



# Lectio Divina

Praying the Scriptures in  
Lent and Holy Week 2010

Year C



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## Introduction

During Advent we floated in the deep blue of God's embryonic waiting, of God's preparing the world for a scandalous birth. At Christmas we sang with the angels the endless heaven-and-earth-filled glory of God-as-babe, and in the white of Epiphany we followed the light of this Christ-in-the-world come to redeem Mary and Elizabeth, Herod and us. Now, in this bruised Lenten purple, the light of Epiphany has led us to dust and desert.

On Ash Wednesday we enter into pure paradox. The Gospel reading warns against practicing our piety before others; then we come up to have ashes put on our foreheads. What could be more public? But the Church insists we walk through a day outwardly wearing the inward reality of our own mortality not to reward us for our faith, but to remind us of our failing.

Our 40-day journey through the desert of temporality and the dust from which we were formed is a countercultural endeavour. As Paul says in today's first reading, 'We are treated. ... as dying, and see – we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.'

Our self-obsessed culture may see Lent's fasting, prayer, sacrificial giving and self-reflection as a result of low self-esteem. But by participating in this season we boldly embrace our identity and appear every bit as odd as our first-century brothers and sisters in Christ.

Ever since God breathed into us the breath of life, we have been both living beings and the dust to which we return. While this dust seems at first to be only the dry remnant of a life ended, in fact it's the fecundity of a God who creates life from void, who breathes God's self into earth to bring forth us, the creature. The same God who brings forth living water from God's own broken humanity.

Our journey is in the desert. Following Christ, we leave our false oasis of instant gratification, indulgence

of every whim and stuff—lots and lots of stuff. The body of Christ is not an oasis in the desert but a desert in the oasis. In our diabetic coma of self-absorption, we are at times vaguely, silently aware that we have gorged on the promises of the Aussie Dream and are left hungry.

We go to church on Ash Wednesday to be told that we are dust and to dust we shall return; the collagen-injected lips turn to dust, even the pilates-lengthened muscles, the 12 essential vitamins and minerals and the bottled water. We are told that we can live forever with the right combinations of exercise, diet and elective surgery. But we know—in those inevitable moments of disquieting silence—that the oasis is not all it's cracked up to be, and so we enter the desert where we can no longer turn from the inevitable dust, where the seemingly impossible happens: destructive self-centeredness is transformed into cruciform living.

As we pray the Lenten *lectio*, individually or with others, may we discover anew the God who continually calls us to become transformed into this cruciform way of living in order to share more deeply in the Easter Mystery of resurrection life.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David L. Walker". The ink is dark and the handwriting is fluid and personal.

David L. Walker DD  
Bishop of Broken Bay

## lectio divina and The Reflection

Will you be doing The Reflection?

This year a unique project will take place in the Australian Church to celebrate our journey towards Easter.

An initiative of the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference Commission for Mission and Faith Formation, **The Reflection**, is a free, online *lectio divina* exploration of the Scriptures undertaken by Bishops from across Australia.

By simply logging on to the website each week (<http://thereflection.vividas.com>), you will be able to participate in a *lectio divina* for Lent, working with it at your own pace and in your own time over the week.

The Bishops will provide their own insight into what strikes them about each upcoming Gospel and what the reading teaches us. Once the segment has been posted online, it will be archived – and so will remain accessible for you to pause or to revisit.

This booklet will work as a wonderful support tool for this innovative experience. Please use the sections inside the covers to guide you through the *lectio*, and to use as bookmarks during your journey.

**The Reflection** will run over 7 weeks during Lent, commencing the week beginning Monday 15 February.

There will be 6 weekly segments exploring the Gospels, with a special event planned for Holy Week.

We believe **The Reflection** will be a wonderful opportunity for people to gather, either in homes or in parish or family groups, and share the journey towards Easter.

If you would like to know more please contact: Annie Carrett 02 9847 0724 or [news@dbb.org.au](mailto:news@dbb.org.au)



[thereflection.vividas.com](http://thereflection.vividas.com)

## *The Season of Lent: Its evolution and key themes*

“Surely the bridegroom’s attendants would never think of fasting while the bridegroom is still with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they could not think of fasting. But the time will come for the bridegroom to be taken away from them, and then, on that day, they will fast.” (Mk 2: 19-20)

These words of Jesus open up a new perspective on the place of fasting in our Christian tradition. Similar words are found in Mt 9: 14-15 and read on Friday after Ash Wednesday. In this brief introduction to the Church’s gradual development of the Lenten season, our aim is to tap into spiritual perspectives in a way that will shed light on our journey through Lent in the 21st Century.

### *The beginnings: A basic preparation for Easter*

The roots of what we now call Lent go far back to the 1st and 2nd Centuries. This was when Christians first began to observe a complete fast on the Friday and Saturday before Easter. It was a kind of “grieving fast” when no food or drink at all was taken for a period of about forty hours. So each person was able to feel a solidarity with Christ in his suffering, his dying, and in his lying lifeless in the tomb as he awaited his rising to new life. There was a real intensity to this fast. And it was considered as a kind of solemn obligation by which each member of the community expressed their common lot with Christ and their shared faith, all in a most personal way.

### *The development of a Holy Week*

In the 3rd Century, the fast to prepare for the Easter celebration was extended to all of Holy Week. This was not a complete fast from all food and drink like Friday and Saturday, but even so, fasting stamped a special character on the week which the Eastern Church called the “Great Week”. As we will see, there were two days which served as a kind of “door” to Holy or Great Week, especially in the East: the Saturday before Holy Week (“Lazarus Saturday”) and Passion Sunday, with its procession of palms.

### *Fasting during the year*

Early in the Christian era the custom developed of fasting throughout

the year on specific days each week. But whereas various Jewish groups such as the Pharisees fasted on Mondays and Thursdays, Christians chose **Wednesdays**, the mid-way point from Sunday to Sunday, and Fridays with the obvious links to Calvary. **Sundays were never fast days** because the “first day of the week” encapsulated the triumph of Christ over sadness and death, the joy of his glorious resurrection, and the outpouring of his blessed Spirit. In today’s liturgical year all Sundays have this very same character.

## The baptismal dimension of Lent

Next we see how the period of preparation for Easter began to be even further extended. From the 2nd Century on, Easter (*Pascha*) was seen in most parts of the Christian world as the **most significant time** for catechumens to undergo the rites of initiation into the faith of the Church. Specifically, the Easter Vigil was the time for conferring the integrated rites of Baptism and Confirmation, culminating in the newly-baptised’s very first experience of the celebration of Eucharist.

The period of **catechumenate** generally took about three years, during which time any person who wanted to become a Christian underwent an **intensive inculturation in the faith**. This meant learning to pray, and to think and act “like Christ”. It meant an induction into Christian moral sensitivity, of beginning to identify with the concerns of the community, of fitting in. It particularly centered on learning to love the poor, to work to alleviate their suffering and to be in solidarity with them. As Thomas Talley writes, the catechumen learned how to develop **patterns of responsibility within the Church**. This whole period of acclimatisation meant constant attendance at prayer meetings, fasting, and sessions in which the faith of each catechumen was tested.

During all this time, absolutely nothing was revealed to the catechumen about the rituals he or she would undergo at the Easter Vigil. Nothing was told about Baptism, not a word about Eucharist, those key sacraments through which the Christ-life would be imparted. Even characteristic Christian prayers (the *Our Father*, the *Creed*) were kept secret. But all would be revealed, not through educational sessions, but by the Christ himself as he imparted his Spirit-life *per medium* of the rites of initiation. So this preparation was aimed at gradually opening a person’s eyes to the mystery of Christ, to his presence, to his healing and reconciling love, and the extraordinary power of his Word.

Working up to this point of profound revelation and transformation called for a special time of preparation. In 4th Century Rome, for example, there was a special three-week period of preparation. During this time there were daily services of prayer and instruction for catechumens, and these were gradually open to everyone. This proved a great way to bring both spiritual and moral education to the whole community, especially in those times when there was a flood of converts. In St Augustine's own community at Hippo in North Africa, the catechumens lived with their bishop all through this special time. He shared their fasting, prayer and penance and imparted to them an extraordinary feeling for the Church and the living action of Christ within the ecclesial assembly.

## The forty days of Lent

As time went on, other important aspects of the meaning of Lent began to open up. By the year 325 when the first great ecumenical Council was convened at Nicaea, we find reference to the 40 days of Lent, as something taken for granted (*cf Canon 5*). What were the origins of this 40 day period? In the late 200's, in the Egyptian desert, a monastic devotion sprang up in which monks undertook forty days of fasting, penance and prayer. It was not specifically a preparation for Easter but a time spent **in union with Christ in his own forty days spent in the wilderness** after his baptism in the Jordan. The Gospels reveal that the same Spirit who came down upon Jesus in his baptism then immediately "drove him out into the wilderness and he remained there for forty days, and was tempted by Satan" (*Mk 1: 12-13; see also Mt 4: 2 and Lk 4: 1-2*).

So this spiritual movement of tapping into Jesus' own life, mission, and self-abandonment spread outside the monastic world and became a major aspect of preparing for Easter for everyone. In the beginning there was no exactness in the counting of the forty days. As we have seen, Sundays in Lent were never counted as fast days, because of the unique character of Sunday. In many places, the "Forty Days" simply began on the 1st Sunday and continued on through the 5th Sunday until it reached the special time of Holy Week, when it deepened and became more intense. Lent in the Eastern Churches begins on the Monday before the 1st Sunday.

## Ash Wednesday

It was not until the 500's, in the Gallic Church of northern Europe, that Ash Wednesday and the following three days before the 1st Sunday of

Lent were added. This made up the forty days and also focused attention on the *modus operandi* of Lent: **fasting, prayer, charity and identification with the poor**, as today's lectionary readings reflect in the days following Ash Wednesday. What began as the rituals of reconciling penitents before Easter, and sprinkling them with ashes, was first extended to the clergy and then to everyone. Gradually the custom of Ash Wednesday spread throughout the Church in Northern Europe and finally to Rome. Now it has become the custom to burn palms saved from the previous Palm Sunday and to use these ashes for the Ash Wednesday rite.

## Reflection 1: On Being with Jesus' in his Forty Days in the Wilderness

As we have seen, this became a major Lenten theme from the 3rd Century on. We need to see how it can inspire our own personal Lenten journey by reflecting on the Gospel narrative.

There are two sides to the mystery of Jesus' person and mission. The first is revealed when we tap into Jesus' baptism in the Jordan. Thirty years old, he has just recently left Nazareth. In all of those years he had never preached, healed or gathered a following. Suddenly, as John is baptising him, there is a **theophany**, a manifestation of God, and, in an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Jesus is himself manifested as Messiah, God's chosen Son and Servant. And Jesus accepts. And the journey begins. Not only a physical journey around Galilee and eventually to Jerusalem and death, but a deeply interior journey which Jesus willingly undergoes.

This is where the other side of the mystery opens up. In Mark's graphic description (*Mk 1: 12*), the same Spirit who anointed Jesus with God's power and presence now **drives** Jesus into the wilderness. Scripture, always full of hidden meanings, tells us that he was there, being tempted, for **forty days**. "Forty" is a kind of scriptural code-word and it always indicates **complete or full-span**. So Jesus, we are meant to see, is completely full-on in terms of his human side, his human nature. And if this is so, then, just like all humans, he has to experience in the workings of his heart and mind an **adversary**. Here is "one who has been tempted in every way that we are, though he is without sin" (*Heb 4: 15*). Both Matthew and Luke spell this out vividly in their Gospels, calling this adversary "the devil" and Satan, Hebrew for adversary.

In addition external spiritual struggles with evil, with 'the powers of this world' and even at times with good-willed people, we must each face our

‘personal demons’ of temptations, addictions, ego. The **Adversary** urges Jesus to take control of his own life. Various possibilities open up for exploiting his situation for his own personal gain, prestige and power. But Jesus answers these temptations with every fibre of his being: “Be gone, Satan! You must worship the Lord your God and serve him alone!” (*Luke 4: 8*). He has let go of his own Ego and let his Father’s will take over completely in him.

This is a complete reversal of what happened in the Genesis story of the temptation and fall of Man and Woman. Both ate of the fruit of the **Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil**, and so set themselves up as sole judges of what was good or bad, something that belongs to God alone. This was the birth of the wayward human Ego but it was not going to happen in Jesus’ case! St Paul spells this out:

“(Jesus), being in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. But he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming as human beings are, and being in every way like a human being, he was humbler yet, even to accepting death on a cross” (*Philippians 2: 6-8*).

So here is an important rationale for our spiritual journey of Lent: It is a recognising of the destructive power of my own Ego and the quest to be increasingly self-forgetful, the letting go of self, in the image of Christ Jesus, Son, Servant, and my own Messiah.

## Reflection 2: Solidarity with Jesus in his Dying and Rising

We mentioned earlier how the Church moved from having just a short fast of two days before Easter to a full week of preparation which became Holy Week. As the greatest week in the whole year people needed to be focused in a special way. In 4th Century Jerusalem, two days stood out as symbolic doors to Holy Week – Lazarus Saturday and Passion Sunday (which became Palm Sunday). We will reflect on the first of these two days.

**Lazarus Saturday** commemorated Jesus’ journey to Bethany just before his arrest. In the story, death and resurrection are the focus. Lazarus Saturday meant this: You are about to enter the mystery of Jesus’ passion, his death, his lying dead in his tomb and then his rising to new life. But how can you be one with Christ in this mystery of life and death if you do not have a clear perspective on your own mortality and death? What does your mortality

mean to you? Are you prepared to face it? With all its horror, can you see beyond it? And does Jesus' own willingness to stare Death in the face strike a chord with you? **Is his death for you, personally, a saving death?**

Our Western Church tradition does not have the custom of Lazarus Saturday in the same way as the Eastern Churches. Yet our Lectionary presents the Gospel of the Raising of Lazarus on the 5th Sunday, Year A, and this can be used on Monday, 5th Week, in Years B and C. And the question about confronting our own death underpins our scriptural reflection as we reach the culmination of Lent and prepare to enter the mystery of Holy Week.

## A Prayer for our Lenten Journey

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, the all-holy one, who gives us life and all things. As we go about our lives, the press of our duties and activities often leads us to forget your presence and your love. We fall into sin and fail to live out the responsibilities that you have entrusted to those who were baptised into your Son.

In this holy season, help us to turn our minds and hearts back to you. Lead us into sincere repentance and renew our lives with your grace. Help us to remember that we are sinners, but even more, help us to remember your loving mercy.

As we live through this Lenten journey, may the crosses of ashes that mark our foreheads be a reminder to us and to those we meet that we belong to your Son. May our worship and prayer and penitence be sustained throughout these 40 days of Lent. Bring us refreshed and renewed to the celebration of Christ's resurrection at Easter.

We ask this through your Son, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen.

## *lectio divina*

**“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God...and the Word was made flesh” (Jn 1:1,14)**

The Word of God is Jesus. He is the human face of God. It is Jesus who gives meaning to the whole of God’s revelation, and brings to a climax the continuing testimonies of God’s love for us. Any understanding of the expression “Word of God” must be interpreted in the light of Jesus, the Word. The expression “the Word” came to signify the message that Jesus preached, his whole approach to humankind (Lk 8:12), and also the fledgling Christian movement as it began to spread under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 12:24, 6:7)

The Church also acknowledges as the “Word of God” the inspired writings recognised by the early Christian community. These inspired writings are God’s gift to the Church, and in them God’s overwhelming love shines through. They embody in human word what is embodied in the divine Word who became flesh; and through this inspired human word of the Scriptures we encounter personally the divine Word himself.

Since the beginning of the Christian movement, its members have read the Scriptures as God’s Word speaking to them. They found in them who their God is, the loving providence of their God, their own identity as God’s people, and the responsibilities that go with God’s choice of them to share the divine love with others. As Mary reflected on the unfolding mystery of her divine Son, Christians have continued to reflect on that same mystery which comes to us in the Scriptures. (Luke 2:51).

The reflective reading of the Scriptures leads us to know, understand and appropriate the fundamental Christian mysteries. It helps us to appreciate what we need to do to respond to God’s approach in them, and holds up to us a mirror of how we are responding and what we might need to do to improve and deepen our response. It humbles us and makes us realise that we need God to walk with us on this journey: we cannot walk it alone. It brings us to prayer, in which we implore the divine help. It leads, too, to the transformation of our life of response to God, and enables us, through our lives as disciples of Jesus, to share the divine love we have known with those around us.

This meditative, prayerful reading of the Scriptures has been referred to as *lectio divina*. It can take many forms, but it is necessary to keep in mind the essential aspects of it, lest we read into the Scriptures what we want to hear

rather than hear from them what God wants to tell us. St Augustine's words are relevant: the one who serves you best is not the one who listens for what he wants to hear, but the one who shapes his life according to what he hears. To help us focus on the essential, I will adopt in this book the practice as described by Guigo II, the fifth abbot of the Carthusian order, in his book "The Ladder of Monks (A Letter on the Contemplative Life) and Twelve Meditations."

*Lectio divina* then, is the meditative reading of a text of God's Word, the Scriptures, alone or with others, which leads to prayer, transformation of life, and, through that transformed life, the sharing with others of the mystery of God entrusted to us. This practice of prayer involves the whole person. Through our senses we read, we meditate using our reason and imagination, and we pray and transform our life with our will. It is not just an interior practice but one that engages with the issues of our Christian life and prompts us to work with them. At different times, the emphasis may be on different aspects of the prayer. But it would be unwise to omit any of them altogether.

In the light of what has been said, we can look at the presuppositions that underpin this form of Scriptural prayer. Firstly it embraces the Scriptures as God's Word speaking to us. It emphasises that this practice is a personal encounter with the eternal Word, who is Jesus. It sees, as the source and goal of this prayer, the life of Christian discipleship.

The image of the arch is sometimes used to speak of prayer. Prayer is designated as the keystone of the arch, the stone at the top which takes the strain, and stops the sides of the arch from falling in. However, the keystone will not stay up there by itself: it needs the sides of the arch. The sides of the arch are working with our life; to root out the vices and to practice the virtues. The practice of *lectio* is not a discrete or isolated event, totally sufficient in itself: it takes place within the living of Christian discipleship. It arises out of the conscious determined effort to live as disciples of Jesus and has as its goal to strengthen that determination and effort. Transformation of life is an essential element of praying the Scriptures.

How we read the Scriptures will depend on how we understand them. If we recognise them as coming from the God who loves us, we could liken reading them to the beloved reading the letters from her lover. It is the one who loves God deeply who is the most likely to appreciate the deepest dimension of the Scriptures. The Scriptures are not just a book, but a library, with many authors. Any one author may not have known the writings of any other. However, there is a unity here. This is the story of God's love for us, and this is so because the unifying author of all of the Scriptures is the Spirit of God.

This means that in reading the Scriptures we do need to appreciate that there are two senses: that of the historical author and that of the Spirit. The historical critical method helps us to appreciate the historical meaning, but we need another methodology to appreciate the “Spiritual” sense: the message that transcends the historical sense, and gives the Scriptures their unique character. Unless we recognise this divine spiritual sense, the Scriptures can be seen as a book of the past, just an historical work, to be explained simply in human terms. *Lectio divina* is always a theological reading of the text of Scripture.

The Scriptures, through the Spirit, emerged from the early Christian community. It was the Church that brought together these disparate books into one canon to make the Scriptures. The life of the early Church was the matrix into which the Scriptures were born. The Scriptures need to be understood and interpreted within the life of the Church. The covenant that God offers in the Scriptures is not with the individual, but with the people. The Church is the community of believers, the community of those who respond to the love of God. It is those that have faith, and are living a loving response to God’s love, who can be most open to the divine message of the Scriptures. Just as the Church was the matrix in which the Scriptures were born, so it needs to be the matrix within which we interpret them. The Scriptures need to be read within the faith community.

*Lectio divina* arises out of a faith relationship with Jesus and reaches its fulfilment in the transformation of that faith relationship. The Scriptures are more open to those active disciples who love God and who are endeavouring to transform their life in conformity with their faith. It is the heart filled with this loving faith that will be most open to the spiritual message of the Scriptures. Active effort to live a life of Christian virtue is an important preparation for reading the Scriptures.

## Lectio Divina Alone

It is our life as disciples of Jesus that brings us to *lectio*: the desire to deepen our intimacy with Jesus in our common journey to the Father. As we begin our *lectio*, we set the scene with a prayer. It can be any prayer. Guigo’s prayer was:

“Lord Jesus, you who are the Son of the Living God, teach me to listen to what you tell me in the holy Scriptures, and to discover your face there”

## Reading

We begin by focusing all our attention on the text: the whole text, not just any one word or phrase. We should try to know the text well. The reading

can be done in a variety of ways: repeated, aloud, with a pencil in hand if it helps. Look at the characters, their actions and words; note the context, related texts and any quotes that might occur. Here, we are focusing on the text in itself, what the author is presenting. We are gathering food for thought. The reading is just the beginning of a process: it is meant to lead to meditation and prayer. It is their necessary presupposition.

## **Meditation**

Meditation brings to bear our reason on the text. We look at the text in terms of ourselves. It is here that we come to understand, appreciate and appropriate the divine mysteries that we read about in the Sacred Scriptures. In Meditation, the divine word and our personal faith life come together. There is an interaction, and integration, of the Word and the person. We not only learn about God but also about ourselves. Here we can learn about the God who loves us and calls us to love in return. Here we can look at our own life in terms of the expectations of our divine lover, and see what we need to do to transform our life.

We can ask four questions to help us in our meditation:

What does the text tell me?

- about the God who speaks to me?
- about how I should respond to that God
- about my faith life?
- about what I need to do to transform my faith life?

The outcome of our meditation is what we need to do to transform our life according to the expectations of God. We are humbled in realising that we cannot do it without the help of God. Thus, the meditation flows naturally into prayer. Meditation moves the will to prayer and strengthens its resolve to transform the life of discipleship.

## **Prayer**

The prayer arises from our reflection on the text. It is focused particularly on what we need to do to transform our life. We humbly ask God to give us the grace to do what needs to be done. This prayer is the climax of the process that began with the reading. It is this reading, meditating and prayer that are the normal way that God draws us

to contemplation. The author of the Cloud of Unknowing, writing about the way to contemplation, looks to the teaching of Guigo;

“So I want you to understand clearly that for beginners and those a little advanced in contemplation, reading or hearing the word of God must precede pondering it and with out time given to serious reflection there will be no genuine prayer”.

## Contemplation

Since the word “contemplation” is used in a variety of ways, it is necessary to define it when we use it. We are following Guigo, for whom “contemplation” refers to a gift of God that is beyond what we can do by ourselves. We cannot alone achieve this contemplation; therefore we should not expect it to happen, as if it were a natural outgrowth of our own spiritual progress. It is a gift of God given when, where, and to whom God chooses to give it. If God bestows this gift, it will break into our prayer: God rushes to us as the father of the prodigal rushed to meet his son. We should not stop or dwell here, unless God intervenes.

## Action

*Lectio* leads to transformation of life. Guigo puts it well, “What use is it to anyone if he sees in his meditation what is to be done, unless the help of prayer and the grace of God enable him to achieve it?” Our *lectio* needs to carry over into our life and affect it in the areas that have arisen in meditation. To achieve this it can be helpful to select from the text a word, phrase or sentence that can be repeated throughout the day. It reminds us of the experience of our prayer and helps us especially when the particular issue that arose is present. This simple practice extends our prayer throughout the whole day. It fulfil the advice given by John Cassian “ Daily and hourly till the soil of the heart with the Gospel plough.”

## Lectio Divina Together

*Lectio* is especially useful when it is shared with others. The basic pattern is the same, but it is enriched by the sharing of the members of the group. It is still a uniquely personal thing, but there is an appropriate sharing of the personal experience. The following suggests a way of sharing *lectio*, but it should be applied according to the desires of the group. Groups will find their own unique way of doing *lectio* together. The following suggestions may be of assistance. If the members of the group have done a *lectio* on the text before the group meeting, the following suggestion could be followed. If not, there would need to be some times of silence for each member to process the particular stages.

1. The opening prayer could be said by all
2. In the reading, it would be helpful for each member to comment on what they have seen in the text. It often happens that an individual see something that others have missed. It can help to get a better appreciation of the text.
3. In the meditation, it would be helpful to respond to the four questions proposed in this section. The comments of each should be seen as a personal sharing of faith, not a contribution to a discussion. A prayerful atmosphere needs to be maintained. Care needs to be taken that members of the prayer group are not pressured to share beyond what they wish to.
4. The prayer of each person is naturally very personal, but even that can be shared if the members of the group choose to do it. It can move the group to a deeper bond and create a context in which the group can more easily engage in lectio.
5. In the action stage, the members of the group could share the word, phrase or sentence they have chosen. It would not be necessary to explain why they have chosen it.
6. A concluding prayer could be shared by all.

***A necessary foundation to prayer is meditating and thinking on the great truths which God has revealed. We should be familiar with all the mysteries of Jesus Christ and the truths of his gospel. Our souls should be coloured by them and penetrated by them as wool is by dye. These truths should become so familiar to us that we acquire the habit of forming no judgement except in their light, that they may be our only guide in what we do, as the rays of the sun are our only light in what we see. It is when these truths are inwardly incorporated in us that our praying begins to be real and fruitful.” (Fenelon)***

*“What we do not know we learn in the Bible and what we have learned we keep in meditation and what we have meditated will inspire all our actions.” (Isidore of Seville).*

***There are two ways in which we can find answers to our questions and guidance when we are alone with God in such a place as this. First, we can consider again His mysteries, rest in them,***

*and humbly bathe our souls in their light. Secondly, in the light of the mysteries of God and His demands and love, we can overhaul our own religious and moral practices in order to discover our slack and disproportionate ways of life....(Evelyn Underhill).*

*“Seek by reading, and you find meditating; cry in prayer, and the door will be opened in contemplation” (John of the Cross).*



## The Season of Lent Reflection

In our busy world, Lent provides us with an opportunity to reflect upon our patterns, to pray more deeply, experience sorrow for what we've done and failed to do, and to be generous to those in need.

Lent is a time to recommit ourselves to God. We begin by taking an honest look at ourselves. Then we listen to Scripture and pray regularly in the hope of discovering more deeply who God is and what God requires of us. Finally, we commit ourselves anew to doing what God asks.

Our Lenten *lectio* offers a unique way of entering into this wonderful season, and prepares us through these forty days to claim our baptismal inheritance, celebrating it anew at Easter.



Ash  
Wednesday

## Marked by Ashes

Ruler of the Night, Guarantor of the day ...

This day – a gift from you.

This day – like none other you have ever given, or we have ever received.

This Wednesday dazzles us with gift and newness and possibility.

This Wednesday burdens us with the tasks of the day, for we are already halfway home halfway back to committees and memos.

This day has become a virtual sacrament of Catholic identity, as people throng churches to “get ashes,” which, paradoxically, is just what the Gospel counsels against—external signs of devotion.

Still, Karl Rahner has captured eloquently the meaning of this sign: “When on Ash Wednesday we hear the words, ‘Remember, you are dust,’ we are also told that we are brothers and sisters of the incarnate Lord. In these words we are told everything that we are: nothingness that is filled with eternity; death that tees with life; futility that redeems; dust that is God’s life forever” (*The Eternal Year*, p. 62).

## Joel 2: 12-17

Yet even now, says the LORD, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing. Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD, your God?

Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather the people. Sanctify the congregation; assemble the aged; gather the children, even infants at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her canopy. Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep. Let them say, “Spare your people, O LORD, and do not make your heritage a mockery, a byword among the nations. Why should it be said among the peoples, ‘Where is their God?’”

The Lord became jealous for his land, and had pity on his people.

## 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2

We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says, "At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you." See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!

## Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

"Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

"So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward.

But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

"And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

"And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.



## 1st Sunday of Lent

In this week's Gospel Luke places Jesus in the desert where he is to fast for forty days. Jesus has appeared from the crowd and has been baptised by a reluctant John the Baptist. John is reluctant because he recognises Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, who will baptise with the Holy Spirit. As Jesus is baptised, as prophesied by Isaiah, the clouds opened. God in a loud voice proclaimed Jesus to be His Son and the Holy Spirit descended from the heavens in the form of a dove to hover over Jesus.

Elijah fasted for forty days to ready himself to prophesy God's word. Moses fasted on the mountain for forty days to ready himself to proclaim God's Law. The Jewish people wandered in the desert for forty years, changing from slaves to people of free will, to ready themselves to occupy the land promised by God. Filled with the Spirit Jesus fasted for forty days to prepare for his mission to spread the Good News that the Kingdom of God is at hand.

At the end of his time of fasting, weakened by lack of food and water, Jesus faced the temptations of the Evil One. Jesus was tempted to take the easy path rather than the path God had chosen for him, a path that would lead to his being rejected by all, condemned, beaten and crucified. Jesus armed with the Scriptures, the love of the Father and the strength of the Spirit rejected Satan and the easy road. Jesus strode out of the desert unbeaten and started the journey to the Cross, his destiny from the beginning of time.

We too face temptations during our lives to take the easy path, to stay silent when we should empower the voiceless, to see that we are fed when we should enable all to feed at the Table of the Lord, to be self-centred rather than God-centred. At those times we can take comfort that Our Lord and Saviour was tempted.

Armed with the Scriptures, the love of the God and the strength of the Spirit, may we too stay resolute and remain on the path God has set for each of us. In this season of Lent we pray that we may follow Christ to the Cross, climb onto the Cross with our Lord and die to ourselves so that we may live for others. Our Lord and God suffered and died for us. How can we do any less?

## Deuteronomy 26:4-10

Moses spoke to the people saying: "When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the LORD your God, you shall make this response before the LORD your God: "A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. When the

Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, we cried to the LORD, the God of our ancestors; the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O LORD, have given me.” You shall set it down before the LORD your God and bow down before the LORD your God.

## Romans 10:8-13

What does Scripture say? “The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. The scripture says, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame.” For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

## Luke 4:1-13

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’” Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, “To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’” Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’” Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.



2nd Sunday of Lent

Jesus and his disciples have been at Caesarea Philippi, the source of the River Jordan, the site of a Roman slaughter of the Jews in battle and of a temple to the pagan god Pan, the god of nature. In this site of religious, political and natural power, in answer to the question put by Jesus to his disciples of who they say Jesus is, Peter has confessed that Jesus is the Son of the living God. In the next breath when Jesus tells his disciples that it is his destiny to be put to death by the authorities, Peter rebukes Jesus. He is happy for Jesus to be the Messiah but on his terms not God's.

Travelling along the road to Jerusalem and to his death, Jesus takes his inner circle, Peter, James and John up a mountain where he is transfigured and is joined by Elijah and Moses. Naturally enough Peter and the others are filled with terror at this other worldly experience. Peter tries to make the best of it by suggesting they should all stay on the mountain and live happily ever after. No sooner has he spoken than the clouds open and God in a loud voice confirms what Peter had earlier professed that Jesus is the Christ, His Son. God tells Peter and the others to listen to Jesus. He tells them to stop chattering on with their earthly expectations and ramblings and to allow Jesus to get on with the mission God has destined for him.

All of this would have happened in seconds. No sooner did it all occur than it disappeared. Jesus and his disciples were alone. The disciples followed Jesus down the mountain where the other disciples were arguing about who of them was the greatest. Not who could serve Jesus the best. Who of them, the lowly students, were great in the face of their Rabbi.

One wonders if Jesus despaired of his disciples from time to time. He performed extraordinary miracles. He spoke with great authority. He taught them how to pray and how to live. Yet they didn't seem to get it. They wanted an earthly messiah who would conquer the Romans and restore the power and might of Judea. They wanted to serve in the imperial court of Jesus, each seeing themselves as better than the others. How human is that.

Jesus was transformed so that his inner circle would know that what he said they should accept. Peter and the others wanted to stay on the mountaintop and bathe in the glory of Jesus, Elijah and Moses. Jesus knew that their mission was at the foot of the mountain where the people of God lived. They wanted Jesus to be the Messiah they expected. Jesus was not that messiah. Jesus came to bring into the world the Kingdom of God, not of man. As Jesus told Pilate, his kingdom is not of this world.

In our lives we may have expectations of what God should do for us and of what role we should play in God's master plan. We may have delusions of grandeur, thinking of ourselves as better than others, more worthy of God's love and attention. Today's Gospel helps us to wake up to the reality of what God seeks of us.

We are called to serve not to be served. We are called to follow where Jesus leads us, down from the mountain of our self importance into the plains of service to others. Jesus taught that it is in service to others that we are fulfilled, in being the least that we are the most.

During this Lenten Season may we come down from our mountains, roll up our sleeves and get down and dirty amongst the people of God. May we acknowledge that in the face of God we are as nothing and that it is in service of others that we find our true calling.

Jesus came to serve us. How can we not serve Jesus, through service to others?

## Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18

The LORD brought Abram outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness. Then he said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess." But he said, "O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." He brought him all these and cut them in two, laying each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away. As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him. When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates."

## Philippians 3:17-4:1

Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with

tears. Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

## Luke 13:31-35

At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” He said to them, “Go and tell that fox for me, ‘Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.’”

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

## Luke 9:28-36

Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah” – not knowing what he said.

While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.



## 3rd Sunday of Lent

Life appears to pattern the ebb and flow of the tides. There are the letdowns and the hopes, the failures and successes, the hardships and the victories, and the sorrows and the joys. In Lent this ebb and flow pattern of life becomes more acute. We anticipate a Resurrection but live now in the Passion. This week's Readings, in the third Sunday of Lent, recall to mind the ebb and flow of our lives in faith.

Our Readings for this third Sunday in the Lenten Season reflect the misery and suffering of time, but also hold the promise of care by the ever watchful gaze of God. We are reminded in the first reading that God is, 'I AM WHO I AM,' who remains steadfast in faith and mercy. It is a God who is and who knows and who calls us into being. Moses 'turned aside to see' the great wonder of God, for in God's holy presence we too are to hear, see and know the steadfastness of God's faith and mercy.

In the second Reading the idea of knowing and seeing is also taken up with the reminder to 'watch out that you do not fall.' In Lent we are both acutely aware of the falls but also the possibilities.

This idea of watching is further revealed to us in the Gospel passage which calls us to repent and to look for the fruit of life. In Lent we strive to become who we are meant to be.

This week's Readings call to mind our ability or inability to hear, see and know. No more are we to hear but do not hear, to see but do not see, for God does hear the cry of the Israelites as we read in the first Reading and has observed their misery. We are left to do the very same as Luke's Gospel passage reminds us: Repent and seek to bear fruit that will last.

It is a God who hears, sees and knows us. A God who calls us and sends us out. Just as in the Exodus reading we hear how Moses was summoned to save the people. Just as Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians reminds us to stand firm. Just as the call is echoed in the Gospel which speaks of the fig tree and its failure to ripen. The final message is clear. We are to work towards fruitfulness. God has called, we respond, but that response must be ongoing. We have heard God, seen God's wonders. We are called out of the ebb of our sins into the flow of life.

As we buoy in the ebb of Lent we are called to move towards the abundant flow of life and Resurrection. We are invited once again to hear and see God and know the God who is, is the God who saves.

## Exodus 3:1-8, 13-15

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations.

## 1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness.

Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did. And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come. So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall.

## Luke 13:1-9

At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. He asked them, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.”

Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, ‘See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?’ He replied, ‘Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’”



## 4th Sunday of Lent

On this fourth Sunday in the Season of Lent, as we listen to the Readings, we glimpse new life, new hope and new beginnings. The Readings delicately hold the promise of God's favour, reminding us that what has been done and has come to pass is only temporary. Lent leads us to a grander picture and a larger scheme. It sweeps us away from what stagnates and carries us forward. The ebb recedes and the flow of life settles us nearer to the shoreline. But it all takes faith on our part.

In the first Reading taken from Joshua, the Israelites are renewed, as they become acquainted with their surroundings in Canaan. In the second Reading from the second letter to the Corinthians, Paul tells of Christ heralding in a new creation and in Luke's Gospel we read in the parable how the son returns home.

The three Readings are a hope-filled promise that things will get better and that we will come into the fullness of life and being. In the Book of Joshua we hear about the Israelites coming to their own, settling on land that will offer them food, prosperity and home. This journey to new identity is developed in the second Reading.

In 2 Corinthians, we read that 'everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!' God in Christ has called us to reconciliation and to new possibilities.

In the last of the Readings, taken from Luke, we have the famous parable of the two sons and the father. After what appeared to be a choice of disaster, we glimpse the hope of reconciliation. The two sons and the father are invited to experience the joys of festivity and unity.

From the first Reading where the Israelites travelled wide and far, to settle in a new land, to Paul's invitation to a new world and beginning a new life, the theme of coming home is re-discovered most profoundly in Luke's parable. Lent is a journey back to God and to our true identity and home. That journey to new life and celebration however is ultimately determined by each person's response to God's love.

Lent is about transformation but that only comes about when we initiate movement. We are urged to get up and move ahead. There is a new possibility if we are willing to follow God's call. This week in the Lenten Season we are invited out of the ebb of our sins into the flow of new life. Will we follow as the elder son is invited to do, or will we wallow in our self pity?

## Joshua 5:9-12

The Lord said to Joshua, “Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt.” And so that place is called Gilgal to this day. While the Israelites were camped in Gilgal they kept the passover in the evening on the fourteenth day of the month in the plains of Jericho. On the day after the passover, on that very day, they ate the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. The manna ceased on the day they ate the produce of the land, and the Israelites no longer had manna; they ate the crops of the land of Canaan that year.

## 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

## Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.” So he told them this parable: “There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.’ So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.”’ So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and

put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe – the best one – and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate. "Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'"



## 5th Sunday of Lent

Isaiah describes a powerful God who will let nothing come between himself and his people. Yahweh speaks “I am about to do a new thing.” We are asked to let go of the old ways and imagining the impossible; wild beasts honouring God, water in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The Lord is making a path, creating a safe passage so that his Chosen people may find water, the water of Life. In Lent we are called to see a new way through a dry and familiar landscape, to find our God, and to remember that we never dry off from the waters of our Baptism.

St Paul describes how it feels to find God, to have your life totally transformed by faith in Jesus Christ. Surely there can be nothing more important than knowing Christ. Everything else is ‘rubbish’.

The last phrase in this passage powerfully describes Paul’s conversion to Christ. Brendan Byrne sj suggests that the word ‘strives’ may be translated as ‘capture’. Paul wants to ‘capture’ the prize as Christ has ‘captured’ him. Paul’s life is totally transformed and so has to let go of all that went before and embrace a new life in the Risen Christ. Paul experiences a total transformation of heart: metanoia.

In John’s Gospel we have a first hand encounter with the saving power of Christ.

The lesson begins and the tension unfolds as the woman, caught in adultery, is brought before Jesus and the crowd who had gathered to hear Jesus teach. What transpires is an extraordinary lesson for all – a transformation of hearts. The scribes and Pharisees are ready to stone the woman to death, according to the Law, and in the process, test Jesus’ authority to teach. ‘... so that they might have some charge to bring against him.’

All eyes are on Jesus. They wait to hear Jesus’ decision. But he says nothing. He draws the attention away from the woman as he bends down and begins to write ‘on the ground’. The barrage of questions continues. We can only imagine the woman’s fear and anxiety as she contemplates her own death by stoning.

Jesus stands and confronts the scribes, Pharisees and the crowd with the disturbing truth: “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” The noise stops, Jesus bends down and begins writing in the sand again. The only sound is the movement of feet as one by one the crowd dissipates. Jesus was tested and won. Jesus has saved her life.

He then restored her whole life: her sins are forgiven and her shame lifted. The woman who was caught in sin is free. She, like Paul, has been ‘captured’ by Christ. She’s invited to ‘go your way’, to live a rich full life and ‘from now on do not sin again’.

The lesson, begun early that morning is complete. This is the lesson for us on these final days of our Lenten journey – we have been captured by Christ, set free, invited to a rich and full life with the admonition, ‘from now on do not sin again.’

## Isaiah 43:16-21

Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick: Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The wild animals will honour me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise.

## Philippians 3: 8-14

I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

## John 8:1-11

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let anyone among

you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She said, “No one, sir.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.”



## Passion Sunday

The reading from the prophet Isaiah show us what we may face as we live the life of a disciple, one who hears the Word and does God's will. This description comes to fruition in the way Jesus faces his death, confident in Abba's promise to be with him and to raise him up. He does not, 'turn backward', he is whipped and beaten. He does not 'hide my face from insult and spitting' but faces all insults without retaliation. This is the action of God's servant.

In St Paul's letter to the Philippians we hear that we are called to glorify 'Jesus Christ as Lord', to 'bend our knees' at the very name of Jesus because he became fully human in order to suffer and die for our human sinfulness. Jesus was the most humble of all because he did not 'cling' to his divinity to avoid experiencing the pain of humanity. Jesus became the 'slave' to God's will. God raised him to the most high.

St Paul prefaces these words by saying, 'In your mind you must be the same as Jesus Christ', and thus he goes on to describe what that means. A humble and obedient slave to God's will.

In Luke's Passion narrative we are reminded of the words of Isaiah coming to fulfilment. We hear the words of St Paul as Jesus accepts his death as the obedient and humble servant of God.

- Jesus is totally innocent. He is arrested, tried and convicted and put to death without committing any crime.
- Jesus, in the midst of suffering, can say, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."
- The conversation between Jesus and the two criminals is extraordinary because one of the criminals acknowledges his own guilt and proclaims that Jesus is innocent, 'this man has done nothing wrong.'
- The criminal asks, 'Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom.' This is the prayer beating in all our hearts. It is so reassuring. What meaning does this request hold for you?
- Jesus' response to the criminal is glorious, '... today ...' that word which echoes through out Luke's Gospel and reminds us that the Kingdom is happening now. Today. What hope do you find in Jesus' response?
- '... you will be with me in paradise.' The dying sinner is forgiven and will be welcomed into the Kingdom forever.

- The centurion, the Roman bystander, has the last words, ‘Certainly this man was innocent.’

What do I say when I see what has happened?

## Isaiah 50:4-7

The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens— wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward. I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. The Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame.

## Philippians 2:6-11

Though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

## Luke 23:1-49

Then the assembly rose as a body and brought Jesus before Pilate. They began to accuse him, saying, “We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king.” Then Pilate asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” He answered, “You say so.” Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, “I find no basis for an accusation against this man.” But they were insistent and said, “He stirs up the people by teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to this place.” When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. And when he learned that he was under Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him off to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had been wanting to see him for a long time, because he had heard about him and was hoping to see him perform some sign. He questioned him at some length, but Jesus gave him no answer. The

chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. Even Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him; then he put an elegant robe on him, and sent him back to Pilate. That same day Herod and Pilate became friends with each other; before this they had been enemies.

Pilate then called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people, and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and here I have examined him in your presence and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us. Indeed, he has done nothing to deserve death. I will therefore have him flogged and release him." Then they all shouted out together, "Away with this fellow! Release Barabbas for us!" (This was a man who had been put in prison for an insurrection that had taken place in the city, and for murder.) Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again; but they kept shouting, "Crucify, crucify him!" A third time he said to them, "Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no ground for the sentence of death; I will therefore have him flogged and then release him." But they kept urgently demanding with loud shouts that he should be crucified; and their voices prevailed. So Pilate gave his verdict that their demand should be granted. He released the man they asked for, the one who had been put in prison for insurrection and murder, and he handed Jesus over as they wished.

As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus. A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. But Jesus turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For the days are surely coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.' Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us'; and to the hills, 'Cover us.' For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews." One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him

and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last. When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, "Certainly this man was innocent." And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts. But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.



## Holy Week

All week, we remember how he loved us. Whatever we do, no matter how busy or “distracted” we might be, we can let the power of this week be in the background of our daily reflections.

Jesus entered into our life - with its profound joys and its punishing evils - that we might never experience those struggles alone.

So, no matter what we experience this week, we can let it become a “holy” week, letting it all be touched by the graces of this week.

From the humble, yet triumphant, entry into Jerusalem, to our standing together at the foot of his cross, this can be a week which helps us bring all of the elements of our lives, all our experiences of sin and death, into the font of his redeeming, liberating death and resurrection.

We enter into a week made “holy” forever by the self surrendering love of Jesus - for us all.

## Monday **Stay Awake**

*Is 42:1-7; Jn 12:1-11*

Sometimes we just don’t understand the significance of what is going on all around us. Events move too quickly to be sorted out or too slowly to be noticed. It was like that for the disciples too. Although Jesus had tried to prepare them for his crucifixion, they were stunned that Passover night when he was arrested. They ran like the wind.

## Tuesday **Marvel At Redemption**

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

In an ideal world, love, denial and betrayal wouldn’t go together. But in the real world, they often do. The disciples no doubt loved Jesus, yet most were disloyal to him at the end. What a marvel that God loves us and sent his Son!

## Wednesday **Prepare For Victory**

*Is 50:4-9; Mt 26:14-25*

In literary tragedy, the hero or heroine is ultimately cut down and dies. The Gospel, though, is different. The hero, Jesus, willingly walks the path that leads to death. But soon after, he is raised up, given a new, resurrected life by God. Jesus glorified, becomes “the Christ.” Our story is no tragedy. Good triumphs!

## Holy Thursday **Be Of Service**

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

Being a servant runs against the grain of most people. It's lowly and difficult. We prefer being served. Jesus' disciples still didn't understand that selfless service is God's way, the key to the Kingdom. So Jesus showed them what to do. He washed their feet.

### John 13:1-35

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean." After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But it is to fulfill the scripture, 'The one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.' I tell you this now, before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am he. Very truly, I tell you, whoever receives one whom I send receives me; and whoever receives me receives him who sent me." After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit, and he declared, "Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me." The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking. One of his

disciples - the one whom Jesus loved - was reclining next to him; Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?" Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." So when he dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "Do quickly what you are going to do." Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, "Buy what we need for the festival"; or, that he should give something to the poor. So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.

When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, "Where I am going, you cannot come.' I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

## Good Friday Put Yourself In God's Hands

*Is 52:13—53:12; Heb 4:14-16, 5:7-9; Jn 19:17-42*

Often, the only way out of an ordeal is to go straight through it. We have to accept and submit rather than fight. While on trial for his life, Jesus is asked repeatedly to do this or that to save himself. But he refuses. Jesus accepts his unjust conviction. Then he puts himself completely in God's hands.

## John 19:17-42

So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew\* is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross.

It read, 'Jesus of Nazareth,\* the King of the Jews.' Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew,\* in Latin, and in Greek. Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, 'Do not write, "The King of the Jews", but, "This man said, I am King of the Jews."' Pilate answered, 'What I have written I have written.' When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now

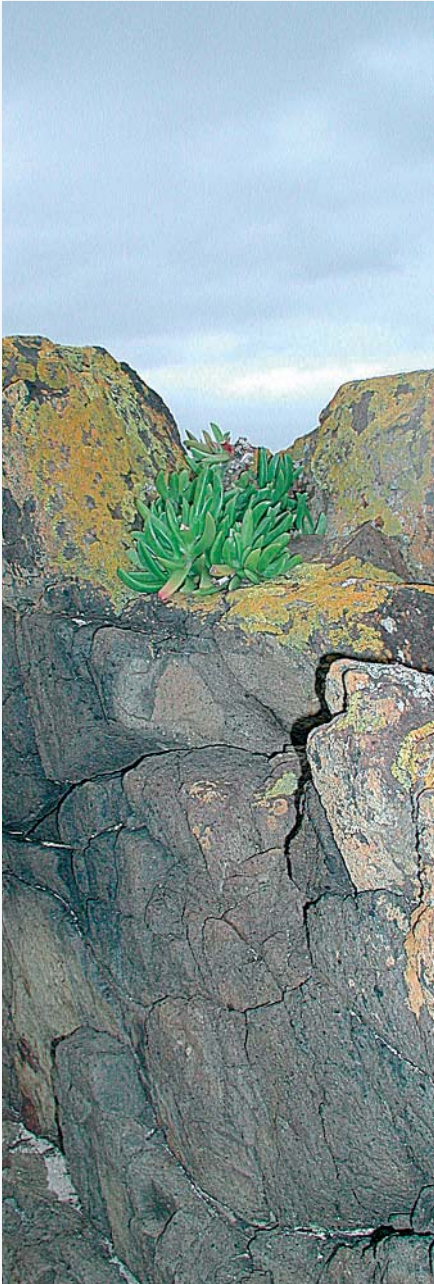
the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.' This was to fulfill what the scripture says, 'They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.' And that is what the soldiers did.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), 'I am thirsty.' A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, 'It is finished.' Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows\* that he tells the truth.) These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, 'None of his bones shall be broken.' And again another passage of scripture says, 'They will look on the one whom they have pierced.'

After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.



## The Easter Triduum

Our long journey to the font culminates in the Easter Triduum. These three days draw us into the mystery of our salvation. Whatever we are doing these days, these prayers and resources can help us be open to the graces the day offers. Each morning, we can pause to acknowledge the meaning of the day ahead. Each night, we can give thanks.

Even if we can't celebrate these days liturgically, we can reflect upon the symbols and rituals, and let the prayers of the liturgies draw us in. All, that we might know the depth of the love being offered us, and power of the gift of life won for us.

We celebrate Easter each day this week. We keep celebrating so that we might continue to enter into the meaning of the resurrection. In the early Church, the newly baptised would be at each liturgy this week, wearing their white garments. We go through our everyday lives this week conscious of the "white garments" we all wear – the waters of our baptism certainly do not dry off! We are renewed as a priestly people, committed with Jesus to give our lives for others.

The resurrection stories, which we read this week, come from communities that are proclaiming the Good News. The tomb is empty – Jesus' tomb and every tomb that tries to claim us in death. These are not believers who, in their deep desire, just made up the resurrection. These are people who can hardly believe what they are seeing and experiencing. They, like us now, had trouble recognising his presence with them.

We let the prayers of this Easter week draw us into the joy. Jesus is with us. He is not dead, but alive. And, that makes all the difference in the world in how much hope and courage we have, before any struggle, any possible fear of death.

## Easter **Celebrate God's Surprise**

*Lk 24:1-12*

When Mary peers into Jesus' tomb on Easter morning, she is stunned at the emptiness. So are Peter and John, who look for themselves, When Jesus, whom God raised to new life, appears to the disciples, his presence defies their understanding. Today, what does Easter mean to you? Do you believe that Christ's Spirit lives among us?

## Luke 24:1-12

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed

about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.” Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

## An Easter Blessing

*The following blessing for the Easter Season may be prayed individually, used at special meetings, or with family and community prayer*

Through the resurrection of Jesus God has redeemed us  
and made us his children. May God bless us with joy.

All: Amen

Our Redeemer has given us lasting freedom.  
May we inherit everlasting life.

All: Amen

By faith, we rose with Jesus in baptism. May our lives be  
holy, so that we will be untied with Jesus forever.

All: Amen

And may Almighty God bless us: the Father,  
and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen