

The Little Black Book
Six-minute meditations
on the Sunday Gospels of Lent (Cycle A)

*This book is dedicated to
Bishop Ken Untener
(1937-2004)
who was inspired to create
the Little Books.
His life and faith continue
to be their driving force.*

This Lenten booklet is based on the writings of Bishop Ken Untener, and put together by Catherine Haven, editor of the *Little Books*, with the help of Sr. Nancy Ayotte, IHM, who works with the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd.

Distribution is under the direction of Leona Jones.

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How to use the *Little Black Book*

This *Little Black Book* is your companion for Lent.

It's an old-fashioned "vade mecum" (pronounced vahday maykum). That's Latin for "travel with me" and was used to describe a book that was a constant companion – perhaps a condensed book of prayers for traveling priests, or a handbook for quick reference – something you could take with you anywhere.

The *Little Black Book* travels easily in your pocket, purse, glove compartment. The goal is to find six minutes of quiet time every day for the next 50 days to walk through this book a page at a time. Six minutes. That's within reach. And it pays big returns.

You can use this *Little Black Book* anywhere. That's why there's no title on the cover – so you can even use it in a dentist's waiting room without broadcasting that you're reading a "religious book."

The key is the right-hand page, which will walk through the Sunday Gospels for this Lent (Cycle A), with explanations and reflections along the way. It's an ancient way of praying the Scriptures – called *lectio divina*. God speaks to us "live" through the sacred word and we're often surprised at the thoughts that come.

The left-hand page has a variety of quotes, information, timely thoughts. Treat it like a buffet table from which you can take what you like. (If pressed for time, go directly to the right-hand page and spend your time there.) This year's left-hand page will look at the corporal works of mercy.

We won't start reading the Gospels until Ash Wednesday. But we'll start the six-minute program on Sunday, February 23 (the Sunday before Ash Wednesday), which will give us three days to get ready for Lent.

February 23, 2020

[Before you begin to sketch your Lenten plans on this page, go to the right-hand page. We need to do some thinking and praying before we chart a course through Lent. God is our guide, and it's to God we must go before we do anything.]



My Lenten plans:

Talk this over with the Lord
or a trusted friend, and begin
to sketch some possible Lenten plans.
Don't worry about finalizing them yet.
Lent is three days away. You can keep coming
back to these plans for revision.

'Jesus said to his apostles,
"Come by yourselves
to an out-of-the-way place
and rest a little . . ."'

– Mark 6:31

A good beginning

I need to use today's six minutes and God's help in making my plans for this Lent.

We all have a file of resolutions in the back of our mind. These are the ones we usually pull out at a time like this.

Maybe I'd do better to put those aside for a moment and find out what God has in mind for me. It may be something I've never thought of, or something that surprises me. Let me put myself in that scene from the Gospel at the top of the page for a few minutes, only make it just the Lord and me, alone in a quiet place.

I can talk straight with him.

"Lord, you sometimes surprise me. What do you want me to write on that left-hand page?"

During Lent, the Little Black Book will look at the corporal works of mercy on Sundays and on various pages throughout the book.



Fast and abstinence

The regulations on Lenten fast and abstinence are:

- **FASTING:** On Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, those who are 18 but not yet 60 are allowed only one full meal. Two smaller meals are allowed as needed, but eating solid foods between meals is not permitted.

- **ABSTINENCE FROM MEAT:** Those who are 14 years of age or older are to abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday and all the Fridays of Lent.

* * *

The Church no longer attempts to prescribe Lenten practices in detail. The above regulations simply highlight Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, and the other Fridays of Lent. The more fundamental obligation is to make Lent a penitential season, choosing practices that are adapted to one's own circumstances.

Corporal works of mercy

A common theme in this year's *Little Black Book* is the corporal works of mercy. These are acts of charity designated by Jesus.

Unlike the beatitudes which were clearly delineated by Jesus on the mountain, the corporal works of mercy are also from Jesus, but are a compilation of his teachings, particularly from Matthew 25:35-37. The seven corporal works of mercy are:

- to feed the hungry.
- to give drink to the thirsty.
- to clothe the naked.
- to shelter the homeless.
- to visit the sick.
- to visit the imprisoned.
- to bury the dead.

In recent years, some lists have been changed to combine visiting the sick and prisoners, and then adding “give alms to the poor” as the seventh work of mercy.

A few years ago, Pope Francis proposed adding “care of creation” to the list of corporal works of mercy.

'Share your bread with the hungry,
shelter the oppressed and the homeless;
clothe the naked when you see them,
and do not turn your back on your own.'

– Isaiah 58:7

February 25, 2020



Mardi Gras colors

The official colors of Mardi Gras are said to reflect the Catholic roots of the city of New Orleans:

- purple symbolizes justice,
- green is faith, and
- gold/yellow is power.

Legend says that the colors were chosen by Grand Duke Alexis Alexandrovitch Romanoff of Russia during a goodwill visit to New Orleans in 1872.

That's not true. The colors were actually chosen by Rex (an organization of the School of Design which sponsors the Mardi Gras Day parade) who had organized a special celebration for the Russian grand duke.

Lent begins tomorrow.
Spend some time on the plans
you wrote on February 23.

CRS Rice Bowl

At the beginning of Lent, parishes distribute a cardboard container shaped like a rice bowl.

People take the “rice bowls” home, and put in them the money they save by fasting and giving up things for Lent. This popular practice is called CRS Rice Bowl. At the end of Lent, the money is given to programs assisting the poor and the hungry.

Operation Rice Bowl (as it was originally called) was the idea of a group of Pennsylvania churchmen back in 1975. Msgr. Robert Coll of the Allentown Catholic Diocese, a Jewish rabbi, and Presbyterian, Episcopal, and Lutheran ministers devised the rice bowl program as an ecumenical response to a severe drought in the African Sahel (Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, and Somalia).

Each Tuesday, the local newspaper would print a menu for a simple meal and a prayer. Families would prepare the meal, and place the savings in their rice bowl (which was decorated with a cross and a Star of David). On Sundays and on the Jewish Sabbath, families would then bring their offerings to church or synagogue and place them in a common bowl.

The success of the rice bowl program encouraged Msgr. Coll to meet with Cardinal John Krol of Philadelphia to see if the rice bowl could be made part of the 1976 Eucharistic Congress, planned for Philadelphia.

Cardinal Krol agreed, and enlisted Catholic Relief Services to sponsor Operation Rice Bowl. In 2011, the project was renamed CRS Rice Bowl.



Throughout Lent, people across the United States will participate in the CRS Rice Bowl.

February 26, 2020



Station churches

In the early Church, the Christian community in Rome and their bishop customarily celebrated Mass together each day during Lent. They would usually gather at a designated meeting place and then process to the “station church” of the day.

In the seventh century, Pope Gregory the Great is said to have compiled the “official” 40-day order of churches that were to be visited in Lent. But after many years, the tradition of visiting churches each day during Lent fell into disuse.

Pope John XXIII, who became pope in 1958, restored the practice. The following Lent, in 1959, he met with the people at the Church of St. Anselm and then traveled to the nearby Basilica of Santa Sabina, where ashes were blessed and distributed. Since that time, the Holy Father has received his ashes every Ash Wednesday at the Basilica of Santa Sabina.

Some of the 40 station churches are not used on a regular basis throughout the year. But they are open on their designated day as a station church.

* * *

Little is known about St. Sabina, whose feast day is August 29. She is thought to have been a Roman noblewoman whose house was located on the Aventine Hill, one of Rome’s seven hills. She was martyred, and, in the fifth century, a church built near her home was dedicated to her.

In the 13th century, Pope Honorius III entrusted the church to St. Dominic of Guzman, founder of the Dominican Order. Today it is the Dominican Generalate, the international headquarters for that religious community.

Jesus said: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.” (Mt 7:21)

Jesus says pretty clearly that people who have a *spectator's* relationship with him aren't really his disciples.

People who say, “Lord, Lord,” or who in great enthusiasm use his name or sing his songs, or who admire but are somewhat at a distance, are not his disciples.

So who *are* disciples of the Lord?

The Lord's disciples are people who cross over from the sidelines as a spectator and get into Jesus' life . . . and allow Jesus to get into theirs.

Now, it's risky business to let somebody into your life. When you're with somebody all the time, you get to know the good and the bad of them, and they of you!

Today is Ash Wednesday and the first day of Lent. For the next 40 days, I can decide whether I want to be a spectator or a disciple of the Lord by truly immersing my life in Jesus.

Yes, there are risks. But Jesus reminds me that he loves me. If I let him into my life, I'll be in this together with him.

Together. The Lord and I.

Spectator or disciple?



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

February 27, 2020

Fr. Augustus Tolton

February is Black History Month in the United States.

The first black Catholic priest from the United States was Fr. Augustus Tolton. He was born April 1, 1854, the son of slaves who had escaped Missouri and settled in Illinois.

Like many slaves of Catholic owners, his parents were baptized Catholic and married in a Catholic ceremony. In Illinois, his mother enrolled Augustus at St. Boniface School in Quincy. But when the child wasn't welcomed at the all-white school, his mother moved him to an all-black public school. At 14, Augustus transferred again, this time to St. Peter Catholic School.

His pastor encouraged him to consider priesthood. After Tolton was refused admission at several seminaries, he returned to Quincy and enrolled in St. Francis College. In March 1880, he was admitted to the Collegium Urbanum in Rome, which trained priests for mission work. He was ordained in 1886, and offered his first Mass over the tomb of St. Peter in Rome.

Fr. Tolton expected to serve in the African missions. Instead, he was assigned as pastor of St. Joseph Parish back in Quincy where, despite his ordination, the prejudice he had experienced in his childhood continued. In 1889, he received permission to leave the Diocese of Springfield and go to the Archdiocese of Chicago, where he organized a storefront church (which he named St. Monica's) for black Catholics. With financial assistance from Sr. Katharine Drexel (who later became a saint), Fr. Tolton built a new church. By the time it opened in 1891, St. Monica's was serving more than 600 parishioners.

On July 9, 1897, during a heat wave in Chicago, Fr. Tolton died of heatstroke at age 43. In 2010, the Chicago Archdiocese began the process for opening the cause for Fr. Tolton's canonization. In 2019, the Vatican Congregation for the Causes of Saints voted unanimously to advance his cause, recognizing his heroic virtues.

Thursday After Ash Wednesday

Jesus said: “Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name? Did we not drive out demons in your name? Did we not do mighty deeds in your name?’” (Mt 7:22)

We tend to have principles about our religious practice and that is good.

For example, we have principles about going to Mass.

We used to have principles about not eating meat on Friday all year – and we still do have principles about doing some kind of penance on Friday.

While these are important for my religious practice, the more important question is: How does my *religious* life connect with my *daily* life?

Operative principles about religious practice are not enough. I need to have principles about the things I do and say every day – principles about the way I live every day. Principles about daily prayer, generosity, forgiveness, the way I treat other people.

Sometimes these areas of my life get neglected.

There’s a difference in having a principle I can consistently live by, rather than simply trying to make up my mind in each situation.

Lent is a good time to make the connection between my religious practice and my daily life.

It might be time to take another look at my life.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

February 28, 2020

'Hell no! I don't care if the Pope himself
comes to Cincinnati.

He can eat hamburgers like everybody else.
We are not going to stink up our restaurants
with any of your damned old fish!

– Ray Kroc

Fish on Friday during Lent

In 1962, Lou Groen owned a McDonald's in predominantly Catholic Monfort Heights, near Cincinnati, Ohio.

During Lent, Catholics didn't eat meat on Friday, and Groen watched his customers flock to a nearby restaurant for their fish sandwiches.

So Groen (himself a Catholic) decided to create his own fish sandwich. He cut up halibut, dipped the pieces in batter and fried them. Groen was so happy with his sandwich that he traveled to Chicago and suggested that Ray Kroc (who built the McDonald's franchise) add it to the menu.

Kroc was not impressed.

But Groen didn't give up. Finally Kroc made him a wager. McDonald's would try out Groen's fish sandwich on the menu for Good Friday, as well as a hula burger Kroc was developing. They would see which sandwich had the higher sales, and that sandwich would be added to the menu.

On Good Friday, Groen sold 350 of his fish sandwiches. Kroc never said how many hula burgers he sold (one source says he only sold six), and the filet-of-fish became part of the McDonald's menu in 1965.

Today, customers eat more than 300 million of McDonald's filet-of-fish sandwiches each year, and it is considered the world's best-selling fish sandwich.

Groen died May 30, 2011, at age 93. He is buried at St. Joseph's New Cemetery in Cincinnati.

Friday After Ash Wednesday

Jesus said: “Then I will declare to them solemnly, ‘I never knew you. Depart from me, you evildoers.’ Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock. (Mt 7:23-25)

The rock upon which I am set is the Word of God.

The Word has a certain wholeness. We don't take it in pieces, here and there, like panning for gold to find a nugget that no one has noticed, and using a nugget here, a nugget there, all of them taken out of context. We respect the Word in its entirety.

It is a living Word. It exists not just in a book but lives in the community. Without the living tradition of the community, the words, by themselves, are incomplete . . . like lyrics without music.

While many temporal things change, the living Word has a timeless character. The passion of Christ is what it always was and always will be. The stories of the prodigal son, the good Samaritan, the sower and the seed are no different than they ever were, and yet they are always contemporary to whatever is going on today, in the world I live in.

The Word of God continues to be a fresh source of life, a steady compass point, a source of peace, and a rock of security today . . . tomorrow . . . always.

So what does the Word mean in my life?



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*



Leap year saint

John Cassian was born about 360 A.D. The son of wealthy parents in what is today Romania, he was well educated. As a young man, he visited the Holy Land and decided to live a monastic life in Bethlehem.

To deepen his spirituality, he visited Egypt, and then Constantinople where the bishop (St. John Chrysostom) ordained him a deacon. When John Chrysostom was exiled, Cassian was among his defenders and went to Rome to plead the bishop's case before the pope. While he was in Rome, Cassian was ordained a priest.

John Cassian later founded two monasteries in Marseilles, France. He wrote three books on the ascetical life, all of which have been preserved.

In the Greek Orthodox Church calendar, today is the feast of St. John Cassian, a feast that occurs only once every four years.

Today we finish the first four days of Lent. These can be a warm-up to help us get the feel of this '40 day' season. Take another look at the Lenten plans you made on February 23, and possibly make some adjustments.

Saturday After Ash Wednesday

Jesus said: “And everyone who listens to these words of mine but does not act on them will be like a fool who built his house on sand. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. And it collapsed and was completely ruined.” (Mt 7:26-27)

The rains do fall . . . and the floods do come . . . and the winds do blow and buffet.

A house built on sand could be completely destroyed – the foundation for a house is that important.

So is the foundation for a life.

There is a difference between living by moral principles and simply the *desire* to do right. Most people sincerely *want* to do right, but deciding *what is right* can be very difficult when there is wind and rain and crisis. The desire to do what is right might be swept away by the power of emotion and immediate needs.

The rock for the decisions that I have to make in life comes from the Word of God. This is a sure and solid foundation.

Upon what kind of foundation am I building my life? Have I built my life on sandy ground so that when the rains fall, the torrents come, and the winds lash against my house, I collapse?

Or is my life solidly set on rock so that come rain, torrents or wind, I do not collapse but actually put into practice the principles that I believe in?



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

March 1, 2020

'The crowds of starving people - children, women, the elderly, immigrants, refugees, the unemployed - raise to us their cry of suffering. They implore us, hoping to be heard.

How can we not open our ears and our hearts and start to make available those five loaves and two fish which God has put into our hands?

If each one of us contributes something, we can all do something for them.

Of course, this will require sacrifices, which call for a deep inner conversion.

Certainly, it will involve changing our exaggerated consumerist behavior, combating hedonism, resisting attitudes of indifference and the tendency to disregard our personal responsibilities.'

– Pope John Paul II
Lenten message in 1996

Today catechumens sign the Book of the Elect.

For I was hungry, and you gave me food



In the Gospel of the loaves and fishes, Jesus seeks a little quiet time so he and the disciples get into a boat.

Then they see a large crowd of 5,000 people (not counting women and children), and Jesus' heart goes out to them. He cures the sick, and he feeds the people, providing more food than they could possibly eat.

The bread that Jesus gave symbolizes and expresses more than food for the stomach. The people's hunger was way more than empty stomachs. Just as with the manna in the desert, what the people would remember was not simply that God gave them some nourishment.

They would remember that God took care of them. Jesus takes care of people when they need taking care of.

But the disciples don't understand: "This isn't what we're about. Send these people into towns where they can get some food." Jesus responds: "Don't send them away. We'll take care of them." The disciples protest: "We don't have enough." And Jesus says: "Well, it will work out."

The food that fed the great crowd was food the disciples already had. It wasn't as though Jesus made bread and fish come down from heaven, or sprout from grass. This was the food that fed everyone: five loaves of bread and two fish. When they finished eating, what was left filled 12 baskets.

Whatever we've got, we share.

That is what Church is meant to be.

*'When people were hungry, Jesus didn't say,
"Now is that political, or social?"
He said, "I feed you." Because the good news
to a hungry person is bread.'*

— Desmond Tutu

March 2, 2020



Bread for the World

Bread for the World is a Christian advocacy group on hunger that was begun by a Lutheran minister in 1974.

Rev. Arthur Simon was a pastor on New York's lower eastside, when he called together a group of Catholics and Protestants who were concerned about United States policies on domestic and world hunger. In the spring of 1974, Bread for the World began to lobby for change, and by the end of that year, its membership had reached 500.

Over the years, Bread for the World has backed such initiatives as the Global Poverty Act to reduce world poverty and feed the hungry, and Elect to End Childhood Hunger, a letter-writing campaign to make childhood hunger a key issue in political elections.

Bread for the World works in partnership with several agencies, including the Catholic Campaign for Human Development.

*This week we begin reading
from the Sunday Gospels. One way
to pray the Scripture is to 'take someone
with you' and talk with them along the way.
For example, Mary Magdalene, or Peter,
or Mary the mother of Jesus.*

Monday ~ First Week of Lent

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was hungry. (Mt 4:1-2)

In their 40-year journey to the Promised Land, the people of Israel were tested in the desert. This “testing” had to do with their willingness to live up to the Sinai covenant: “I will be your God, and you will be my people.”

Jesus faces a similar testing in the desert. The voice from heaven at the baptism of Jesus had just declared, “This is my beloved Son.” Jesus is now tested whether he is willing to live up to his identity as the Son of God. Is he willing to confront evil, not with the sword, but with goodness and kindness? The temptation to follow a different path will dog him until the day he dies.

Satan, often referred to simply as the “devil,” is the great “tempter” who tries to keep me from living as the person God has called me to be.

At first glance the temptations I face seem to invite me to do (or not do) this or that. But they aren’t that simple. They go deeper – to my identity, to the person I *know* I am.

Often disguised as minor temptations, they are major league deceptions that steer me away from something not small at all: being the person I am made by God to be.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

March 3, 2020



Mary, Mother of the Church

On this day in 2018, the Vatican's Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments officially added a new celebration to the Church's liturgical calendar. The congregation had issued its decree nearly a month earlier, on February 11, 2018.

The feast of Mary, Mother of the Church would be celebrated each year on the Monday after Pentecost, in an effort to increase devotion to the Blessed Mother.

The Marian title wasn't a new one. In 1964, during the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI gave Mary that designation, but the title, "Mother of the Church," had been used as early as the 12th century. In an encyclical on the rosary, Pope Leo XIII referred to Mary by that title. Pope John Paul II commissioned a mosaic for outside his papal apartment that depicted Mary as the Mother of the Church.

Even prior to the Vatican's announcement in 2018, dioceses in Poland, Argentina, and other countries were already celebrating the feast.

This year the feast of Mary, Mother of the Church will be celebrated Monday, June 1.

Tuesday ~ First Week of Lent

The tempter approached and said to Jesus, “If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become loaves of bread.” Jesus said in reply, “It is written: ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.’” (Mt 4:3-4)

Many temptations, which may seem minor, go much deeper. They have to do with whether we want to live up to our true identity.

It’s interesting that the very first words on the lips of the tempter pick up on the identity of Jesus: “If you are the Son of God . . .”

The tempter isn’t dumb enough to say, “Do you want to be what that voice from heaven said you are?” Instead the tempter suggests that Jesus use his power for show. Play to his audience and be more popular. Zap some stones into bread.

Jesus doesn’t fall for it, but goes to the heart of the matter. He has been sent by the Father to use his power to bring salvation to people, not show off. His food is God’s word.

Straight answers are best when I’m tempted. And the person I usually have to talk straight to is myself.

And the Lord.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

March 4, 2020

'The National Council of Catholic Women acts through its members to support, empower and educate all Catholic women in spirituality, leadership and service. NCCW programs respond with Gospel values to the needs of the Church and society in the modern world.'

– NCCW's mission

National Council of Catholic Women

This year the National Council of Catholic Women, a federation of Catholic women's organizations, celebrates its 100th anniversary.

The United States Catholic Bishops formed the organization on this day in 1920 "to give Catholic women of the country a common voice and an instrument for unified action in all matters affecting Catholic or national welfare."

In its early years, the NCCW worked with the National Catholic Welfare Council to aid Catholic refugees with relocation. It also focused on Catholic education, establishing parent-teacher organizations, catechetical instruction, and college Newman Clubs. In 1946, the NCCW began a long-term partnership with Catholic Relief Services. Over the years, NCCW has aided war refugees, began the Madonna Plan to aid mothers and expectant mothers, and supported Water for Life, providing clean water to families.

Today NCCW represents more than 6,000 Catholic women's organizations in the United States. Besides CRS, its other partners include Bread for the World, the United States Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking, and Catholic Climate Covenant.

Ash Wednesday was a week ago.
It's time to go back and review
the Lenten plans on February 23.

Wednesday ~ First Week of Lent

Then the devil took Jesus to the holy city, and made him stand on the parapet of the Temple, and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: ‘He will command his angels concerning you’ and ‘with their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone.’” Jesus answered him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God, to the test.’” (Mt 4:5-7)

Travelers to Jerusalem can still see the corner of the massive platform on which the Temple was built – the place Matthew is describing here.

This scene plays out like a poker hand. Jesus’ response to the first temptation expressed his trust in God. So the devil raises him: “Okay, if you trust God, then show it. Jump.” To strengthen his bluff, the devil even quotes Scripture.

Jesus raises him back: “Really to trust God is to be obedient to God and believe that this is *the* way to success, happiness, fulfillment.” To strengthen his hand, Jesus quotes Scripture right back.

To trust – really to trust – is to be obedient to God. That’s not as easy as it sounds.

But it’s the kind of trust to which a son or daughter of God is called.

It keeps coming back to the same issue: am I willing to be the person God made me to be?



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

March 5, 2020

'How could the archbishop live in a palace if his most faithful and dedicated collaborators lack a minimum of comfort and the resources indispensable to carry on their work?'

– Dom Paulo Arns,
upon being named a cardinal in 1973

'Cardinal of the people'

Paulo Evaristo Arns was born September 14, 1921, in Criciúma, Brazil, the fifth of 13 children of poor German immigrants. He was ordained a Franciscan priest in 1945, and then studied at the Sorbonne, France. After teaching at a seminary and Catholic university in Brazil, he became a bishop in 1966. In 1970, he was appointed archbishop of Sao Paulo.

On this day in 1973, Dom Paulo Arns was named cardinal. That same year, he sold his bishop's residence and land, and gave the proceeds to church workers who aided slum dwellers. Known for his dedication to the poor and to human rights, he aided prisoners and homeless children. Dom Paulo was also an outspoken critic of the military dictatorship which ruled Brazil from 1964 to 1985, and he once stood up to armed soldiers in order to retrieve the body of a slain labor leader.

He died December 14, 2016, at the age of 95.

* * *

Paulo's younger sister, Zilda Arns Neumann, was a pediatrician. With her brother, she founded the Children's Pastoral (Commission for the Care of Children) of the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil. She also worked to improve infant mortality rates. In January 2010, she died at age 75 in the earthquake that devastated Haiti. She was on a humanitarian visit to improve the health and quality of life of children in that island country.

Thursday ~ First Week of Lent

Then the devil took Jesus up to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in their magnificence, and he said to him, “All these I shall give to you, if you will prostrate yourself and worship me.” (Mt 4:8-9)

The subtleties vanish with this third temptation and I can see what the stakes really are: Satan presents himself as the god to be worshiped.

Each day I come face-to-face with this issue.

Is it God, or is it something else I will worship – something else that will take first place in my life, something else that will consume my time, energy, attention?

Jesus says that there’s no possible debate on this one.

God is God, and God alone shall you serve.

Here’s something to take to heart: how do I spend my time and my money, and what do I think about most each day – and that will tell me what is most important to me.

Try it.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

March 6, 2020

St. Patrick's Cathedral

On this day in 1810, land was purchased on which the largest cathedral in North America would one day be built.



The Jesuits originally bought the property in Manhattan, New York, for \$11,000 as a site for a boys' school. When the school failed, they sold the land to the Diocese of New York, who leased the property to a group of French Trappists in 1813. The Trappists, who had fled France because of persecution, used the building as a small monastery and orphanage. When Napoleon's rule of France ended in 1814, the Trappists returned to France.

In 1850, Pope Pius IX elevated the Diocese of New York to an archdiocese; soon after, Archbishop John Hughes announced plans to build a new cathedral "that may be worthy of our increasing numbers, intelligence and wealth as a religious community." The building's cornerstone was laid on August 15, 1858, just south of where the Trappist orphanage had stood. Construction was halted during the Civil War, and resumed in 1865. St. Patrick's Cathedral was dedicated on May 25, 1879.

The cathedral can seat 2,400 people. Its Altar of St. Michael and St. Louis was designed by Tiffany & Co., and its Pieta is three times larger than Michelangelo's Pieta.

The cathedral was declared a National Historic Landmark in 1976.

Today is the 10th day of Lent. Look back to the Lenten practices written February 23. Talk them over with the Lord and see if they need any adjustments.

Friday ~ First Week of Lent

At this, Jesus said to the devil, “Get away, Satan! It is written: ‘The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve.’” (Mt 4:10)

The temptation of Jesus in the desert takes place right after the baptism of Jesus where he is revealed as the Son of God.

The tempter is challenging that identity. But Jesus will not let anything come between him and who he is, and who he is called to be.

The tempter had expected Jesus to be weakened by his lengthy fast in the desert. Only *after* the 40 days (figuratively, after Lent is over) does the tempter come and try to ruin this relationship between Jesus and the Father.

But Jesus had spent his time in the desert under the power of the Spirit, strengthening his commitment to his identity, to his mission, to God. Scripture says Jesus wasn't even hungry until his time in the desert was over.

Lent is when I plunge in and try to experience who I am as a baptized follower of Christ, and to enjoy the exhilaration of clearing away things that come between me and God.

Perhaps I should worry about more temptations coming *after* Lent than during Lent. These 40 days are a needed opportunity to prepare for those temptations, whenever they come.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

March 7, 2020

'There will always be a small patch of sky above, and there will always be enough space to fold two hands in prayer.'

– Etty Hillesum

Etty Hillesum

Sometimes known as the “adult Anne Frank,” Etty Hillesum was born in the Netherlands in 1914 to Jewish parents. Her early life was colorful – at the university she belonged to left-wing, anti-fascist student groups.

When the Netherlands fell under German occupation, Etty was working in Amsterdam. As she watched the mounting atrocities of the Nazis, Etty was drawn into aiding her fellow Jews. In 1942, she got a job at Westerbork Concentration Camp in the northeastern region of the Netherlands. “Helping people in transit” was often dangerous but Etty refused to go into hiding, opting instead to “share her people’s fate.”

In March 1941, Etty Hillesum began her diaries which for the next couple years would chronicle life in German-occupied Amsterdam and her own spiritual journey. She described herself as “the thinking heart of the barracks.”

In September 1943, Etty and her family were arrested and transported to Auschwitz, Poland, where she died on November 30 at age 29.

* * *

Etty Hillesum’s diaries, *An Interrupted Life: The Diaries of Etty Hillesum 1941-1943*, were published in 1981, nearly four decades after her death.

Saturday ~ First Week of Lent

Then the devil left Jesus and, behold, angels came and ministered to him. (Mt 4:11)

Sometimes when I think of sacrifices in Lent, I may think of giving things up, or doing something I wouldn't ordinarily choose to do.

Sacrifice, in that sense, implies hardship or discomfort or deprivation.

But the word *sacrifice* actually means to “make holy.” It's a gift that I give to God as I try to take away anything that stands between me and the Lord.

My sacrifices are a gift to God but they are also the best gift I could ever give myself. My sacrifices during Lent (or at any time of the year) bring me closer to God by eliminating something between me and God.

Let Lent be a time of sacrifice – both of giving things up and giving beautiful gifts to God.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

March 8, 2020

Working to provide clean water

Nearly two billion people around the world do not have drinkable water.

The Catholic Diocese of Nakuru in Kenya is taking steps to correct that situation.

When drought devastated Kenya in 1984, the diocese wanted to provide people with clean water. It wasn't easy. Drilling for water was unproductive, and any water they did find carried high levels of fluoride. Then, in 1998, the diocese developed a defluoridation program to properly filter water and improve its quality, through the use of bone char technology.

Over the years, the diocese has supported water quality projects in South Sudan, Tanzania, and Ethiopia.

* * *

In the United States, the Sisters of St. Francis in Dubuque, Iowa, studied water issues, seeking to find a project that all the community could support. The result was the Sister Water Project (SWP). Begun in 2006, SWP seeks to provide clean drinking water to the poor. In Tanzania, SWP has completed 203 wells, and helped bring safe drinking water to remote villages in Honduras.

There are five more weeks in Lent.

I was thirsty, and you gave me drink



People are poor or thirsty or hungry in so many different ways.

There are those who hunger for a smile, or for attention, or for understanding, or for love.

There are those who are naked. There are so many ways of being naked – people whose faults are well-known for one reason or another find themselves exposed to curiosity or exploitation. They are vulnerable to criticism because their inadequacies are on their sleeves.

There are people in prison in so many ways.

There are many ways of being a stranger.

I can experience these needs in one form or another too. There are people in my family who experience them. There are people with whom I work who experience them. There are people in my neighborhood who experience them. I don't have to look halfway around the globe to think of ways in which I might respond to those needs – or fail to respond to them.

Come the judgment, the greatest things I will have done will be to have extended a consoling touch, a word, a smile, to those who in so many different ways are hungry, thirsty, strangers, in prison.

'Water is life.
It's fundamental for social and economic
development and human dignity.'

– Paul Hicks, CRS El Salvador

March 9, 2020



Story of Esther

The Jewish feast of Purim celebrates an incident that took place some 2,500 years ago. It is recounted in the Book of Esther, and is a story of intrigue at the royal palace in Persia.

Esther was a Jewish woman from the tribe of Benjamin. Orphaned as a child, she was raised by her cousin Mordecai.

The pagan king, Xerxes, had become angry at his queen, Vashti, when she refused his request to attend a lavish seven-day feast he was hosting. Xerxes deposed her and banished her from his kingdom. The king sought a new wife and chose Esther to take Vashti's place.

Meanwhile, a powerful member of the royal court had concocted a plot to have the king, in a single day, kill all the Jews living in Persia. The date for this massacre was chosen by casting lots – which is why Purim is sometimes called the “Feast of Lots.”

Esther decided to go to the king and plead for her people. In doing so, she risked her life, for to enter the king's presence uninvited was punishable by death. She bravely went ahead anyway and succeeded in saving her people.

The two-day Jewish feast of Purim
begins today.

Monday ~ Second Week of Lent

After six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light. (Mt 17:1-2)

The reading about the Transfiguration tells as much about something that happened to three disciples as something that happened to Jesus.

Peter, James, and John had a prayer experience. In their faith, they were able to see this man with whom they had walked and fished and eaten for who he really was. Perhaps Matthew could not quite put their experience into words, so he used the imagery of faces radiant as the sun, clothes dazzling, a bright cloud.

Such prayer experiences are very much part of our tradition. I can have those experiences at different times in prayer – when I just feel the presence of God, and I can't quite describe it in words. It's very powerful and is sometimes called a "mystical experience."

Almost always, I need a "mountain" in order to experience the presence of God in a mystical way, a place where it is quiet and still.

Have I discovered where my "mountain" is?

It can be any place where I can be alone to pray.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

March 10, 2020

'Religion means loving God
with your heart and your neighbor as yourself.'

– William Booth

Salvation Army

The Salvation Army was founded by William and Catherine Booth in 1878.

Born in 1829, William Booth had grown up poor in Nottingham, England. At 15, he left the Anglican Church and became a Methodist. He became a minister but felt that his real calling was to preach to the poor and the sinners in places outside of churches.

In 1855, Booth married Catherine Mumford, whom he met at a church meeting. The couple began searching for a church which welcomed all people, especially the non-churched. In 1865, while preaching outside the Blind Beggar Pub in a poor section of East London, Booth was asked to lead a series of meetings in a nearby tent. As a result, the Booths founded the Christian Mission, dedicated to doing God's work by providing basic necessities to the less fortunate and to proclaim the Gospel message of salvation. In 1878, the Christian Mission changed its name to the Salvation Army, adopting military symbolism since it "fought sin like an Army."

In 1880, several church members traveled from England to New York to introduce the Salvation Army on American shores. An early member was Eliza Shirley who joined the Salvation Army at age 16. She and her family helped the Army establish roots in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Today the Salvation Army serves in 102 countries, raising money for the needy through such activities as Doughnut Days, the Red Kettle collection at Christmas, radiothons, and thrift stores.

Tuesday ~ Second Week of Lent

And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, conversing with him. (Mt 17:3)

On that mountain, the disciples got a glimpse of how human beings look with God's spirit running through them.

That's what Peter, James, and John saw: a human being seen with eyes that see the whole person.

The astounding thing is that if people could see me with the same eyes, they would see a similar sight.

I am a daughter, a son of God. I have the Holy Spirit running through me. I am the beloved of God. I was immersed (figuratively, at least) in the waters of baptism which symbolize being immersed in God.

I received confirmation, with holy oil soaking into me as a sign of the Spirit running, coursing through my whole being.

When I receive holy Communion, the Lord Jesus and with him the whole Trinity enter within me.

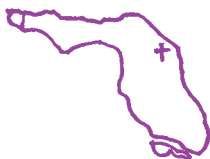
Lent is a time when my fasting, prayers, and good works help me see myself, others, and God as they truly are.

What an awesome sight.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

March 11, 2020



Diocese of St. Augustine

On this day in 1870, the Catholic Diocese of St. Augustine, Florida, was created with boundaries extending from the Georgia border to Key West.

Named as its first bishop was Bishop Augustin Verot, formerly the bishop of Savannah, Georgia.

Born in France in 1805, Fr. Verot was ordained a priest of the Order of St. Sulpice (Sulpicians), and taught theology and philosophy at St. Mary's Seminary College in Baltimore, Maryland, from 1830-1857. When the territory of Eastern Florida became a vicariate in 1857, Fr. Verot was named vicar and was consecrated a bishop at the cathedral in Baltimore in 1858. Three years later, he was appointed as bishop of the Diocese of Savannah, but still kept his responsibility for the vicariate in Florida until 1870.

Bishop Verot initially defended the practice of slavery, but at the First Vatican Council (1869-70) he became known as the "rebel bishop" for his relentless advocacy of the rights of African-American freed slaves. He recruited the Sisters of St. Joseph from his hometown of LePuy, France, to come to Florida and establish Catholic schools for the children of freed slaves (many of whom were Protestant Christians).

He died June 10, 1876, and is buried at Tolomato Cemetery, in St. Augustine.

Wednesday ~ Second Week of Lent

Then Peter said to Jesus in reply, “Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” (Mt 17:4)

“Lord, it is good that we are here.”

Peter wasn't just speaking about the place on the mountain where they happened to be at the time. He was also referring to his place on life's journey.

Peter's remark didn't mean that everything was all worked out, or that his life's journey was at an end. Peter and the disciples had many more miles to go and their journey would have its ups and downs.

Peter, after all, would soon deny Jesus three times.

There would be pain, suffering, confusion.

Nevertheless, Peter had a strong sense of being called by the Lord to the journey he was on, and a strong sense of the Lord's presence with him. The Lord had called him to the life he had, and the Lord was with him every step of the way.

Peter could say about his life, “It is good that we are here.”

Can I say that about my life?

Lent is a good time to think about my journey in life.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

March 12, 2020



‘Whatsoever You Do’

One of the most familiar hymns about the corporal works of mercy is “Whatsoever You Do.”

Its composer is Fr. Willard F. Jabusch, a musician, author, and chaplain emeritus at the University of Chicago.

Born March 12, 1930, in Chicago, Fr. Jabusch attended St. Mary of the Lake Seminary, Loyola University, and Northwestern University. He studied music at the Chicago Conservatory of Music and the University of London.

Ordained for the Archdiocese of Chicago in 1956, Fr. Jabusch worked in several archdiocesan parishes, and taught at Mundelein Seminary, Sacred Heart Seminary, and Notre Dame University. He also served as director of spiritual formation at the University of Louvain in Belgium. He was a contributor to America magazine, and wrote several books and plays.

“Whatsoever You Do” is one of more than 80 hymns that he composed. His other songs include: “The King of Glory,” and “Lord, When You Came to the Seashore.”

Fr. Jabusch died December 8, 2018.

Thursday ~ Second Week of Lent

While Peter was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud cast a shadow over them, then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” (Mt 17:5)

People who visit the Holy Land talk with a certain awe and wonder about the part of the trip when they went to the site of the Transfiguration.

Mount Tabor is a high mountain up in the north country of Israel. It offers a magnificent view. The cool, peaceful air and the scenery are things everyone remembers happily.

Had Jesus chosen to take all the disciples with him to the mountain, they too would have shared that wonderful and awesome experience.

But Jesus chose to take only Peter, James, and John.

Compare the way this mountain experience is described in the Gospel with the way Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with all of the Twelve. For the Last Supper, I can almost hear Jesus saying, “Come on, everybody, get ready. Get the food and we’re going to gather in a nice big room.”

When they got there, they sang songs and talked and spent time together. Jesus washed feet, they shared bread and wine, they argued a little, and then they left.

I need to experience both riches of our tradition – the supper room where we gather, sing and figuratively wash feet, and the mountain top where I meet with Jesus on a more personal basis . . . especially during Lent.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

March 13, 2020



'When a poor person
dies of hunger, it has not
happened because God did not
take care of him or her.

It has happened
because neither you nor I
wanted to give that person
what he or she needed.'

– Mother Teresa (1910-97),
who stepped down as head
of the Missionaries of Charity
on this date in 1997.

Friday ~ Second Week of Lent

When the disciples heard this, they fell prostrate and were very much afraid. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and do not be afraid.” (Mt 6-7)

The Transfiguration isn't just a flash in the pan.

Jesus gives his disciples a glimpse of what one day shall be – the whole human race will be transformed. All creation will be transformed, luminous with the presence of God.

It is not only Jesus who is transformed on that mountain. Peter, James, and John find themselves enveloped in a lustrous cloud, and they hear the voice of God.

They're awestruck and don't know what to do, except fall down in worship.

I wonder how they tried to describe this experience to the other disciples later.

It was too much for words, and yet, it's only a hint of what's to come.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

March 14, 2020



Peter, James, and John

In Matthew's Gospel, Peter, James, and John are specially chosen by Jesus to accompany him up the mountain and witness his Transfiguration.

They also are invited by Jesus to come closer to him during his time of agony before his arrest, leaving the other disciples a distance behind. They, together with Andrew (Peter's brother), are the first disciples to be called by Jesus in Matthew's Gospel.

Why did Jesus choose Peter, James, and John to witness the Transfiguration?

Some scholars have thought that these three were chosen because they also would witness Jesus' agony, the high and low points of Jesus' public life. Or it may just be that they were chosen because they were the closest to Jesus and would become the most important of his followers.

We are just about halfway through Lent.
Look back at your Lenten plans on February 23.

If you haven't done as well as you wished,
today is a good time to make a fresh start.

Saturday ~ Second Week of Lent

When the disciples raised their eyes, they saw no one else but Jesus alone. As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus charged them: “Do not tell the vision to anyone until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.” (Mt 17:8-9)

That must have been quite an experience for Peter, James, and John. It is mentioned in three of the four Gospels.

The three disciples probably talked a lot about it and shared it with the Christian community after the Lord's death and resurrection. They had a powerful experience of the Lord's presence.

Maybe I see such experiences as something reserved for those who are already saints. Perhaps I picture my own spiritual life at best as a straight line gradually moving upward. To get to the top (to sainthood, to genuine holiness), I *have* to go through a long and laborious process, a regimen with clearly designated steps along the way.

But my relationship with the Lord is more like an up-and-down graph (that is the way relationships are). There are peaks and valleys. It is not one long, steadily ascending journey.

Lent is a time when I take a long look at my life and make some changes.

Maybe I can make space in my life for a religious experience.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

March 15, 2020



St. Alban

One of the Church's patron saints of immigrants is also considered the first martyr in his homeland of England.

Not much is known about Alban who lived in the third or fourth century. Legend says that during a persecution of Christians, Alban (a pagan) hid a priest in his house. Alban hadn't known the priest when he took him into his home, but as the two talked, he was so impressed that he began to study the faith and was eventually converted.

According to the story, when the local governor heard that Alban was hiding a priest, he sent soldiers to capture the cleric. But Alban traded clothes with the priest so that he could escape. When the governor learned of what Alban had done, he was enraged. The governor arrested Alban and threatened to kill him unless he worshiped the pagan gods. When Alban refused, he was whipped, and then sentenced to be beheaded. He was martyred about 304 A.D.

St. Alban's feast day is celebrated on June 22.

The first scrutiny for persons entering the Catholic Church is celebrated today. During this week, the Creed and the Lord's Prayer are presented to the elect.

I was a stranger, and you welcomed me



God tells me that I cannot love him and accept him unless I love and accept the people he loves.

And he loves a lot of people that I may think he shouldn't love. He loves sinners. He loves losers.

I would like to love God without accepting his family. Part of his family I could live with, but the other part I don't want. God tells me that I can't have it that way. Unless I love and care about even the very least, I do not love and care about him.

In the Gospels, people tried to separate Jesus from his friends and followers, and tried to make friends with him without accepting those around him.

Jesus would never let them do it. The apostles were always his men. They embarrassed him. They said foolish things. They were sometimes sloppy and rude, but Jesus never stepped back from them. He never crossed a line saying that those were not really his men.

Jesus was criticized more for the people he hung around with than for himself. He was criticized for all the sinners who surrounded him. Yet he never turned to the Pharisees and apologized for those people, saying that he really didn't have much time to put a good group together and that's why he came up with such second-rate associates.

He simply said that these are my people. And if you can't accept them, you can't accept me.

And that is what he says to me.

**'Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers,
for thereby some have entertained
angels unawares.'**

March 16, 2020

Medical Mission Sisters

Born on this day in 1892 in Austria, Anna Dengel was the oldest of nine children. Her mother died when Anna was a child. Although attracted to the missions, Anna became a teacher. One day, she attended a talk in Lyons, France, where a Scottish doctor was recruiting women doctors to care for poor Muslim women in India (Indian customs prevented male doctors from treating women).



Anna returned to school to become a doctor. She studied at Ursuline College in Innsbruck, Austria, and then at Cork's University College in Ireland, where she graduated in 1919 from medical school. After residency in England, Dr. Dengel left for St. Catherine's Hospital in Rawalpindi, India, where she was the only doctor caring for 10,000 sick women and children.

While in India, she felt called to religious life. Canon law, however, forbade women religious from practicing surgery or obstetrics. Encouraged by an Austrian Jesuit, Anna decided to establish a new congregation where sisters could be surgeons or deliver babies.

She traveled to the United States where she wrote up a constitution for the proposed community, and received permission from Archbishop Michael Curley of Baltimore, Maryland, to establish it. In September 1925, four women began as medical mission sisters. Because of the canon law restriction, they were called a "pious society." When Pope Pius XI lifted that ban in 1936, the Medical Mission Sisters received full canonical status.

As superior general from 1925 to 1967, Mother Anna increased the number of Medical Mission Sisters to more than 700, serving in 50 health facilities in 33 countries.

Mother Anna Dengel died on April 17, 1980.

Monday ~ Third Week of Lent

Jesus came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of land that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there. Jesus, tired from his journey, sat down there at the well. It was about noon. A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."

(Jn 4:5-7)

In this Gospel story about the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, there is a great lack of understanding not only on the part of the woman, but on the part of the disciples and then the villagers.

Jesus does not get impatient because of their difficulties in understanding what he had to say, or think that they therefore deserve only a shallow message. He put up with their exasperating slowness, their mockery, their prejudice (Jews against Samaritans, Samaritans against Jews).

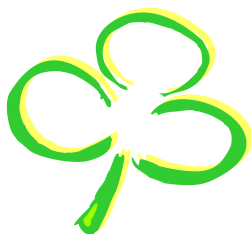
Jesus was patient with all of them. He gradually led them to see that he was the Messiah.

Is the truth about Jesus getting through to me?



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

March 17, 2020



Irish immigration

According to the United States Census Bureau, an estimated 4.8 million Irish have immigrated to the United States since 1820. Only Germany, Italy, Mexico, and the United Kingdom have sent more immigrants to America.

* * *

Everyone wants to be Irish on St. Patrick's Day. The U.S. Census notes that 34.5 million Americans say they are primarily or partially Irish – seven times larger than the population of Ireland itself (4.68 million).

But St. Patrick couldn't claim to be Irish. He was born in Britain and taken as a slave to Ireland.

* * *

Since 1800, 10 million people have emigrated from Ireland. The country with the most Irish immigrants is the United Kingdom (England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland).

Today is the feast of St. Patrick.

Tuesday ~ Third Week of Lent

Jesus' disciples had gone into the town to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, "How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?" (For Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." (Jn 4:8-10)

Throughout the story of the Samaritan woman, Jesus speaks of some beautiful, profound truths . . . and the woman keeps missing them because she only hears what Jesus is saying at a superficial level.

I do the same thing.

At times I can go through life that way and never see the depth and the richness and the presence of God in other people nor the deeper things of their life.

During Lent, I need to try to be more attentive. That's why we do what we do during Lent.

The three Lenten practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving go back over 1,000 years in the Church. When I fast, I don't just lower my cholesterol, I begin to tune into hunger, to life, to death. When I give things away, I clear away the clutter of my life and begin to recognize what is essential.

And when I pray?

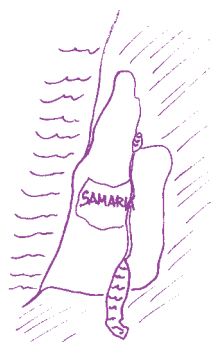
Just imagine what I might see.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

Samaritans

When Assyria conquered the Jews of the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 721 B.C., they deported a large number of Jews to other parts of their vast empire, and brought into the area many people from other nations they had conquered.



Since many of these people inter-married with the Jews who remained in Israel, the population became of mixed nationality, no longer purely Jewish. These people also followed religious practices that were not wholly Jewish.

Because the capital city of the Kingdom of Israel was Samaria, the people came to be known as Samaritans.

When the Jews of the Southern Kingdom of Judah returned from exile in Babylon in 538 B.C., the Samaritans actively opposed their desire to rebuild the city of Jerusalem. So, by the time of Jesus, there was lingering hostility between Jews and Samaritans.

Since the Samaritans lived between the Jewish territories of Galilee and Judea, many Jews going to and coming from Jerusalem had to pass through their land. Samaritans were often hostile to these travelers.

'You pray for the hungry.
Then you feed them.
This is how prayer works.'

– Pope Francis

Wednesday ~ Third Week of Lent

The woman said to Jesus, “Sir, you do not even have a bucket and the cistern is deep; where then can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us this cistern and drank from it himself with his children and his flocks?” Jesus answered and said to her, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again; but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” (Jn 4:11-14)

The Samaritan woman at the well didn't quite grasp what Jesus was teaching. She wondered how he could give her living water without having a bucket.

Sometimes I can get a little mixed up myself, usually because I, too, am thinking on a different level, lost in all the concerns of my own life.

Jesus pointed to the water in the well and said, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again. But whoever drinks the water I will give will never be thirsty again.”

God is caring for me right now. God has something to give me right now.

Do I accept this care . . . or get lost in my own concerns?

Jesus could say to me as he said to the Samaritan woman at the well, “If you but knew the gift of God . . .”



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

March 19, 2020

'Fr. Joe'

On this day in 2013, the cause for sainthood was advanced for a priest who served the poor in the United States and in the missions of South America.

Born March 15, 1924, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Joseph Walijewski was the ninth child of poor Polish immigrants. He was ordained a priest for the Diocese of LaCrosse, Wisconsin, in 1950.



After several years of parish ministry in his diocese, Fr. Joe became a missionary in Bolivia in 1956. He later worked in Ecuador for two years, and then moved to Peru after the 1971 earthquake. In Lima, he founded St. Joseph Parish in a shantytown outside the city, and worked with people uprooted by the earthquake. When Pope John Paul II visited Fr. Joe's parish in 1985, he was so impressed by the priest's work that he gave him \$50,000 in seed money for an orphanage, which eventually housed 100 children.

At age 76, Fr. Joe established a home for the elderly. Despite his advancing years, he continued to drive into the rainforest to celebrate Mass for the Ashiko Indians.

Fr. Walijewski died from pneumonia and leukemia in Peru on April 11, 2006, at the age of 82. He is buried in Peru on a hill overlooking the orphanage.

* * *

Fr. Joe said that his Polish mother had three wishes: to have a son named Joseph who would become a priest, that he'd build a church in honor of St. Joseph, and that she would die on St. Joseph's feast (which she did in 1971).

Today is the feast of St. Joseph.

Thursday ~ Feast of St. Joseph

The woman said to Jesus, “Sir, give me this water, so that I may not be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.” Jesus said to her, “Go call your husband and come back.” The woman answered and said to him, “I do not have a husband.” Jesus answered her, “You are right in saying, ‘I do not have a husband.’ For you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true.” The woman said to him, “Sir, I can see that you are a prophet.” (Jn 4:15-19)

The Samaritan woman and Jesus continue their conversation. Once the woman appears to understand a bit more, Jesus invites her to bring her husband – perhaps so they can engage in deeper conversation.

At this point, the woman gets a little bit snippy, and Jesus then points out that she has had five husbands and the man she is living with now is not really her husband.

The woman now realizes that the man she is talking to is no ordinary person. He must be a prophet because he knows things about her that no stranger could ever know.

The Lord knows things about me too. But he still loves me, just as he loved the Samaritan woman.

During these remaining weeks of Lent, that’s good to remember.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

March 20, 2020



Jacob's well

The traditional site of Jacob's well is located in the region of Samaria, about 30 miles north of Jerusalem. The well can be found about six miles to the northwest of the city of Shechem (formerly Sychar), near the modern city of Nablus, Israel.

The well is located on land that the Old Testament says was purchased by Jacob. Near the well is a tomb which is believed to contain the remains of Jacob's son, Joseph.

Today, the well is located near the ruins of an unfinished Russian Byzantine Church. The Communist revolution in Russia halted construction of the church in 1917.

* * *

Jacob's Well Appeal is a nonprofit organization based in the United Kingdom. Begun in 1984, the charity focuses on education and providing safe drinking water, sanitation, hygiene, and feeding programs in developing and underdeveloped countries.

The woman left her water jar and went into the town and said to the people, “Come see a man who told me everything I have done. Could he possibly be the Messiah?” They went out of the town and came to him. Meanwhile, the disciples urged him, “Rabbi, eat.” But he said to them, “I have food to eat of which you do not know.” So the disciples said to one another, “Could someone have brought him something to eat?” Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to finish his work.” (Jn 4:28-34)

Jesus is sitting there, thinking about the woman and the people in the town, and how he’s come to help people like them.

And all the disciples can think about is food.

Jesus is thinking about salvation, and they’re thinking about bread and meat because they just went to town to buy food.

Jesus is thinking symbolically about what his “food” is, and they’re talking about their immediate physical needs, like having a sandwich.

Jesus uses the image of food to talk about his hunger to do the Father’s will, but they don’t get it. The disciples think that he is talking about food that someone must have given him.

Sometimes I don’t get it either. How often do I enjoy the good food of doing the Father’s will?

Or how often do I just settle for meat and bread?



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

March 21, 2020

Fr. Fabian Flynn

Fabian Flynn was born June 21, 1905, in Boston, Massachusetts. Following his ordination in 1931 as a priest of the Passionists, he worked as a retreat master, and later as associate editor of *Sign*, the Passionists' magazine.

From 1942 to 1946, he was a chaplain for the United States Army, participating in the Africa, Normandy, and Sicily invasions, for which he received a Silver Star, the Bronze Star, two Oak Leaf Clusters, and a Purple Heart. After the war, he served as confessor to Nazi war criminals during the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, Germany.

Fr. Flynn also became involved with the newly-created Catholic Relief Services, established by the United States bishops to address humanitarian needs in war-torn countries. Fr. Flynn worked in Munich, Germany, to provide housing, food and clothing to displaced persons. He later directed CRS agencies in Austria, Hungary, and Italy. In Hungary, he often assisted Cardinal Joseph Mindszenty in charity work, and was cited by the Communists as the cardinal's friend when Mindszenty was arrested.

In 1961, Fr. Flynn returned to the United States where he became director of publicity for CRS. In 1968, he returned to Rome to assist with relief work in Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, and India.

Fr. Flynn retired to the Passionists' St. Michael Monastery in Union City, New Jersey. He died January 29, 1973.



This weekend is the annual
Catholic Relief Services
Collection.

Many of the Samaritans of that town began to believe in Jesus because of the word of the woman who testified, “He told me everything I have done.” When the Samaritans came to Jesus, they invited him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. Many more began to believe in him because of his word, and they said to the woman, “We no longer believe because of your word; for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the savior of the world.” (Jn 4:39-42)

The Samaritans asked Jesus to stay with them, so Jesus did. During that stay, they came to know him better and arrived at a deeper faith. No longer did their faith depend on the secondhand word of the woman who met Jesus at the well. Now their faith came from direct experience.

Their belief may not have been perfect, nor did they have all the answers. But they had crossed a line so that their faith was their own.

There is a lesson here for me.

At some point, my faith has to become my own.

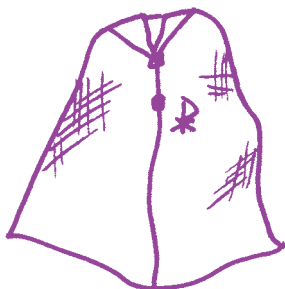
I can learn about faith from others, from teachers, from preachers, from my parents. That is my initial faith. But, after that, I need to have some direct contact with the Lord through prayer and through my own experience. Then my faith becomes my own.

Some people can live their entire life without crossing that line. But what happened to the Samaritans can happen to me. My faith will no longer depend on the story of others because I have experienced the presence of the Lord in my life.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

March 22, 2020



St. Martin of Tours

At 18, young Martin was a soldier in the Roman Imperial Army on duty in Gaul (modern-day France).

The story is told that as he rode up to the city gates on a harshly bitter winter day, he saw a beggar, poorly dressed in rags and shivering from the cold. Martin had no money, but he cut his own cloak in two and gave half to the beggar. That night Martin dreamed he saw Jesus clothed in half of the garment, saying, “Martin, yet a catechumen, has wrapped me in this garment.”

After he left the army, Martin entered religious life. He founded the first monastery in France. When the bishop of Tours died, Martin was declared bishop by the local Catholic community.

He died about 397 A.D.

We are three weeks away from Easter.

I was naked, and you clothed me



Imagine something terrible happens, a famine, a flood, a fire, and residents hardly have anything left.

When that happens, people around the world always try to help out. They collect money, clothes, food, medicine, and furniture which they send to those who need help. The shipment arrives, and it's distributed to the people.

About six months later, donors come to visit, and they ask those who received the aid, "What did you do with the assistance we sent you?" Suppose the person who had been in need said: "Oh, it's terrific. Look at my closet. It's full of clothes. Look at the shelves where I have all this food. And the money? I was able to buy a couple of houses. I also have all the medicine stocked up for me and my family."

The donors will reply: "That's not why we gave it to you. We want you to have enough food, clothes and furniture, but we gave all this to you to do something with it for all the people who are in need."

Someday Jesus is going to say the same thing to me: "What did you do with what I gave you? I gave you food and good things. Did you share them? I gave you a mind. Did you use it to make this world a better place?"

Jesus gave me these gifts so that I could help people.
A good thing to remember during Lent.

*'The service you cannot render me
you must do for your neighbors.'*

– St. Catherine of Siena
recounting words God spoke to her

March 23, 2020

'I want to wrap up the whole world
in a network of charity.'

– Blessed Frederic Ozanam

St. Vincent de Paul Society

On April 23, 1833, the first meeting of the Conference of Charity was held, and the organization was placed under the patronage of St. Vincent de Paul.

Among the attendees was a French law student named Frederic Ozanam, who happened to be celebrating his 20th birthday that day.

Despite Frederic's love of literature, the young man had bowed to his father's wishes that he follow him in the legal profession. While studying law, Frederic often found himself defending his Catholic faith. One time after he had talked about Christianity's positive role in society, a listener challenged him: "What do you do besides talk to prove the faith that is in you?"

Frederic took that question to heart.

Following the meeting of the Conference of Charity, he spent the next 20 years working to establish and grow the St. Vincent de Paul Society. The French revolution of 1848 left many people in need of the services the St. Vincent de Paul Society could offer. Ozanam, despite deteriorating health, wrote articles and fought for justice for the poor.

He died September 8, 1853, at the age of 40. In August 1997, Pope John Paul II beatified Frederic Ozanam during World Youth Day.

* * *

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is present in more than 150 countries, and has more than one million volunteers. It runs more than 180 thrift shops throughout the United States.

Monday ~ Fourth Week of Lent

As Jesus passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him. We have to do the works of the one who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” (Jn 9:1-5)

Some people see faith and religion only as a fixed set of truths, boxed in, set, a pat hand.

Others see that faith calls for something more – it is also a call to believe in some truths that eye has not fully seen nor ear fully heard. Faith calls us to ongoing discovery that challenges, consoles, and sometimes discomforts.

In the Gospel story about the miracle of the man born blind, the Pharisees stand pat. They are disciples of Moses and for them, everything has already been set. They are not open to any new discovery, new insight, any new way of looking at things.

The man who was blind from birth is the only one who can say: “I don’t know.” He is presumably also a disciple of Moses but he is open to new discovery and to the eye-opener that Jesus is.

Sometimes it’s hard to resist the temptation to approach faith only as something fixed and finished. It seems to involve less risk and pain. That’s the attraction of fundamentalist religion. But my life is meant to be a process of opening my eyes, widening my vision. I am called to imitate the openness of the man born blind, and not the blindness of the Pharisees.

The Lord can help me do it.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*



Pool of Siloam

During the time of Jesus, the Pool of Siloam was the only source of water for the residents of Jerusalem. It brought water from the Gihon Spring (which was located in the Kidron Valley) through a 1,750-foot tunnel that had been built by King Hezekiah in the eighth century B.C.

The exact location of the pool is unknown, but two sites south of the Old City of Jerusalem have been identified as possibly being the place where Jesus cured the man born blind.

The first pool is the larger and grander of the two. Early Christian pilgrims often visited here. About 450 A.D. a church was built nearby, only to be destroyed in 614 by the Persians.

The second pool is about 50 meters away from the first. This pool's existence became known in 2004 when Israeli workers doing maintenance on the water pipe discovered ancient steps leading to a first-century pool.

Archaeologists now believe this could be the actual Pool of Siloam used in the time of Jesus.

Tuesday ~ Fourth Week of Lent

When Jesus had said this, he spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva, and smeared the clay on his eyes, and said to him, “Go wash in the Pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). So the blind man went and washed, and came back able to see. (Jn 9:6-7)

The story of the man born blind is one of the “long stories” in John’s Gospel (like the story of the woman at the well, or the raising of Lazarus). These long stories are superb pieces of literary and theological art.

The cast of characters in this story gives me a range of choices as to whose shoes I want to put myself in.

I can easily put myself in the shoes of the man born blind. He’s a natural, because his experience resembles my baptism. He was “anointed” by Jesus (with mud), and then sent to a pool of water where his eyes were opened.

At my baptism, I received the gift of faith which enabled me to see the light.

But the man born blind had more to learn, and so do I.

He gradually moved from a superficial relationship with Jesus to one that was much more profound.

I need to ask if I am moving in that direction.

Am I moving closer and closer to Jesus?

Or am I just standing still?



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

March 25, 2020



Spitting

In John's account of the story of Jesus restoring the sight of the man born blind, the evangelist specifically notes that Jesus spat on the ground and made clay which he then applied to the man's eyes.

In Mark's account, Jesus spits on the eyes of the blind man before healing him.

In both passages, Jesus uses spit in the process of healing the man.

* * *

In contrast, in the Old Testament, the action of spitting was an insult and a sign of contempt. In the 25th chapter of Deuteronomy, a man who fails to follow the Jewish law of marrying his dead brother's wife was to be spat upon. He was under the curse of God for refusing to follow God's law.

In the 12th chapter of Numbers, spitting in someone's face indicated the person was cursed by God.

* * *

There's no consensus among biblical scholars about why Jesus used spittle when healing the man born blind. Some have suggested that there may be a connection with the anointing ("smearing") with sacred chrism that's part of the ritual of baptism.

Today is the feast of the Annunciation.

Wednesday ~ Feast of the Annunciation

They brought the one who was once blind to the Pharisees. Now Jesus had made clay and opened his eyes on a Sabbath. So then the Pharisees also asked the man how he was able to see. He said to them, “He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and now I can see.” Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, because he does not keep the Sabbath.” (But) others said, “How can a sinful man do such signs?” There was a division among them. So they said to the blind man again, “What do you have to say about him, since he opened your eyes?” He said, “He is a prophet.” (Jn 9:13-17)

After healing the man born blind, Jesus won't be seen again until the story's final verses. This next part describes various people's reactions to the miracle through a series of four "interrogations."

The first interrogation is made by the friends and neighbors of the man born blind. They'd been used to seeing him begging, and now they want to know what had happened to him.

The second interrogation strikes a different note, as the Pharisees enter the story. They're suspicious. Some get caught up in the fact that Jesus made clay on the Sabbath when the law says that you're not allowed to work on the Sabbath. They think they see it all, and they're ready to go after anyone who doesn't see it their way.

Nobody really wants to put themselves in the shoes of these Pharisees. But in order to be honest with myself, I have to do it. Not that I'm *always* like them, but sometimes I am. It doesn't matter whether I call myself liberal, moderate, or conservative. Everyone's got blind spots.

Lent is a good time to look for my own blind spots.

Jesus, open my eyes too.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

March 26, 2020



Patron saint of the blind

While December 13 is usually associated with St. Lucy, she shares this feast day with another saint who is also the patron saint of those with eye problems: St. Odile.

Because she was born blind, Odile's wealthy French family gave her away to a peasant family to raise. At age 12, she entered the convent and miraculously regained her sight during her baptism. She was baptized Odile, which means "daughter of light." She eventually became an abbess and founded a monastery in Alsace, France. Among the pilgrims who visited this spot was Charlemagne.

St. Odile died about 720.

Look back at your Lenten plans on February 23.
If you haven't done as well as you wished,
now is a good time to make a fresh start.

Thursday ~ Fourth Week of Lent

Now the Jews did not believe that the man had been blind and gained his sight until they summoned the parents of the one who had gained his sight. They asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How does he now see?” His parents answered and said, “We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. We do not know how he sees now, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him, he is of age; he can speak for himself.” His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone acknowledged him as the Messiah, he would be expelled from the synagogue. For this reason his parents said, “He is of age; question him.” (Jn 9:18-23)

The third interrogation is of the man’s family and friends by the Pharisees. They’re trying to break the man’s story. This is not interested questioning in order to find out and to learn. Now it’s a cross-examination.

And the family and friends are afraid.

They don’t want to get involved. They don’t want to be expelled from the synagogue by giving the wrong answer.

For them it’s simply: Don’t ask us. Ask him. He can speak for himself.

I do some of that too. I don’t want to get involved if it means I might have to pay a price.

Let me take a few minutes to put myself in the shoes of the parents as they are being questioned.

What would I say if I were cross-examined . . . about my faith in Jesus Christ?



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

March 27, 2020



Chrism Mass and the poor

On March 26, 1991, Bishop Ken Untener took the unusual step of issuing an “official decree” for the Diocese of Saginaw, Michigan.

The bishop asked the people attending the Chrism Mass at the Cathedral of Mary of the Assumption in Saginaw, Michigan, to begin every church meeting from that day forward, with the question: “How shall what we are doing here affect or involve the poor?”

The decree was to cover all meetings held under Church auspices, at the parish or diocesan level, no matter what their purpose. The reason for the decree, the bishop later said, was “to put the poor front and center in our thoughts.”

The decree on the poor was in effect for 97 days, until July 1, 1991. What were some of the effects?

A parish youth group fasted to raise money for a Catholic church in Haiti, while another parish held its first food collection for migrant families.

One gentleman at a major corporation ran off copies of the homily. He distributed these at every major meeting, and invited participants to spend some time talking about the poor. He later related it was having a good effect.

Bishop Untener died on this day in 2004.

So a second time the Pharisees called the man who had been blind and said to him, “Give God the praise! We know that this man is a sinner.” He replied, “If he is a sinner, I do not know. One thing I do know is that I was blind and now I see.” So they said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” The man answered them, “I told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?” (Jn 9:24-27)

Now the Pharisees bring back the man born blind and interrogate him again (the fourth interrogation). They try to turn him against Jesus whom they have declared a sinner. They try to break his story by getting the man to repeat the details and perhaps contradict himself.

The man, who was once blind, can now see. The Pharisees, who at the beginning could see, are now blind. They have closed their eyes to the reality of what happened. They are moving backwards. They are trying to stand pat on their own position and close their eyes to everything else.

They claim confidently that they know everything, but they do not know where this “Jesus” came from, and aren’t interested in finding out.

In the last line of this Gospel, Jesus will tell the Pharisees that there is no sin in blindness. There are many things that I honestly do not see, and there is no sin in that.

The problem is when I *think* I see everything and claim that I do . . . and refuse to open my eyes to what God has to offer.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

March 28, 2020



Oberammergau

Germany's famous passion play at Oberammergau (a Bavarian village about 60 miles southwest of Munich) takes place every 10 years. It is scheduled for this year from May 16 to October 4.

When an outbreak of the bubonic plague began to spread in the 17th century, the people of Oberammergau prayed to be spared. They vowed that the whole community would, every 10 years, stage a massive production presenting the story of Christ's death and resurrection to the world. The town was spared from the plague, and the tradition of the Oberammergau Passion Play was born. Its first performance was in 1634.

The Passion Play is performed on an open stage with seating for nearly 5,000 spectators. Members of the huge cast (there are 1,700 parts) must be Oberammergau natives, or have lived there for 10 years. The play lasts a whole day, with a three-hour break for lunch. The play is performed five times a week, running for several months.

* * *

The Passion Play of Oberammergau did not take place in 1770 when Bavaria banned passion plays after some Church and state leaders objected to any theatrical production of the death of Christ. The Passion Play was also canceled in 1940 because of World War II.

Saturday ~ Fourth Week of Lent

The Pharisees ridiculed the blind man and said, “You are that man’s disciple; we are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses, but we do not know where this one is from.” The man answered and said to them, “This is what is so amazing, that you do not know where he is from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if one is devout and does his will, he listens to him.” They answered and said to him, “You were born totally in sin, and are you trying to teach us?” Then they threw him out. (Jn 9:28-31)

After the blind man bathed in the pool, his eyes were opened. Not only could he see physically, but gradually he began to see with the “eyes of faith.” He kept learning more about Jesus and about himself. His journey wasn’t finished when he came out of the pool.

When I was born, I was born “blind,” spiritually blind, without faith. Then (like the man born blind), I was immersed in the waters of baptism, and given the spiritual sight of faith. But my journey was not finished at that moment either.

Throughout my whole lifetime, I am meant to open my eyes to the great mystery that never can be seen completely or understood fully in this life.

I am meant to open my eyes to the meaning of life and who I am, to try to make sense out of suffering and to grow.

I am called to the great, expansive adventure of opening wide my eyes of faith to this great mystery that is God.

Lent is a great time to think about that.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

March 29, 2020

'No question of race, nationality, religion, sex or character hinders a single applicant for repose and healing . . . the best medical talent in the city is placed at the disposition of the poorest and meanest of its citizens.'

– Newspaper description of Charity Hospital, 1873

Charity Hospital

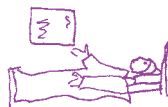
The first Catholic hospital in the United States was Charity Hospital in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Charity was also the second public hospital in the United States, opening only months after Bellevue Hospital in New York opened on March 31, 1736. Charity was founded when a French sailor and shipbuilder died and left his estate to “establish and maintain a hospital for the poor people of New Orleans.” In the 1830s, the hospital came under the operation of the Daughters of Charity.

During the Civil War, Charity was one of the world’s largest hospitals, serving 1,000 patients at a time. Over the years as it outgrew its building, Charity Hospital had six different locations. Its last location was completed in 1939 with a bed capacity of 1,800, which soon was increased to 3,000. Charity was, by then, one of the largest hospitals in the United States.

After Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the hospital was badly damaged and was closed. Despite civic efforts to reopen the hospital, the facility remains closed and is slated for redevelopment.

I was ill, and you cared for me



Lent should mean a great deal to people who are chronically sick. Lent leads to Easter, and Easter is a promise that no matter how damaged their body, no matter how fragile their health, they can still look forward to a day when they will have life, and have it to the fullest.

To those who are sick, that means a great deal. Try as they may, they're bound to feel like only spectators to a lot of human activity. Commercials about frolicking on the beach are not intended for them. Physically, things are not improving. In some cases, they're going downhill. There is damage that no rehabilitation can undo, tissue or bones or organs that will never come back. It may be a heart condition, partial loss of hearing, arthritis – and it will be so until the day they die. It may be a wheelchair, a bed, a brace – for life.

Many of the sick cope, and cope well. They're not gloom and doom. Their spirits are often better than those whose bodies are supple and strong. But still, with all their good spirits, they must feel that they're missing a lot of life.

Easter is the feast of human life to the full. For the sick, Easter is the promise that all our bodies have a future that is bright. For the sick, their hope is more than a wish. It's full-bodied, rich and strong. Flesh-and-blood life is not passing them by.

Jesus has brought human life safely through death, and he transformed it. When they buried his body, it was a wreck. When he rose from the dead, it was wondrous.

That's what awaits the sick. That's what awaits all of us.

**'We must show charity towards the sick,
who are in greater need of help . . . at least
let us go and wait on them and comfort them.'**

– St. Alphonsus Liguori

March 30, 2020



Bishop Bartolomé de las Casas

In 2015, drought had struck in the Mexican state of Chiapas. As the water in a large reservoir evaporated, the shape of a 400-year-old church began to emerge. Known as the Temple of Santiago, it was submerged when the reservoir was created in the region in 1966.

The church had been established by Bartolomé de las Casas, a Spanish priest and historian, who was named the first bishop of Chiapas on this day in 1544.

Born in Seville, Spain, about 1474, Bartolomé's father had accompanied Christopher Columbus on his second voyage to the New World. Bartolomé became a lawyer and frequently traveled with other explorers to the Antilles and Hispaniola to seek his fortune. But he wanted to study for the priesthood, and was ordained about 1510.

During his visits to the New World, he witnessed the harsh treatment and poor conditions of indigenous people, who were overworked and dying from epidemics carried over from Europe. With the backing of local clergy and Church hierarchy in Spain, he campaigned for the native people's rights, and won support for a measure to place the native people under the Church's protection. Not all his efforts succeeded. He tried unsuccessfully to establish settlements where Spanish farmers and native people could work together.

He joined the Dominican order in 1523, and wrote historical articles about the native people. As bishop, his advocacy for the rights of native people brought him into serious conflict with local landowners, and las Casas soon was forced to leave Mexico and return to Spain where he remained until his death in 1566.

Monday ~ Fifth Week of Lent

Now a man was ill, Lazarus from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who had anointed the Lord with perfumed oil and dried his feet with her hair; it was her brother Lazarus who was ill. So the sisters sent word to Jesus, saying, “Master, the one you love is sick.” (Jn 11:1-3)

This week’s Scriptural text is the familiar story of the raising of Lazarus. Throughout this week’s readings, there are certain truths that can easily be applied to me:

- “The one you love is sick.” Someone could be saying that to Jesus and pointing to me. Not that I am necessarily dying, but everyday I have my tribulations and moments of weakness and I need the strength and redemption and the forgiveness that Jesus gives us.

- Jesus traveled a long way to come and see Lazarus. He would do the same for me.

- Jesus risked his life by heading into enemy territory. He would do the same for me.

The same life-giving help, the same basic miracle is available to me every day.

I need to remember that and never be afraid to turn to Jesus and ask for his help.

Maybe I need to turn to Jesus more often.

Like now, for instance.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

March 31, 2020



St. Martha

Very little is known about Martha, the sister of Lazarus and Mary. She appears only in the Gospels of Luke and John. Legend says that after Pentecost, Martha accompanied Lazarus and Mary to evangelize southern France.

Martha is the patron of servants, housewives, waitstaff, and cooks. Her feast day is July 29.

* * *

In John's Gospel, Martha makes the great profession of faith that Peter makes in the other three Gospels: "You are the Messiah, the Son of God."

Tuesday ~ Fifth Week of Lent

When Jesus heard this he said, “This illness is not to end in death, but is for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that he was ill, he remained for two days in the place where he was. Then after this he said to his disciples, “Let us go back to Judea.” The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just trying to stone you, and you want to go back there?” (Jn 11:4-8)

The story of Lazarus is one of the great passages in the Fourth Gospel.

That’s because Jesus comes face-to-face with the great enemy that is death . . . and we see who wins.

The Church saved this Gospel for us until the last Sunday of Lent before Palm Sunday.

Interestingly, in John’s Gospel, the raising of Lazarus became the final straw as to why Jesus was killed. It’s right after this in John’s Gospel that the Sanhedrin meets and says, “We have to kill him.”

And they did.

So when Jesus is talking about the Son of God being glorified, he is saying that through his response to Lazarus’ illness and death, the Son of God will enter into his death and his resurrection, which is his glory.

And he did this for me.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

April 1, 2020



Mary of Bethany

Outside of what is written in the New Testament, little is known about Mary, the sister of Lazarus.

She is often confused with Mary Magdalene, is thought to have been at the foot of the cross, and is sometimes believed to be the woman who washed Jesus' feet with perfumed oil.

The number of women named Mary in the New Testament adds to the confusion. In the sixth century, Pope Gregory the Great said that Mary Magdalene, the woman sinner in Luke 7:36-50, and Mary of Bethany were all the same person – a statement reiterated by Pope Gregory XIV in 1591.

Today's theologians no longer believe the two Marys are the same person.

The Orthodox Church honors her on June 4 as the Righteous Mary, the sister of Lazarus. Legend says that after the martyrdom of St. Stephen, Lazarus and his two sisters left Jerusalem and began preaching in other lands.

Today is April Fools' Day.

Wednesday ~ Fifth Week of Lent

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, only about two miles away. Many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him; but Mary sat at home. Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” (Jn 11:17-21)

Sometimes I may feel about the Lord as Martha did when Jesus took so long to arrive in Bethany: “Thanks for coming, Lord . . . *a little late*. I know you’re with me, Lord, but where were you when I needed you?”

But Jesus reassures me as he reassured Martha: “Look, no matter when I seem to get there, I’ve been with you all the time, and I can pull life out of anything. I can do that with your sins – things that are your fault. I can do that with tragedy. I will do it with the crucifixion. I can do it when things happen because of the sins and failings of others.”

That is the lesson of Lazarus’ rising. If I can believe that Jesus brought Lazarus back to life, it makes all the difference. I never need lose hope. With faith in Jesus, I can respond to situations (even sin and violence) *his* way, and know that he can pull life out of it.

It’s a powerful belief.

As we approach Easter, if I can catch the spirit of this Gospel and believe that Jesus can bring life from death, my whole life will be changed.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*



Jewish belief in life after death

In the Jewish tradition, belief in life after death was quite vague.

In the days of Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, or Isaiah, the Jewish people did not really believe in life after death. They thought that when people died, only their memory lived on. (That, by the way, is why it was so important to have children, and why it was considered a curse to be childless.)

The first Scriptural evidence of Jewish belief in life after death appears in the Book of Daniel, which was written only about 150 years before Christ. The author is speaking about what will happen some distant day in the future – the end of time. Here is what he wrote:

“Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake. Some shall live forever . . . and shall shine brightly like the splendor of the heavens . . . and shall be like the stars forever.” (Daniel 12:2-3)

The description in Daniel is that after people die, they more or less sleep until the end of time. Therefore, the Book of Daniel describes a delayed life after death.

By the time of Jesus, belief in a life after death and a final resurrection was commonly held by the Jewish people, although some (such as the Sadducees) did not believe in any kind of afterlife.

Thursday ~ Fifth Week of Lent

Martha said, “(But) even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise.” Martha said to him, “I know he will rise, in the resurrection on the last day.” Jesus told her, “I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” She said to him, “Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world.” (Jn 11:22-27)

In light of Jewish belief of what happens after death, it's interesting to read carefully the response of Jesus.

He is revealing a new understanding of life after death. It is a remarkable revelation.

Jesus says that through faith in him as the Messiah, the Son of God, I have a new life within me now that is more than the result of my heart ticking and my lungs breathing.

And this life that I have now lives right through death.

How can we human beings have a life that goes on when the heart stops ticking and the lungs stop breathing?

Because Jesus gives us God's life, and God's life never dies, never goes into a holding mode. It lives fully and forever.

“I am the resurrection and the life . . .”

Do I believe this?



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

April 3, 2020

'I prayed to know how best to serve my God.'
– Dame Cicely Saunders

Hospice care

Hospice is specialized health care that is centered on palliative (comfort) care rather than on treatment.

The word comes from the Latin word *hospes*, which means “guest” and “host.” During the 11th century, the Catholic Church provided places of hospitality, or hospices, for travelers as well as for the sick and dying.

In 1967, hospice took on new meaning when Dame Cicely Saunders opened St. Christopher’s Hospice for terminally ill patients in the United Kingdom.

She conceived the idea of different care for the terminally ill while working as a medical social worker at a London hospital in 1948. Once an agnostic, she became a Christian, and believed God wanted her to build a home for dying people where they could live and die in dignity and love. She became a doctor, and, at one point in her career, worked at St. Joseph Hospice for the dying poor, which was run by Sisters of Charity. At St. Joseph’s, she developed a system of pain control for dying patients, and later said she also learned the importance of symbols. At St. Christopher’s, she incorporated artistic representations of the crucifixion throughout the facility.

Dr. Saunders died July 14, 2005, at St. Christopher’s Hospice.

* * *

According to the World Health Organization, only about 14 percent of people worldwide who need palliative care receive it.

We're a week away from Good Friday.

And Jesus wept. So the Jews said, “See how he loved him.” But some of them said, “Could not the one who opened the eyes of the blind man have done something so that this man would not have died?” So Jesus, perturbed again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay across it. Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the dead man’s sister, said to him, “Lord, by now there will be a stench; he has been dead for four days.” Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?” (Jn 11:35-40)

When Jesus is informed of Lazarus’ illness, he waits two more days before leaving. When he finally arrives in Bethany, the people point out that Lazarus has been dead four days.

Why did John make such a point of the time lag?

There was a popular Jewish belief at the time this Gospel was written, that at death the soul lingered in the vicinity of the body for three days. John wanted to be sure everyone realized that after four days, Lazarus was as dead as dead could be.

And Jesus had the power to bring Lazarus back.

Sometimes I may wonder if God has the power and patience to deal with me. I know I sin, and my failings are my own fault. They’re all too clear to me. Deep inside, I know how many chances I’ve had. I may wonder if God can be that patient with me, or if God has the power to help me.

Today’s passage reassures me that God does have power and patience to deal with my sins and failings.

And God can bring me to life eternal.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*



Tomb of Lazarus

The traditional tomb of Lazarus is said to be located in a cave in the village of Bethany.

Church scholars do not recognize this tomb as the final resting spot of Lazarus. Even the present city of Bethany itself is said to only be *within* the general location of the village where Lazarus, Mary, and Martha lived.

The first mention of the tomb of Lazarus came from the third-century historian Eusebius. In 390 A.D., St. Jerome wrote about a church that had been built over the tomb. The church (called the “Lazarium”) was later destroyed by an earthquake. A new church was built, but Persian conquerors tore it down in 614. Crusaders built a third church in the 12th century, but it fell into the hands of the Moslem invaders.

The present church was built in 1952, and the site is maintained by the Franciscans.

In the fourth century, Egeria (a Christian pilgrim who wrote about her visits to such holy sites as Nazareth) described how the clergy and people of Jerusalem visited the Lazarium on the Saturday before Palm Sunday.

Saturday ~ Fifth Week of Lent

Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out, tied hand and foot with burial bands, and his face was wrapped in a cloth. So Jesus said to them, “Untie him and let him go.” Now many of the Jews who had come to Mary and seen what he had done began to believe in him. (Jn 11:43-45)

Jesus brings Lazarus back to physical life.

But the main point of the raising of Lazarus is not to show that Jesus can raise a dead man back to life for a time.

The main point of the raising of Lazarus is to teach that Jesus here and now can overcome death. It's a revelation that Jesus offers me a life *now* that will never die, because he offers me a share in *God's own life*.

Lazarus will one day die again, but so what?

I will die one day, but so what?

Jesus offers me a life *now* that lives right through death. So that when I die, I already have God's life running through me.

This is a life that does not die.

This is a stunning revelation.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

April 5, 2020



Dismas Ministry

“Dismas Ministry” is an organization which reaches out to those who are imprisoned.

The ministry was begun in 2000 by Ron Zeilinger, who was working in the development office of the Priests of the Sacred Heart in Hales Corners, Wisconsin. Zeilinger noticed that the congregation received a fair amount of mail from prison chapels and inmates, often asking for Bibles and other religious material.

Dismas Ministry was soon formed. Today, it supplies free religious materials to more than 700 prisons in 50 states and 116 dioceses. The ministry also works to help heal the lives of both inmates and victims.

On Palm Sunday, the Passion narrative
is from Matthew, Mark, or Luke,
rotating every three years
(John's account is always read on Good Friday).
This year's account is from Matthew.

I was in prison, and you visited me



When I stop and think about it, nobody can love everybody. You can't even like everybody, and you certainly can't help everybody.

So how am I supposed to reach out in love to the kinds of people Jesus mentions in the Gospel?

I may not be drawn to people who are poor or in prison, but Jesus is. He loves everyone, and he says that if we are kind to them (even if we are not drawn to them naturally) I am kind to him: "Whatever you did to one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me."

He also says: "What you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me."

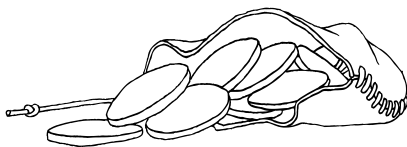
This week the Church celebrates the arrest, imprisonment, and death of Jesus. In a sense, his whole message, the whole Gospel can be summarized in five words: you did it to me.

That is the key here.

If I believe that, I will live differently.

Palm Sunday ushers in the final week
of preparation for the elect,
who will be baptized at the Easter Vigil.

April 6, 2020



Silver in the Bible

In the passion narrative of Matthew, Judas is given 30 pieces of silver for his betrayal of Jesus. The amount of the payoff also turns up in the Old Testament:

- In Zechariah 11:12, Zechariah is paid 30 pieces of silver for his labor.
- In Exodus 21:32, 30 pieces of silver is the payment given if a person's bull gores someone else's slave.

Monday of Holy Week

Then one of the Twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, “What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?” They paid him 30 pieces of silver, and from that time on he looked for an opportunity to hand him over. (Mt 26:14-16)

Each Gospel is really a collection of stories about Jesus. The earliest and most frequently told story about Jesus was the story of the last 18 hours in his life – the story of the way he died. Somehow, this captured all that he was and what he came to do and all that he said and stood for.

Jesus never promised that he would prevent all evil, sickness, tragedy or sin. After all, he gives us free choice. But he did promise that he could come to any evil situation of our own doing or of someone else’s doing – small or great – and pull goodness and life out of it.

Jesus said that his goodness would be more powerful than any evil. He was that good.

Well, if he could go even to death on the cross – a senseless death at the age of 30 or so – a humiliating, repugnant, awful death – and pull life out of it, then the good news is true. He can come to any human situation and draw life.

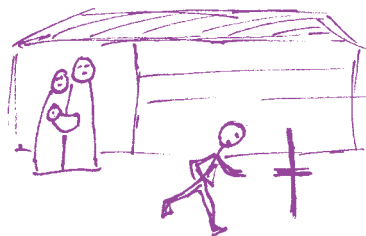
And so, the early Church told the story over and over again – long before the Gospels ever were written. They told of the way He died and they ended that story with the announcement that he pulled life out of it – the announcement of the Resurrection.

Great story . . . and all true.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

April 7, 2020



*A legend or a fable is a story
that doesn't pretend to be historical,
but simply teaches a lesson. The events surrounding
the suffering and death of Christ
gave rise to many legends.*

The repentant robber

A monastery farther up the Nile River from Cairo, Egypt, claims to be on the site where the Holy Family lived for six months.

One of the apocryphal gospels tells the story that while the Holy Family was there, two robbers set upon them. But seeing Mary's tears, one man repented.

According to legend, the men turned out to be the same two robbers who were later crucified with Jesus. The man who had been moved by Mary's tears back in Egypt, ended up to be the "Good Thief" on the cross.

Tuesday of Holy Week

On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the disciples approached Jesus and said, “Where do you want us to prepare for you to eat the Passover?” He said, “Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, ‘The teacher says, “My appointed time draws near; in your house I shall celebrate the Passover with my disciples.’” The disciples then did as Jesus had ordered, and prepared the Passover. (Mt 26:17-19)

In today’s reading, the disciples are preparing for Passover, the high point of the Jewish year . . . and this week we are coming upon the high point of the Church year.

We are celebrating the “paschal mystery.” It’s a phrase with which I’m familiar. But I might think of the paschal mystery in shorthand fashion and reduce it (more or less) to the dying and rising of Jesus.

The trouble with that reduction is its implication that my participation in the paschal mystery happens only when I die. I’m supposed to lead a good moral life *so that* when I die, I can share in the resurrection that Christ won for me.

But the paschal mystery includes much, much more. It refers to the Jewish Passover as the angel of death “passed over” the homes of Jewish people who had put the blood of a lamb on their doorposts.

But it also includes the great passage of Jesus from God to the human race . . . his passage through life, through suffering, through death and then his resurrection and ascending to God, his sending of the Spirit upon us, and his gathering of all creation into the reign of God.

The appointed hour draws near.

Time to prepare for the celebration.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

April 8, 2020

'And from that time on
Judas looked for an opportunity
to hand him over.'

– Mt. 26:16

'Spy Wednesday'

The Wednesday of Holy Week is sometimes referred to as "Spy Wednesday."

In Matthew's account of the Passion, Judas went to the chief priests on the day before the Last Supper and offered to hand Jesus over if they would give him some money.

They paid him 30 pieces of silver.

* * *

Judas Iscariot will forever be known as the disciple who betrayed Jesus. His name is mentioned 22 times in the Gospels (only Peter is mentioned more).

Though his name is well-known, little else is known about Judas Iscariot – which is true of most of the 12 apostles. Scholars aren't even sure what "Iscariot" refers to. It is an obscure word and could have been his family name. Or his town of origin. Or it could have designated his trade, physical appearance, or even political allegiance.

Later, non-scholarly speculation identified him as the older brother of Martha, Mary and Lazarus, or the beloved disciple in John's Gospel, or a Jewish priest.

Such theories have no credibility.

The holy Easter Triduum begins
with the Mass of the Lord's Supper
tomorrow evening.

Wednesday of Holy Week

When it was evening, Jesus reclined at table with the Twelve. And while they were eating, he said, “Amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me.” Deeply distressed at this, they began to say to him one after another, “Surely it is not I, Lord?”

(Mt 26:20-22)

Picture the early Christians, about 10 years after the death of Jesus, gathering to celebrate the Eucharist. There weren't any readings from the New Testament as part of the celebration because none of it would be written until some years later.

So the people told stories about Jesus. They remembered things he had said and things he had done.

They told honest stories. They told the story of how all the disciples of Jesus abandoned him when he was arrested (they told the story so much that it was eventually written down in the Gospels). They told the story of how Peter denied Jesus three times – not simply by hedging a little bit but with an oath and a curse. They told how Judas (one of the *inner circle*) betrayed him for 30 pieces of silver.

They were honest about what had happened.

They told these stories to help one another, because one thing they learned from Jesus was how to deal with sin.

I too can deal with my sin by being honest about it, and by turning to God.

Who can forgive anything.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*



Was the Last Supper a Passover meal?

This simple question is probably the most disputed “calendar” issue in the New Testament.

In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the Last Supper was clearly a Passover meal. But in John’s Gospel, it occurred on the day before the Passover meal. When Jesus is on trial before Pilate, John’s Gospel reads:

“[Pilate] brought Jesus out and seated him on the judge’s bench in the place called Stone Pavement, in Hebrew, Gabbatha. It was preparation day for Passover, and it was about noon.” (19:13-14)

If this chronology is accurate, then the Passover meal would have been celebrated after sunset on the day Jesus died.

The last meal Jesus shared with his disciples certainly was in the spirit of Passover. This feast was the reason they came to Jerusalem. And, certainly, the day before Passover would have special meaning. Some say that this is why Matthew, Mark, and Luke refer to it as a Passover meal.

Furthermore, John has Jesus condemned to death at noon on the day before Passover – the very time when the priests began to slaughter the paschal lambs in the Temple area.

Passover began yesterday.

Thursday of Holy Week

Jesus said in reply, “He who has dipped his hand into the dish with me is the one who will betray me. The Son of Man indeed goes, as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It would be better for that man if he had never been born.” Then Judas, his betrayer, said in reply, “Surely it is not I, Rabbi?” He answered, “You have said so.” (Mt 26:23-25)

Judas was a good person.

That’s worth repeating: Judas was a good person.

Jesus chose him not only to be one of his disciples, but also to be one of the Twelve (his “inner circle”). Judas followed Jesus for maybe two-and-a-half years. Judas was close to Jesus. He was dedicated.

But one thing I know for sure: good people are capable of doing wonderfully good things and terrible things.

Peter was a good person but he denied Jesus three times, under oath, because good people are capable of the finest things and of the worst things. Unlike Judas, Peter did not kill himself. What’s the difference between the two men? Peter returned to the disciples who reminded him that Jesus forgives sinners.

But Judas, after he handed Jesus over and betrayed him, left Gethsemane. As best as we can tell, Judas never went back to the disciples and said (as Peter did), “I did an awful thing.” Instead, Judas went to the chief priests who said, “So what?” Poor Judas confessed to the wrong people.

A good friend is someone who loves you even if you do something wrong. A good friend is someone who has the nerve to tell you that what you did was wrong.

Sin has to be received mercifully and honestly. It can happen with the help of the Lord and the help of good friends.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

April 10, 2020



Stations of the Cross on Good Friday

Many Christian churches celebrate Good Friday with the traditional devotion known as the Stations of the Cross.

While it usually takes place inside a church, a growing number of other venues are also used to pray this devotion. Parishes hold living stations, or travel the route of Jesus through city streets, or pray in cemeteries. One New Jersey church community prayed the Stations of the Cross at sites where violent crimes had occurred.

In Jerusalem, pilgrims pray the Stations of the Cross as they follow the traditional path that Jesus took on the road to his crucifixion.

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, “Take and eat; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, from now on I shall not drink this fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it with you new in the kingdom of my Father.” (Mt 26:26-29)

The sufferings of Jesus may make me uncomfortable. God the Father may seem demanding or cold to make his only son go through all these torments to redeem me.

My sins may seem like a debt that needs to be paid – but *I* can't pay it so Jesus pays it for me by suffering and dying in my place. God the Father seems like a cruel creditor, carefully measuring the debt owed to him because of sin.

But that's not the way it was at all. In the Gospels, the death of Jesus was not a matter of paying a debt.

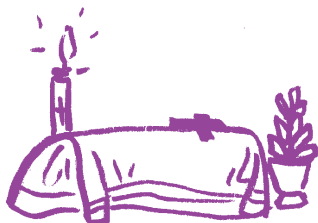
It was a matter of love. An act of perfect love.

Jesus the man loved God fully and (as it turned out) this love involved human suffering. His suffering was the expression of the love of a human being infused with divine love for God.

That love – not the suffering – is the important part.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*



To bury the dead

There was a day, not so long ago, when Catholic cemeteries were “consecrated” – and only Catholics could be buried in consecrated ground. This created problems:

- non-Catholics couldn’t be buried next to their Catholic husband or wife;
- unbaptized children couldn’t be buried next to their parents.

The post-Vatican II changes have resolved these problems. Cemeteries are considered “blessed” not “consecrated.” As a result, non-Catholic family members can be buried in the same ground with their family.

* * *

The Church has also revised its regulations regarding the funeral rites themselves.

Catholic funeral rites can be celebrated for “fallen-away” Catholics. These rites are to be denied only if the deceased had publicly repudiated the Catholic Church, or was a notorious sinner whose funeral would cause public scandal.

Catholic funeral rites can also be celebrated for baptized non-Catholics under the same conditions, provided that this would not be contrary to the deceased’s wishes.

'For Christ died for sins once for all,
the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you
to God. He was put to death in the body but
made alive by the Spirit, through whom also he
went and preached to the spirits in prison who
disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in
the days of Noah while the ark was being built.
In it only a few people, eight in all,
were saved through water.'

– 1Peter 3:18-20

After Jesus died . . .

Early Christians believed that the just who died before the coming of Christ awaited redemption in a shadowy existence, referred to in the Old Testament as *Sheol*.

This belief is alluded to in First Peter 3:18-20, where the place is described as a prison. The statement in the Apostles' Creed that says "he descended into hell" refers to this belief. The statement expresses our faith that, after his death but before his resurrection, Jesus went to announce to those in this "prison" that they had been saved and were invited to heavenly life.

This shadowy existence was really not equivalent to the "hell" that is part of the Church's theology of life after death today. That is why in recent years, many have suggested that the translation of the Apostles' Creed be changed to read: "He descended to the dead."

April 12, 2020



Easter egg roll

A popular Easter custom is the egg roll. Some say that its origins are symbolic of the rolling away of the rock from the tomb of Jesus.

One of the best known Easter egg rolls takes place at the White House on Easter Monday.

First Lady Dolly Madison is said to have suggested the idea of a public egg roll back in 1810. The children of President Abraham Lincoln and Vice-President Andrew Johnson held unofficial Easter egg rolls in the 1860s. In 1876, more than 10,000 children gathered near the U.S. Capitol for their own egg roll. But rolling and racing the hard-boiled eggs down the Capitol's hill badly damaged the grounds, and the activity was soon banned from there.

After a group of children personally asked President Rutherford Hayes to re-establish the activity, the first official White House Easter Egg Roll was held on April 22, 1878. The tradition was held on the South Lawn until 1918 when a government administrator decided that because of World War I food restrictions, destroying eggs as part of an egg roll could no longer be permitted.

The egg roll returned to the White House in 1921, but was suspended from 1943 to 1945 because of World War II, then again from 1946-47 because of a public outcry against spending money on an egg roll instead of aid for the post-war global hunger crisis. The egg roll was also canceled from 1948 to 1952 when the South Lawn became a construction zone for White House renovations.

President Dwight Eisenhower revived the White House Easter Egg Roll in 1953.



Every Sunday is ‘Little Easter’

If Christ had not risen from the dead, there would be no Eucharist as we know it.

We might have a meal commemorating his Last Supper. But it would only be a memorial, a reenactment – no more real than people gathering on the Fourth of July to dress up like the colonists and ring the Liberty Bell.

But the Eucharist is not a re-enactment. It is real. It is “live.” It is the risen Lord himself who leads every celebration of the Eucharist. It isn’t something we do on our own. The Church teaches that the Mass is “the action of Christ and the People of God.”

It is the risen Lord, in his glorified human body, who calls us together, who hosts the celebration, and invites us to join him as he continues to give himself – and us – to the God he calls *Abba*.

Christ *did* rise from the dead. That’s *why* we get together every Sunday to celebrate the Eucharist.

And that’s why every Sunday has traditionally been called “Little Easter.”

‘Christ has no body now on earth but yours.
No hands, but yours. No feet, but yours.
Yours are the eyes
through which the compassion of Christ
must look out on this world.’

– St. Teresa of Avila

About the *Little Book* . . .

In 1999, Bishop Ken Untener of the Catholic Diocese of Saginaw, Michigan, decided to create a *Little Black Book*.

The purpose of the book, he said, would be simple: To encourage people to pray . . . even if only for six minutes a day.

To accomplish that, the *Little Black Book* would use the prayer tradition of *lectio divina* to help people pray the passion of the Lord.

The *Little Black Book* debuted in 2000 as a Lenten reflection book for the bishop's mid-Michigan diocese. Besides an English version of the book, there was also a Spanish edition, and a children's version (*Little Purple Book*). Soon word of the *Little Books* began to spread to parishes throughout Michigan and the Midwest, and the Saginaw Diocese was flooded with requests for copies.

The following liturgical year, Bishop Untener added a *Little Blue Book* for the Advent/Christmas season, and a *Little White Book* for the Easter season. Later, he introduced a *Little Burgundy Book*, an undated four-week reflection on stewardship in light of the Gospels. The first *Little Burgundy Book* was based on the Gospel of Luke; similar books based on the Gospels of Mark, Matthew and John were later added.

Bishop Untener died 16 years ago, on March 27, 2004, but his writings, talks and homilies are the basis for the reflections on the right-hand side of *Little Books*.

Today, more than three million books are distributed annually worldwide.

Also available:

- *Little Burgundy Books* (available in English and Spanish)
Stewardship in light of the Gospel of Matthew
Stewardship in light of the Gospel of Mark
Stewardship in light of the Gospel of John
Stewardship in light of the Gospel of Luke

- *Little Blue Book* for Advent
(available in English, Spanish and Vietnamese)

Little Purple Book (Lenten book for children ages six to 12)

- *Little White Book* for the Easter season
(available in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese)

Little Books are available in digital format;
the English books are also available in large print.

“My Name is Ken and I will be your waiter for a long time,”
a collection of writings by Bishop Ken Untener.
(available in hard- or soft-cover).

“Angel Fred,”
a Christmas fable written by Bishop Ken Untener.

*“Introductions to Sunday Readings
Cycles A, B, and C”*
(available in English and Spanish)

Please visit our website
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