita de Teología, Universidad de Santa Clara y de la Escuela de Liderazgo Hispano de la Arquidiócesis de San Francisco. Profesor jubilado de la Universidad Centroamericana “José Simeón Cañas” (UCA) de El Salvador.

April 12

Friday of the Fifth Week of Lent

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/041219.cfm>

In chapter 1 verse 18 of John's Gospel, it says, "No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known." That is to say, Jesus makes visible all that we believe of the invisible God. Stated more radically: Jesus is the human face of God. A welcoming God, God forgiveness, God solidarity, God compassion, God free, God love, God justice. However, in today's text, the authorities do not listen to reason or revelation. They reject the God that Jesus reveals with his words and deeds, declaring him blasphemous. They prefer a God of order and of law. In short, a God they could manipulate in their own interest.

In the past, prophets - like Jeremiah - who spoke and served the God of justice and law, also encountered stubbornness and hatred from those who fostered human and social cruelty. They ended up describing him as the "prophet of terror."

In what God do we believe? This is one of the key questions that we must deepen in front of these texts. Saint Oscar Romero affirmed, in one of his homilies, that there is a criterion to know if the God [of Jesus] is close to us or is far away: "everyone concerned for the hungry, the naked, the poor, everyone concerned for those who have vanished in police custody, for those who have been tortured, for prisoners, for all people that suffer --- these have God close at hand. The essence of religion is not found in praying often. Rather the essence of religion is found in this guarantee of having God close to us because we do good works on behalf of our sisters and brothers. The way that we know that our prayers are heard is very easy to know. We simply have to ask the question: how do we treat the poor? Because that is where God is" (February 5, 1978).



Let us place our absolute trust and our radical availability in the God of Jesus Christ, who reveals himself as a God identified with the poor, who walks with his people and who feels the suffering of the victims.

Carlos Ayala Ramírez, Th.M.

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April 13

Saturday of the Fifth Week of Lent

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/041319.cfm>

My dad, an Orthodox priest, once gave me a crash course in preaching. It had three parts: “Help the people see their world as it is. Then help them see the world as God sees it. And then, lead them to Jerusalem!” These are things every good Christian leader does in the homilies they preach with their very lives.

The prophet Ezekiel proclaims to us: God wants a good shepherd to lead us (Ez 37:24). And the women and men at our school are training to be leaders of God’s people. On this last day before Holy Week we see the opposition mounting as Jesus prepares for what he longs to do: to lead us all to Jerusalem to celebrate his Passover. In Jerusalem he will find a world blessed and wounded by the same things that bless and wound our world: hearts longing for freedom, the joys of festivals, poverty, riches, domination, corruption, sin, and evil. He will face betrayal, abandonment, and even his own death. And yet the Son always desires what the Father desires: “to gather into one the dispersed children of God” (John 11:52).

We are all so scattered, so divided from each other, so divided from ourselves in our longing to do better, to be better, to be free of our addictions, to be—as if it were possible—someone other than who we really are. But nothing will stop Jesus from loving us as we are. Nothing will hold him back from what he desires: to gather us all into one and lead us to Jerusalem to celebrate his glorious Passover. Not even death will stop him. And so we have nothing to fear. “Therefore,” as our teacher and leader Paul exhorts us to do, “let us keep the feast” (1 Cor 5:8).



*Lord Jesus,
our brother, our shepherd:
as you longed to celebrate the Passover with your disciples,
so you long to celebrate with us.
Heal our divisions and gather us into one with our sisters and brothers.
Free us from fear as we follow you to the Jerusalem of our life in this world,
which you long to fill with your joy.
For you are forever blessed, together with your Father and your life-giving Spirit. Amen.*

Rev. Christopher M. Hadley, S.J.
Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology, JST

April 14

Palm Sunday

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/041419.cfm>

Today, we reflect on Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem, only to have that celebration dashed by the Gospel and our first glance at the tragedy to come on Calvary. Nestled among the liturgical readings of Palm Sunday lies a text that is key to understanding not only Jesus' life, but also the story that unfolds during Holy Week. In the Christological Hymn (Phil 2. 6-11) we hear: "Though his state was divine, he did not cling to his equality with God but emptied himself to assume the position of a servant, to assume human likeness . . ." Emptied himself to become like us. Emptied himself to take up the position of service.

Self-emptying is a hard concept for us to get our head around. It is not self-promoting, not self-assuring, not self-satisfying. Rather, self-emptying is about making space in one's person in order to experience in ourselves what is the experience of another -- whether that be their success, pain, loss, brokenness, hopes or even waywardness. Self-emptying frees us from our obsessions with the past and our concerns about the future. It makes us radically present to those who are present in our lives. This communion, or kinship of feeling with another, which is possible in an emptied self, predisposes Jesus to expend his life on behalf of others. Self-emptied, he is filled with *pathos* for another. Thus, Jesus becomes the medium disclosing the magnificence of a widow who deposits her coin in the temple treasury. He serves as channel for a healing of a man with a withered hand. He becomes the evocateur for Mary Magdalene's central role in the early church. And even in the final moments of his life, Jesus negotiates forgiveness on behalf of those who put him to death. Such a dynamic and intimate communion with others begins with, and is grounded in, self-emptying propelled by the high ethic of love.

As we follow Jesus, waving our palms and singing our "Hosannas" today, let us recognize that, indeed, he enters Jerusalem as the new authority. But unlike kings and heads of state from the past or even the present, Jesus authors a novel kind of governance, one that can instigate comprehensive change, even social transformation. But to do so, Jesus summons us to share in this governance, to do as he has done. He invites us to a self-emptying that occasions deep connectedness with others. He invites us to act out of love, on their behalf and, in the process, to discover that anything is possible. Whether it be feeding five thousand hungry people. Or offering forgiveness to those who may harm us. Or even understanding that, despite the finality of crucifixion, one can rise from the dead.



Lord Jesus, lead me in the way of self-emptying. Disrupt those defenses I forge and those excuses to which I hold firmly so as to avoid being present to others. Dismantle my tendencies to be self-promoting; disable my desire to be self-satisfied; and rupture my need to be self-assured. Instead, gift me with your openness that can make me, like you, servant to those present before me. And then seed deep within me your high ethic of love. Amen.

Gina Hens-Piazza

Professor of Old Testament Studies

April 15

Monday of Holy Week

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/041519.cfm>

Hope is a reality. And so is suffering. Take courage.

I found deep hope when I first read Isaiah: a servant, sent by God, who *shall bring forth justice, be light for the nations, open the eyes of the blind, bring out prisoners from confinement*. YES! As my heart continues to feel and embrace the brokenness of our world, country and church, these words comforted me. As I attempted to hold this comfort and hope in prayer, I was quickly challenged by the reality of this reading and placing this servant in its context. The servant in Isaiah was ultimately rejected by the people. The people were so broken from their experience in exile, that it was hard for them to trust God. This servant who brought me deep hope, was faced with rejection and death. How do I pray in and for hope, while accepting the suffering of this servant?

In the Gospel, Jesus is journeying to Jerusalem and stops in Bethany to visit friends. During the meal, Mary anoints Jesus' feet and dries them with her hair. With some complaints and confusion, Jesus asks those gathered to "leave her alone; let her keep this for the day of my burial." For me, this story reflects Mary's trust in Jesus and model of discipleship. Throughout the four Gospels, Jesus directly and indirectly tell the disciples what will happen when he enters into Jerusalem. Many of them do not understand or cannot accept that Jesus will die in Jerusalem. Mary does. She is preparing Jesus for his journey to the cross. I imagine this moment was filled with deep grief and sorrow for Mary: to anoint and love a friend in their suffering is no easy task, even the other disciples wanted to avoid it. Yet, as women in scripture always do, she invites me into a deeper understanding of discipleship. In her love and grief, she musters the courage to see, know, and accompany Jesus in this journey. How do I hold my love for Jesus and the suffering he will endure? Can I muster the courage to anoint and accompany him?

These readings perfectly point to the most difficult task of a disciple: to have hope in the midst of deep suffering. I think Mary displays what it takes to hold both these realities: courage. Mary invites me to anoint Jesus this Holy Week: to see, know and accompany Jesus to the cross. To live in the tension of hope and suffering.



Loving God, I ask for the grace that I may take courage to see, know, and accompany those who suffer. I ask for the grace to be present to Jesus, to participate in his anointing, as he journeys towards Jerusalem. Give me the strength and wisdom to seek hope, even in the most painful moments.

Kelly Miguens MDiv '17

April 16

Tuesday of Holy Week

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/041619.cfm>

These verses provide an abundance of raw material to paint the scene imaginatively in an Ignatian “composition of place,” and enter into it with deep feeling. John 13 moves with astonishing speed through a dramatic series of actions and words. The gestures reveal meaning; the conversations careen through confusion and misunderstanding, anguish and love, bravado and betrayal. Our mental picture-painting might well take in da Vinci’s famous *Last Supper*, in which the face of Jesus, the calm center of that painting, shows his internal pain with understated delicacy .

Our own life experiences of pain are likely to draw us easily into Jesus’ feelings. Most religions attempt to deal with the problem of suffering: why it exists, how to make sense of it. Christianity does not answer with neat words, but with the person of Jesus, the Suffering Servant who is “one like us in all things but sin.” This solution is unlikely to dismiss the objections of people who want a neat solution which cannot be rebutted. But faith is not a matter of intellectual neatness, but of mystery and commitment. And Jesus’ commitment to humanity means he is present in the depths of human confusion, pain, and loss, in solidarity with us.

Realistically, in the midst of those experiences, we are often going to be more inclined to make Jesus’ prayer from the Cross: “God, why have you abandoned me?” Retrospection, when we can revisit emotion in tranquility, reveals that even when we have felt betrayed by others, or abandoned by God, Jesus has been unfailingly loyal to us. Ignatius’ conviction is that the right response to love received is to return that love. By that equation, the same is true of commitment, loyalty, and solidarity.



Jesus, help your people to seek and find you, especially where life has no meaning and we are overwhelmed by confusion and hurts. Help us to know that no matter how dark and deep the night, you are there, always present in the silence. Keep us loyal to you so that we can be part of the answer to the prayers of others.

Dorian Llywelyn S.J., S.T.L. '95

Executive Director of Santa Clara University's Ignatian Center for Jesuit Education

April 17

Wednesday of the Holy Week

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/041719.cfm>

In a book I recently read about refugees and the political crisis of our time, I came across a quote that I cannot erase from my heart. It was from a filmmaker who spent time in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: *If you look at the statistics, you get depressed, but if you look at the people, you find hope.* This person was in a country experiencing rampant human misery. Without minimizing the severity of its plight, especially among women and children, the statistics exponentially increase as we expand our circle and embrace the entire global community: 65 million forcibly displaced – refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced people. Once again, in all honesty, the same questions surface; Where is God in all this? Where is hope?

Today in the third Song of the Suffering Servant, we hear that God has given him the gift to speak to the weary and to open their ears to hear. This can be unsettling or even frightening. Yet, in the depths of our heart, each of us desires to be receptive to God's nudging of our loving. That's certainly true for me. My own courage is renewed as I allow the living witness of these 65 million men, women, and children to invade, not only my prayer, but my life as I work with and develop relationships with them. The reign of God once again becomes a possibility. It's not easy to speak to the weary or to set our faces like flint. Today's scriptures reconfirm that it is God's desire for each one of us. And, unbelievably, God never stops giving us this message. In this assurance, we can freely enter the world of the many men, women, and children who are seeking a place of welcome, acceptance and home. Even more, *in their faces, we encounter and experience hope!*



Dear God, as we anticipate the Sacred Triduum, we pray for all humankind. May you give us the strength of spirit to journey with you from the darkness of death into the radiance of light. You love each of us with a love that has no bounds. May we always live and act with the breadth and depth of your love. Amen.

Jacquelyn GUSDANE, S.N.D.
JST Renewal Program, Spring 2018

April 18

Holy Thursday

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/041819-evening.cfm>

Je me suis habitué à recevoir ma dose hebdomadaire du sang du Christ sans trop penser à son aspect “sanguinolent”. Le sang répandu ne fait toutefois pas partie de ma zone de confort. Je ne tourne pourtant pas de l’oeil quand il me faut épancher du sang mais je ne vois aucun inconvénient à laisser à d’autres l’opportunité de mettre en pratique ce qu’ils ont appris lors de leur cours de premiers soins. De ce point de vue, si la recherche d’un réconfort est une raison répandue pour lire la Bible, les lectures du jour en procurent bien peu à moins d’être un vampire: Le sang coule dans deux de ces passages. La première lecture parle d’égorger des agneaux et de peindre de leur sang le linteau des portes pour éviter encore plus de morts. La lecture de la lettre de Paul aux Corinthiens parle d’une coupe de sang et de la mort prochaine.

Heureusement, la lecture de l’évangile omet le sang pour se concentrer sur le lavement des pieds. Ce point d’intérêt procure-t-il un certain soulagement au sang versé? Pierre exprime une partie de mon inconfort concernant l’initiative prise par Jésus quand il dit: “Tu ne me laveras jamais les pieds.” Jésus répond à Pierre qu’il peut bien ne pas comprendre ce que Jésus est en train de faire mais qu’il comprendra plus tard. Il est possible que Pierre ait finalement compris, mais pour ma part, je ne suis pas sûr de réellement tout comprendre.

Saint Basile de Césarée commentait que ce qui est le plus agréable en ce monde est mêlé de tristesse. Se rassembler pour des repas est souvent une des choses agréables de la vie. Toutefois, tous ces récits de repas annoncent une mort prochaine et illustrent la remarque de saint Basile en nous menant tant vers la douleur profonde de la passion de Jésus que vers sa réunion avec ses amis après la résurrection.



C'est par le Cœur de mon Jésus, ma voie, ma vérité et ma vie que je m'approche de vous, ô Père éternel. ... Je fais en esprit le tour du monde pour y chercher toutes les âmes rachetées du Sang très précieux de mon divin Époux afin de vous satisfaire pour toutes par ce divin Cœur; je les embrasse pour vous les présenter par lui et par lui je vous demande leur conversion. Sainte Marie de l'Incarnation (Tours, France 1599--Québec, Canada 1672)

Jean Francois-Racine
Professor of New Testament Studies

April 18

Holy Thursday

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/041819-evening.cfm>

I have grown accustomed to my weekly sip of the blood of Christ without thinking too much about its “bloody” aspect. In my comfort zone, there is nevertheless no such thing as blood spill. Not that I turn pale when I have to handle one but I am willing to let other people put in practice what they have learned in first aid courses. In that regard, if finding comfort is a common reason to read the Bible, today’s readings fail to do so unless one happens to be a vampire: Blood runs through two of them. The first reading speaks of slaughtering lambs and painting doorposts with their blood to avoid even more killing. The reading from Paul’s letter to the Corinthians speaks of a cup of blood and impending death.

Fortunately, the Gospel reading omits blood but it focuses on foot washing. Does that different focus provide some kind of relief from blood spill? Peter expresses some of my discomfort with Jesus’ initiative when he says: "You will never wash my feet." Jesus replies to Peter that he may not understand what Jesus is doing but that he will understand later. Peter may have eventually understood but I am still unsure that I really do.

Saint Basil of Caesarea had remarked that what is most enjoyable in the world is also mixed with sadness. Gathering for meals is often one of these enjoyable things in life. Yet, all these meal accounts announce impending death and illustrate saint Basil’s remark by leading us toward both the deep grief of Jesus’s passion and the joy of his reunion with his friends after the resurrection.



It is by the heart of my dear Jesus, my way, my truth and my life, that I approach you, O eternal Father. ... In spirit I go around the world seeking the souls redeemed by the most precious blood of my Divine Spouse, in order to make reparation for them by this divine Heart. I kiss them to present them to you through him, and through him I ask you for their conversion.
Saint Marie of the Incarnation (Tours, France 1599--Québec city, Canada 1672)

Jean Francois-Racine
Professor of New Testament Studies

April 19

Good Friday

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/041919.cfm>

I'll apply an important lesson from my preaching class to this reflection: Your sermon should always provide good news to your listeners.

However, today's Gospel reading is dark: betrayal, denial, interrogation, intrigue, blame, torture, hubris and the execution of Jesus... good news is not obvious. But, we can see the dimmest of stars on the darkest of nights. After reading the texts several times, I finally saw it, and it appears only in John's account, "The slave's name was Malchus."

When we first hear about the band who came to seize Jesus, we're told of soldiers and guards. Peter, passionate and impulsive, reminds us that anger often follows the path of least resistance. He draws a sword and attacks, but not a soldier, not someone of power. Peter attacks Malchus, a slave. Likely, Malchus was not there of his own accord and had no personal interest in the situation. He had done nothing. He was innocent. And still, Malchus becomes the target of Peter's anger.

With all the events that needed to be written down for Good Friday, this Gospel writer could have easily omitted Malchus' name. True, his name doesn't add to the plot... but, it does add to the *story*. The author of this Gospel may have recorded the name of this vulnerable, powerless slave to remind us that Jesus cared about those who were vulnerable and powerless. Malchus will never be "forgotten like the unremembered dead." Malchus is forever a part of the story. He was marginalized and brutalized, but then lifted up and remembered. Including his name reminds us that there are possibilities for hope where there is despair, for solidarity amid fracture, and for tenderness, compassion and recognition in times of great violence.

"The slave's name was Malchus."



Good and merciful God, help me to see when I am being like Peter, finding scapegoats for my anger and frustration. Give me the courage to oppose real sources of personal and social ill, and to discern the good, rather than the easy. Open my eyes and heart to those who, like Malchus, are oppressed. Lead me to bring justice and hope to our world. Amen.

Maureen K. Day, M.A. '05, GTU/JST Ph.D. '15
Assistant Professor of Religion and Society at the Franciscan School of Theology

April 20

Holy Saturday

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/042019.cfm>

**“Exult, let them exult, the hosts of heaven. . . .
Let this holy building shake with joy,
Filled with the mighty voices of the people.”**

Last night, gathered around our Pillar of Fire - the Easter Candle - the Church sang the Exultet, her joy flowing through her Body, through material things, vigorous gestures, passionate prayers. The building shakes and joy is unleashed; light dances on the dark walls of “this holy building” – holy because we gather in Him to share his resurrected joy. Joy is the energy that pulses this resurrected Body.

The plethora of Vigil readings, from the very beginning, “when God created the heavens and the earth,” through mighty waters that open up a new way and Myriam dancing by the sea . . . from the stilled arm of Abraham raised in death and now cradling his son, to the Maker and husband embracing a precious spouse, just as the ark held Noah’s treasure of family and kin . . . the joy of all things made new again invites us on this Easter not merely to stand and watch, but to take a risk and dive in, to enter the dance and the song. The Orthodox liturgy sings about this vigorous joy:

**“Christ is risen from the dead,
trampling down death by death,
and upon those in the tombs
bestowing life.”**

Let us resolve today to let these 50 days have their way with us, joining in Christ’s raucous dance, conspiring to turn our weary world upside down. What we thought could never be, *can* be. Do not doubt the word of promise, Isaiah says, for it will not return from us empty of meaning but stubbornly “achieving the end for which I sent it.”

The angel tells spice-bearing women, “Do not seek the living among the dead. . . .” Joy – especially when it makes no sense - does not come easily; it must be tended. Easter is a school for joy.

“O happy fault,” the Exultet sings, “O necessary sin of Adam.” This gift of joy is truly risen: given to revive a people to see in a new way, to love unboundedly, to begin again to build a community of justice, love, and peace.



O risen One, we long to truly share your joy, deep down and overflowing. This the beginning of our hope; it is our summons and our mission to let this whole earth “shake with joy.” Just as you ‘were raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, may we too live in newness of life.’

Paul Janowiak

Professor of Liturgical and Sacramental Theology

April 21

Easter Sunday

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/042119.cfm>

Mary, a woman of importance in the town of Magdala, is the first to see the empty tomb; the first disciple, prophet, and preacher. The Gospel of Mary tells of her standing in the early church, of the male apostles who tried to dismiss her, of Jesus's love for her, and her unwavering devotion to Jesus-- during his life and after his death.

Today's readings do not want us to forget Jesus's life ("You know what has happened," Acts 10:37). So it is good to remember: Jesus announced his mission to bring liberty to captives (Lk 4:18), ate with sinners and outcasts (Mt 9:10-17), healed the marginalized (Acts 10:38), turned over the tables of the money changers (Mk 11:15), preached woe to the rich (Lk 6:24), and "stirred up the people" (Lk 23:5).

This is the one who God raised from the dead (Acts 10:40).

And it had to be so. In a world of suffering, where far too many are oppressed, what other God could be credible? What other God could sustain our hope?

This semester I am teaching a course called, "Violence, Justice, & Mercy." Many of my students come from countries torn apart by killing or work with people who are perpetrators or victims of violence. Together, we are wading into the waters of war, sexual violence, apartheid, genocide, mass incarceration, racism, and trauma. Each week, we feel the weight of what we have undertaken and the discomfort of sitting with questions that have no easy answers.

Everything that is within us screams at the suffering we encounter. If God is, if God is just, if God is merciful, then only the empty tomb makes sense. Violence cannot be the last word. We cannot possibly bring about enough justice here to make things right.

But we can keep trying, strengthened by the hope that in the life to come the God who raised Jesus from the dead will gather up all of the brokenhearted, and they 'shall not die but live' (Ps. 118:17).



God of justice and mercy, give us the strength to hope in the midst of suffering. Shine your light, so that we, like Mary of Magdala, can see that the stone has been moved away. Be with us today as we "celebrate the feast ... with sincerity and truth" (1 Cor 5: 8).

Julie Rubio
Professor of Social Ethics