

All are welcome at [Our Parish Name] –
for these Lenten events:

[Speaker on time/date]

[Soup and Stations on time/date]

[Penance Service on time/date]

[Stations of the Cross]



Daily Mass at [times/day]

Weekend Liturgy

(4:00 Saturday and 8:00, 10:00 & 6:00 Sunday)

For youth activities call:

[Our Parish Name]

Address

[Phone]

Follow us at: [website, facebook, twitter]

[Parish Picture]

Pray

with

[Your Parish Name]



Lent

2013

Praying with (Our Parish Name) this Lent:

Lent is a special opportunity to grow in God's love for us, share faith together and be reconciled with one another. The word *Lent* comes from an old Germanic word "*Lengen*" which refers to something '*lengthening*' or growing. Literally Lent refers to the arrival of spring, the *lengthening* of daylight and abundance of new life. In this Year of Faith, Lent can represent a spiritual springtime for the Church.

Lent is not only a time to pray for those entering the Church. Lent is also a time for personal renewal. It is a time to grow in our relationship with God. We do this when we pray, fast and care for the those in need.

Genuine prayer is more than just saying prayers. Lent is a time for listening in a way that aligns our heart with the heart of God. For centuries Christians have taken advantage of special seasons to encounter the power of God in the saving Word. This Year of Faith will be filled with important opportunities for our parish to fall more deeply in love with Jesus.

One way to pray using this booklet:

Settle by removing distractions for fifteen minutes and get comfortable.

Invite the Holy Spirit into your heart by saying a memory verse (e.g. "Speak Lord, your servant is listening"), then be still for a moment to clear your mind and heart and allow God to be present to your heart.

Listen to the Scriptures indicated for that particular day.

Reflect on a particular word or phrase that catches your attention. Ask yourself, "What is the Lord saying to you in this time and this place? **Consider** the reflection offered by a contributing parishioner.

Receive by saying "I receive you saving Word, my Lord and my God" and take time to contemplate the Word,

Respond by sharing your thoughts, fears and desires with the God who knows your heart.

Give Thanks conclude by expressing thanks for opportunities to share and being loved. Recite a favorite psalm or voice an intention for the day ahead.

2013 Contributors

Evaluation

Is this prayer resource worth repeating next year? ____ Yes ____ No

One thing that I enjoy most about this prayer booklet is: _____

One thing that I would change is: _____

____ I would like to make a contribution to future booklets

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Email: _____

Thank you for praying with [Our Parish Name] this Lent. Please let us know what you think about doing this again by completing and returning this form. You can: mail it, place it in the collection basket, give it to a staff member, or drop it off at the parish office.

Blessing of a Good Lent to you.

Rev. [Pastor]

Easter Sunday

Acts 10:34a, 37-43 — John 20: 1-9

March 23

Christ is Risen! The Lenten Journey crescendos in the feast we celebrate today. We made this journey, not just to recall what happened to Jesus, but to deepen our sharing in the Life of our Risen Christ. Christ's received his new life from the Father by the power of the Holy Spirit. Then, he immediately begins to share with others. Through the Easter Sacraments, we have received a share in the new life of God's kingdom through, with and in the Risen Christ. Several weeks ago, I gave the First Graders in our religious education program a tour of the Church. At one point I asked them "Where is Jesus right now?" Several hands went up, but the little boy I called said: "Jesus is standing right beside me!" He understands Easter. This boy knows what St. Paul describes in his Letter to the Colossians: "your life is hidden now with Christ in God." (Col 3:3, NRSV) Christ's new life changes us – how we think, what we do, the choices we make (and seek to avoid), in other words, the way we live our lives.

In the course of Easter Day, perhaps as you celebrate the Eucharist, ask the Risen Lord to help you appreciate the personal, life altering relationship you have with him. Consider the ways that Lent has deepened your faith, hope and love. Ask the Lord Jesus, who abides with you always, to reveal himself to others through, with and in you. Happy Easter!

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Ash Wednesday

Joel 2:12-18 – 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2 – Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

February 6

Lent is a season that calls us to a greater trust and communion with God. It is a season to renew our faith. Joel reminds us to “return to [God] with your whole heart.” It is time for considering what means the most to us. We truly have everything in our lives if we have God. God gives us love and forgiveness. Jesus reminds us in this passage from Matthew’s Gospel that we do not need to broadcast our faith. In a society that focuses so much on outward appearances, Lent is a time for us to remember, cherish and nurture our inner relationship with God.

In that light, the call to pray, fast, and give alms are personal ways to give glory to God. Therefore, prayer, fasting, and giving alms are not burdensome acts. God will respond to us with grace and mercy. This is the response of loving and forgiving parent.

During the Lenten season, we are invited to deepen our personal relationship with God. May this Lenten season be one of faith, love, and trust for each of us.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Easter Vigil

Matthew 28: 1-10 — Mark 16: 1-7 — Luke 24: 1-12

March 22

Christ’s resurrection is a great big earthquake! WE read the story of creation at Easter because in raising Jesus from death, God is starting a whole new creative movement. Jesus rises in his new re-created humanity. He is filled with the life and power of God. Sin is doomed. Death is defeated. But that is only the beginning. God’s recreating power reaches out from Jesus to touch everyone who comes into contact with him.

Men and women baptized at the Vigil of Easter are actually “recreated” and filled with the risen life of Jesus. I was filled with that life in baptism and it was restored time and again through the power of repentance and forgiveness celebrated in the sacrament of Reconciliation. Every Eucharist is the promise of a new world. Christ’s mission is to recreate this whole world in god’s justice, healing and peace. I am Christ’s instrument in that mission filled with the Easter gift of newly recreated life.

Do I think big at Easter? Do my rejoicing and hope include dreams for social justice, an end to war, the making of a whole new world? How can I live the dream of Easter?

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Good Friday

Isaiah 52:13-53:13 — Hebrews 4:14-16, 5:7-9 — John 18: 1-19, 42

March 21

Recently, a young child in the parish drew my attention to the painting of the Crucifixion above our altar. I found myself suddenly very aware of the bystanders looking on – mostly from afar. I found myself asking, “where would I have been in that picture?”

Am I in awe of Jesus? Am I unsure of who he really is? Am I afraid to come closer to him, not knowing what the consequences might be? Have I persecuted him? Do I stand by him? Has my indifference caused damage to his kingdom? What does his death mean to me? I find myself consoled by the author of the Letter to the Hebrews who reminds us that in Jesus, we have someone who has faced anything that I could suffer or imagine.

Thus, on this holy day I am again called to sit with this tremendous love – and this tremendous lover - to ask how I can be faithful to him; how I can find the courage to come closer; and how I can bring his amazing love to those most in need.

Perhaps you could stop for a few moments today and do the same, and come and celebrate the Lord’s Passion.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Thursday after Ash Wednesday

Deuteronomy 30: 15-20 — Psalm 1: 1-6 — Luke 9: 22-25

February 7

Moses speaks of life and death, and exhorts the people of Israel to choose life by loving the Lord, heeding His voice, keeping His commandments, following in His way. Jesus likewise invites me to choose life, life in Him. He shows me what this means in His own life, for His choosing to follow the will of His Father will result in rejection and death before He is raised to new life.

In the same way, my choosing life in Christ will require me to lose my life for His sake in order that I may have life in Him. But this choosing is not once and for always. It requires my choosing in each encounter with Christ . . . in each encounter with the people in my life . . . in each encounter with my own self and the good and the evil of which I am capable.

This is what it means to take up my cross daily. This is what it means to follow Christ. The blessing is that He has gone before me, that He is beside me at each step. I pray for the grace to choose always to accept Christ’s gracious invitation to life.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Friday after Ash Wednesday

Isaiah 58:1-9a — Psalm 51:3-6a,18-19 — Matthew 9:14-15

February 8

God’s message in today’s passage from Isaiah is clear and firm. God calls us on our wicked ways and tries to set us straight. We seek God, and desire to know God’s ways, that is, until God’s response is too difficult for us, until God’s challenges are seemingly too great. Three chapters earlier in Isaiah, God explains, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways...”

God is calling us from our comfort zones, asking us to live a life for others, (e.g. responding to the needs of those different from ourselves). God reminds us who our neighbors are- the unjustly bound, the hungry, and the homeless, to name a few.

God does not ask us to fast, to do this vital work for justice, alone. God promises to answer our cries for help, God promises companionship on the journey to bring about the kingdom of God. Augustine wrote, “our hearts are restless until they find rest in God...” Can our hearts truly rest in God while our brothers and sisters are oppressed and suffering?

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Holy Thursday

Exodus 12, 1-8, 11-14 — 1 Corinthians 11: 23-26 — John 13: 1-15

March 20

In the Psalm today, we say “Lord, I am your servant, you have loosed my bonds.” And in the Gospel we read about servanthood. Jesus insists on humbly washing the grimy feet of all of his disciples. This startling act of service comes after a Passover meal, a meal soon re-enacted in communal Christian worship, “for as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes.”

Thus servanthood and Eucharist are linked in a bond of love. When we proclaim the death of the Lord and partake of his body and blood, we pledge to be more like him and to follow his commands. Christ told us that to be the servant of the Lord is to be the servant of all peoples on the earth—we have been freed so that we might love freely and without restraint. His acceptance of the intimate task of washing feet inspires us accordingly.

Does your faith inspire you to acts of service toward your neighbor? How can you serve in a personal way, by giving of yourself? How might this change the way you live your life?

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Wednesday of Holy Week

Isaiah 50:4-9; Psalm 69:8-10,21,22,31,33-34 — Matthew 26:14-25

March 19

“You are all we have. You give us what we need. Our lives are in your hands, O Lord, our lives are in your hands.”

These words from composer Fran O’Brien’s much loved hymn, *You Are All We Have*, came to mind while I was reading Isaiah 50: 4-9. I believe this passage challenges us to sustain weary people with a message of hope to those who are dispirited, but we need to *trust* that we are up to this challenge. If we could only listen with clearer ears and grow in confidence perhaps we would be better empowered to help others. But just as we don’t always listen well, sometimes there is a lack of reception and our help is not accepted. Again, we need to *trust*, though it’s not always easy to do so!

This Lent God is speaking to us. Will we listen more attentively? Are we willing to accept the challenges presented to us? Can we truly trust that God is in charge?

“Behold, the Lord God is my helper” Isaiah 50:9

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

Isaiah 58:9-14 — Psalm 86:1-7 — Luke 5:27-32

February 9

God’s promise is that if we reach out to him, he will answer through guidance, strength and renewal. The conditions of his promise, however, are that we help the oppressed, that we feed the hungry and that we care for the afflicted. In our incompleteness, deep within each of us, is a yearning for God. In my own life this is manifest directly but also indirectly through discontent and dissatisfactions that arise when I limit my concerns to my own needs.

For what am I living? Have I been created for more than just a comfortable life and my opinions of what an equitable world ought to look like? Do I ask for help simply for myself, or for finding a way to serve God’s purpose in my life?

Sometimes I am frightened by the sacrifices required for me to grow into a God-sized purpose in my life. And yet, to call and be called is one of the greatest blessings. Can I live with gratitude, courage and trust so that my life is a living reflection of God’s will and love? Can you?

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

1st Sunday of Lent

Gen. 2: 7-9, 16-18, 25; 3: 1-7 — Romans. 5:12-19 — Matthew 4: 1-11

February 10

Tuesday of Holy Week

Isaiah 49:1-7 — Psalm 71:1-4,5-6,15,17 — John 13:21-33,36-38

March 18

Adam and Eve wanted to know their purpose in life. They tried to be happy through self-reliance. Me too. What they may have forgotten was that God was already happy with them and already had a purpose for them. Jesus was faced with the same temptation in the wilderness. All the things that the devil offered Jesus were good. But just like in the garden, the enemy of the best can sometimes be a good.

I often strive for good things, but miss what is best. I sometimes believe that to be loved I must do more or have more. Perhaps that is the real temptation – whether in the garden or in the wilderness. Perhaps to believe that we are not already “**very good**” is the great deception. Jesus accepted His Father’s love. He was obedient to God’s purpose. Could it be that His happiness was rooted in accepting God’s love and trusting God to be in charge. Perhaps that is the best that I can do this Lent.

How about you? Can you trust God to be in charge? Where does that confidence lead you?

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Jesus was troubled knowing that Judas would betray him. Who wouldn’t be? One of his beloved disciples was the man who would ultimately turn him over to die. Yet, he accepted his fate for the greater good in God’s plan. When faced with adversity, rather than dwell on the pain, I think our challenge is to see it as Isaiah affirms it to be when he writes, “Though I thought I had toiled in vain, and for nothing, uselessly, spent my strength, my reward is with the Lord.” Isn’t that the point? It is our choice what we do with adversity and disappointment.

How many times have I complained and asked, “why?,” when having a difficult time? By focusing on my discomfort, did I miss God’s plan for me? Perhaps hardships are also places where God is revealing Himself. Often, troubling times have a way of bringing those we love together. Thus, revealing God’s intention for us.

As I reflect this Lenten season, I will try to seek God’s plan for me, especially in times of adversity. Isn’t a life WITH Jesus worth some sacrifice?

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Monday of Holy Week

Isaiah 42:1-7 — Psalm 27:1-3,13-14 — John 12:1-11

March 17

"I have grasped you by the hand...formed you....set you as a covenant of the people...a light....bring out prisoners.....those who live in darkness"

I truly believe that God grasps me by the hand and gives me guidance and direction even when I have been in darkness through pain and sickness. I think about how he grasped my hand and gave me to a loving adoptive family who brought me up with a good Catholic education and passed on a wonderful faith in God, with so little they gave me so much. And they found time to serve many others too. I have so much to be thankful and grateful for. How do I give back for all he has given to me?

Jesus invites me to give back. I will do so with much pleasure. Is it by bringing a meal to someone, taking that phone call that I know will take time out of my busy day, saying "yes" to help with a mail-a-thon for a deserving charity. Despite how crazy it sometimes can get, God gives me all I need and more. How about you?

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Monday of 1st Week of Lent

Leviticus 19:1-2,11-18 — Psalm 19:8-10,15 — Matthew 25:31-46

February 11

Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least..., you did for me.

I recently found myself in the temporary role of caregiver to an elderly woman suffering from dementia. At one point, she became very anxious for no apparent reason. Because of her dementia, all of a sudden I was an unfamiliar face. Where was her daughter, the familiar and trusted face she sees daily? "I need to go home", she repeated over and over again, rocking back and forth in her chair. As I held her hand and assured her that she was home and that she was safe, I felt compassion for her anxiety and fear. Reflecting upon the experience again, I realize too that I experienced God's presence and grace in my efforts to comfort her.

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me...

How have you encountered God recently in the "least" among us? What feelings were evoked in you in that experience? To what might God be inviting you through this experience?

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Tuesday of 1st Week of Lent

Isaiah 55:10-11 — Psalm 34:4-7,16-19 — Matthew 7:7-15

February 12

Reflecting on today's readings, the words that resonate for me are "purpose" and "prayer." Isaiah and Matthew hit on a question that can excite, confuse and even haunt us: *What is my life's purpose?* Do we not spend our lifetime discerning and re-discerning our purpose, or call, in life? *Why am I here? What is it that God wants – or even needs – from me?* Such questions are at the heart of our Christian identity.

While in the midst of discerning our purpose – and all this entails – both Isaiah and Matthew pull us back and ground us in prayer. Isaiah blesses us and calls us to trust in the One who created us and sends us forth to do Christ's work in the world. And Matthew invites us to still ourselves and simplify our prayer, for God already knows the needs and desires of the heart.

God, what is your purpose for my life? For what have you sent me?

May I trust that you provide what I need so I may fulfill this purpose. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Palm Sunday of Lent

Isaiah 50:4-7 – Philipians 2:6-11 – Luke 22:14-23:56

March 16

Today's Gospel has always been one that is difficult for me to imagine clearly. After struggling with the story of Judas and the thirty pieces of silver, I decided to switch my focus and reverse the roles a bit. We have all heard the expression "What would Jesus do?" But I invite you to ask yourself "What would Judas do?"

Aren't we always quick to proclaim we could never act the way he did? There are probably more times than we would like to admit when we lean in the direction of Judas when it comes to decisions or actions that later amaze or embarrass us. Selfishness, greed, envy, consumption, jealousy, unfaithfulness, gossip, half truths or even outright lies. We can all speculate and ask ourselves what really drove or motivated Judas to do what he did. Or we could examine whether or not we sometimes act in our own lives, in our parish, our families, our workplaces a little like him.

Perhaps for the day we could dig out that little button that asks: What would Judas do? And in the next few days we might also don the other button that asks; "What would Peter Do?" Oh, the challenges of Lent!

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Saturday of 5th Week of Lent

2 Samuel 7: 4-5a, 12-14a, 16 — Luke 2: 41-51a

March 15

Life hands us struggles and challenges. Some, at face value, are almost too large to bear. One reaction might be to turn your back on God and the Church. We will never find peace with that kind of response. Our hearts are restless until we take advantage of the covenant God promised us through David.

We were promised that we would be given a house in the kingdom of God. When Mary and Joseph found Jesus in the temple, he reminds us that the promise was fulfilled through him. “Did you not know that you would find me in my father’s house?”

Bring your burdens “home” to the kingdom of God. Bring them to a community that provides love and support. This is your best hope for healing the heart...the mind...and the spirit.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Wednesday of 1st Week of Lent

Jonah 3: 1-10 — Psalm 51: 3-4, 12-13, 18-19 — Luke 11: 29-32

February 13

Sometimes we are like modern Jonah’s rejecting God’s call and suffering in denial while struggling to survive in the bodies of our own metaphorical whales. We struggle against the “Hound of Heaven,” as we follow our own egos. But God remains compassionate. Jonah tried to escape his responsibility, but God prevailed upon him to bring a message of repentance to the people of Nineveh. From the lowly to the mighty, the citizens of Nineveh fasted, donned sackcloth, sprinkled themselves with ashes, and turned from their evil ways. God relented and forgave the people of Nineveh, just as he constantly forgives us and gives us solace a hundred times over.

In Luke’s Gospel Jesus reminds his listeners that this generation will be given no sign because “there is something greater than Jonah here.” Just as Nineveh, an ancient cosmopolitan nexus of the East and West, was spared, likewise we are forgiven “ten times ten.” Ironically the ruins of the once great city of Nineveh lie in Mosul, Iraq where Americans and Iraqis die each day. Pray for them; pray for peace.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Thursday of 1st Week of Lent

Esther C:12,14-16,23-25 — Psalm 138:1-3,7-8 — Matthew 7: 7-12

February 14

Have you every wondered just what God is like? It's an important question. Until we have a good solid picture of God, it's hard to know just how to ask God for anything. Today's Lenten Scripture open us some small but real glimpses of who God really is. In the gospel Jesus is talking to people like us who are wondering if God really cares enough to hear our prayer. Jesus compares God's attitude toward seeker to that of a parent. Even the vilest parent will be attentive and caring to the needs of the family's children.

If God has the characteristics of a parent, then don't worry. Just ask. And kept on asking! Queen Esther is faced with asking her pagan husband the king to spare the entire Jewish population from a death sentence. She is terrified in the face of his anger. But remembering that the God of Israel "fulfilled all his promises" she takes heart. "Give me courage" she prays. Could it be that one Lenten gift this year will be change in my picture of God?

What is my image of God's attitude toward me? How does it fit with today's Scripture? Is my picture of God too calculating and nitpicking? Do I need to trust Jesus assurance that God cares for me like a parent?

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Friday of 5th Week of Lent

Jeremiah 20:10-13 — Psalm 18:2-7 — John 10:31-42

March 14

Would it have been easier to follow Jesus if I was able to see the signs and miracles he accomplished in his public ministry? This question frequently arises for me during the season of Lent, a time when it becomes obvious to me that I often fail in my pilgrimage toward discipleship. If only I could see the miracles of Jesus, to hear his discourses and challenging parables, then I might believe and live accordingly. Yet, in the passage from the Gospel of John, we hear of an unidentified group, who "saw" Jesus' miracles, "heard" his discourses, and yet still could not believe.

Perhaps, I have much in common with this group of unbelievers. I have heard Jesus' words in the Scriptures and seen the face of Christ in the poor, but more often than not I respond to my encounter with Christ by picking up my own stones, words of hatred and a hardened heart toward those in need. Might the real problem be my inability to let God inform my seeing?

"May the eyes of [your] hearts be enlightened, that you may know what is the hope that belongs to his call" (Eph. 1:18).

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Thursday of 5th Week of Lent

Genesis 17: 3-9 — Psalm 105 — John 8: 51-59

March 13

God told Abraham that because God loved him, he will give him land and all his descendants will be kings and have this land. The covenant is trust in God's love. The reward was huge for them and for their descendants through eternity. Their purpose is to love God and their love will be rewarded. Living for something bigger than ourselves is the power to know that if we keep God's word, love others, and care for others, then we will be granted everlasting life with God.

When Jesus said "Whoever keeps my word will never taste death", he was referring to life with God in Heaven. The Jews wanted to stone Jesus because he preached his knowledge of Abraham and the Jews didn't understand this. They accused him of thinking of himself better than Abraham or the prophets.

I sometimes need to be reminded that God's love for my parents, for me, for my children, and their children is constant and everlasting. I must trust God in all things and my reward is to be with Him in Heaven.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Friday of 1st Week of Lent

Ezekiel 18:21-28 — Psalm 130:1-8 — Matthew 5:20-26

February 15

This passage from Matthew makes me uncomfortable. Intellectually, I get the idea of right relationship with God and others which is expressed in these writings, but in reality, I don't like conflict and tend to avoid it when I can.

That said, I am also aware that relationships have been the primary means of conversion in my life - the way I have grown most profoundly as a human being and experienced glimpses of the unfathomable love of God. Tending to our relationships is literally a spiritual practice. Like the practice of prayer, which cultivates a space in us for God, the relationships in our lives enlarge our hearts and build our capacity to give and receive love. They comfort us but they also shape and stretch us.

Taken in this light, I am prodded to recognize Jesus' challenge to take the risk of confronting and reconciling with my brother or sister as a part of this sacred practice. It is an invitation to surrender to the call of relationship, with all of the mess, vulnerability and beauty that it brings, and in doing so to know more deeply the fullness of God's love.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Saturday of 1st Week of Lent

Deuteronomy 26: 16-19 — Psalm 119: 1-7 — Matthew 5: 43-48

February 16

Moses asks us to follow God’s commandments, but is that enough? Surely, God doesn’t want us to just follow the rules. The challenge is to live God’s commandments and to see and witness God in others. As Moses also states, we are to “walk in his way”.

What must it be like to walk in his way each day, to view others as God does – with love and understanding? Imagine if we treated all people, even our enemies, as we treat those close to us that we love: unconditionally and without prejudice?

All must be welcome in our hearts and actions. We can accomplish this by setting goals. To achieve our goals we need to break out of our comfort zone, be mindful of His commandments, and to challenge ourselves to walk in his way.

What is your comfort zone? What goal can you set this Lenten season to walk in his way outside of your comfort zone?

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Wednesday of 5th Week of Lent

Daniel 3:14-20,91-92,95 — (Ps) Daniel 3:52-56 — John 8:31-42

March 12

“This great season of grace is your gift to your family...you give us strength to purify our hearts, to control our desires, and to serve you in freedom...” (Preface of Lent II)

Whatever Lenten discipline you have chosen this year, whether it involves a ‘letting go’ or a ‘taking up’ it has only one goal: spiritual freedom. The things we do and don’t do have a capacity to captivate us. During the exile in Babylon many Jewish people let their foreign surroundings captivate them. However, the three young Israelite men, Shadrack, Meshach and Abednego were willing to choose death over idolatry. They were free - though it put them at grave risk. Jesus our Lord is free and liberates those who share in his life to love God and free to love others selflessly. Christ challenges the thoughts that enslave us, the choices that bind us and the actions that deplete us of love and life. But Christ’s grace sets us free! The paradox of Lent indicates that freedom is not found through independence but through the loving dependence of being Christ’s student, his disciple.

What things in your life keep you tied up or enslaved under the guise of freedom? How is your Lenten journey offering you the freedom that comes from being yoked to Christ? What prevents you from receiving the freedom that Christ offers? Ask the Son of God to set you free by his selfless love.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Tuesday of 5th Week of Lent

Numbers 21:4-9 — Psalm 102:2-3,16-21 — John 8:21-30

March 11

Numbers 21:4-9

Nothing you strive for in life is easy. If you expect your true reward on this planet, you will always be disappointed and ill at ease. It is easy to doubt; easy to question; easy to be anxious. It is painful to not carry anxiety; painful to be at peace because it means letting go of what we perceive to be right; painful to accept what we consider to be less than perfect conditions. We need to have faith that even with these less than perfect things that befall us, God is present, even when life is unfair to us.

John 8:21-30

Jesus and God are the best debaters in the world. You can't fight the logic Jesus keeps bringing us back to – the Word of God.

The world is complicated; sometimes we try to search for complicated answers. Jesus reminds us that the only truths come from the Father. "I do nothing on my own." Not even Jesus thought he could figure things out on His own, He needed God's help. We should admit the same.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

2nd Sunday of Lent

Genesis 12: 1-4 — 2 Timothy 1: 8-10 — Matthew 17: 1-9

February 17

I can relate to Abram, who left his family and everything he was comfortable with, to find a new place because I am also from another land. Coming here was never a part of my plans. Still one day I found myself flying to Boston, leaving my family and everything that I knew.

After three years, I'm about to be certified as a teacher and I hear some people say that it's a "nonsense" career change from accounting to teaching. I myself wonder, sometimes, if that's really what God planned for me and if my contribution to the community is enough.

When those thoughts cross my mind, it's helpful for me to remember that God has a purpose for each one of us, and none of them is too small or "nonsense". We are all made by God. He knows us and what we are able to do in His name. Although I sometimes have a hard time understanding God's messages, I allow myself to trust Him and follow His lead. I have no doubts that I'm always led by Him.

Do you sometimes get discouraged and unsure about God's message? Can you just trust Him anyway and allow yourself to follow His lead?

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Monday of 2nd Week of Lent

Daniel 9:4-10 — Psalm 79:8-9,11,13 — Luke 7:36-38

February 18

Today may my prayer and reflection echo the Psalm responsorial verse: “Lord do not deal with us according to our sins”. Which reminds me not to deal with others according to their differences, weaknesses, human frailties, or offenses against me. Daniel’s message reminds us that we are all sinners, unfaithful to who we are called to be by and in Christ. The author of Daniel lays this out in a pretty heavy and stern fashion. Yet he also provides encouragement.

For me God’s mercy and the call to reflect this mercy is the message for today. Luke reinforces this: “Be merciful, as your Father is merciful”. Luke further instructs us to stop “judging”, “condemning”, holding against, looking down on, feeling more superior than, being aloof, self centered... Not because we should do things or not do things but rather be cause it is who we are called to be as Beloved of God. I need to give so that others may receive as I receive from God.

This Lent we should audit our mind and heart to see where we might not be as compassionate, understanding and forgiving as we are called to be, especially within our immediate family circle.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Monday of 5th Week of Lent

Daniel 13: 1-9, 15-17, 19-30, 33-62 — John 8: 1-11

March 10

These are two stories about justice, about individuals accused, rightly or wrongly, of a crime. They are also about the accusers. The elders were “wicked” men; the scribes and Pharisees were also sinners. We are all sinners. Yet society is often quick to judge. How often are we the ones casting stones?

We are all loved by God. He sacrificed His own son to save us from sin. Are we able to accept that love, or are we encumbered by sin and other aspects of day-to-day life which distract us from that acceptance? We are not likely to be in Susanna’s position, condemned to death, yet we can all strive to have her faith and trust in God’s love and purpose for us. That faithful optimism gives us the strength to live the life we are called to lead.

This Lent, consider how God has shown is love for you. Can you show that love to the wider community? To those among us with financial or physical needs? To those with emotional needs? To those that are made to feel unwelcome or worthless by our society?

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

5th Sunday of Lent

Ezekiel 37: 12-14 — Romans 8: 8-11 — John 11: 1-45

March 9

When Israel was exiled to Babylon, Ezekiel reminded them of God's power and promise to save them from death. Similarly, Jesus offered the same promise, and by example, actually raised Lazarus from the dead. In both cases, *belief* and *glory* go hand-in-hand. When I *believe* in God's mercy and love, I experience God's *glory* and salvation. However, it's easy to say, "I believe in the resurrection," but it takes more than just belief to transform one's life.

I'm like Lazarus in the grave sometimes, mired in the death-like grip of my sin, with Jesus calling to me, "come out!" What a leap of faith it must have been for Lazarus to trust in Jesus' word and come out from his place of death. Many times I have read that story and considered it only from a spectator's point-of-view.

But I am called to be as Lazarus – open to all that God might want to do through me, trusting in God's magnificent power to raise me from the death of sin. When I am open to God's call, I can rise outside of my self-centeredness and joyfully serve others, where I meet God.

How does God offer you hope in times of darkness? How do you meet God?

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Tuesday of 2nd Week of Lent

Isaiah 1:10, 16-20 — Psalm 50:8-9,16-23 — Matthew 23:1-12

February 19

Isaiah's message seems so familiar to me that I generally slide past it. I do that because I already know life is chaotic and how sins have gathered around me like a shameful cloak. I have not heeded the cry of the widow or the plea of the orphan. I have lost sight of the need for justice and I have lost track of God's call to be faithful because I feel stuck in my feelings of hopelessness in the face of suffering and helplessness in the face of overwhelming governmental power and social gridlock. Blah blah blah... Whatever!

But wait! God has found hope in me even when I have lost it in myself. And because of that God invites a change in me despite my history of neglect! The focus of my life must shift from self to God, if I am to have any hope for the future. If I am to have any chance to experience the fullness of what God has promised me, I must stop using the past and my feelings of unworthiness, helplessness, and discouragement as excuses for not heeding God's call to be His.

Is it true that God loves me enough to let me turn my life around?

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Wednesday of 2nd Week of Lent

Jeremiah 18:18-20 — Psalm 31:5-7,14-16 — Matthew 20:17-28

February 20

Today's gospel speaks to the heart of the Christian life - service in the name/imitation of Jesus. The service he models is clearly not just any service, but is service with a cost. Many people do not want to be the person with the most authority that everyone looks to. This gospel, however, asks each of us to reflect on our own level of self centeredness- the degree to which we place our own desires/wants/needs ahead of those whose needs are greater than ours – sometimes far greater. It isn't really so much about who the greatest is among us, but about who is the least?

Parents who put their children's needs first, people caring for sick and aged loved ones, those who protect others without counting the risk/cost to themselves, are some people who clearly model this selfless service of Jesus. A vital spirituality must include this element of other centeredness. Jeremiah understood this. Jesus clearly understood this as well.

As we move through this Lenten season, ask yourself how you can offer yourself to one in greater need than you are. Be like Jesus!

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Saturday of 4th Week of Lent

Jeremiah 11:18-20 — Psalm 7:2-3,9b-12 — John 7:40-53

March 8

Remember, God is the source of all knowledge. Even though we don't always know or understand what is happening, good or bad, God will always make things right in the end. Therefore, we must have faith in His love for us and trust that He has a plan and our life a purpose. It's easy to be confused, especially when the facts are not always available or understood.

It is often said "the devil is in the details", and I believe that evil is supported by confusion. To know God is not dependent on historical facts or scientific evidence but on faith. He created us in His image for a purpose – to show our love for each other as we would to Him.

What challenges me most is accepting the fact that people who do bad things aren't necessarily bad people. That judgment and its retribution are not mine to exercise.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Friday of 4th Week of Lent

Wisdom 2: 1a, 12-22 — Psalm 34: 17-23 — John 7: 1-2, 10, 25-30

March 7

In today's Gospel, people in the crowd at the harvest feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem confidently assert that they know Jesus and where he came from, so he can't be the Messiah. Jesus responds that what they know is only superficial. To really know him, they must know God who sent him.

In the same way we sometimes mistakenly assume that we know one another. God sends us to one another in ways that are beyond our understanding, and we must always try to be open to his loving presence.

The psalmist says that the Lord is close to the broken-hearted, but how is his presence made known? When we comfort one another in times of sadness or discouragement, we help to bring Jesus close to the brokenhearted. When we share our faith with each other, often in small ways, we make the whole community stronger.

We should always try to see ourselves and others not only as we appear on the surface, but also to see the one who sends us.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Thursday of 2nd Week of Lent

Jeremiah 17:5-10 — Psalm 1:1-4,6 — Luke 16:19-31

February 21

In the mad rush of every day life it is easy to forget the true purpose of life and why we exist. Our tendency is to acquire more material possessions and awards and seek our "strength in flesh." We live in a self-centered world where "I" is the most used pronoun.

We forget we exist for the greater honor and glory of God and that our hearts are restless until we acknowledge God's constant presence, grace, and love in our life. Find a few minutes each day to meditate about this and dedicate your every action to the glory and love of God. Your life will be changed!

Realization of God's omnipresence, through good times and bad times, not only gives essential meaning, strength, and hope to our lives but it also leads us to extend His love to our neighbors. There is no better expression of this love than to care for our neighbors. Even little acts, a smile, a "Hello, how are you?", done out of love, means so much. Try it, you'll like it!

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Friday of 2nd Week of Lent

Genesis 37:3-4,12-28; Psalm 105:16-21; Matthew 21:33-43,45-46

February 22

Some time after being referred to by Jesus as the rock upon which “I will build my Church”, Peter exhorts the early church presbyters to “tend the flock of God in your midst” and to “be examples to the flock”. We might use the phrase “leaders” instead of presbyters today. Does that mean that we “ordinary lay people” are let off the hook, that it is only the “leaders” – priests and professionals must heed this exhortation? Not at all!

We are each a leader in our day-to-day lives. We may not hold a specific position or title of leadership but in reality we are leaders: in our families, among our friends, at school, in the workplace, in our community and also in our church. As such, we are each called to tend to our fellow men and to be an example of a good Christian.

Lent is an excellent time to reflect on how we are managing in our roles as tenders of our flocks (our families, friends, community, etc.) and as being Christian examples to these groups. How are you doing in these areas? Where could you make positive advancements?

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Thursday of 4th Week of Lent

Exodus 32: 7-14 — Psalm 106: 19-23 — John 5: 31-47

March 6

It is very difficult to trust someone you do not see. "But you have never heard his voice nor seen his form. . ." It all depends in what we want to see. The challenge is to trust without "seeing."

The word of God tells me to trust in Him but it is not easy to keep that in mind all the time. Human nature sometime pushes me in the opposite direction when I see such pain and wrong in the world. I struggle with my faith and trust in God, but even with my lack of trust, God is willing to forgive. . . "The Lord relented in the punishment he had threatened to inflict on his people."

I know God loves me and I pray for His guidance in everything I do, but I also know that I fail in my complete trust in Him. Maybe my "molten calf" is not being able to trust 100% all the time.

I am working at it every day...

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Wednesday of 4th Week of Lent

Isaiah 49:8-15 — Psalm 145:8-9,13c-14,17-18 — John 5:17-30

March 5

Why would you keep me Lord? I am pretty difficult -always searching, wanting more, arguing, struggling to understand the world, tempted... the list is endless.

Am I a covenant to your people? No matter what I do, the people remain hungry and homeless and they continue to suffer.

WHERE ARE YOU LORD? Is the hour really coming? I need you with me now - this Lenten season. I need to understand why you have chosen me. And I need to accept that you have kept me, even if I don't understand why. And Lord, I need you to be with me as I struggle with the indifference of this world.

You said that you will "have compassion and will not forget." And yet, so many are forgotten. Help me to know that you are working with me each day so I will not forget those who are forgotten. And help me to believe you when you say that the hour is really coming when we shall sing for joy and exalt the earth.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Saturday of 2nd Week of Lent

Micah 7:14-15, 18-20 — Psalm 103 1-4, 9-12 — Luke 15: 1-3, 11-32

February 23

For many years I identified myself with the older son of this Prodigal son parable....I was considered by others to be mature and responsible. I was purposeful to do things "right". But this year I'm again confronted with the story of a ner'do well younger brother getting very special attention after screwing up so badly! I again recognize and know the anger of the older brother. But this year I've also come to recognize that I am not only like the older brother, but also like the father and the younger brotherall are part of who I am. I can still be angry and indignant like the responsible older brother, but increasingly more understanding, forgiving and compassionate like the father. And Lord knows I am like the younger brother with my judgmental thoughts, selfish actions and deeds of omission.

It's remarkable to consider that despite our inevitable weaknesses and failures, i.e. our "sins", we are always considered as beloved sons and daughters by our God....always understood, always loved, always forgiven.

Can we believe and trust that? Can we be more like that towards others -- even our enemies?

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

3rd Sunday of Lent

Exodus 17: 3-7 — Psalm 95: 1-2, 6-9 — John 4: 5-42

February 24

Sometimes I think that the Israelites had it easy. They had Moses to draw water from a rock for them to drink, proving that God was indeed in their presence. Sometimes I am jealous of the Samaritan woman by the well, who was told by Jesus Himself that he was the living water that would bring salvation to all who believed. But then I realize that as Catholics, we don't need a miracle to affirm our belief in the presence of Christ.

Our faith, hope, and love as a community of believers are the real proof that God is always with us. During Lent, I will reflect on Jesus' life on earth and look for ways to enrich my faith, hope, and love as a member of the world-wide community that awaits Jesus' resurrection at Easter.

What will you do to reaffirm your faith in Christ during Lent?

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Tuesday of 4th Week of Lent

Ezekiel 47:1-9,12 — Psalm 46:2-3,5-7,8-9 — John 5:1-16

March 4

This poor man, sick for thirty-eight years, must have been awed by this compassionate stranger who with the simple words, "Rise, take your mat and walk," healed his handicapped body.

Yet instead of joyous gratitude for this miracle, discerning this as a divine gift of healing, the people got caught up in the non-essential, worrying about Jesus breaking a rule.

Christ was always centered on the essential: caring for and ministering to people in physical or spiritual need; we must follow in his footsteps if we are to call ourselves Christians.

Do I focus on the essentials? What are they? Do I truly see those in need?

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Monday of 4th Week of Lent

2 Samuel 7:4-16 — Romans 4:13-22 — Luke 2:41-51

March 3

(Solemnity of St. Joseph)

I work in Northern Uganda. This is a part of the world that is far from the comforts of Newton. It is just now emerging from decades of a war fought with child-soldiers. Every family there cares for one or two orphans, children left alone due to violence or HIV/AIDS. This is a part of the world that is unable to reduce their high rates of maternal and infant mortality. But they are starting over again with the hope and the promise of peace.

That is what perhaps the Roman official, whose faith brought healing to his child was also longing for. When Jesus told him, “your son will live”, wasn’t there, just then in his heart, the longing for a peaceful world where he could live with his family and enjoy a long life next to his son? That too is what the prophet Isaiah calls us to create, a new heaven and a new earth, a place where infants will grow into adulthood. We can only create the world God sees for us when we lay aside hate and fear, when we can accept everyone as our neighbor. This happens when we make room in our lives for the “other”. Remember? Do unto “others” as you would have them do unto you.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Monday of 3rd Week of Lent

2 Kings 5:1-15b — Psalm 42:2-3; 43:3-4 — Luke 4:24-30

February 25

Who are the prophets of today? Those who speak the truth. Those who challenge our assumptions and push us to think about the world in a different way. Those who live out God’s word in times of danger, often putting their own lives at risk, to spread God’s message of hope, love, justice, and peace.

Jesus put it quite aptly when he said: “no prophet is accepted in his own native place.” I immediately think of the prophets of our time who were slain in their “native place” because of their work for justice and peace in our world – Martin Luther King Jr., John F. Kennedy, Oscar Romero, Benazir Bhutto. To be a prophet of God’s Word is a vocation – a life calling – that requires faith and courage and strength.

Perhaps this lent Jesus is calling me outside my comfort zone to be a prophet in a community different from my own. Perhaps this lent Jesus is calling all of us to look outside ourselves – outside our own families – to be prophets of God’s word to communities beyond our “native place.”

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Tuesday of 3rd Week of Lent

Daniel 3:25,34-43 — Psalm 25:4bc-5ab,7-7bc,8-9 — Matthew 18: 21-35

February 26

In this passage, I could hear Jesus saying, “Love one another as I have loved you.”

Forgiveness is never easy. Once an envious person kept making biting comments constantly that really riled me up. Only by God's grace, was I able to control my anger and refrain from retaliating, but the feelings stirring within me were disturbing my inner peace. I prayed that God would take away my bitterness and forgive her through me. Some time later that person became very ill, and I made myself care for her needs as graciously as I could. From that time on she stopped her aggravating speech and began to seek me out as her friend. This experience taught me that the best way to confound our enemies is by treating them with kindness. To refuse to forgive those who hurt us is to endanger our own health and to forfeit our own peace.

Lord, open my heart to receive your love that I may be your channel of peace and reconciliation in the world.

What is your relationship with God? Do you have any relationships that require reconciliation? Trust in God's love.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

4th Sunday of Lent

Josiah 5:9-12— Psalm 34:2-7 — 2 Cor. 5: 17-21 — Luke 15:1-3,11-32

March 2

Samuel had to trust God to choose the next king. God said to Samuel: “Do not judge from his appearance or from...Not as man sees does God see, because man sees appearance but the Lord looks into the heart.”

Man and God do not see eye to eye. God didn't look at their superficial appearance, but what was in their heart. Can you trust God to be in charge? Can you be more like God, who looked past someone's appearance and at their heart?

The Pharisees basically put the blind man on trial. In the end, the Pharisees were the ones on trial. The Pharisees were arrogant. They thought they knew everything. Jesus called them on this “But we see,...” The blind man could see and Jesus was from God. The Pharisees couldn't see the truth. They wouldn't believe it.

How can I be less arrogant? Then maybe I will “see” as well as this blind man.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

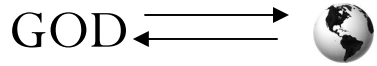
Saturday of 3rd Week of Lent

Hosea 7:1-7 — Psalm 51:3-4,18-21b — Luke 18:9-14

March 1

At this point in Lent, let me invite you into a crucial question. How do you imagine God? This question is implicit in the prayers of the publican and the sinner.

Richard Gaillardetz offers two images. The first sees God living outside this world. God is an individual who is more loving, bigger and better than us. This God responds, from time to time, to our prayers. This image implies that since God is an individual outside of our lives, God will have to compete for our attention, there will be a 'tug of war' between time for God and time for the rest of our lives. This image implies that we only meet God from time to time.



In the second image, our world is *in* God. This changes everything. God is not a loving individual outside of the world, but rather 'a relationship of love' that we participate in through the world. God is a trinity – Father, Son, Spirit – lover, love, beloved. And the whole of creation is in this relationship of self-giving love. We are *in* God and this changes everything.



What has your image of God been this Lent?

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Wednesday of 3rd Week of Lent

Deuteronomy 4:1,5-9 — Psalm 147:12-20 — Matthew 5:17-19

February 27

The Gospel of Matthew insists that Jesus came to *fulfill* the law and not to abolish it. In fact, Jesus takes the two greatest commandments to love God and neighbor *from* the law. Indeed, the law given in the Hebrew Scriptures often gives us guidance as to concretely *how* we are to love God and neighbor (for example, the Ten Commandments).

I find it reassuring that we do not have a God who simply issues decrees from on high. Rather we have a God who invites us into a relationship of love with Godself and with one another, and then gives us guidance on how to live these relationships of love faithfully in the world.

The line that affects me most profoundly in today's readings is from Deuteronomy: "For what great nation is there that has gods so close to it as the Lord, our God, is to us whenever we call upon him?" Deuteronomy tells us that observing the law brings what we most deeply desire—wisdom for living and closeness to God.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Thursday of 3rd Week of Lent

Jeremiah 7: 23-28 — Psalm 95: 1-2, 6-9 — Luke 11: 14-23

February 28

In Jeremiah, God asks the nation and all His people to trust in Him, and in my interpretation, also to trust in themselves and their goodness. Often I forget this and feel so helpless. This is exactly what God says will “stiffen our necks away from him” How can we look inside and hear HIS voice?...remember HIS love? Could it be that we hear his voice, but do not trust it? This Lent, I invite myself and my fellow sisters and brothers to listen to HIS voice to look around and outside of ourselves to the faithful and share the joy of TRUST in His LOVE!

In Luke, we hear that the Mute is challenged and also revered by the people. Some were fearful and suspicious. What they miss is that the Mute had faith and armed himself with the love of GOD. He had faith that God’s LOVE, FAITH and HOPE would bring him speech and real peace. Where is OUR love, where is OUR faith, where is OUR hope? I must arm myself with these this Lent, so I do not scatter, but gather with the faithful and drive out demons in unity with GOD. Are you well armed?

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Friday of 3rd Week of Lent

Hosea 14:2-10; Psalm 81:6c-11b,14,17; Mark 12:28-34

February 29

The Gospel gives us the greatest commandments to love God and love our neighbor. We hear these words often and their simplicity make it sound like an easy thing to do, but in the real world it is a challenge. The distractions and pace of everyday life can so easily steer us away from this message.

The first reading and psalm offer us hope and support in meeting this challenge. We are directed to trust God and turn toward Him for His compassion, healing, and love.

Perhaps a challenge for us this Lent, and beyond, is to reflect on the following questions to keep focused on His message for us.

Do we make God the center of our lives and truly believe that our lives are in His hands? Are we listening to and more importantly, acting on God’s call to love and care for our neighbors? What do we need to change in our lives to make us more receptive to what God wants us to do?

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)
