

February 26

Ash Wednesday

[Joel 2:12-18; Psalm 51:1-17; 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2; Matthew 6:1-6;16-18](#)

Years ago, as a recently ordained priest working with a military chaplain in Germany, I was preparing the Ash Wednesday liturgy. “Do not bless or distribute the ashes,” he said, “after the homily but wait until the end of Mass.” Many would leave right after being signed with ashes, which has become a virtual sacrament of Catholic identity.

Symbols are more eloquent than words, and people embody a profound truth through this gesture. The ashes symbolize the power of God to bring forth life since at creation God forms humanity from the “dust of the earth” (Gen 2:7). Reflecting on the origin of life in the universe, scientists say that we are all made from stardust. The mark of ashes affirms our solidarity not only with all humanity but with the material creation that clamors for respect and care today. These symbols also announce that we are “brothers and sisters of the incarnate Lord: nothingness that is filled with eternity; death that teems with life; futility that redeems; dust that is God's life forever” (Karl Rahner, S.J., *The Eternal Year*).

The readings for today sound the Lenten themes. Joel and the Responsorial Psalm summon us to return to God who is “slow to anger and rich in mercy,” who “gives back the joy of salvation and sustains a willing spirit.” Jesus heralds in the Gospel a Father who knows when Lenten practices unfold in quiet faith and trust. Paul summons Christians to be ambassadors of reconciliation: so urgent in our world. Ash Wednesday begins a journey of renewal with Christ through death to all that wrenches us from love of God and neighbor, to the joy of victory over death at Easter, and celebrates at Pentecost continuing life in the Spirit, until the dust of death shall be no more (1 Cor 15:50-56).

*God of Day, God of Darkness with loving kindness and gracious mercy guide our Lenten journey. Open our hearts to your renewing love. Inspire us to be ambassadors of reconciliation in a troubled world. Let us travel not alone but as companions of Jesus, with brothers and sisters who sustain us along the way.*

John R. Donahue, S.J. taught New Testament at JSTB from 1980-1990; 1992-2001, and was a member of the Board of Trustees of Santa Clara University (1996-2002)

February 27

Thursday after Ash Wednesday

[Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Psalm 1; Luke 9:22-25](#)

Although I was raised Catholic and consider myself deeply spiritual, I have never studied and rarely read the Bible. I found it challenging to contextualize the readings for today. So I read and re-read them and ultimately two questions emerged for me: “How am I choosing life?” and “Who are the teachers that have accompanied me along the way?” To take time for reflection, to ask these questions, and share this response with you is an incredible privilege.

My youngest teachers are my daughters Maria (7) and Maite (3). These spirited girls race with me across the park until we are out of breath, notice the brilliance and hue of the sky at sunset, and demand pink napkins at the breakfast table. If I am present and listen with love and generosity my daily adventure accompanying them bursts with beauty and generosity. We have chosen life.

My most inspiring and courageous teachers are the families I met at Kino Border Initiative’s comedor, a place that serves refugees on the U.S./Mexico border. Fleeing for their lives, men, women and children arrive and wait in line for meals as they begin the asylum process. At long tables food is shared, bodies and spirits are nourished. Community is cultivated. Parents have been carrying their young children for days or weeks and are gently caring for them with the barest necessities and in harshest reality. Pure love. These families have chosen life.

Choosing life is being attentive. Being attentive to our own life and the lives of others. Encountering our resistance is also part of being attentive.

Who are your teachers on this journey? The red-tailed hawk, migrants seeking asylum, your neighbor...To live with abundant and generous love is to choose life.

*God, inspire us to choose life. Give us strength to listen and love more generously each day.*

*Inspire us to invoke the words of Sr. Peggy O’Neill: “Together we imagine a circle of compassion where no one is standing outside of it.” Give us the courage to do the real work of building a more just, gentle, and sustainable world.*

Valerie Sarma

Senior Program Director for Student Engagement and Special Projects

Ignatian Center for Jesuit Education

February 28

Friday After Ash Wednesday

[Isaiah 58: 1-9; Psalm 51; Matthew 9:14-15](#)

Lenten fasting always held my attention as something that had to be done, a sacrifice to prepare for Easter, with a heavy emphasis on a feeling of lying “in sackcloth and ashes.” What this vision of fasting often fostered within me was not a focus on preparing for the joy of the Resurrection, but on lamenting the act of fasting. Lent became a season focused on what I had given up and my primary horizon was the eventual return to my previous circumstances. As we read in Samuel, this vision of fasting led me to elevate a temporary inconvenience to the height of personal sacrifice, while often my relationship to those around me remained unchanged. What today’s readings make clear is that I had it all wrong.

The vision that emerges of Lenten fasting from today’s readings is one where our emphasis should not be on what we give up, but rather what we give of ourselves. Our contrite and humbled heart is made plain by what we do to shelter the unhoused, to share our bounty with the hungry, and to address injustices like mass incarceration and economic exploitation. To fast in the way offered to us in the reading from Isaiah is to truly live in accordance with the Kingdom of God.

As we deepen our bonds and stand with those on the margins, Lent becomes a time of genuine preparation to live out the joys of Easter. By answering the call of Christ we will not have to mourn, for the bridegroom will be with us and our light can break forth. With Christ we look to a horizon wider than our fleeting period of fasting, to live each day towards a more just world.

*Compassionate God, help me to remember your call to fast in a different manner. Guide me towards acts that enrich my community, confront injustice, and build a more sustainable world. During this Lenten season may my fast be a source of fulfillment and a true preparation for the joy of Easter. Amen.*

Aaron Willis, B.S. ‘04

Director, Bannan Forum, Ignatian Center for Jesuit Education

From the editor: Please note that while this reflection colloquially refers to fasting, Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are the only obligatory days of fasting during Lent. Fridays during Lent are obligatory days of abstinence. For more information on the difference between fasting and abstinence, please refer to [this page](#) from the USCCB.

February 29

Saturday After Ash Wednesday

[Isaiah 58: 9; Psalm 86; Luke 5:27-32](#)

Some of the imagery in today's reading from Isaiah reminded me of a recent trip I took to Tucson, Arizona. On a hot summer day (all summer days are hot in Tucson!), I spent a good four hours hiking in Sabino Canyon, part of the Catalina Mountains in the Sonoran Desert. It's a hot, dry, desolate, and unforgiving environment. It doesn't take long before parched lips and dehydration can set in, and that precious swig of water gives what is needed to keep going. Isaiah tells us that God is like water in a desert. God refreshes us and revives in us the will, the strength, and the courage to do what needs to be done. But the water motif goes beyond that. When we fulfill the prophet's call to do what is needed for our neighbors in strife, through God's grace we become water for others - "the spring whose water never fails." That image of ourselves as "a watered garden" summons up the ripple effect of good deeds and righting the wrongs of injustice. In other words, goodness begets goodness - what a lovely cycle of hope!

In times of waning strength or personal drought, God is always there to quench our thirst. Isaiah is clear about God's promise: When we do what is right, when we discern God's desires for us and the world - lifting up others with our voices, with our hearts and with our hands - God will give us what we need like a drink of water in a barren desert.

I can't help but think that Levi in the Gospel reading today somehow knew with remarkable certainty that being a disciple of Jesus would give refreshment. How else would a wealthy tax collector of dubious repute be so moved to leave everything behind and follow Jesus? Perhaps amidst a personal drought of his own, Levi discerned God's nudging, and through the grace of God he saw that Jesus's radical words and deeds would quench a nagging thirst.

*God, our Creator, like water in the desert, refresh my soul this day. Fill me with the grace to be a "spring whose water never fails" for others, particularly those who need our attention the most: those who suffer from oppression, hunger and affliction. Remind me that You are always present to quench our thirst and give us the strength to do what You call us to do.*

Anne McMahon, M.A. '14  
Assistant to the President for Communications

March 1

First Sunday of Lent

[Genesis 2:7-9, 3:1-7; Psalm 51; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 4:1-11](#)

The famous story in Genesis 1 – 3 of creation and the fall of Adam and Eve is a powerful reminder that, like our first parents, we have all lost our innocence and cannot understand redemption without first embracing our sin. As the first reading of the First Sunday of Lent, it is followed by the text from Romans 5 about sin entering the world through our first parents and the greater righteousness through Jesus; the readings conclude with the famous temptations of Jesus in Matthew 4. Jesus was able to sin just like us, but, unlike us, he was *able not to sin*.

A somber, sad-making quality pervades these texts, as well it should. We human beings have fallen from grace; each of us has eaten from our own particular forbidden fruit. Lent, therefore, is a time for confronting our sinfulness, of examining the face of Adam and Eve deep inside our souls. Lent urges us to confront and explore what darkness and estrangement exists deep within. Sin isolates and separates us from the image of God in which we were made, from our fellow brothers and sisters, and the Divine Life itself. Lent is a time of penance, and penance means much more than public rituals. Lent is a time for metanoia, of repentance, of a “turning around,” a new conversion of heart. Repentance simply means this: a recognition that my ego self is not, never has been, and never will be the center of the universe, no matter how we all sometimes live with this embarrassing illusion.

When Adam and Eve recognized their nakedness, they knew that they could not embrace the light without also accepting darkness. The power of Easter is lost if Ash Wednesday and our fallenness are forgotten. Jesus entered human darkness and embraced it on the cross to become our one true Light. As Irenaeus eloquently said near the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century C. E., “Jesus Christ became Son of Man for this purpose: that man also might become the son of God.”

*O God, we thank you for your gift of creation. During this holy season of Lent, make us mindful that the sin of our first parents in the garden remains within us. Help us to seek a true change of heart and to grow in your grace with courage and openness of spirit. Through Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, One God, world without end.  
Amen.*

Fred Parrella  
Religious Studies Professor, Santa Clara University

## March 2

Professor Margaret M. Russell

Associate Provost for Diversity & Inclusion

Taken together, these readings call to mind my own journey from childhood to adulthood in understanding the cadence and depth of Scripture. Reading 1 teaches through a litany of “shall nots” (“You shall not steal, you shall not lie...you shall not defraud...”) and a daunting command: “...you shall fear your God.” As a Catholic child, I absorbed the feelings of forbiddenness and fear, and had few tools to comprehend the wisdom. Since then, I have learned to connect commandments to spiritual practice with (I hope) openness and grace.

The Gospel contains what are for me some of the most moving lines in Scripture: “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.....whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.” These words are where I try to live, as a community member and advocate for social justice. This is not easy. As aware as I am of the true need that surrounds me, it is an emotional challenge both to stay open and to stay whole, to maintain healthy boundaries and build healthy bridges, to give to others and replenish my own energies. Yet, the lesson of these readings for me is to combine reflection with action. People on the margins of society are those who most need proximity with and love from those of us with privilege. The converse is also true; those of us privileged with the necessities of life need to be proximate with those who have little, in order to grow in spirit and in wisdom.

Let our souls be refreshed and our eyes be enlightened during these painful times in our country and around the world. Let us hold deep in our hearts a reservoir of empathy for each other that will help us resist the coarseness, cynicism, and suspicion that divide us. As we discover the divine within and all around us, let us join together in radical amazement of the love and justice we can create.

March 3

Tuesday of the First Week of Lent

[Isaiah 55:10-11; Psalm 34; Matthew 6:7-15](#)

This morning, when I was walking downstairs to get my customary cup of coffee, I was surprised to see snow falling through the window. Not just any snow, but big fluffy flakes, the sort that I have never seen before here in El Paso. The sight took me aback a bit even in my pre-caffeinated, half-asleep state, and I stopped and gazed in awe and admiration.

The first reading today from Isaiah invites us to consider the action of the Lord, “water[ing] the earth, making it fertile and fruitful, giving seed to the one who sows and bread to the one who eats.” Here on the border, in the spiritual desert of the thousands sleeping on the street waiting for asylum appointments, forced out of the places from which they have come and not accepted in the so-called land of opportunity which they seek, it can be difficult to find God’s presence.

The Gospel today invites us to a new way of praying, focused on the God who takes care of people precisely in the midst of unjust systems and structures.

As the associate pastor at Sacred Heart Catholic Church, a Jesuit parish four blocks from the U.S./Mexico border in El Paso, TX, I have learned from my parishioners the power of celebration. The other night, I attended a baby shower for a member of the choir. I left around 9pm, but parishioners stayed until almost midnight, eating, singing, dancing, and celebrating this new life in our community.

At times the suffering in the lives of the people we serve overwhelms me; yet the people who carry these crosses inspire me with their ability to carry them lightly, so they do not obscure the moments of joy around them or prevent them from sharing that joy with one another. In this way, they are teaching me little by little to live the resurrection.

Lord God,  
Creator and Sustainer of all things,  
When we feel burdened  
By our own crosses and  
Those we see all around us,  
Give us this day our daily bread,  
Show us how you are at work in our lives  
Help us to savor all that is good and fruitful  
And give us the confidence  
That your love and grace are enough  
To bring about your kingdom,  
You who live and reign  
Forever and ever.  
Amen.

Rev. Stephen Pitts SJ MDiv '17, ThM '18

March 4

Wednesday of the First Week of Lent

[Jonah 3:1-10; Psalm 51; Luke 11:29-32](#)

Jonah finally arrives in Nineveh, proclaiming God's imminent destruction of the city. We can only imagine Jonah's surprise when the Ninevites immediately repent by covering themselves in sackcloth, proclaiming a fast, and calling loudly to God for forgiveness. After all, this is a city God was originally intent on destroying due to its wickedness. The actions of the Ninevites are so moving that even God repents the evil God had threatened.

Today, Jesuit School of Theology has cancelled classes and instead gathers as a community for a Climate Justice Teach-In. Like the Ninevites, we are reminded that our world is in great danger. We are on the brink of destruction at our own hands. The planet is, quite literally, in flames. Floods overtake our cities. Instead of getting needed rain, parts of the Bay Area reached eighty degrees Fahrenheit in mid-February. What are we to do? We must act as both Jonah and the Ninevites. Like Jonah, we need to listen to God's word, God's call to nurture the earth that is infused with the Holy Spirit. We need to serve as prophetic witness in a society that has failed to recognize our responsibility for and kinship with the earth, instead using the earth for its own ends. Yet we must also be like the Ninevites: we are called to acknowledge our own transgressions. This will not be easy. Though we need not literally fast, we are called to fast from activities that harm the earth. In putting on sackcloth, we publicly acknowledge that we have created harm and that we strive to do better. And we must be humble enough to cry out to God for forgiveness.

*Creator of all, may we repent the sinful actions  
We have perpetrated against this world,  
Constantly striving to instead see You in each and every creature.  
May we respond to your demanding call to be prophetic,  
Proclaiming the goodness of your divine creation  
And the need to protect it as sacred.*

Ellen Jewett, M.Div. '20



March 5

Thursday of the First Week of Lent

[Ester C: 12, 14-16, 23-25; Psalm 138; Matthew 7:7-12](#)

“I don’t remember that part of the story!” This was my initial reaction to the prayer of Esther that we encounter in today’s readings. As it turns out, the passage comes from one of the additions to the Book of Esther found only in the Greek translation, not the shorter Hebrew version. Does that make it any less compelling? Quite the contrary. Here we see an aspect of Esther once hidden from view—that of a woman unafraid to beseech God for divine aid in her moment of anguish. As befits a queen, her petition is made not for herself, but rather out of concern for her extended family, the Jewish people.

Esther at prayer reminds me of the women in my own extended family, queens in their own right, who spent many an hour asking God to “make a way out of no way” for their children and grandchildren (especially when we were too young and too brash to realize we needed God’s help). These African American women of the Deep South had known struggle, lack, and fear, but they had the courage to pray for a better future for us. Their faith then informs my faith now. Like Esther, when I turn to God in prayer, I do so because I remember that my ancestors sought and received aid from the same source.

Ask, and it will be given; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened. In the accompanying Gospel reading, Jesus reminds the disciples of something that I still need to hear: prayer changes things. Esther and the women of my family seemed to know this instinctively. For the rest of us, may the remembrance of Jesus’ words, Esther’s actions, and the faith of our foremothers sustain our prayer during this Lenten season.

*God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; God of our mothers and our grandmothers; help us to remember your faithfulness to them and to us, every time we come to you in prayer. Amen.*

Ed Stewart  
Senior Director of Academic Administration  
JST

**March 6**

**Friday of the First Week of Lent**

[Ezekiel 18:21-28; Psalm 130; Matthew 5:20-26](#)

I am not the worst thing that I have done. In December, I had the privilege of accompanying a group of Santa Clara undergraduate students on an immersion in East Los Angeles. During this immersion we visited Homeboy Industries, an organization that provides support to formerly gang-involved and previously incarcerated men and women. While chatting with an individual at Homeboy Industries, they shared with us their story of formerly being incarcerated. Throughout their story, we were moved by their resilience, honesty, and compassion. When a student asked what they wanted us to take away from our time with them, they said, “I am not only the worst thing I have done. I am more than my mistakes.”

The readings today invite us into deeper reflection on our own iniquities and judgements. The first reading from Ezekiel calls us to do “what is right and just.” The Gospel reading tells us “whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgement.” These readings invite us to reflect on how often we define others or ourselves by mistakes? Is that doing what is right and just? If God does not define others by their mistakes, how can we? This Lenten season is an invitation to consider where we can act more justly and recognize that we are all more than our mistakes. In the Gospel, Jesus states, “Go first and be reconciled... and then come and offer your gift.” What relationships can we reconcile, so that we can more fully offer our gifts to God and to the world?

*Loving God, remind us this Lenten season to recognize the dignity of all people we encounter. Inspire us to see others how you see them and to discover our shared humanity. Grant us the courage to reconcile with those who have hurt us or who we have hurt. Amen.*

Anna Ricci  
Program Director, Immersions  
Ignatian Center for Jesuit Education

March 7

Saturday of the First Week of Lent

[Deuteronomy 26: 16-19; Psalm 119; Matthew 5:43-48](#)

In today's Gospel according to Matthew, it seems that Jesus is giving us a clear directive: Don't just love your neighbor. You must love "your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father."

But I like to think that Matthew left something out. Loving your enemy is not just an order to follow, a mandate to be accomplished, or something that can be done by sheer will. Anyone who has truly ever loved someone knows that love has never been and will never be a task to accomplish. True love is a process.

Few people know about the process of loving better than the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In his sermon "Loving Your Enemies," Dr. King provides us with coordinates to help navigate that process. He proclaims:

*"In order to love your enemies, you must begin by analyzing yourself. And I'm sure that seems strange to you, that I start out telling you this morning that you love your enemies by beginning with a look to self. It seems to me that that is the first and foremost way to come to an adequate discovery to the 'how' of this situation."*

Dr. King reminds us that our first step is not to analyze the other, but to start with ourselves. Again, *You must begin with yourself*. Or as Scripture notes, you must remove the plank from your own eye before trying to remove the plank from another's eye.

What is the hate or "planks" in your life that you want to begin removing today? How can God help you with this removal process? How might this removal process help you love your enemies?

*Loving God,*

*In the midst of a world fraught with division, divisiveness, war, and fractured communities, we ask that you send forth your Holy Spirit to be an agent of comfort and support. We pray that the Holy Spirit may help us through the process of loving to do the interior work to uncover the hate in our lives. It is only through your abundant grace that we can learn to love ourselves and our enemies. Amen.*

Jeff Sullivan, S.J., M.Div '20

March 8

Second Sunday of Lent

[Psalm 33; 2 Timothy 1:8-10; Matthew 17:1-9](#)

The Transfiguration Gospel presents a multiplicity of images and messages. For this reflection I felt drawn to consider the image of sacred space that brings us closer to God with relentless trust. Today's readings exemplify how sacred spaces transformed into salvific history with a trusting heart in God. In the Book of Genesis, Abram navigated from his homeland to an unforeseen space that became the birthplace of a new nation. In the New Testament, Jesus and his disciples' ascent to the mountaintop foreshadowed his eventual Passion and Resurrection.

Much was experienced on Mt. Tabor, the site scholars have named as the space of Transfiguration, although the Synoptic Gospels do not specify this. On the mountain, the three disciples see the glory of God's Kingdom glowing through Jesus. On the mountain they are overshadowed by God's holy cloud. On the mountain—in the conversation of the transfigured Jesus with Moses (the Law provider) and the Prophet Elijah—they learn that Jesus himself is the living Word, Son of God: human & divine. On the mountain they see the 'power' (dynamis) of the Kingdom of God.

Christ's transfiguration intends to strengthen the disciples' trust in the Messiah. The ascent onto the 'high mountain' prepares for the ascent to Calvary.

But the tendency of the world today is in the opposite direction—too much activity, too little prayer. Even Peter demonstrates this impetuous nature, that he must do something—construct tents, domiciles & remain on the mountaintop, their sacred space. Yet Jesus knew that they had to come down from that mountaintop and complete the Passion in Jerusalem, a sacred space that transformed the world.

This Lent gifts us with a time of solace, an opportunity to go within our sacred space for prayerful reflection & meditation, trusting that our deeper relationship with God transforms us in becoming Christ to others.

*Most powerful Father you are omnipresent in our hearts and in all our spaces. Remain in us as we deepen our trusting relationship with you and grace us to become Christ to others. St. Ignatius of Loyola, pray for us. Amen*

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Yolanda Brown, D.Min.  
JST Board Member  
Parish Life Director  
Blessed Sacrament Parish Community, Los Angeles

March 9

Monday of the Second Week of Lent

[Daniel 9:4-10; Psalm 79; Luke 6:36-38](#)

What might this new way of being and living that Jesus describes in today's selection from Luke's Gospel look like? More importantly, what would the experience of this life be like? What might open up for us and others? Might it lead us to a greater realization of our truest self, a self that is imbedded in a vital relational matrix with others and God?

This matrix is evident in this pithy selection – be merciful as God, our Mother/Father is merciful, do not judge or condemn others, forgive and give to others. Its use in the Lenten season is an important reminder that this time of reorienting, of turning and being turned to our God is not only, or even primarily something just between God and ourselves – it is intrinsically communal, relational in nature.

To be daughters and sons of God is, in a way, to make real and concrete who God is to others. When we reflect on the times we have experienced condemnation and judgment, had mercy and forgiveness withheld, we recall the pain of alienation and shunning. From this we can better understand the pain we caused when we acted in this way. And yet, having been forgiven, having had judgment withheld, given what we deeply needed, opens us to do the same. Since, at the heart of it, we are God's mercy, God's forgiveness, God's overflowing goodness. And it is the giving – especially of ourselves – that releases ourselves and others from the constriction of “I-ness” to the freedom of “we=self-regard.” This is our deep nature. This is how we are all transformed into love.

*Loving God, help us to free ourselves from all too human tendency to keep track of what we believe we are owed and what we fear we owe. We need your mercy and forgiveness. Help us be that mercy and forgiveness for others, so we all may experience freedom and release, living the life you desire for all of us.*

Bede Healey, OSB

Adjunct Lecturer

March 10

Tuesday of the Second Week of Lent

[Isaiah 1:10, 16-20; Psalm 50; Matthew 23:1-12](#)

Today's reading from Isaiah reminds us that, when we are sorrowful, God's mercy graciously and generously cleanses us of our wrongdoings and heals our suffering. Simultaneously, God calls us to celebrate this gift of mercy by sharing our own unconditional love with all of humanity. In the Gospel reading, Christ implores us not to seek places of honor nor exalt false masters. Rather, he invites us into a relationship of mutual respect with the whole of Creation.

These messages resonate with me because I truly believe that human encounters, when approached with a sincere desire for authentic kinship and solidarity, can transform the world and bring healing to individuals, societies, and even the planet at large. Over the past 20 plus years I have witnessed the powerful, positive change that can take place when university students, faculty, and staff engage authentically with individuals from their surrounding communities to address social injustice. In a spirit of mutual respect, reciprocity, and collaboration, not only can people lovingly transform their own individual hearts and minds, but they can bring peace to the broader world. This happens when we can "see" within one another the goodness bestowed by God, love what we see, and turn that love outward together to address suffering, reconcile divisions and heal the world with grace.

In the opening of her book, *The Inner Work of Racial Justice: Healing Ourselves and Transforming Our Communities Through Mindfulness*, Rhonda V. Magee, a professor of law and mindfulness practitioner, shares her poem *If the Path Could Speak*:

Beneath these words rests the awareness of generations.  
And of generations.  
And of generations that have come before.  
The awareness that each one of us is a vital part of the  
earth that we call home,  
is of the wind, the rain, the fire.  
And so inherently belongs.  
If the path could speak, it would say:  
"We must assert that which exists deep within us,  
namely, a sense of kinship with all those with whom we share the earth."  
On repeat.  
In every language.  
Unceasingly.

Magee later explains that realizing a sense of kinship involves identifying with all of creation and working to alleviate suffering. This is done by seeking deep, inter-connected engagement with the world and tending to its need for care.

How do you experience kinship? Where do you find comfort? Where do you see the care of others enriching your life, and where do you extend care in places where you recognize need?

*God of goodness, forgiveness and healing, please remind us today and always that your love is unconditional, ever-present, merciful and gracious. Help us to bring peace to our world by leaving our nets to follow your example, seeing the goodness in all those we encounter, and accepting and loving ourselves and others as you accept and love us.*

Jen Merritt, DCBL at the ICJE and Graduate student of pastoral ministry at SCU

March 11

Wednesday of the Second Week of Lent

[Jeremiah 18:18-20; Psalm 31; Matthew 20:17-28](#)

### Quiet Service in the Kingdom

Two weeks into Lent, and we find Jeremiah pleading with the Lord to pay attention to him. The people are plotting against Jeremiah and he would like nothing more than a little vengeance; perhaps more than a little vengeance as the subsequent verses (following today's reading) suggest. Today's Psalm seeks the Lord's kindness, speaks of trust, and foreshadows our Savior's last words on the Cross. No vengeance here.

The Gospel starts with Jesus' third prediction of the Passion, but the twelve don't quite "get it". They had seen him work miraculous cures, dismiss devilish demons, and bless the children with love. While their hearts raced toward him, their heads failed to see that his kingdom would be one where love, humility, and service would replace hate, power, and vengeance. We then learn a little more about his kingdom.

Salome, the mother of John and James comes to Jesus with a simple request: "Let my sons sit next to you in your kingdom". She had watched them mend nets, catch fish, and sail on Galilee's sea with Zebedee. Jesus had nicknamed them the "Sons of Thunder", and they must have been a handful. They offered to call fire down on a Samaritan town who rejected Jesus (offer rebuked). But he saw their goodness, inviting them to witness the Transfiguration, to see Jairus' daughter cured, and to share his Agony in the Garden. These brothers boldly say they can drink of Jesus' chalice (James will be martyred and John will care for Mary); but the other ten apostles are less than pleased with them. Jesus then responds gently, kindly, and directly: It's God's call who sits where in the kingdom; greatness will be measured by service; I came to serve and give my life for many.

And so with deep gratitude we pray:

*Lord, during this Lenten period of grace, help us quietly thunder your love, your kindness, and your light as we walk on our Lenten journey, serving our sisters and brothers, especially those most in need.*

John Ottoboni, B.A. '69

Chief Operating Officer and Senior Legal Counsel



March 12

Thursday of the Second Week of Lent

[Jeremiah 17:5-10; Psalm 1; Luke 16:19-31](#)

Just a few weeks into my *Spirituality of the Earth* class here at JST, I already find myself more attuned to the intimate connection between God and the natural world. This new way of thinking pushed me to reconsider today's Gospel about the rich man and Lazarus.

Normally, I struggle to make sense of this reading. Because while I'm disturbed by the rich man's treatment of Lazarus, God's outright dismissal of the rich man's pleas for his family paint a God who seems unfeeling and distant, a God who doesn't reflect the God I know. What, I always wonder, is this text trying to tell us?

When I reframed the story considering the connection between God and the natural world, new, meaningful questions emerged. What if the story about the rich man and Lazarus is teaching us not about right relationship between human beings but about right relationship with the Earth?

What if in the telling of sumptuous dining, we see not a rich man ignoring one who is hungry but rather human beings who overexploit the Earth and her resources, unconcerned about taking more than they need?

What if in the rich man being tormented after death, we see not a preview of the next life, but instead see our children, the next generation, who suffer extensively because of what we are doing today to the planet?

What if Abraham's assertion that no message of warning will save the rich man's kin is a warning that at some point we will no longer be able to save the Earth?

*Creator God, teach me to listen to the Earth. Open my ears so I can hear the cries of creation. Help me to remember that this world was created not for me but with me. Strengthen my resolve to preserve your creation before it is too late.*

Erin Conway, M.T.S. '21

March 13

Friday of the Second Week of Lent

[Genesis 37:3-4; 12-13; 17-28; Psalm 105; Matthew 21:33-43, 45-46](#)

In the Gospel passage today, Jesus tells the story of a landowner, who rented out his vineyard to a group of tenant farmers. When the landowner sends servants to collect the fruit of the harvest, the tenants refuse to give up the fruit and physically assault the servants. When the landowner sends his own son to the tenants, they kill him, hoping to claim his inheritance of the land. In their hunger for power and wealth, the tenants are deluded into thinking that they are rulers of land and people. Indeed, they seem to think that they are more powerful than the landowner himself.

As someone who is training for leadership in the Church, this passage feels particularly pointed. One thing we have learned from the failures of the Church is that people in positions of power can easily confuse their own will with the will of God. If I am honest, I know that my heart is not always pure. I know that the very human lure to power and control is embedded in my nature.

Given how easy it is to confuse my will with God's will, I am ever thankful for those people in my life who can speak to me in a loving and honest way. These honest relationships call me to humility; not a false humility, which seeks praise through diminishment, but a humility which is based in genuine and courageous love. These relationships help us to see ourselves more clearly and draw us to conversion. In genuine relationships the grace of humility, the purifying love of God, breaks forth and renews our hearts. Through my honest relationships I hope to more easily embrace the message of today's Gospel: God invites us to work in the vineyard, not to claim it as our own.

*Spirit of Humility, grant me courageous companions. Place truth upon their lips and love in their hearts, that they may magnify your light upon my path and guide me to your gentle embrace.  
Amen.*

Louis Hotop, S.J., M.Div. '21

March 14

Saturday of the Second Week of Lent

[Micah 7:14-15, 18-20; Psalm 1-3; Luke 15:1-3, 11-32](#)

The Prodigal Son is a story that we all know and love: a father forgives the youngest son when the son returns after squandering his inheritance. This story is Jesus' response to his critics when they condemn him for befriending sinners and society's outcasts. Jesus gives us a beautiful tale on how God loves and forgives those who stray. I have heard many interpretations that connect the wandering son to those who wander from God. However, how often do we reflect on wandering from each other? I find that our society thrives on division and conflicting opinions. We continue to separate ourselves from one another through politics, religion, gender, sexuality, race, and class. Instead of straying from one another, why not follow God's example of welcoming others with open arms? Why not build relationships with those across the divide?

From my upbringing, Lent was understood to be a solemn time of shame and repentance. I was taught to woefully reflect on everything I have done wrong and ask for God's forgiveness. This year, I will be celebrating Lent as a time for healing and new beginnings. After all, the Lenten season does occur during springtime. How about we witness the season of new life by blossoming new friendships? We can turn to those who have strayed from us with forgiveness and begin to heal what has been broken. We need to challenge one another to welcome those who have been pushed to the side. Finally, let us use this season to identify how we have strayed from our true selves and from being the person God created us to be.

*Creator of Light, Life, and Love, guide me this spring to create new relationships. Help me to love those who have strayed from me within my family, friendships, and community. Remind me of your compassion so that I can welcome those who are marginalized. Show me the reality and magnitude of your love so that I can recognize your light within me. I ask this in Jesus' name.*

*Amen.*

Elise Dubravec, M.Div '22

March 15, Jerry Cobb, S.J.

When Jesus encounters a Samaritan woman at a public wellspring we recognize a powerful metaphor for our own Lenten journey. In the time of Jesus, a “watering hole” satisfied more than a physical thirst. It answered the spiritual, deeply human need to connect socially to others. As water from the well literally gave people life, their social connections gave them a vital community. Jesus ignores the longstanding ethnic prejudices and presuppositions that divided Jews from Samaritans.

Mission Santa Clara was established near an extraordinary well, the Guadalupe River. Today on campus we see a number of beautiful fountains, including my favorite which is on the approach to the Mission Church. The sound of flowing water is nature’s prayerful voice calming us. Light dancing on rippling water reminds us of God’s light shining into our lives. Inside the Mission Church a baptismal font represents the well and the welcome of new members into the community of the Church.

Every university seeks to be a fountain of learning, but this Lent we can recall the deeper, life giving currents of that knowledge as presented at Santa Clara.

The woman at the well offers us an unconventional view of “wellness.” Wellness refers to the state of being close to true fountains of authentic energy and renewal. Not coffee, not an energy drink, not a martini, but the life-giving water of relationship to Jesus.

Jesus’ well-side encounter also takes on additional layers of significance in our era of concern for water resources. Two terrific books for prayerful reading about water are: *Because Water is Life: Catholic Social Teaching Confronts Earth’s Water Crisis* (2018) by Gary Chamberlain, and *The Water Will Come: Rising Seas, Sinking Cities, and the Remaking of the Civilized World* by Jeff Goodell (2018).

**Prayer:**

***Lord, we thirst for you. Slake our thirst with your abundantly flowing grace, and help us to be good stewards of the blessings of water in our lives.***

*Fr. Jerry Cobb, S.J., received his M.Div. and S.T.M. degrees from JST in 1981 and 1982. He teaches English at Seattle University and he is a member of SCU’s Board of Trustees.*

March 16

Monday of the Third Week of Lent

[1 Kings 5:1-15; Psalm 42; Luke 4:24-30](#)

Our God comes to us in the most unsuspecting ways. Usually, God's coming is not on our timetable, in the way we expected, or through the person(s) we anticipated. Often a moment of grace takes us by surprise.

Naaman's moment of grace was initiated by the unsuspecting servant girl of his wife, *"If only my master would present himself to the prophet in Samaria, he would cure him of his leprosy."* Although the message traveled quickly, Naaman was slow to accept how his healing would occur. He was unable to absorb the words of Elisha, the prophet. His own servants urged him to do as Elisha had directed. Over time, Naaman's anger subsided and he grew in an awareness that God was with him. The turning point arrived, Naaman listens. He believes. He acts. Healing happens. And at the pinnacle of this graced moment, Naaman returns to the prophet, Elisha, and gives voice to the healing love he has experienced, *"Now I know there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel."*

A moment of grace for us is not only the surprise of how God comes, heals, and transforms us, it is also in noticing that our God never stops nudging us, mending our broken hearts, and loving us as we are.

Think back on these first two weeks of Lent: How has God entered your life? Was it during a lively conversation with a friend at Starbucks? Was it in the homeless person camped out on the corner near the metro station? Was it while building a Lego bridge with your 5-year-old nephew when, out of the blue, he asks you a question that stops you dead in your tracks? Or was it when you were reverently lifting your hands to receive the Eucharist and you became overwhelmed with a deep experience of our God's coming to you?

With Naaman, at the end of this day, how will you give voice to God for the moment of grace that took you by surprise? For God's healing love that has filled your life this day?

*Jesus, rejection and suffering await you and yet nothing prevents you from speaking and acting. Your prophetic voice arises out of your compassionate love for each of us, regardless of the surrounding adversity in your life. Teach us how to listen, to believe, and to act. Most of all, grace us with an increase of faith and courage to be your prophetic voice in our world, especially for those on the margins of society. We ask this in Your Name. Amen.*

Jacquelyn Gusdane, S.N.D.  
Renewal Program, 2018 participant

March 17

Tuesday of the Third Week of Lent

[Daniel 3:25, 34-43; Psalm 25; Matthew 18:21-35](#)

For refusing to worship Nebuchadnezzar's golden statue, Azariah finds himself in a fiery furnace. "Do not take away your mercy from us," he laments. He prays not only for himself and his companions in the furnace but for all the Hebrew people. "For we are reduced, O Lord, beyond any other nation, brought low everywhere in the world this day because of our sins" (Dn 3:37). At the story's conclusion, Azariah's prayer is heard. God shows mercy and sends an angel to their rescue.

Years later, Peter asks Jesus how many times he must forgive another who has sinned against him. Jesus replies with the parable of the ungrateful servant, "not seven times but seventy-seven times" (Mt 18:22). Jesus' reply is not a numerical answer, but an expression of God's infinite love. Both cases illustrate God's limitless mercy and unending willingness to forgive. Should God ask anything less of us? The lesson of each reading is God's boundless love and mercy for each of us and for all humanity.

The Lenten season gives us all a chance to ask God for mercy like Azariah in the furnace. We can also seek forgiveness, not only from God, but from those who we have offended. And like the master in the parable we too can extend limitless mercy, forgiveness, charity; not only to strangers but to those who may have offended us. Are there relationships in our lives that need mending? Are there friends or family with whom we have become distant? Would the reign of God be brought closer by the repair of these broken relationships? Like the Psalmist we acknowledge that we are lost and need God's light to show us the way. May this Lent give us hope for reconciliation with those from whom we are estranged.

*Almighty God, we are here before you in need of your mercy. In this Lenten season hear our prayer and give us the courage to ask for forgiveness from those who we have offended and to be merciful toward those who may have offended us. Show us the light and give us the courage to rebuild the broken relationships in our lives, and to make your kingdom whole through our words and deeds. Amen.*

Eric Gregory, MTS '20

March 18

Wednesday of the Third Week of Lent

[Deuteronomy 4:1, 5-9; Psalm 147; Matthew 5:17-19](#)

How does God feel? We can read God as both the object and subject of that question. As the subject, we are asking, “How is God feeling right now? What textures and emotions does God respond to?” This concept is fairly rare in Christian spaces, academic and ecclesial alike. We may be more familiar with God as the object of the sentence, “How does God feel to me?” Less familiar may be to ask, “*How* do I feel God?” or, “How do I *feel* God?” or rather, “How does this body move and breathe and taste the god-ness of this world? What emotion or feeling is responding to God? How do I move with God’s rhythms? Where do I store the somatic memory of God? And how does it feel?”

The author of Deuteronomy depicts for us again, a moment of the Israelites being given knowledge of God. In fact, it is that very knowledge that Moses is so eagerly trying to equip them with as capital for starting life in the promised land. But almost as though he remembers, like us, how often that knowledge has failed the Israelites, how easily they have turned away when only equipped with the cerebral, he says to them, “However, take care... not to forget the things which your own eyes have seen.” As they enter the new land, it is important that they, uniquely different from the strangers they will encounter, remember how God feels. And Matthew’s Gospel reminds us how it is that *God* feels; “I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.” As we continue on this Lenten journey, these texts urge us to remember, to feel, the vastness of God. The multitude of ways we might remember and re-member God in our bodies, and the multitude of ways God remembers and re-members Godself to us.

*God who moves and feels and breathes and loves, gift us with your vastness. Let us feel you in this world, and let this world be felt by you. May we learn to remember your love in our bodies, so that we may give it generously and eternally, like you.*

Carly Corinne Lynch

Campus Minister for Religious Diversity

March 19

Wednesday of the Third Week of Lent

[2 Samuel 7:4-5, 12-14, 16; Psalm 89; Romans 4:13, 16-18, 22; Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24](#)

The Scriptures do not tell us very much about Joseph. We know he was a descendant of King David. But mere blood lineage is not all that is important. The Gospel gives us insight into Joseph's spiritual life, which makes all the difference in his role as husband to Mary and father to Jesus.

Although Abraham was the first to receive God's covenantal promise, David was the heir to that promise, and Joseph of Nazareth was a descendant of David, St. Paul explained to the Romans that neither descent alone nor even following the Mosaic law is enough to join the way of Christ. Rather it is through the gift of faith. Do you behold that gift? Then you too are an heir, a recipient of God's promise, wrapped in a love like that which unites a parent and a child.

Joseph received that promise, but it came in strange circumstances. The news that Mary is pregnant was a shock and a source of certain shame for Mary and for Joseph. Though Joseph received this news with compassion – intending to quietly call things off to protect Mary – the angel who appeared to him named what he was feeling: Fear. “Do not be afraid” the angel said, and revealed that these circumstances were actually the work of God who had chosen Mary and Joseph for a special role in the unfolding promise of God.

Fear, the *Spiritual Exercises* show us, is frequently the tactic of the evil spirit to draw us away from God's path. The spiritual experience Joseph had in his dream allayed his fears and gave him courage to take the path God was calling him to. That meant a closer, loving walk with God, like a parent and child. It made all the difference.

*Lord, give us hearts like Joseph, full of desire to hear your voice speaking in our lives. Help us to find freedom from all that could divert us from your path, especially the temptation to give into our fears. Draw us by your light and love, to walk ever closer to you in this time of Lenten renewal.*

Brent Otto, S.J., M.Div. '14, STL/ThM '16



March 20

Friday of the Third Week of Lent

[Hosea 14:2-10; Psalm 81; Mark 12:28-34](#)

### **Can We Love Hate?**

Today's Gospel reading cuts to the chase and simplifies the foundation of Christianity: to love God with everything we have; and to love our neighbor as ourselves. As I prayed how I might be able to contribute to the interpretation of this Scripture, since thousands have preached brilliantly on it, Jesus whispered: "*Can you love hate?*"

"*Whoa!*" I thought to myself, caught off guard by my prayer.

Then I realized that the question, while seemingly crazy, is especially relevant in our world of growing hate and divisiveness. Jesus embodies radical love, dying a gruesome death on the cross for us, yet in the midst of unspeakable suffering, forgives Pontius Pilot and comforts Mary. Hosea is able to love his materialistic, betraying, prostitute wife Gomer.

Even though it feels impossible, God calls us to radical love.

Daryl Davis shows us that the impossible is possible if we follow God's radical call to love hate. Daryl, an African American, has spent his life trying to understand: "How can you hate me when you don't even know me?" To do so, Daryl spends his free time inviting Ku Klux Klan members to dine at his house, attending their hateful rallies, listening without judgment. As a mother of bi-racial kids, Daryl challenges my thinking. He believes that civil and loving discourse with those we hate can lead to miraculous change. Daryl has a closet to prove it. Inside, he stores 200+ robes from ex-Klan leaders with whom he's lovingly talked. Due to Daryl's remarkable compassion, they have renounced hate and racism. One robe is from Jeff Schoep, the head of the notorious 2017 Supremacist march in Charlottesville, who Daryl helped de-radicalize.

At the very root of hate is fear. We fear those who are different, who act unjustly, who hate us. God tells us not to fear 365 times in the Bible. Interestingly, that's once every day. What if this Lent we fasted from hate and fear, and instead, engaged in a loving conversation with someone we don't like?

Lord, give us the courage to step out of our fears and find loving responses in the face of hate. Help us see the humanity in those who are different from us so that we might find common ground, affirming that God loves each and every one of us. Instill in our souls that we are called to radical love, to reach across the aisle of hate and discomfort, and hold our enemies in our hearts with love and prayer.

*Good and gracious God, be with us in these turbulent times. Stir our hearts to care for those who are sick and suffering. In small ways and in sweeping gestures, may our lives give witness to your compassion and holy mercy. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.*

Anne Zehren, M.T.S. '24

March 21

Saturday of the Third Week of Lent

[Hosea 6:1-6; Psalm 51; Luke 18:9-14](#)

Seldom are the biblical readings and psalms as closely connected as these on Saturday in the Third Week of Lent. In the first reading from the prophet Hosea, the Hebrew people are criticized for striving for a closer connection with God through a kind of *quid pro quo* in which religious ritual secures relief from affliction. Hosea's interpretation of God's response is that "Your piety is like a morning cloud, like the dew that early passes away." It's an extortion of mercy and care in forms of public worship that are ephemeral and meager. Rather than half-hearted worship, God seeks a deeper relationship with us. "For it is love that I desire, not sacrifice, and knowledge of God rather than holocausts."

My favorite psalm is #51, a meek confession of sinfulness and a petition for mercy and compassion. The psalmist recognizes what God wants -- not ritual sacrifices but "a heart contrite and humbled." There is an echo of Hosea in acknowledging the deeper connection to us that the Lord is seeking, and only after that love is permanently established will there be pleasure in "burnt offerings and holocausts."

Our Gospel reading gives us a parable about contrasting ways of approaching God in prayer. The first is that of a haughty, elitist, scornful Pharisee who, in the guise of gratitude, congratulates himself on his righteousness, asceticism, and correct religious practices while despising a tax collector, or publican, who's joined him in the temple and gives the appearance of being "grasping, crooked, adulterous." Meanwhile, that publican is so aware of his sinfulness that he does not even dare "to raise his eyes to heaven," as if he's guilty as charged. But in humility he taps his chest in repentance while praying, "O God, be merciful to me, a sinner." And in that simpler, purer, and far easier way he receives the gift of justification.

And so we pray:

*O God of mercies,  
help me to admit and address  
my faults and sinfulness,  
and with my contrition  
please join me to yourself  
in love  
so that I may find joy  
in your joy.*

*Good and gracious God, be with us in these turbulent times. Stir our hearts to care for those who are sick and suffering. In small ways and in sweeping gestures, may our lives give witness to your compassion and holy mercy. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.*

Ron Hansen, M.A. '95  
Professor  
English Department, Santa Clara University

March 22

Fourth Sunday of Lent

[1 Samuel 16:1B, 6-7, 10-13 A; Psalm 23; Ephesians 5: 8-14; John 9:1-41](#)

*“It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.”*

*-Antoine de Saint-Exupery*

We are living in perilous times. It’s difficult to look at a newspaper without feeling awash in stories of suffering. Families torn apart. Children in cages. Politicians mocking each other with stunning regularity. Military brinkmanship. A new mass shooting every week. People unhoused and ignored. Substance abuse and addiction. Racist violence. If we see only with our eyes, all we are likely to see is despair. Worse: many stand ready to blame the suffering upon those who suffer. Those children: they deserve their fate, since their parents broke the law! Those unhoused persons: they weren’t able to keep a good job! Victim-blaming abounds. In the passage from John, even the disciples use their worldly reason to accuse the blind man: “Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

But, that is not the last word. It turns out that the blind man is not the one in this story who can’t see; it is rather those around him who “see” only with their eyes. Jesus asks us to see *not* with the eyes, but rather with the heart. Jesus, the light of the world, refuses the worldly reasoning and victim-blaming that leads to death and despair. He instead urges hope and renewal, a profound truth that “widens the lens” to refocus it upon God. He sees differently, refusing to label the man a sinner. Jesus covers the man’s eyes with clay made from his own saliva, asks him to wash...and his sight is restored.

In this Gospel message, truth comes to us not from worldly appearances, nor from a lens that blames those who suffer. Here, truth comes to us from a new lens: a lens centered on God, one that looks beneath the surface and believes in the profound value of a man whom society has discarded. Jesus sees with the lens of the heart.

*Christ who sees truly:*

*see us.*

*Help us to see with our hearts, and not our eyes;  
to see truly those who are discarded, dismissed, and blamed.*

*Help us to see as God sees,*

*With a spirit of love and hope, one that restores and renews all that is true, beautiful, and good.*

*Good and gracious God, be with us in these turbulent times. Stir our hearts to care for those who are sick and suffering. In small ways and in sweeping gestures, may our lives give witness to your compassion and holy mercy. We ask this in Christ’s name. Amen.*

Karen Peterson-Iyer

Assistant Professor

Religious Studies Department, Santa Clara University

March 23

Monday of the Fourth Week of Lent

[Isaiah 65: 17-21; Psalm 30; John 4:43-54](#)

I. “They shall live in the houses they build, and eat the fruit of the vineyards they plant” (Isaiah 65:21).

Isaiah’s reading today ends with a worker-centered couplet. Isaiah is prophesying about a radical future in which workers own the profits of their labor. This is, indeed, a radical future to imagine, even in the twenty-first century! I invite us into a reading and reflection today that centers on this narrative of worker empowerment and moral freedom.

II. “A prophet has no honor in his native place” (John 4:44).

What we have in this excerpt from John’s Gospel is a reminder of past miracles Jesus has performed and the addition of a new one. Gospel writers included healing and miracle stories to attest to the legitimacy of Jesus’ divinity. But more than a testament to Jesus’ power, John tells us that there is a moral element to Jesus’ evangelization, that there is honor in prophetic mission. In other words, if you have something to say, it is dishonorable to keep silent.

III. “I am about to create new heavens and a new earth” (Isaiah 65:17).

In our first reading, we see the long view of vision, and in our Gospel reading, we see the short view of healing. Together, they point us toward the creation of new worlds, divine and humane, through both justice and service. How do we do this in the context of worker justice?

To follow Jesus we must take up the honorable task of speaking up when we see injustice with a message of freedom and healing. Our actions should bring us toward a new earth of dignified work, where work performed is equivalent to the worker’s fruits. In this Lenten season of sacrifice, may we pray today with workers whose sacrifices still fall short of their costs of living.

*God of dignified work, may you cast out spirits of exploitation and commission us to act as a people in just relationship to wage and economy.*

*Good and gracious God, be with us in these turbulent times. Stir our hearts to care for those who are sick and suffering. In small ways and in sweeping gestures, may our lives give witness to your compassion and holy mercy. We ask this in Christ’s name. Amen.*

Barbara Anne Kozee, M.Div. ‘22

March 24

Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Lent

[Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12; Psalm 46; John 5:1-16](#)

In the vision of the prophet and priest Ezekiel, God is reestablishing the Temple which is God's dwelling place at the center of creation. Just as God reestablishes the destroyed Temple in Ezekiel's vision by the life-giving waters which spring from below towards the east, Jesus reestablishes the life of the man who was ill for thirty-eight years. Jesus, who goes up to Jerusalem one more time in his life, sees this man who was ill. Most probably, he has encountered him in the past. He knows his suffering and maybe, because the time has come for this man to see the glory of God, Jesus asks him, *do you want to be well?* To the question, the ill-man gives the answer that he thinks is good, but which shows his lack of faith in God. Not only will Jesus heal him physically, but Jesus will heal him spiritually. Instead of sending him or helping him to get to the pool, Jesus orders him to rise and to take his mat and walk.

The reestablishment of life in this man who was ill for so long goes beyond his own thoughts and expectations. In that consolation, he carries his mat, not even paying attention to the sabbath. And because there are some people for whom the laws are more important than life, they will go after the healed man, not paying attention to how this ill man became healed. Because of the reestablishment of life on the sabbath but also because Jesus called God His Father, He will be persecuted. But today we can ask ourselves, how is God reestablishing life in us and in the Church, even amidst suffering and struggle?

*May God Almighty, who reestablished not only the Temple but the life of the ill man, reestablish life in every one of us today. May God reestablish life in the Church: Christ's body. May this reestablishment give us the courage, love, and faith to stand for what is good for every life that we encounter.*

*Good and gracious God, be with us in these turbulent times. Stir our hearts to care for those who are sick and suffering. In small ways and in sweeping gestures, may our lives give witness to your compassion and holy mercy. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.*

Tchetongbe Gansa, S.J., S.T.L. '20

March 25

Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord

[Isaiah 7:10-14, 8:10; Psalm 40; Hebrews 10: 4-10; Luke 1:26-38](#)

*Coming to her, he said, "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be (Luke 1:28-29).*

I first started attending church regularly when I was thirteen or fourteen, for reasons that still escape me. I clearly recall standing in my grandparents' living room, asking my grandfather—the permanent deacon of our parish—if I could go to Mass with him on Saturday mornings when he preached. But I have no memory of what, other than the Spirit, would have led me to that decision. And I certainly had no idea that this question would lead to confirmation, discernment of vocation, undergraduate study of theology, and now my pursuit of a Master of Divinity degree here at JST.

As I felt myself being drawn further down this path, there were many moments when it all seemed like too much – when the call towards some great unknown became terrifying, paralyzing. I became scared of what God might be asking of me. I felt inadequate, sinful, small.

And yet (I'm coming to realize) ours is a God who just wants to be in relationship, above all else. God who offers Ahaz a sign—*deep as the nether world, or high as the sky*—in spite of his fearful appeals to propriety. God who wants the people to know of God's *faithfulness* and *salvation, kindness* and *truth*, rather than make sin-offerings and sacrifices. God who loves what God has made and wants to be Emmanuel, "God with us," delighting in our presence. God who surprises Mary with the angel's greeting, "hail, *full of grace*," and urges her not to be afraid.

May we strive to trust in God's desire for friendship – and be open to where that invitation might lead us!

*Loving Creator, help us to believe You when You tell us we are good. Help us to trust You when You show us we are loved. Above all, guide us to seek and cherish Your company without fear, rejoicing in Your care and mercy. Help us to share the good things we have received with all our fellow creatures, that they too may know that they are blessed, they are treasured, and they are enough.*

*Good and gracious God, be with us in these turbulent times. Stir our hearts to care for those who are sick and suffering. In small ways and in sweeping gestures, may our lives give witness to your compassion and holy mercy. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.*

Alyssa Moore, M. Div '22

March 26

Thursday of the Fourth Week of Lent

[Exodus 32:7-14; Psalm 106:19-20,21-22,23; John 5:31-47](#)

How quickly we forget.

And our forgetting isn't about the past; it's about the present.

In the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius gives multiple opportunities for the retreatant to reflect on our history, remembering the ways that God has always been present to human beings *and* how God has been present to and laboring for me personally over the course of my life. Again, this remembering of God's presence and activity in our life isn't about the past; it's about the present.

Like the Israelites in the desert and like those who were skeptical of Jesus, we can easily forget what our remembering is for. They remembered how God was present to Moses and the Israelites in liberating them from Egypt and giving them the Law, but they were unable to see God's presence and activity in their very midst. Today, people on both sides of the aisle too often recall how wonderfully God was present and at work in the Church at some point in the past, but we can easily despair at the seeming absence of the Spirit in aspects of the Church today.

Maybe the readings today are calling us to remember not just God's presence but, perhaps more importantly, our forgetfulness. In the first reading, Moses reminds God (even God needs a reminder!) of the people's forgetfulness and of their need for mercy (and reminders!).

May we remember God's past presence and labor in our lives and in our Church so that we can see and trust in that liberating presence and activity among us today.

*Remember us, God, in your mercy.  
Remember our difficulty in following your guidance  
and staying close to you.  
Help us to remember  
your presence among us and your goodness to us  
today;  
help us to turn our gaze back (as often as it drifts away)  
to you,  
the God of presence, of freedom, and of life.*

*Good and gracious God, be with us in these turbulent times. Stir our hearts to care for those who are sick and suffering. In small ways and in sweeping gestures, may our lives give witness to your compassion and holy mercy. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.*

Thomas Bambrick, S.J., M.Div '21

March 27

Friday of the Fourth Week of Lent

[Wisdom 2:1A, 12-22; Psalm 34; John 7:1-2, 10, 25-30](#)

Remember that scene from Disney's *The Lion King* when Simba, accompanied by Rafiki, looks into the water only to see his own image reflected back? Rafiki swiftly encourages Simba to "look harder." 'Harder' does not necessarily mean a greater exertion of energy but instead a prompt to stay in reality, to stay with it. Simba once again looks at the water and stays with it, until the expansiveness of his father is revealed.

Today's readings certainly have an air of tension and controversy, with a side order of death threats. We only get a small glimpse in our Gospel reading, so I invite you to read all of John Chapter 7 for further context.

As the Jewish feast of Tabernacles nears, those close to Jesus lay out their respective campaign strategies, seemingly wanting to build on the miracle worker brand. Meanwhile, the crowds in Judea question the plausibility of Jesus being much to write home about, given where he is from. Jesus sternly challenges such fickleness with a "look harder" of his own. There is something happening beneath our feet, something more expansive, something true.

It is often in the tender moments of silence that honesty whispers to us, and welcomes us into the "something" that we have always known. This is no philosophy to be understood, but a reality to surrender into. This surrender, however, is not an affront to our dignity but is instead an invitation to become a gracious host to all that may come our way. This is no false optimism, nor a religious apathy, but a profound undercurrent of freedom that is not easily swayed by the winds above. A dear mentor of mine once shared with me: welcome everything as if it were an out of town visitor, and then, watch God's own freedom kick in.

*A Feast...*

*Teach me to welcome reality with the graciousness of your freedom.*

*Teach me to host with a lavish mercy,*

*And a humble feast.*

*Teach me to not busy myself,*

*Lest I forget my guests.*

*Teach me to welcome reality, so that it might teach me.*

*And when fear disturbs our gathering,*

*May we set the table,*

*For one more.*

*Amen*

*Good and gracious God, be with us in these turbulent times. Stir our hearts to care for those who are sick and suffering. In small ways and in sweeping gestures, may our lives give witness to your compassion and holy mercy. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.*



Victor Lemus, M.A. '12  
Campus Minister for Retreats

March 28

Saturday of the Fourth Week of Lent

[Jeremiah 11:18-20; Psalm 7; John 7:40-53](#)

When Jesus encountered the naysayers who declared that what he was all about was impossible, I immediately flashed to a moment in my life two years ago. I was serving at a Catholic high school when I felt an overwhelming sense of call to embark on something totally different; to start a nonprofit urban farm.

*Can you make any money in that?*

*Is that even a real profession?*

*What? You're going to give nearly all of the proceeds away to the most effective public health interventions? That doesn't sound pragmatic.*

To this day I still can't negate these valid thoughts and concerns, but I took the leap of faith anyway. Surprise connections made this vision a reality just one mile from my house in an urban environment. While there was plenty of toil and struggle, the Sowing Solidarity in Sacramento has become a haven where generosity, goodwill, and authentic community abounds. It feels like a new expression of spirituality and church that brings together people of goodwill from all walks of life and belief systems, a place that reveals that we truly are one beloved community connected to the earth and each other. Volunteers express their creativity in contributing to the common good, whether through creating signs, building sheds, or nurturing the soil. Week after week, people express profound gratitude for how much they look forward to the farm stand, what this means for the neighborhood, the opportunity to slow down to a human pace where we reconnect with our neighbors and behold the beauty of creation.

Making money? A real profession? Pragmatic? Maybe not...but Sowing Solidarity donated 1,1000 pounds of fresh produce to our local food bank and sponsored over 7,300 malaria nets to protect against malaria in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2019! We dream of embodying the verse before today's Gospel, "Blessed are they who have kept the word with a generous heart and yield a harvest through perseverance."

*Dearest Divine Creator, Gently shepherd me to persevere, when others may question my life's vocation. Help me, Lord, to keep a generous heart in the face of adversity and always remember that leaning into your mystery is far more soulful than my need for control or approval.*

*Good and gracious God, be with us in these turbulent times. Stir our hearts to care for those who are sick and suffering. In small ways and in sweeping gestures, may our lives give witness to your compassion and holy mercy. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.*

Gina Anderson, M.Div. '08

March 29

Fifth Sunday of Lent

[Ezekiel 37:12-14; Psalm 130; Romans 8: 8-11; John 11:1-45](#)

On his visit to their house, Jesus favors the listening Mary while her sister Martha is too busy in the kitchen, according to Luke's Gospel. But this time in John's Gospel, Martha got it right. In today's reading, on the awakening of Lazarus, she confesses that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. She is therefore a role model for believing that there is hope of life beyond death. Martha helps us to believe in the joyful Easter message.

Imagine that Martha encourages you to spread this good news not only among devout Christians but also to sceptics. In my home country of Sweden, one of the most secularized countries in the world, the topic of death has been taboo for decades. Many think that the end of life is definitely the end, and any celestial imagery is regarded as pure fiction. Recently, however, books on Swedish Death Cleaning (tidying up to save relatives the hassle) are published and discussed. In Stockholm, professional clowns visit dying patients in hospitals and hospices to alleviate their suffering through humorous, cheerful, and, at the same time, deeply respectful interactions.

What would you say to secularized Swedes in a conversation about mortality? Do you wholeheartedly share Martha's conviction of life in heaven and pass it on? Or do you recognize some of these Scandinavian doubts in your own soul and share those uncertainties?

Liturgical worship promotes and expresses belief in eternal life. We pray for the deceased during every Mass. Before receiving communion, the presiding priest silently prays: "May the Body of Christ keep me safe for eternal life;" and "May the Blood of Christ keep me safe for eternal life." And at the end of the Creed we all profess: "I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come."

*Jesus, you are the resurrection and the life, help us to deepen our faith uniting heaven and earth, so that we may taste and see the rich mystery of eternal life.*

*Good and gracious God, be with us in these turbulent times. Stir our hearts to care for those who are sick and suffering. In small ways and in sweeping gestures, may our lives give witness to your compassion and holy mercy. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.*

Fredrik Heiding, S.J.

Visiting Scholar, Adjunct Lecturer in Ignatian Spirituality

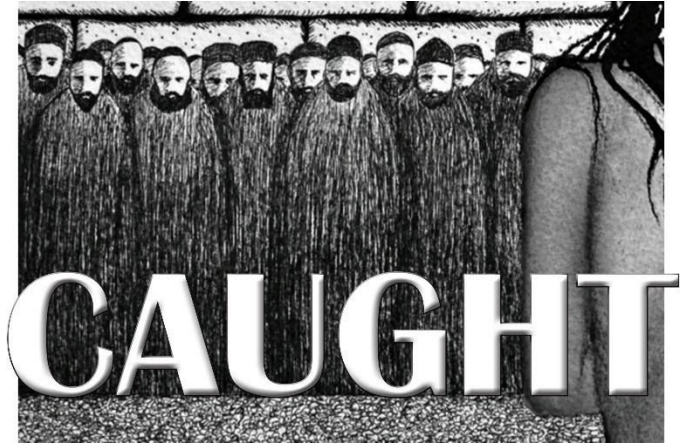
March 30

Monday of the Fifth Week of Lent

[Daniel 13; Psalm 23; John 8:1-11](#)

*Caught*: a word that speaks about standing naked before God and the tribunal of conscience; about divisions in our society; about judgment, guilt and shame, sin and freedom, dignity and choice, the mercy of God.

In the story from John's Gospel, everyone but Jesus is somehow caught: caught in the act, caught up in, apprehended, exposed, trapped. But throughout there is *Revelation*, another matter altogether.



Like this woman in the Gospel story, I see myself so often “caught in the act of . . .” My flaws and failures leave me feeling exposed, ashamed, powerless over my own life, and trapped by the judgments of others.

In the scribes and elders, I can also see myself: testing the motives of others, needing and claiming to be “right” and saying so in ways that inflict collateral damage. But truth-telling untempered by compassion can be death-dealing – even when just looking in the mirror. And there is more. Represented in the plight of this nameless woman is the story of so many “disposable” people, even the planet itself, ensnared in power struggles not of their making. Am I somehow complicit? Should some compassionate intervention bear my name?

Jesus, himself the Truth, catches them all in the act of being themselves. He alone cares about this woman. With subtle but exquisite clarity he redefines the question and lays bare each personal truth. To one and all, he offers challenge and choice, not condemnation. The others leave, guilt exposed; the woman alone stays, hope and dignity restored. Caught by faith, she names Jesus “Messiah,” in Greek, *Kurios*.

Grace here and now works the same way. It intervenes unexpectedly, invites attention, cuts to the core of the matter. In the heat of the moment, grace offers pause, perspective and possibility. It challenges us, for our healing, to claim kinship, without excuses, with all of sinful humanity redeemed by Jesus.

*Jesus, Messiah and Lord, my name, my heart, is known to you. When I am broken by sin, you raise me up to face you. Gazing into your eyes as in a mirror, I see myself, worthy, beloved, able to become more than I have been. I would be reborn into a life renewed. Catch me.*

*Good and gracious God, be with us in these turbulent times. Stir our hearts to care for those who are sick and suffering. In small ways and in sweeping gestures, may our lives give witness to your compassion and holy mercy. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.*

Suzanne Gagné Bregman, M.A. '87

March 31

Tuesday of the Fifth Week of Lent

[Numbers 21:4-9; Psalm 102; John 8:21-30](#)

Today, here in California, is the 13th day of shelter-in-place. As I sit in Berkeley, exiled in my own home, I can't see past the plight of the Israelites. They are in the midst of their own indefinite wandering toward a future they cannot yet imagine. Thirteen days of Zoom meetings, quixotic quests for toilet paper, and improvised homeschooling leaves me with plenty to complain about. Can you imagine how much more *they* had after forty years of this?

And it's not just the exile that resonates between the Israelites and us. We have some insight into how the Israelites felt as the seraph serpents slithered, taking lives with their venom. We watch as an invisible microbe spreads throughout the world sowing sickness, death, and fear.

So, I've got nothing but resentment for a petty, vengeful, and merciless God who responds to the idle complaints of the stressed-out and forlorn with violent death by a venom for which there is no cure. Where is there good news to be found here?

Maybe you can see it in the gift God offers to the Israelites in their need. In their powerlessness, God gives them a sign to hold high, look at, and find life.

As Christians, God has given us a sign in the person of Jesus Christ. One of the great gifts of this last half of Lent is the opportunity to walk with Jesus through John's Gospel. As we hear each daily story, we can find life as we can contemplate Jesus just as the Israelites contemplated their bronze serpent. In these days of distress, we join the psalmist struggling for hope and crying out to see the face of God. Our prayer is answered and we find life by looking at Jesus.

*Loving and generous God, you gave us Jesus as a sign of life. Give us the grace to keep our eyes on him and be sustained through this time of sickness and death.*

*Good and gracious God, be with us in these turbulent times. Stir our hearts to care for those who are sick and suffering. In small ways and in sweeping gestures, may our lives give witness to your compassion and holy mercy. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.*

Perry Petrich, S.J., M.Div. '20

April 1

Wednesday of the Fifth Week of Lent

[Daniel 3:14-20; 91-92, 95; Daniel 3; John 8:31-42](#)

Humanity is being called this Lenten season, more than ever, to engage our faith in the present reality. While our lives are threatened by the frightening coronavirus, political hostility, environmental hazards, gender violence, and economic inequality, we are called to gaze on these realities and make decisions based in faith. This calls us to retreat, to be aware of the silent divine presence in the universe. The three young men in the heart of the fire in the first reading had options not to do so. But they opted to trust God. The responsorial psalm continues to remind us of the presence of God in everything created, including the environment. God is present in all aspects of creation, large and small.

In John's Gospel, Jesus continues to point to the present reality. We, the present followers of Christ, cannot dwell on past glories. We must attend to the here and now, social issues are at stake: the hungry, the sick, environmental and human violence, and growing inequality. The whole of creation is in pain. Each person is called to lend a healing hand, no matter how little. As we ground ourselves in these realities, we look up to God's mercy and remind God of the wonders promised to us in the resurrection on Easter morning.

*God of infinite mercy, accept our thanks, praise, and blessings. You are always faithful to your promises from the beginning. At this time of total confusion we remind ourselves of our frailties and call to you for our spiritual and physical healing. We ask this through Christ our savior.*

*Good and gracious God, be with us in these turbulent times. Stir our hearts to care for those who are sick and suffering. In small ways and in sweeping gestures, may our lives give witness to your compassion and holy mercy. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.*

Jacqueline Anujulu, M.S.H.R.

Renewal Program participant, Spring 2020



April 2

Thursday of the Fifth Week of Lent

[Genesis 17:3-9; Psalm 105; John 8:51-59](#)

“God spoke to him” and “Jesus said to the Jews” direct explicit words of the Divine to specific people. Don’t we long for this sort of communication? To know things such as: What is going on Lord? What is it that you desire of me? Jesus, do you hear my cries?

I sometimes find myself jealous of Abraham and of those first-century Jews. However, I need to remind myself that I know God, the One who speaks directly to our world, to us, to me, to my heart. In this particular Lenten season, it has been difficult for me to hear or recognize God’s voice. But, Lord, let me not stay there.

Thankfully, I can recall and reacclimate myself with the tenor and tone of God’s communication. As I remember, Jesus speaks words of tenderness and compassion. Jesus approached suffering women and men and with comforting words or a gentle touch. In my own life and prayer, God’s voice is of sweet gentleness, of acceptance and love. Ahh, yes! There it is, I remember it now!

Amidst my busy mind, amidst changing circumstances, I need not long for precise words like the ones spoken to Abraham or the Jews. I can open myself up and ask for the grace to hear the loving Divine voice that has been speaking to us all along.

*Dear Lord,  
You who revealed yourself to Elijah,  
Amidst chaos and wonder,  
In small simpleness,  
Draw near to us now.  
Help us to know your presence.  
Speak your loving and guiding words to our hearts.  
And, grant us the graces,  
To know your presence,  
To hear your voice,  
And, to be who we are, your beloved.*

*Good and gracious God, be with us in these turbulent times. Stir our hearts to care for those who are sick and suffering. In small ways and in sweeping gestures, may our lives give witness to your compassion and holy mercy. We ask this in Christ’s name. Amen.*

Jeff Dorr, S.J., M.Div. ‘21

April 3

Friday of the Fifth Week of Lent

[Jeremiah 20:10-13; Psalm 18; John 10:31-42](#)

As I ponder the readings from today, fear of betrayal emanates from the prophet Jeremiah. The Psalmist also echoes fear through death, destruction, and distress. Oh, how these words from the Old Testament resonate with the current state of our country and the world as the pandemic rages. Yet, the prophet Jeremiah and the Psalmist find rescue and hope in the Lord.

In today's Gospel, Jesus returns to the River Jordan where he was baptized. He had been chastised for his good works and goes back to this source of renewal. His return to a familiar place seems relevant for us. In this time of limited travel and shelter at home, many of us are fastened at home. Most of us are transitioning to having all of our activities at home-- work, meals, study, leisure, exercise, and prayer.

Upon further reflection of Jesus' return to the place of his baptism, I find myself thinking about my baptism, when my Christian identity was marked. In baptism, immersed in the refreshing water, we enter into new life with Christ. This Lent, I have had more time to contemplate suffering and death, especially with the crisis occurring in the world. Yet, my Catholic faith has been a source of security and hope. I offer my fear, lack of control, and trust to Jesus Christ whose love knows no bounds. Just as Jesus returned to the Jordan River, perhaps we can consider how we too can return to our baptismal identity and remember our Christian call.

*Merciful God, in times of fear, destruction, and distress may you be a source of strength and hope. May your compassion and tenderness be a source of healing for all those who are sick in mind, body and spirit. As each hour of the day unfolds, help us to return home to your loving embrace. May we live out our baptismal call, sharing our love with others.*

*Good and gracious God, be with us in these turbulent times. Stir our hearts to care for those who are sick and suffering. In small ways and in sweeping gestures, may our lives give witness to your compassion and holy mercy. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.*

Justine Javier, M.Div. '18

April 4

Saturday of the Fifth Week of Lent

[Ezekiel 37:21-28; Jeremiah 31; John 11:45-56](#)

We are a scattered people—and not just because of social distancing. We know all too well what it feels like to live in a divided nation. We can feel Ezekiel’s outrage and lament. We shake our fists when we listen to the news, “Can you believe these people?!” We watch videos of hospitals jaws agape, tears welling up. I know people are *suffering* in this pandemic—God’s people, my people. Alone in my house, I feel far away. I feel helpless, frustrated, sometimes even angry. I’m sure Ezekiel, the prophet living in exile, felt that. He too was far away from his people.

Jesus also knows how we feel. He could no longer walk around in public. For his safety, he has to go away. He has to isolate himself. Sounds familiar. I imagine that Jesus was *on a roll* healing people, performing miracles, preaching, teaching... People began to believe in him. Through his public ministry, he was fulfilling his mission. Then, it all comes crashing to a halt.

The Gospel today leads us into the last week of Lent. It reminds us of what’s to come: Jesus’ death. Every year I know this part of the story is coming. Every year it’s heartbreaking. My friend who knows how I feel, who heals me, who teaches me... he will be killed. It makes me think of all the people who are suffering unjustly: nurses getting sick because they don’t have personal protective equipment, patients dying because there aren’t enough ventilators, workers losing their jobs...

This is not ordinary time.

So, we put our stock in the everlasting covenant. We choose stubborn, unreasonable hope. We choose radical faith in Jesus, who will gather the dispersed children of God.

Everything is broken.

So, God dwells among us and works with us to rebuild.

Full of hope and faith, we pray:

*The Lord will guard us, as a shepherd guards his flock.*

*Good and gracious God, be with us in these turbulent times. Stir our hearts to care for those who are sick and suffering. In small ways and in sweeping gestures, may our lives give witness to your compassion and holy mercy. We ask this in Christ’s name. Amen.*

Maddie LaForge, M.Div. ‘21

April 5

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion

[Isaiah 50:4-7; Psalm 22; Philipians 2:6-11; Matthew 27](#)

***Palm Sunday: Reflection***

*“Christ Jesus, emptied himself...taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness...becoming obedient to the point of death.”* Being human is being and becoming, realizing and actualizing oneself against the horizon of human freedom which finds its term and fulfillment in death.

We are called, of course, to imitate Christ, but only after he had first imitated us: imitating us in our mortality, imitating us in our fragility, imitating us in our quaking uncertainty and paralyzing fears, imitating us in our heartfelt disappointments and wrenching pain, imitating in our suffering loneliness, misunderstanding, injustice and violence.

During Holy Week the parish church in the small German village where I lived during doctoral studies displayed its *Pestkreuz*, a large medieval crucifix on which the corpus of Christ was artistically disfigured by pock marks resembling those of the Black Plague that spread across Europe in the 14th century. Outside of Munich at the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial stands a crucifix where the crown Jesus wears is platted of barbed-wire.

There is more here than the vicarious suffering of one bearing another's punishment, more than the pound of flesh being paid by means of some divine credit card. If Jesus is symbol of God's having drawn near to us, then his cross is symbol that God knows, understands, grasps, tastes our "being human" at our most fragile, most critical and vulnerable moments.

As a global community we are being offered during this pandemic the opportunity to embrace, in solidarity with one another, who we are, to serve, support and grieve with each other. As a Christian community Holy Week invites us to accompany Christ in the days ahead because he has first accompanied us, we are following in his footsteps because he first had followed in our own.

***Prayer:***

Gracious God, you revealed your name in the Book of Exodus, saying you had seen the misery of your people, heard them crying out, that you were concerned about their suffering, and had come down to rescue them. May we accompany your Son in the coming days just as he had joined us in our affliction. Let us recognize him suffering in our brothers and sisters today.

*Good and gracious God, be with us in these turbulent times. Stir our hearts to care for those who are sick and suffering. In small ways and in sweeping gestures, may our lives give witness to your compassion and holy mercy. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.*

George E. Griener, S.J.

Associate Professor Emeritus of Historical and Systematic Theology

April 6

Monday of Holy Week

[Isaiah 42:1-7; Psalm 27; John 12:1-11](#)

Today I pulled from my shelf the text from last year's Triduum celebration, the order of liturgies that I keep as the liturgist for St. Ignatius Parish in San Francisco. As I flipped through the pages, I could smell chrism that had saturated the pages for Holy Saturday's rite, imbued by the celebration of years past. I felt a wave of grief come over me as I imagined plodding through these three-days-in-one in an empty church, six-feet away from our pastor. The assembly's voice distant, the celebration of sacraments postponed.

We begin Holy Week amidst a global pandemic. One in four Americans are sheltering in place; more than a billion people in our human family face economic insecurity and the threat of frightening illness. And yet, the liturgical calendar urges us forward toward the Triduum: a Church dispersed while on a pilgrimage through the unknown.

In today's Gospel, Lazarus reclines at table with Jesus, having been resurrected from the dead not long before. How have his days of life been infused by the new since being resurrected from the dead? What were the foods, feelings, sensations that he longed for after spending four days in a tomb? How was his relationship with Jesus changed after such an encounter?

Motifs of betrayal and foreshadowing of the crucifixion pock this gathering of reunited friends, and then Mary interrupts it all with an extravagant gesture and an extravagant gift. In her action, we, the Church-dispersed, are called to the dynamism of the Paschal Mystery: a mystery that is indeed costly, and mixed with the human experiences of suffering, uncertainty, death - and hope.

We will likely greet Easter with some grief. But the stone has been rolled away, and the tomb is empty. Can we exist in the tension of fear and imperfection and unknowing, as Mary, and still give extravagant gifts?

*By his holy and glorious wounds, may Christ the Lord guard us and protect us.  
May the light of Christ rising in glory dispel the darkness of our hearts and minds.  
-The Blessing of the Fire and Preparation of the Candle at the Easter Vigil the  
Holy Night*

*Good and gracious God, be with us in these turbulent times. Stir our hearts to care for those who are sick and suffering. In small ways and in sweeping gestures, may our lives give witness to your compassion and holy mercy. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.*

Maggie Warner, M.Div. '19, M.A. '20

April 7

Tuesday of Holy Week

[Isaiah 49:1-6; Psalm 71; John 13](#)

On this Holy Tuesday, countless Christians all over the world are spending their Holy Week deprived of the consolation of services in church, to protect themselves and others from the coronavirus. They cannot receive the consolation Christ's Body and Blood with their sisters and brothers.

But today in the Gospel, Jesus suffers distress at His own supper before Holy Pascha in Jerusalem, because one of those present with Him will betray Him. Another will deny Him. And all of them will abandon Him.

How we have longed to share in Christ's Holy Gifts in church, and yet now the very act of dipping a morsel with Him at the Supper has become a sign of Judas' betrayal in the Garden and Peter's denial at cockcrow.

It is too difficult to hold these conflicting pains together, especially on top of all our other sufferings in this pandemic.

But we must remember: Jesus is always able to touch our suffering and our longing, no matter where we are. Peter thinks he wants to go where Jesus is going, but he cannot. During this Holiest of Weeks, that is not the point. The point is: Jesus shows the power of His love for us by coming to where we are first. Down into the depths of loneliness and anxiety in the Garden, into the shame of a trumped-up kangaroo court, into the pain and suffering of the Cross, and even into the depths of death itself.

There is nowhere that He is unwilling to go to seek out those who are lost. And we will soon see: He cannot even be shut out of the room where His disciples are locked down in fear, sheltering in place.

When He finds us, He will take us with Him to the Paschal Feast for which all our hearts long.

*O Lord Jesus Christ, keep us united to you in prayer during these nights of Holy Week. Keep us united to each other in your Holy Spirit, because we can depend upon no other. Prepare our hearts for Your Great Entrance into the locked rooms of our lives, when you will burst through every door to give us life with You, and your Father, and your All-Holy and Life-Giving Spirit, with whom You are blessed unto the ages of ages.*

*Good and gracious God, be with us in these turbulent times. Stir our hearts to care for those who are sick and suffering. In small ways and in sweeping gestures, may our lives give witness to your compassion and holy mercy. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.*

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

April 8

Wednesday of Holy Week

[Isaiah 50:4-9; Psalm 69; Matthew 26:14-25](#)

### **A Decision to be Hopeful**

Walter Brueggemann, a scripture scholar and theologian, once wrote that exile is not just a geographical reality but a theological decision. We live in troubled, exile-like times. Covid-19 has unleashed on us untold fear and panic. People have been exiled, from their places of work, schools, from one another. As a human family, we feel afraid. This exile, I believe, also provides us space as people of faith to make a theological decision: to remain hopeful. To be a people “who have been given well-trained tongues that we may know how to speak to the weary.” That’s what prophet Isaiah proclaims as his mission in the Third Song of the Servant of God which is our first reading. He enthusiastically proclaims his mission of being a messenger of hope to the weary, yet he quickly notes that it will involve suffering too.

I believe the prophetic message for us today is to remain hopeful in the exile-like situation of isolation that we live in at the moment. To be a people with open ears like the prophet Isaiah, who listen to the voice of God within and proclaim hope and words of comfort to God’s people amid despair, pain, and weariness.

How does this current crisis move us to be prophetic in our different contexts? There are numerous stories of hope that abound: nurses and doctors putting their lives on the line to save others; friends, family, and neighbors are reaching out to one another; and many more. We all have something we can share to bring hope in this darkness. It is in small prophetic deeds and words shared that we can be uplifting to ourselves and to other people who feel isolated, are weary, and in fear. We need to make the theological decision to remain hopeful and to witness, together with Isaiah, that the Lord is our help. That decision will help us believe that this exile too shall pass: a new post-coronavirus world will emerge, a world that is more loving, a world that stops from time to time to reflect on the effects our human activities have on the planet.

Prayer:

Loving God, we as a human family pray for the grace to remain hopeful amid the coronavirus pandemic. May the Resurrected Christ, whom we prepare to welcome anew in our hearts this Easter, be our source of strength and courage at this time. May you grant us the grace to persevere the many weeks ahead of us that may challenge our faith in you. We ask this through Christ our redeemer.

*Good and gracious God, be with us in these turbulent times. Stir our hearts to care for those who are sick and suffering. In small ways and in sweeping gestures, may our lives give witness to your compassion and holy mercy. We ask this in Christ’s name. Amen.*



April 9

Holy Thursday

[Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14; Psalm 116; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-15](#)

In our lives today, the pandemic upends every aspect, becoming a terrible, turbulent, tragic time with no calm future on the horizon. The readings today are particularly relevant because they narrate, in storied layers, God's saving work in the most turbulent times of our faith history.

Stories orient us as they narrate who and whose we are. In particular, the founding stories of our faith reveal our deepest identity as the people of a loving God. Like a compass giving us direction in these times of loss and uncertainty, the readings for the Mass of the Last Supper make present again God's love for human beings.

What is the saving love that God offers now? What do Jesus' actions mean when the pandemic threatens the foundations of our lives? Can foot washing provide a compass today? *Yes!* God's saving action in history, which we relive in the Triduum beginning on Holy Thursday, still draws us into life – *always* Resurrection life.

In the Exodus story, with traveling clothes, staff and sandals, the people of Israel ate the paschal lamb, protected their homes with its blood, and journeyed into the desert toward the land Yahweh promised. They became a covenant community with lives bound together in God's commandment to love one another. In John's Gospel, Jesus celebrates the Passover meal as he establishes an eternal bond between God and humanity. As powerful as his words are, recounted in Paul's letter to the Corinthians, his actions reveal God most vividly. Jesus washes his followers' feet.

In Jesus' tender and intimate act, we know that our God-with-us loves us. We have a clear orientation for the dark pandemic days. The only way ahead is to care for the people around us. There is no abstraction here, only real stooping and tenderness. God is a God of love, revealed in history, thousands of years ago, in Jesus, and now in us. The Resurrection that we will celebrate on Easter Sunday has already begun. Let us live the Resurrection as the direction of our lives right now.

*God-Emmanuel, in every age you show us your love. Give us the courage and creativity to care for others with Resurrection love in this dark time of suffering and terrible uncertainty. God, be with us! God, bless us again with your Passover mercy and free us from the captivity of our days. We trust and pray in Christ's name.*

*Good and gracious God, be with us in these turbulent times. Stir our hearts to care for those who are sick and suffering. In small ways and in sweeping gestures, may our lives give witness to your compassion and holy mercy. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.*

Alison M. Benders  
Interim Dean

April 10

Good Friday

[Isaiah 52:13-53; Psalm 31; Hebrews 4:14-16, 5:7-9; John 18:1-19:42](#)

The Passion narrative that we read or hear today is what Love looks like when it gets close.

At Christmas, we celebrated how God came as close as possible to us in the person of Jesus. The later ministry of God-among-us revealed how Jesus repeatedly drew close to people who were hurting, alienated, and reviled. As the opposition mounted, Jesus stayed close to us, so close that he got mixed up in the messiness and violence of our world. In the words of John's Gospel, which open the reading on the Last Supper, "He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end."

Jesus' love was expressed in faithfulness. He was faithful to the mission entrusted to him: promoting the reign of God. The Passion recounts how some people were threatened by God's reign of justice, peace and love, so consumed were they by fear, self-promotion, and lust for power and privilege. But Jesus did not run. He remained faithful to who he was and whose he was. And that got him killed.

We stand at the cross today, gazing upon it not as an instrument of torture (which it was), but as a sign of faithful love. We meditate on the Passion with new eyes, seeing how passionate love bursts forth from the wood of the cross which we venerate with a kiss. With those same eyes, we gaze towards Easter morning, when God's vindication comes. Death and division will not have the last word. Love does. And love is the most redemptive thing in the world.

*Jesus, help me stay close to you in your Passion today. Draw me to others who are suffering and crucified today. Spring forth from me fonts of compassion. School me in your faithful love so that I may be more faithful and loving to others.*

*Good and gracious God, be with us in these turbulent times. Stir our hearts to care for those who are sick and suffering. In small ways and in sweeping gestures, may our lives give witness to your compassion and holy mercy. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.*

Kevin O'Brien, S.J.  
President, Santa Clara University

April 11

Holy Saturday

Readings (options): <http://cms.usccb.org/bible/readings/041120.cfm>

My full name is Martin Thomas Cletus Mauter Connell. *Martin* was my paternal grandfather's twin brother; *Thomas* was that grandfather's name. I took *Cletus* as my confirmation name because it was my father's confirmation name. *Mauter* was my mother's family name, and I took it as my vow name because she played such an important part in my religious formation. And *Connell*? That has its own story. My father used to say that it used to be *O'Connell*, but we dropped the "O" in the ocean on the way over. All those names, but people just call me *Marty*.

I always think of my friend Brian Helge on Holy Saturday. Brian, who passed away several years ago, was a Lutheran pastor who taught liturgy at Valparaiso University in Indiana. He was fond of saying that what happens at Easter Vigil is the full name of what is customarily – and inadequately – abbreviated as "Christian."

As Brian noted, "Our name is a very long story - of how we are made, of how God chose us from among all peoples, of how God liberated us from bondage, of how God planted us in the promised land, of how, in these last times, God has given a new twist, given our name meaning in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus."

At the Easter Vigil we "tell our name" to ourselves, to those who will become one with us when they receive the Easter sacraments of initiation, and to the world that needs to hear how God in Christ Jesus has been victorious over sin and death and division.

Because of COVID-19 many won't be able to "hear our name spoken" at tonight's Vigil, but maybe you can find some time to read the story of our salvation [here](#).

*Blessed are you, Lord our God,  
Blessed are you, Ruler of the Universe,  
For you have given us new birth in Christ by water and the Holy Spirit  
And bestowed upon us the forgiveness of sins.  
Keep us faithful to the story of our redemption,  
In the name of Jesus Christ, our risen Lord.*

*Good and gracious God, be with us in these turbulent times. Stir our hearts to care for those who are sick and suffering. In small ways and in sweeping gestures, may our lives give witness to your compassion and holy mercy. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.*

Marty Connell, S.J.  
Rector, Jesuit Community at JST

April 12

Easter Sunday

[Acts 10:34, 37-43; Psalm 118; Colosians 3:1-4 or 1 Corinthians 5:6B-8; John 20:1-9](#)

This Easter is unlike any we have ever experienced. How can we sing “Alleluia” locked down in pandemic fear? Has any Easter ever felt more like Good Friday?

I don't know if you have ever had the feeling I have sometimes had on Easter morning when, still high on the glorious celebration of the Vigil, I listened to the somber, puzzling Gospel assigned for every Easter morning. What a “downer”! Unlike the Vigil reading from Matthew 28 in which, with an earthquake, an angel in glorious white raiment descends from heaven, rolls back the stone from Jesus' empty grave, and enthrones himself upon it to announce to the women that the crucified Jesus is truly risen and that they are to proclaim this stunning Good News to his disciples who will soon see him as he promised. As they joyfully depart on this mission, Jesus himself, radiantly alive, appears to them, calms their fears, and sends them on their way with the stunning news, “He is truly risen!” Now *that* is how Easter *should* look and feel!

But this year.... We could not even gather, in the midst of this apocalyptic plague, to hear this joyful proclamation. PERHAPS we just tried, this year, not to think about our real situation as we heard what sounded like a fairy tale, and tried to project ourselves imaginatively toward what, we hope, will come later, what is mirrored in the familiar stories of appearances, joyful reunions, free forgiveness of desertion and betrayal, and empowering mission. OR perhaps this is the year in which we are challenged to a new spiritual maturity, in which the reading we are offered every Easter morning, John 20:1-10, really gets into our hearts and minds.

In this episode there is no angel in glistening white enthroned triumphantly on the rolled back stone, no proclamation that “He is risen,” no commission to announce this Good News, no glorified Jesus waiting on the road with a promise of a reunion in Galilee. Maybe there is a reason, that could only become fully evident in a context like ours today, that the Church offers us, *every* Easter morning, not a Gospel feast of Pascal jubilation but this mysterious episode in which the three main characters in the Fourth Gospel, Mary Magdalene, the Beloved Disciple, and Simon Peter, prototypes of each of us in various phases of our spiritual lives, converge on the (not-quite) empty tomb of Jesus and leave it, to return to their everyday lives, without having seen even an angel, much less the Risen One. We are told they did not yet understand that He must rise from the dead. Maybe *this* is the paradigm of life as Easter people that we (who heretofore have not fully, experientially understood) need to grasp and finally embrace if Easter is to be not simply a lovely interlude, a kind of brief annual imaginary vacation from grim everyday reality, but the source of a deep, invincible paschal joy that we can live out of, in good times and bad, in peace and pandemic. Let us look at this mysteriously un-glorious episode a bit more deeply.

This pericope is really a meditation on Paschal seeing, not the kind that thrives on flowers, hymns, new clothes, and feasting in felt community and shared faith. But the kind of *seeing* that only Easter eyes can and must mediate every day in the ordinariness and agony of not- or misunderstanding, of massive injustice, broken relationships, gratuitous violence, pandemic and death itself — of all the real life suffering that is only alleviated, made bearable, by sharing it in

the Easter community Jesus opened to us by his paschal mystery.

Let me suggest that, in these three paradigmatic Johannine characters, Mary, Peter, and the Beloved Disciple (all three of whom live in each of us), we are offered a theological presentation of real, adult Paschal faith lived in the real, often traumatized and traumatizing world that we inhabit. Mary, first at the tomb, saw what anyone would have seen —the stone rolled away — and concluded what anyone would have concluded: the corpse, the definitively dead Jesus whom she erroneously thinks is now the only Jesus, has been taken away. Her epiphany will come only in the following scene in which the Risen Jesus calls her by name, converts her from despair to believing, and commissions her as the first official apostle of the Resurrection.

Simon Peter, first to enter the tomb, sees the discarded burial wrappings including the face veil that testified to the real death of a buried person, and draws a blank. It will not be until Easter night that the veil over Peter's eyes is lifted.

The Beloved Disciple, John's paradigm of the true disciple of Jesus, sees physically what the other two saw but, in believing, he responds in a completely different way. The Beloved Disciple sees the open tomb, the absence of the corpse, the discarded burial clothes, the definitively wrapped up because now unneeded face veil that, like that which Moses wore to protect the Israelites from the blazing glory of God upon his face when Moses descended from his theophanies on Mount Sinai, is no longer needed by Jesus who has been definitively glorified, as he had predicted, by his return in death to the One who sent him. The Beloved Disciple did not see, physically, anything different from what his two companions saw; rather he saw differently what anyone could see. We are told that HE SAW AND BELIEVED, John's formula for salvific paschal faith, true insight into God's salvific work in the world. But then, mysteriously, we are told that "they" (all three) did not yet understand the meaning of Jesus' Resurrection, namely, that the glorified Jesus would return to them in a different way from what they had hoped for, even demanded — not as a physically resuscitated corpse, or even some mysterious purely spiritual presence, but as the bodily glorified Son of God who would take up his abode within and among them (and us) forever.

This is no easier for us to believe today, especially in the midst of a pandemic, than it was for these first three, all of whom live and struggle and rejoice within each of us. In this Easter like no other, may we learn what "Alleluia" really means.

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*Jesus, mysteriously and demandingly risen in our midst, open the eyes of our hearts so that we may recognize You, not in our fantasies or projections, our evasions and pipedreams, but in the challenges we face and surmount as we try to make you present through and in our joyous commitment to the world that God so loved as to send You to save us. Teach us to sing "Alleluia" (God be praised) as you did — in the many Gardens of our lives: of creation, betrayal and arrest, burial, resurrection, and apostolic commissioning. Make us mature disciples who see and therefore can proclaim, "He is risen" in every circumstance of our personal and collective lives.*

*Good and gracious God, be with us in these turbulent times. Stir our hearts to care for those who are sick and suffering. In small ways and in sweeping gestures, may our lives give witness*

*to your compassion and holy mercy. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.*

Sandra Schneiders, I.H.M.  
Professor Emerita of New Testament Studies and Christian Spirituality

April 13

## **Thank You**

Dear *A Heart Renewed* community,

As we prayed together this Lenten season, our world changed. During a time of fear and suffering, these daily emails brought us together as a community in prayer. Even though our series is at a close, our connection to one another is not. While we will no longer be reading the same daily reflections, Christ's love continues to bind us together as a beloved community. For the past three weeks, we have concluded each reflection with this prayer: *In small ways and in sweeping gestures, may our lives give witness to your compassion and holy mercy.* May we rest in the comfort of knowing that we belong to one another as a community who reveals God's love through our actions, whether in small ways or sweeping gestures.

Thank you for participating in *A Heart Renewed* and praying with our community through Lent. This project is a labor of love and a reflection of the personal journeys of our contributors: students, alumni, faculty, and staff at the Jesuit School of Theology and Santa Clara University.

We look forward to continuing this journey together. *A Heart Renewed* will return next year, and in December, we will again offer an online Advent retreat: *Waiting in Joyful Hope*. All current subscribers will continue to receive future seasonal reflections. If you would like to invite others to subscribe please refer them to [this link](#).

Caroline Read, M.A. '18  
*A Heart Renewed* editor  
Assistant Director for Marketing and Recruiting