

A painting of a forest scene with a stream. The trees are in various shades of green and yellow, suggesting spring. The stream is in the foreground, reflecting the trees. The sky is a pale blue.

Springtime of the Soul

Lent 2023

Maria Benging

LENT 2023

INTRODUCTION

LENT! Although Lent is often referred to as the Springtime of the Soul (as is the title of this booklet) I like to call on the Italian word used in music: “lento” which means to “go slowly.” This liturgical season calls on us to slow down, to better see God and ourselves and our relationship. Our Jewish friends observe Yom Kippur, a Day of Atonement, as they reflect on their keeping of their Covenant with God. We Christians reflect on our keeping of our baptismal commitment, even as we accompany those who finally prepare for the initiation sacraments of our Church at Easter.

Lent is a season of forty days, a biblically symbolic number of transformation: the Exodus through the desert of forty years, from slavery to freedom; Jesus’ forty days in the desert, from private life to public ministry. Just so, Lent calls us to be transformed, to be made new. I suggest we don’t simply “give up” something for the days of Lent, but be transformed in so doing.

We are all familiar with the three practices of the Lenten season which lead us to be transformed: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Let us ponder these:

It’s not by the saying of many prayers, but the intent to deepen our prayer these days. Let us intend to be ever mindful of God, seeking to deepen our relationship as we enter into dialogue with God. May we “slow down” to listen to God’s voice and to respond.

Perhaps fasting to the point of hunger will remind us of our soul’s hunger for God! Our fasting shows what we are willing to do out of our love and desire for God. Fasting also causes us to be in solidarity with those in our world who go hungry because of their poverty.

And almsgiving is not merely the giving of extra coins or great sums of money to charity. Almsgiving is acting to actually support someone(s) in need: giving of time, money, or possessions to those less fortunate.

May we indeed SLOW DOWN this Lenten season to see better with eyes of faith!

*Sallie Latkovich, CSJ
Chicago, IL*

WEDNESDAY - FEBRUARY 22

ASH WEDNESDAY

SCRIPTURE

Joel 2: 12-18

Ps 51: 3-6, 12-14, 17

2 Cor 5:20 - 6:2

Mt 6: 1-6, 16-18

REFLECTION

“Even now...return to me with your whole heart.”

Joel 2:12

When I read the words of Joel 2:12, I feel my heart soften and turn towards the One who loves me, like a plant rotating toward the Light that sustains it. How could I not?

These forgiving words acknowledge that, although there is a relationship, the Love that I seek is always seeking me. But *Laudato Si'* challenges me to deepen how I hear this re-union call. This verse, according to Elaine Wainbright, is not simply the divine voice speaking to the human community. We're invited, she says, to hear the text as addressed to the entire Earth community. The broken relationship is between Divinity and the Earth community — which includes people, animals, and all other communities of being. The call is to re-turn from the current relationships to a prior one. And the call is coming not only to the human community, but to all groups within the Earth community. It is a comprehensive call to right relationships between Divinity and Earth.

PRAYER

Peace and happiness are available in every moment.

Peace is every step. We shall walk hand in hand.

There are no political solutions to spiritual problems.

Remember: If the Creator put it there, it is in the right place.

~ Cherokee Prayer ~

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

What Earth community voices do you hear calling for re-union?

What are you doing to show you hear them?

*Judith Minear, CSJ
Cleveland, OH*

THURSDAY - FEBRUARY 23

SCRIPTURE

Dt 30: 15-20

Ps 1: 1-4, 6

Lk 9: 22-25

REFLECTION

*Then He said to all, "If anyone wishes to come after me,
he must deny himself
and take up his cross daily and follow me."
Lk 9: 23*

Today one might ask: "What is my plan or desire to live this Lent more fully, more sincerely, more prayerfully?" In the Gospel we hear the first prediction of the Passion of Jesus. He was to suffer, die, and be raised up on the third day. Jesus speaks of the condition of discipleship. "If you want to be a disciple, then take up your cross daily, deny yourself, and follow me." Life is not easy, as sometimes this daily thing of accepting what happens can be more than overwhelming. The struggles of illness or poor health, a difficult neighbor or co-worker, a project or plan that fails, a cancellation of a scheduled appointment - can all become the cross one must take up daily. Can I deny myself the frustration, the pain, the anger that seems to appear, by prayerfully accepting the unplanned circumstances and challenges of each day? Can I take up that cross and follow Jesus, who gives us the best example of what a disciple should be?

PRAYER

Dear Jesus, help me to take up that daily cross,
as small or as over-whelming as it may be,
and follow You.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Each evening take time to reflect on how I accepted the challenges that came into my life that day.

*Lenora Benda, CSJ
St. Clair Shores, MI*

FRIDAY - FEBRUARY 24

SCRIPTURE

Is 59: 1-9

Ps 51: 3-6, 18-19

Mt 9:14-15

REFLECTION

"...you shall call and the Holy One will answer... will say 'Here I am'"

Isaiah tells us that the fasting asked of us is to release those bound unjustly, set free the oppressed, share food with the hungry, shelter the oppressed who are homeless, and to clothe the poor. It seems that if Isaiah were writing to us today, the words of Pope Francis in *Laudato Si* would be included:

"...we have to realize that true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor." LS 49

We then ask ourselves – "What fasting is being asked of us in hearing the cry of the Earth?"

Pope Francis also tells us many times that it is the poor and those in the margins that suffer the most because our Earth is being destroyed and abused. We who have much can fast from our abundance in consumerism so that others can live.

All justice issues are connected. Isaiah and Pope Francis remind us of this in many ways. We need to **listen and act**.

PRAYER

Come, O Holy One! Show us the way to be a sign of your care for Earth, the poor, and those who suffer the most because of our misuse of Earth's gifts.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Today I will be aware of how I use the gifts from Earth that effect those who have less than I.

*Joellen Sbrissa, CSJ
La Grange Park, IL*

SATURDAY - FEBRUARY 25

SCRIPTURE

Is 58: 9b-14

Ps 86: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6

Lk 5: 27-32

REFLECTION

(Jesus said to Levi, the tax collector), "Follow me" . . . (and to the scribes and Pharisees), "Those who are healthy do not need a physician, but the sick do." Lk 5: 27, 32

Are you feeling generally healthy or somewhat unhealthy—personally and socially? Are you experiencing a sense of malaise? Many of us are. We look for the causes and for a way of feeling better. Pope Francis wrote: (in *Laudato Si* #204)

"The current global situation engenders a feeling of instability and uncertainty which in turn becomes 'a seedbed for collective selfishness.' When people become self-centered and self-enclosed, their greed increases. The emptier a person's heart is, the more he or she needs things to buy, own and consume . . . (and) a genuine sense of the common good also disappears. . . .Our concerns must extend to the catastrophic consequences of social unrest."

Jesus, the divine physician, wants to heal us individually and collectively as he did for Levi, the tax collector, and many others with two simple words: "Follow me." Jesus' prescription, his plan of care for our malaise, is a change in lifestyle, where we are concerned for others and doing what we can – as he did. What one thing might you do?

PRAYER

Jesus, help me in these troubled times to follow you more closely in my lifestyle and in my relationships with people in need.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

I will take some time during my morning or evening prayer to consider Jesus' prescription, 'Follow me,' and what changes that might mean for me.

*Mary Lamski, CSJ
St. Paul, MN*

FEBRUARY 26 - 1st SUNDAY of LENT

SCRIPTURE

Gen. 2: 7-9; 3:1-7

Ps. 51: 3-6, 12-13

Rom. 5: 12-19

Mt. 4: 1-11

REFLECTION

“Do not take your spirit from me.” Ps. 51: 12

The readings today outline the redemption story in dramatic detail. Genesis speaks of the cunning nature of evil as the serpent bargains with Eve: Don't worry about this particular tree, go ahead, try it and you will be rewarded with so many good things. Eve thinks about it for a minute and then gives in to the temptation.

The Psalm response counterbalances the shame and pity Eve experiences: “Do not drive me from your presence nor take from me your spirit.”

Matthew's Gospel returns to the cunning sense of evil. Jesus, exhausted from fasting in the desert for forty days, is tempted in three ways. Theologians say the temptations represent fame, power, and money. The dialogue between Satan and Jesus reflects the trust in his Father that Jesus must have experienced.

As we begin this season of Lent, I hope I can be more aware of how very easily I can fall into the subtle and often cunning power of evil over good. Although my minor temptations are not of the epic proportions outlined in today's readings, they are the “who cares” moments that whisper “What difference will my small efforts to recycle or cut back make in the grand scheme of things?” “How can my meager contribution to the parish Lenten collection possibly make a difference to those on the margins?” “Can I risk alienating a friend if I remind her that a racist comment made in jest can be so damaging?”

PRAYER

Creator God, may these Lenten days provide a good opportunity to be more attentive to changes, large and small, that I might be called to make in my life. May my heart be open and responsive to how those changes might make a difference in large and small ways.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

I will try not to give in to the “who cares” or “what difference does it make” moments in the day.

*Jean McGrath, CSJ
Chicago, IL*

MONDAY - FEBRUARY 27

SCRIPTURE

Lv 19: 1-2, 11-18

Ps 19: 8-10, 15

Mt 25: 31-46

REFLECTION

“Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.”

Mt 25: 45

An understanding of our responsibility toward others is presented clearly in Leviticus, when the people of God are admonished to “love their neighbor as they love themselves.” Jesus clarifies the meaning of “neighbor” for his disciples to include those beyond their own kinship and comfort level and presents our responsibility toward them as imperative for living a life in Him. There are no “others” in the Gospel of Jesus, only “us.”

How, then, can we ignore the ways in which our world has neglected so many? In the face of global inequality, when the few have so much and the many have so little, we cannot pretend that our choices are benign. The Gospel reading today reminds us that looking the other way is not an option. We need to look beyond our willful indifference toward our impact on the Earth and those most profoundly affected by its degradation, the poorest among us.

PRAYER

Loving God, you created a universe of unimaginable glory. Teach me how to live each day in service to your Creation, to truly listen and respond to the “cries of the earth and the cries of the poor.”

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

I will treat each day as a gift, an opportunity to choose to make a positive difference for your Creation.

*Tess Bezouska - CSJ Associate
La Grange, IL*

TUESDAY - FEBRUARY 28

SCRIPTURE

Is 55: 10-11

Ps 34: 4-7, 16-19

Mt 6: 7-15

REFLECTION

"Your God knows what you need..." Mt 6:8

"Give us this day our daily bread." Mt 6:11

My favorite time of the day is enjoying the quiet, slow unfolding of morning. Lighting a candle, sipping hot coffee and imagining the day ahead with my Prayer Partner. God already knows what I will need, but this is how I attend to my hopes and desires and set my intention for the day.

And Rumi reminds us: "The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you."

Bread of Life:

Feed my hopes for our weary world.

Nourish my desire to become a more loving, attentive, and grateful being.

Taste the goodness of breaking bread with others: of sharing with prisoners, migrants, the oppressed and marginalized.

Teach me to look within for what I need to release resentment, judgment, and bitterness.

Share the stillness needed to sit quietly in unhurried prayer that I may live in the presence of Inclusive Love.

PRAYER

God of Surprises, and the One who knows my heart best, show me how to receive the daily bread of life and infuse it with great love for You and others.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

As you begin this day, pay attention to the secrets that dawn whispers to you.

*Jackie Schmitz, CSJ
Burr Ridge, IL*

WEDNESDAY - MARCH 1

SCRIPTURE

Jonah 3: 1-10

Ps 51: 3-4, 12-13, 18-19

Lk 11: 29-32

REFLECTION

*“This generation is an evil generation: it asks for a sign,
but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah...”*

Lk 11: 29

There is always an interest in the unusual and the spectacular. There is a demand for signs as the ordinary does not seem to be enough to impress or prove anything. It needs wisdom to see the deeper gift, to appreciate what lies hidden in the everyday. Curiosity plays a significant role in the life of many. They want to know and feel they are entitled to know. May we have curiosity about Jesus and the desire to know him and his ways more fully. We pray for a conversion of heart to bring us to a fuller relationship with Jesus, who invites us to live the ordinary in an extraordinary way.

The Ninevites were called to repentance by the prophetic sign of Jonah, which they recognized as the authentic word of God. The story of Jonah describes how the disobedient prophet was swallowed up by a giant fish, and after three days, emerges on the shore. He repents. His life is turned around and he preaches the message of salvation with courage. Jesus says that the only sign to be given is that of death and resurrection, for “something greater than Jonah is here.” Jesus will die and be raised to life again. This will be the greatest sign of all that God is among us.

PRAYER

Lord, give us eyes to see the signs that are present today and the ability to recognize your presence in the ordinary events.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Jesus compares himself to Jonah, calling for conversion.

Ask for a listening heart, open to Jesus
and ready to change its ways.

*Ileana Fernandez, CSJ
Wheeling, WV*

THURSDAY - MARCH 2

SCRIPTURE

Esther 14: 1-7
Ps 138: 1-3, 7-8
Mt 7: 7-12

REFLECTION

*“The moment I called out, You stepped in,
You made my life large with strength.”
Psalm 138: 1-3*

My friend Kate works with pre-school children. Max - four years old- independent, wise, and smart is one of her favorites. Max loves to play games; a favorite is “Matching.” Multiple cards are spread randomly on a flat surface. With a partner there is a contest to see who can make the most matches in a set period of time. When Kate, standing by, tries to help, Max exclaims, “No, help!” When the circumstances change, he calls, “Kate, help!”

In a way we are like Kate and Max when we pray. The Holy One is with us, next to us in all of the movements of our lives. From the moment of birth, the Holy One created us with the freedom to choose how we will live. Our very essence as a human is free choice: God is Love and Love does not force, does not interfere. In the words of the Psalmist, “the moment I called out, You stepped in, You made my life large with strength.” Don’t we know, that when we call for help all will be well because we prayed and the Holy One really does stand by our side and waits for our call...

PRAYER

When I walk into the thick of trouble
Keep me alive in the angry turmoil.
With one hand strike my foes,
With your other hand save me.
Finish what you started in me, God,
Your love is eternal – don’t quit on me now.
Psalm 138: 7-8

The Message

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Today I will reflect on the times in my life when I have called to God, when I have prayed, “help” and God helped.

*Carol Crepeau, CSJ
Burr Ridge, IL*

FRIDAY - MARCH 3

SCRIPTURE

Ez 18: 21-28

Ps 130: 1-8

Mt 5: 20-26

REFLECTION

*“Since they have turned away from all the sins that they committed,
they shall surely live, they shall not die.”*

Ez 18:28

The reading from Ezekiel uses the words turn, turned, or turning five times in seven verses. The season of Lent is all about turning: turning away from that which is harmful to ourselves, others, and all of creation and turning toward all that brings wholeness and healing. This is the true spirit of our Lenten sacrifices. What actions can we turn away from or turn towards which would bring healing to relationships with ourselves, God, the dear neighbor, and all of creation? We start by praying, opening ourselves up, so that God may reveal to us what attitudes and behaviors we have that harm our relationships. Then we make the daily effort to turn away from those behaviors and attitudes and turn towards repairing any harm that we have done. The words from an old Shaker hymn, *“Tis a Gift to Be Simple”* come to mind: *“To turn, turn will be our delight, Till by turning, turning we come ’round right.”*

PRAYER

Good and Gracious God, I ask for the vision to see clearly what I need to turn away from in order for me to be free to help make a more just society and world. Help me to see what is mine to do and not get overwhelmed by all that needs to be done.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

What is one thing that I can do today to help restore right relationships with all of creation?

*Pat Murray, CSJ
Charleston, WV*

SATURDAY - MARCH 4

SCRIPTURE

Dt 26: 16-19

Ps 119: 1-2, 4-5, 7-8

Mt 5: 43-48

REFLECTION

“Be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Mt 5: 48

I admit that I struggle with the word perfect. It reminds me of the ways in which I have held myself and others to impossible and inhuman standards, which chips away at our dignity. My relationship to this word transformed, however, when a friend suggested that Jesus is really talking about wholeness, not our human notions of perfection. To think of wholeness brings warmth to my heart and rings of truth. As I read this passage with new eyes, I am aware that Jesus is not speaking of wholeness of one person, but of the community. He challenges us to become aware of the ways we sow division among ourselves. I realize that while I am called to grow in wholeness, I can never be whole until everyone is whole. The challenging statements of Jesus serve to remind us that growing in God without also laboring to birth wholeness in our families, communities, and world, leaves us all wanting.

PRAYER

Whole Maker, may you enkindle in us the courage to be present, to speak, and to act so that your beloved community may become reality.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Take some time to notice the moments in which you cooperate in communal whole-making.
Are there moments when you work in opposition to whole-making?

*Sarah Simmons, CSJ
Westchester, IL*

MARCH 5 - 2nd SUNDAY of LENT

SCRIPTURE

Gn 12: 1-4

Ps 33: 4-5, 18-20, 22

2 Tim 1: 8-10

Mt 17: 1-9

REFLECTION

“When they raised their eyes, they saw no one else but Jesus.” Mt. 8

What if you truly lived as a beloved Child of God? What if all the communities of earth (every creature: human, flora and fauna) found blessing in you? How would your heart, mind, and actions be changed? How the world would be changed!

If we truly believed that we are children of God, God’s beloved ones, we would trust our own goodness and act out of it. We would embody unifying, self-emptying, and animating love. We would be on fire with zeal for communion, listen attentively to the Spirit’s luring, and be imbued with cordial charity in our minds and hearts, our words and actions.

If all communities of earth, every creature found blessing in us, we would walk gently on this earth, caring for and advocating for the most vulnerable, building communities of love.

Then, when all raised their eyes, they would see no one else but Jesus, the Christ.

PRAYER

Loving and Gracious God,

Inspire us to live as your beloved children,

Reflecting your great love to all the world.

Lift up those who are burdened and know not their goodness,

And allow all communities of earth to find blessings.

We ask this in the name of the Creator, Jesus the Christ,

and the animating Spirit.

Amen.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Pay attention to ways that you can be Christ
for the other through your words and actions.

*Kathy Brazda, CSJ
Chicago, IL*

MONDAY - MARCH 6

SCRIPTURE

Dn 9: 4-10

Ps 79: 8-9, 11, 13

Lk 6: 36-38

REFLECTION

"...Be Compassionate..."

Luke Ch: 6

I've discovered that if I approach life holding a "yes" inside of myself, things go better, and I feel lighter, happier, and more engaged in life.

The "yes" allows compassion to make its home in me and it changes how I hear, speak, respond, and perceive myself and others.

We are invited today to "Be compassionate as our God is compassionate." "Do not judge or condemn." And give to others, and the world – live respectfully.

In our worst moments we've all fallen into the sad state of criticism, judgment, or even condemnation in relationships with others and in the way we perceive the world around us.

Judy Cannato, in her book *Quantum Grace*, invites us to remember we cannot know the heart and soul of another human being. Really, how can we judge? And when we condemn another, we have already judged.

When we pardon ourselves or others we choose to see through the eyes of Love. This way of viewing life is difficult but possible.... remember "hold the yes" on the inside! It will transform our vision and living.

PRAYER

Our God, may your transforming power of love heal us and allow us to live compassion in our daily choices, in our relationships with others, and in response to the situations in our world.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

When I feel stressed or stretched,
I will assess the status of my inner being.
How might an inner "yes" help me to move forward
with love and a peaceful heart?

*Bernadette Dean, CSJ
Kalamazoo, MI*

TUESDAY - MARCH 7

SCRIPTURE

Is 1:10, 16-20

Ps 50:8-9, 16-17, 21, 23

Mt 23:1-2

REFLECTION

“Come now, let us set things right, says the Lord...if you are willing, and obey, you shall eat the good things of the land.”

Is 1:18a, 19

Invited to correct our course with EARTH DYING...I ponder these words of Isaiah. It all depends on WILLINGNESS, doesn't it? INTENTION. PRACTICE. Willingness is God's only requirement to set things right. What an offer! The good things of the land Isaiah describes are ours, the collective OURS, if we willingly embrace God's dream for solidarity. Listening to the prophets, we follow Jesus living the Beatitudes and Matthew 25, as we implement the goals of *Laudato Si*. God dreams it; with God we do it!

“Our full Christ option--and it is indeed a free choice to jump on board--offers us so much that is both good and new--a God who is in total solidarity with all of us at every stage of the journey and who will get us all to our destination together in love.”

(Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ*, p.168)

PRAYER

O God, give me the courage and strength to be worthy
of being called a Christian.

For this I praise and thank you in the name of Jesus
and in all the Holy Names of God.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Today I will embrace my full Christ option by exercising one
concrete way to be in solidarity with _____.

Give me only your love and your grace.

They are enough for me.

*Cynthia Sabathier, CSJ
Baton Rouge, LA*

WEDNESDAY - MARCH 8

SCRIPTURE

Jer 18: 18-20

Ps 31: 5-6, 14-16

Mt 20: 17-28

REFLECTION

*“...the Son of Man will be handed over...
and they will condemn him to death and hand him over...
to be mocked and scourged and crucified...”*

Mt 20: 18-19

Condemnation, mockery, scourge, and crucifixion await the Son of Man. Oh, and condemnation, mockery, scourge, and crucifixion also await Jesus. Turns out it isn't merely the life of Jesus on the line here; the chief priests, scribes, and Gentiles are looking to snuff out the Son of Man—the Christ consciousness incarnated in and fully embodied by Jesus—as well.

And here's why:

The Son of Man calls out and rejects any system where rulers lord power over and where “great ones” make their authority felt. Christ consciousness spurns any scheme where favor and privilege are sought or bestowed.

Aware of all that lies ahead, Jesus summons the Twelve to open their hearts to the Son of Man, to instruct them in the ways of Christ consciousness, “whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be the first among you shall be your slave.”

PRAYER

Ultimate Unity, we know that we are perpetrators of the very same scourge that is mutual condemnation and mockery so prevalent in the time of Jesus. The abomination of desperate, violent grasping for power and privilege continues in our own moment. Lead us into the Christ consciousness that will move us toward lives of loving and compassionate union with and service to one another.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

In today's language we might say that Jesus was “woke.” Cooperate with Divine Spark Within so that I may live awake to the needs of my neighbor.

*Barbara Foreman - CSJ Associate
La Grange, IL*

THURSDAY - MARCH 9

SCRIPTURE

Jer 17: 5-10

Ps 1: 1-4, 6

Lk 16: 19-31

REFLECTION

*"If we wish to live apart from God during our time on earth,
God will grant us our wish for eternity as well."*

Lk 16: 25-26

In Luke's parable about the rich man and Lazarus, we are shown that if we wish to live apart from God during our time on earth, He will grant us our wish for eternity as well. In this parable Jesus is talking about the dangers of holding power over others. When power or wealth separates us from "the other," we can lose sight of the imperative that "One must, above all else, love one's neighbor." What is it about power or wealth that is so seductive and results in this separation from "the other?" Humankind perpetually fails to learn this lesson. Certainly, there are moments of brilliance, when generosity of spirit makes headlines, but these moments are few. Caring for "The Dear Neighbor" is what we are called to in our mission, "That all May Be One." We are invited to share our resources for systemic change. Personal wealth and power may elevate one's standing temporarily, but when consciously sharing our resources and voice for the underserved, underrepresented and those on the margins, we are living our life for God.

PRAYER

Loving God, help me to approach others and life through a spirit of Ubuntu; to be humane and ensure that human dignity is always at the core of my actions, thoughts, and deeds so that I remain alert, attuned, and in harmony, that all May Be One.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Each evening before going to bed, take a few minutes to reflect on ways that you have stood with and for others in your life and work.

*Theresa Denton – CSJ Associate
La Grange Park, IL*

FRIDAY - MARCH 10

SCRIPTURE

Gn 37: 3-4, 12-13, 17-28

Ps 105: 16-21

Mt 21: 33-43, 45-46

REFLECTION

“Remember the marvels the Lord has done.” Ps 105

Today’s Scripture invites us into the thicket of life.

The story of Joseph, his brothers’ jealousy, and his being sold into slavery put before us realities of evil still alive today. In the Gospel parable, the property owner attempts to collect his share of the harvest, only to be continually stymied by unjust tenants. They even kill the property owner’s son! This parable names evils like those we watch on the daily news!

BUT God’s ways are not our ways!

Jesus tells us this as he quotes Ps 118:

“The stone which the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone.
It was the Lord who did this
and we find it marvelous to behold.”

Our faith enables us to see realities from God’s vantage point. We are in turn called to be instruments that can help transform the injustices and evils of our times.

What marvels do I/we envision that could turn around our broken world? How am I/are we being called to be a transforming presence today?

PRAYER

Companioning God, open us to Your marvelous ways.

So many dimensions of life need transformation.

Suffering and evils are too alive in Your creation and this world.

Help us to be aware and active in bringing your Kingdom into reality today. Amen

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Become more aware of the marvelous ways God is alive today.

*Christine Partisano CSJ
Latham, New York*

SATURDAY - MARCH 11

SCRIPTURE

Mi 7: 14-15, 18-20

Ps 103: 1-4, 9-10, 11-12

Lk 15: 1-3, 11-32

REFLECTION

“Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity?” Mi 7:18

Reader alert: This question from the prophet, Micah, points to the end of the Prodigal Son (Father) Lukan text and is one of many questions to be pondered if we wish to go wider and deeper into the Word of God today. Familiarity with the parable of the Prodigal Son can block a new meaning or a deeper understanding of what Jesus was teaching... Jesus, the Prophet, in line with Micah, Isaiah, and all the others. Do you remember the three main characters of the parable? Let's not take their representation for granted. The younger son gets his inheritance and squanders it in another country, while the faithful, older son stays in place and upholds the status quo. The Father somehow knows of the younger son's change of heart, joyfully welcomes him home with an embrace and a kiss, and throws a party to celebrate his return. The older brother will not change, and has nothing to do with it at all. Who are you? Who are we as a nation in the western hemisphere? The squanderer, living in excess, spending prodigally, then hitting rock bottom and repenting, returning? The self-righteous, older one, holding the status quo, unwilling to change, embrace, rejoice? The Father or Parent, open-hearted, lavish in forgiveness and unconditional love?

I propose we, as a community, a nation, or an individual in a capitalistic culture identify with all three manifestations of human/divine behavior. What do we need to change today? How will we return home to ourselves, our God's Love, this Lent and in the future? Who is a God like You? How am I made in this Divine Image?

PRAYER

Embracing God, on this ordinary day, bring your extraordinary Grace to me. Change me. Deepen and widen my consciousness of you and your action in our world, through me, through us.

Strengthen us to love as you love, in intimacy with Jesus the Christ, our Prophet and Guide. Amen.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Change something in your thinking, your actions, your behavior, your heart, today. Don't wait until tomorrow. Meet God's Spirit in the everyday. Strengthen your relationships. Pardon someone or yourself.

Reach out to join with others in changing our consumeristic ways, to be more responsibly sustainable citizens.

MARCH 12 - 3rd SUNDAY of LENT

SCRIPTURE

Ex 17: 3-7

Ps 95: 1-2, 6-9

Rom 5: 1-2, 5-8

Jn 4: 5-42

REFLECTION

“Whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst.”

Jn 4:14

We've heard the Woman at the Well story so many times, haven't we? Yet Lent 2023 offers invitations perhaps on a deeper level. Jesus relates with a woman from Samaria who acknowledges that she has had five husbands! Wait...did he break cultural and religious norms on three counts: gender, race and marital status? Yes! Jesus' all-inclusive love invites us to let go of judgment/prejudice and to open our hearts to all people, not just those who look, think, and act like us.

Good thing that the living water which Jesus promises to the Samaritan woman is not only for her but for all of us. Do we thirst for this living water? Do we trust that it will be gratuitously given, without needing to merit it? Do we desire a well deep enough to be filled to overflowing? What are my deeper hungers and thirsts this Lent that only our God can satisfy?

PRAYER

God of All-Inclusive Love, please bless Earth and all creation with
your free-flowing and abundant

Living Water to heal, renew, and bring all to wholeness.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

To accept the invitation to believe that Jesus treasures me as I am
with my past failures just as he did the Samaritan woman.

*Mary Jo Hazard - CSJ Associate
Naperville, IL*

MONDAY - MARCH 13

SCRIPTURE

2 Kgs 5:1-15

Ps 42: 2-3; 43: 3-4

Lk 4: 24-30

REFLECTION

*"If the prophet had asked you to do something hard and heroic,
wouldn't you have done it?"*

So why not this simple wash and be clean."

2 Kgs 5:13

We are a confounding human race! We can "rise to the occasion" in times of emergency or danger. We can have such generous hearts! We can go beyond our limits of energy and compassion to care for one another. These are our "best selves" as a human community.

We also can whine or procrastinate to avoid doing what is right in front of our faces to be done for one another. "Oh, God, just tell me what to do!" is a frequent prayer when we are overwhelmed or confused. And then we often go about doing what we darn well wanted to do in the first place!

When Jesus of the Gospels points out the Way of Good News—of being about the work of loving justice—we balk. Jesus showed us that the Way is both simple and demanding at the same time—but not impossible! It is in doing the loving action, without distinction and without counting the cost, that we are made new every day.

PRAYER

Eternal One, I bless you for inviting me into this Mystery of Love that Jesus the Christ made real in human history. When I begin to lose my way, point me again to Your Way of doing and being, so that I can find my place in your presence.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

I will be intentional today in responding to God's invitation to follow the Path of Life, mindful of the simple ways of extending Love into the world.

*Jacqueline Goodin, CSJ
Cleveland, OH*

TUESDAY - MARCH 14

SCRIPTURE

Deut. 3: 25, 34-43

Ps 25: 4-9

Mt. 18: 21-35

REFLECTION

"I canceled your entire debt...Should you not have dealt mercifully with your fellow servant as I dealt with you?"

Mt.32-33

A priest, teaching children about the need for forgiveness, said, "Sometimes we don't do the right thing." Then a young boy blurted out, "I always do the right thing." This emphasis on "doing the right thing" is often ours. We examine ourselves on our wrongdoings but not on our failure to believe in God's merciful love and live it. We become perfectionistic, self-absorbed, often pursuing goodness out of pride rather than out of humble love. In the words of T.S. Eliot: "The last temptation is the greatest treason/to do the right thing for the wrong reason."

In *Laudato Si* Pope Francis invites us to enter the process of recognizing ourselves as sinners—individually and collectively—as a profound interior conversion which involves sharing God's mercy with others and all creation. This new awareness enables us to develop new convictions, new attitudes, and new forms of life. What we have received we cannot but want to share.

PRAYER

Your merciful ways, O Lord, make known to us; teach us your paths. Guide us in your truth and teach us, for you are our Savior.

Deal with us in Your kindness and great mercy.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Today I will be aware of living the spiritual work of mercy by forgiving myself and others willingly.

*Lucy Silvio, CSJ
Baton Rouge, LA*

WEDNESDAY - MARCH 15

SCRIPTURE

Dt 4: 1, 5-9

Ps 147: 12-13, 15-16, 19-20

Mt 5: 17-19

REFLECTION

"I teach you the statutes and decrees that the Lord, my God, has commanded me. Observe them carefully." Dt 4:5-6
"I have come not to abolish, but to fulfill." Mt 5:17

A few years ago I gave up coffee for Lent. I usually have only 1-2 cups a day. I would donate the money I'd spend on any specialty coffee to the food cupboard. Easy right? I found out otherwise! I did learn how much I seemed to depend on that cup of joe in the morning, but did it lead me to love others more deeply? Yes, but only if they heeded others' advice to keep their distance from me in the morning!

All joking aside, we are about halfway through Lent, which is a good time to assess what we are all about. How important is it that I strictly adhere to my Lenten practices verses how those practices are leading me to be a more loving person? Am I only concerned with rules and practices, or am I examining the lens through which I see and live life to the fullest in the Spirit of Love? How am I with God, with self, with others, with all the created world? Jesus came to fulfill the Law and Prophets – he came to reconcile us to God and each other and teach us to do the same.

PRAYER

Lord of Reconciliation

Lord of Love

I open my heart to your healing power.

Make clear to me where I have veered off the path
of Reconciling Love.

Deepen my love of you, myself, the dear neighbor,
and all creation.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

I will take a reconciliation walk outside, if possible, breathing deeply and stopping periodically to ask forgiveness for the ways that I have veered off of Love's path.

*Denise Waytes - CSJ Associate
Dexter, MI*

THURSDAY - MARCH 16

SCRIPTURE

Jer 7:23-28

Ps 95: 1-2, 6-9

Lk 11: 14-23

REFLECTION

“Oh, that today you would hear God’s voice...”

Ps 95:7

This is what God wants us to get right – to follow God’s example of love. Such a simple request from our God, one spoken with love and concern, but do we listen? From the time of the ancient Hebrews to the time of Jesus, God’s voice is directing us to care for one another, and especially the most vulnerable, that we might prosper. I remember when I consciously started saying yes to God and found myself with men in maximum security prisons, with women and children who did not speak English, with foreign workers who were jeopardized by traffickers who withheld their visas and their pay and caused them to become sick.

We are God’s people when we follow God’s caring ways. But it begins with listening to the word of God spoken to each of us. It begins with quiet prayer and meditation, where our face, not our back, is turned to God, and our heart is soft, gentle, and ready to receive.

PRAYER

Help me, loving God, to follow you with my heart and not just my words. Create in me that space where you can speak to me and my heart will respond with the same tenderness and care.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Today I will fast from the noise and distractions
that occupy my mind and my spirit
so that I can hear God’s voice in the quiet, gentle breeze.

*Celeste Cotter, CSJ
Westchester, IL*

FRIDAY - MARCH 17

SCRIPTURE

Hosea 14:2-10

Ps 81: 6c-8a, 8bc-9, 10-11, 14 and 17

Mark 12:28-34

REFLECTION

“The first commandment is you shall love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength.

The second is you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

“There is no other commandment greater than these.”

Mark 12: 29-31

The scribe in today's Gospel knows the Mosaic Law by heart. When he asks Jesus which commandment is the greatest, he likely assumes Jesus will name one of the ten. Simple. Follow that commandment and you're set. People like clear cut answers. However, Jesus surprises his listeners once again by introducing a new commandment, one that is more challenging than merely keeping a rule: "Love God with all your heart AND love your neighbor as yourself." I believe Jesus links these two commandments together in order to emphasize how impossible it is for us to love God without loving our neighbor...every neighbor. Yes, we love God by loving our neighbor who is the immigrant, the prisoner, the bird and butterfly. We love God by loving our neighbor who is the rain forest, the ocean, the child living in poverty and the climate refugee. We love God by loving our neighbor who is the marginalized, the forgotten, every endangered person or species.

Love God and love your neighbor...Jesus commands...one in the same.

PRAYER

Source of Life, deepen our love for you and help us recognize you in our neighbor. Open our minds and hearts to the realization that our love for you is manifest in our love for all you have created; that every neighbor reveals something of you. May it be so.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Reflect on the neighbors you tend to leave out of your circle of care. Pray for the grace to be more inclusive, remembering love for God is expressed in love for the neighbor.

*Kathy Sherman, CSJ
Westchester, IL*

SATURDAY - MARCH 18

SCRIPTURE

Hos 6: 1-6

Ps 51:3-4, 18-21

Lk 18:9-14

REFLECTION

“Let us set ourselves to know Yahweh. “

“...what I want is Love, not sacrifice; knowledge of God, not holocausts.”

Hosea 6: 3a, 6

Through the ages how humans have come to “know” God and have tried to live out this knowledge has changed time and time again. Burning sacrifices, warring against the others, righteous genocides, separation from main stream cultures, adherence to strict rules of behavior down to the simplest acts of denial during Lent to please God. But in the readings above, Yahweh is telling the people “... what I want is Love...” How simple – How complex! How to love – know – God is a lifelong process.

During Lent we give ourselves a set number of days to reflect on our relationship with God, to try to know God and understand how to live a life that shows God our love. Maybe I resolve to practice acting with more kindness, to be less judgmental, to try to understand a situation or person from a place of love. Maybe what I give up for Lent is a narrow attitude, a selfish perspective, or a limited understanding of something disliked or feared. Be more loving – how simple, how complex.

PRAYER

Grace me with honesty and resolve so that I can see and then change my behavior to be more loving.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Each day be aware of at least one encounter or one decision and see it through the lens of acting with love.

*Sue Biskup – CSJ Associate
La Grange, IL*

MARCH 19 - 4th SUNDAY of LENT

SCRIPTURE

1 Sam 16: 1, 6-7, 10-13

Ps 23: 1-6

Eph 5: 8-14

Jn 9: 1-41

REFLECTION

"I am the Light of the world."

Jn 9:5

The story of the blind man is our story. We are all born blind. The difference between the blind man and ourselves is that he knew he was blind. Yet, Jesus consolingly tells us the blindness is not a result of sin, but a condition that gives the works of God a chance to be made visible through us. The blind man does not request healing. Jesus takes the initiative. The healing was not instantaneous, but a process. Lent is an invitation from Jesus to us to enter into a process that will enable us to see more clearly, more deeply. Our faith is not directed toward theological dogmas, but toward a Person. "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" Our answer always contains the question of the blind man: "Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" And Jesus' answer is the same to us: "You have seen him, the one speaking (deep within your own heart) is he."

Let us listen. Let us believe. Let us see.

PRAYER

*"Walk in the light. The beautiful light.
Come where the dewdrops of mercy shine bright.
Shine all around us by day and by night.
Jesus, the light of the world."*

Song by John Newton based on Isaac Watts' poem

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

I take time today to listen, to hear the voice of Jesus speaking
deep within my own heart.

*Marcella Clancy, CSJ
Detroit, MI*

MONDAY - MARCH 20

ST. JOSEPH

SCRIPTURE

2 Sam 7: 4-5, 12-14, 16

Ps 89: 2-5, 27, 29

Rom 4: 13, 16-18, 22

Mt 1: 16, 18-21, 24

REFLECTION

The angel of the Lord appeared to [Joseph] in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her."

When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home.

Matthew 1: 20-21

Who is this man whom God chose to be the father of Jesus on earth?

Who is this man chosen to partner with Mary as her companion and helpmate?

Who is this man who takes direction from angels in dreams?

Who is this man who takes Mary, pregnant with a child not his own, into his home and his heart?

There is so much we want to know about Joseph, but the gospels are almost silent, and so we stand in this silence and we wonder, holding the fragile threads of tradition.

He was like so many fathers, doing what he had to do—always faithful.

He was a devoted husband and father—always faithful.

He worked to support his wife and child—always faithful.

With Mary, he taught the child Jesus how to love, how to walk this Earth with reverence, how to trust God as Father—always faithful.

He models for us a life of fidelity—quiet and constant—and deep love.

PRAYER

Joseph, teach me to be faithful to the dailiness of my life and the responsibilities of my vocation.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

I will listen for God's messages to me—expecting and trusting them.

*Jeanne Cmolik, CSJ
Cleveland, OH*

TUESDAY - MARCH 21

SCRIPTURE

Ez 47: 1-9, 12

Ps 46: 2-3, 5-6, 8-9

Jn 5: 1-16

REFLECTION

“Do you want to be well?”

John 5:6b

Do we really know what it means to choose wellness? Rather than being a simple question, I find it to be spiritually challenging, one requiring serious contemplation and discernment. Given the urgency of the times in which we live, sitting on the sidelines as passive observers of life is not an option. In order to be well we must choose to live differently, to enter a process of radical transformation for the sake of our world. Perhaps we sincerely desire change, but the suffering we witness each day overwhelms us to the point of inertia; we may fear not making a difference. As we each contemplate our answer, I pray we recognize that we are never alone; the Spirit is leading all of us, together, to hear and respond to the cries of the earth and the poor, engage in ecological education, and begin the transformative work necessary to change systems, so that with God’s grace we begin healing.

PRAYER

Loving God, give us the strength, wisdom, and courage to choose wellness over suffering. Help us to overcome complacency and immobility with right action and replace indifference with compassion. Let healing flow from the depths of our hearts and radiate infinitely outward so that all may truly be one.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Become the healing you seek; practice compassion toward the earth today by adopting and maintaining a sustainable living practice.

*Barbara Szulc - CSJ Associate
Western Springs, IL*

WEDNESDAY - MARCH 22

SCRIPTURE

Is 49: 8-15

Ps 145: 8-9, 13-14, 17-18

Jn 5: 17-30

REFLECTION

*"The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger
and abounding in steadfast love."*

Ps 145:8-9

As I write, it is Ordinary Time; Christmas is behind us, Lent is a just a month away. Chapter will be here before we know it; changes and transitions that challenge and stretch us are happening all around the Congregation. We are being called to look with new eyes, to listen to the cries of Earth and the cries of our brothers and sisters, our dearest of neighbors, who are in need. We feel helpless and wonder what more can we do. In the midst of all these challenges, however, we find unimagined courage, unbounded hope and kindness, and belief in new possibilities. How appropriate that our readings today remind us that *God With Us* is gracious and merciful and abounds in steadfast love.

PRAYER

God of our longing, help us to trust that your abiding love
is with us now as we walk together in hope into the future
You desire for us.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

As we journey through the remaining days of Lent and towards
Chapter 2023, I will be present and aware of each moment of
grace and share this with others.

*Mary Anne Hebert, CSJ
Wichita, KS*

THURSDAY - MARCH 23

SCRIPTURE

Ex:32: 7-14

Ps 106: 19-23

Jn: 31-47

REFLECTION

“You like to receive praise from one another, but you do not try to win praise from the one who alone is God: how, then can you believe me?”

Jn 5:44

In both readings today the people of Moses' and Jesus' time were struggling to believe. Jesus is asking us to try to win praise from God instead of one another. Are we looking for praise from our bosses, co-workers, family and friends, or do we look for ways to win praise from God with our words and actions? We can win God's praise by helping those in need, listening to a grieving or troubled friend or family member, helping an elderly neighbor, showing concern for the health of our planet, accepting those who are different from us, rejoicing in others' happiness, love of our families, etc. By winning God's praise, we are praising the world He has given us. Advocating for laws to protect our environment, using less energy in our homes, finding alternatives to plastics, planting trees and gardens are some ways to praise the world God has given us. Let us sing our praises to God today!

PRAYER

Let us not grow tired of doing good, for in due time we shall reap our harvest if we do not give up.

So then, while we have the opportunity,
let us do good to all. (Gal 6:9-10)

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Each morning I will ask myself how I can praise God in my daily actions and make the world more beautiful and peaceful.

*Nancy Leonard – CSJ Associate
La Grange, IL*

FRIDAY - MARCH 24

SCRIPTURE

Wis 2: 1, 12-22

Ps 34: 17-21, 23

Jn 7: 1-2, 10, 25-30

REFLECTION

“But we know where he is from.”

Jn 7: 27

In today's Gospel we see Jesus having to face rejection and attempts at his annihilation. Yet he is God's Love Incarnate. He came that we might be held and raised up by, and transformed into, the very same Love from which he had come. How could we resist?

Jesus bumped up against some tightly grasped and preconceived notions about what to expect from the Long-awaited One when he comes. How could this Jesus be the One? “But we know where he is from. When the Messiah comes no one will know where he is from.” Many of those waiting for the Savior were simply stuck in their self-imposed limitations of how the One-to-Come would be recognized.

What about us? Could today's Gospel contain a call to let God's love widen and deepen our hearts with a spaciousness that allows them to expand in their capability to welcome a bigger God than the one we may have had in mind?

PRAYER

Come, O Holy Spirit! Just as you were witnessed descending upon Jesus and remaining with him, may I, too, generously welcome your transforming presence so that you remain with me, transforming me into the Compassionate Presence of Jesus in our needy world!

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Live out your life with one desire only: to be always what God wants you to be, in nature, grace, and glory, for time and for eternity. (MP #73)

*Sue Torgersen, CSJ
Cottage Grove MN*

**SATURDAY - MARCH 25
ANNUNCIATION**

SCRIPTURE

Is 7: 10-14; 8: 10

Ps 40: 7-11

Heb 10: 4-10

Lk 1: 26-38

REFLECTION

"You did not ask me for sacrifice"

Ps 40: 7

"You did not ask me for sacrifice." Can we honestly pray those words from today's psalm? How often have we heard that we should sacrifice? What on earth does that really mean? Etymology indicates that sacrifice is the act of making something holy. Just how do we expect to do that?

The readings for the Feast of the Annunciation suggest a major turnaround in our thinking about sacrifice. The Gospel tells us that God, the one who looked upon Mary with favor, is the source of holiness, not vice versa. Isaiah tells Ahaz that God is the author of salvation and that he should simply accept God's signs. The Letter to the Hebrews invites us to simply cooperate with God's desire to consecrate us. The Psalm and Mary's last statement confirm it: our role is simply to say, "Let it be according to your word."

Like Mary, we are asked nothing more than to say, "Here I am."

PRAYER

Gracious God, source of all holiness, help us to hear your call
and echo Mary's response.

May we, like she, be Christ-bearers in this world so much in need
of signs of your presence.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

I will spend the last week of Lent learning to say ever more deeply,
"Here I am."

*Mary M. McGlone
St. Louis, MO*

MARCH 26 - 5th SUNDAY of LENT

SCRIPTURE

Ez 37: 12-14

Ps 130: 1-8

Rom 8: 8-11

Jn 11: 1-45

REFLECTION

*... she went and called her sister Mary and told her privately,
"The Teacher is here and is asking for you."
John 11: 20, 28*

As I re-read this Gospel, a detail that I had not noticed before caught my attention: "When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him; but Mary sat at home."

This detail and the story that follows offer a slightly different picture of these sisters and their relationship than what we see in Luke 10 ("Mary has chosen the better part...") by highlighting Martha's faith and care for her sister. Following Martha's encounter with Jesus and confession of faith, she goes to her sister and tells her—without judgment or criticism—that Jesus is asking for her. The two sisters then go together to find him.

This story is not only about Jesus' power over death, but also our own power to be God's grace and life for others. When a sister or neighbor is struggling with grief or despair, we are called to be like Martha, gently reminding them that "the Teacher is here and is asking for you" so that **together** we can experience hope and new life in Christ.

PRAYER

Jesus, you were moved with compassion for everyone you encountered. Give us tender hearts and move us to active care for all who suffer and grieve. Try to imagine yourself in this story: Who are you? What are you feeling? What are Jesus' words to you?

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Make a point of reaching out to someone who you know is struggling and remind her/him of God's love.

*Jessica Wroblewski - CSJ Associate
Cleveland, OH*

MONDAY - MARCH 27

SCRIPTURE

Daniel 13:1-9, 15-17, 19-30, 33-62

Psalm 23:1-6

John 8:1-11

REFLECTION

“God-fearing woman, through her tears...she trusted in [God] wholeheartedly.”

Dn 13:1, Dn 13:35

Early in the reading Susanna is described as a “God-fearing woman.” As we read on, we realize she did not literally “fear God” but clearly loved and trusted God wholeheartedly. I came to grips with the meaning of God-fearing when I journeyed with a young man dying of cancer. He told me he was struggling with the gift of the Spirit of fear of the Lord at this part of the journey because he knew real fear of dying and leaving behind a young son and wife. This reading of Susanna’s story reminds me of this man’s final days. In my many visits with him, I tried to lift him from what he thought fear of the Lord meant to a larger meaning of the awesomeness of God in every part of our journeys.

As we journey in this life and as we encounter each other we may be stirred by the Holy Spirit to intervene on someone’s behalf. We ourselves might find that we are caught in the judgment of others, and sometimes we might admit to wrongdoing and need mercy and forgiveness.

PRAYER

God, you are our constant companion. We need not ask and yet you send a helper or mercy when we need truth or forgiveness.

May we, in turn, be stirred by you to reach out to others.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

I will end the day thinking if I was challenged by someone who loves me or by someone who is hostile to me, and I will ask myself what the difference would be.

To forgive and be forgiven is a wonderful healing.

*Karen Kirby, CSJ
Cleveland, OH*

TUESDAY - MARCH 28

SCRIPTURE

Nm 21: 4-9

Ps 102: 2-3, 16-21

Jn 8: 21-30

REFLECTION

*“When you lift up the Son of Man then you will realize that I AM
and that I do nothing on my own,
but I say only what the Father taught me.” Jn. 8: 23*

*“Lord, hear my prayer; let my cry come to you...turn your ear to me...”
Ps 102: 2-3*

In this quote from John’s gospel Jesus speaks of his true identity as both human and divine. We may not think about this very often, yet it is something we know about him. Any clarity about how this influences my relationship to him is challenging. Believing in him is the path for following him. “Who do you say that I am?” What a great question to keep us on our feet and be in tune with our inner movements and accepting of the Spirit that guides us. I don’t have a clear answer myself. More than demands are invitations to union and love.

When doubts come we can turn to the beautiful, honest prayers like Psalm 102, “Hear my prayer O God... Let my cry come to you... turn your ear to me!”

Faithfulness to my daily practices of prayer and silent reflection help me maintain a growing relationship with Jesus the Christ, the true Center of everything and everyone. In him we have our true being.

My friend, Fr. Jim, shared this story when someone asked him, “Fr. Jim, when did you decide to be a priest?” He answered, “This morning!” There you are. When do I decide to follow Christ?

Each day I wake up!

PRAYER

O God beyond all names and ideas, stir my heart to seek you in my struggles and my wonderings. Help my unbelief. You are alpha and omega, the center of my life. I am grateful.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Be faithful to prayer and quiet reflection in your daily living.

Be thankful for all that you meet each day.

*Betsy Meagher, CSJ
Kalamazoo, MI*

WEDNESDAY - MARCH 29

SCRIPTURE

Dn.3: 14-20, 91-92, 95

Daniel 3: 52-56

Jn. 8: 31-42

REFLECTION

*"If you make my word your home you will indeed be my disciples,
you will learn the truth and the truth will set you free."*

Jn.8:32-32

Growing up in our family, I recall how foundational speaking the truth with love was in everyday conversations. Whether at home or on the school playground truth telling was a given. If anyone ever told a half-truth, there were consequences. Today I imagine many of us ask ourselves, "What is happening to speaking the truth with love? "Does it matter?" John's simple words invite us to reconnect to our individual, family, and congregational truths. We are reminded that in order to live with truth, we are called to seek opportunities to be in union with God, our dear neighbor and ourselves. In this very challenging time, seeking the truth moves us to lovingly welcome and support immigrants, gently care for our earth, work to eliminate racial inequality, and make a difference in our world through risking conversations where truth matters. Risking truthful conversations leads us to live with inner freedom where our hearts are opened to unknown and unexpected gifts. Embracing truth assures that each of us will get more comfortable living on the edge. As we ready our hearts this Lent for God's promises of hope and for hope to be born anew in Chapter 2023, what are the whispers of new truths emerging within you and around you, as you choose to be set free?

PRAYER

God of Truth, our faithful relationship with you and the dear neighbor continually moves us to the "MORE." Be with us as we see clearly new opportunities for living on the edges of life with you, God, with strangers, and with all we name as "our dear neighbor." During this Lenten journey, let us seek to be bearers of truth and light in a world that struggles to recognize and embrace truth.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Risk speaking the truth with love in all relationships.
Be a beacon of truth and light.

*Linda Bronersky - CSJ Associate
Bolingbrook, IL*

THURSDAY - MARCH 30

SCRIPTURE

Gn 17: 3-9

Ps 105: 4-9

Jn 8: 51-59

REFLECTION

“Very truly I tell you, whoever obeys my word will never see death.”

Jn 8: 51

I wonder what my reaction would be if I heard this. Would I think Jesus was delusional? Maybe crazy? Most assuredly, I would not believe him. The saying goes that the only certainties in life are death and taxes. But this misses the point. Jesus emphasizes who we are is not our physical bodies, but a divine presence that exists within all creation. This divinity can never die and transcends all human understanding. Unfortunately, our world is full of examples of those who do not accept this divine presence: inhumane immigration policies, wars, and our planet’s destruction. However, there are many examples of those who do. People are working tirelessly to welcome refugees, while others lobby for policies that ban nuclear weapons and protect our planet. In recognizing this divine presence, I often think of the last line of Amanda Gorman’s inauguration poem: “Are we brave enough to see it?” But more importantly, “Are we brave enough to be it?”

PRAYER

God of Courage, open our hearts to this divine presence in our dear neighbor. Let us recognize our duty to establish relationships with all of creation that promote the common good.

And may we never tire of doing your will. Amen.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Where do I recognize this divine presence today?

*Luke Sullivan – CSJ Associate
Brookfield, IL*

FRIDAY - MARCH 31

SCRIPTURE

Jer 20: 1-13

Ps 18: 2-7

Jn 10: 31-42

REFLECTION

The Jews fetched stones to throw at him, so Jesus said to them, 'I have shown you many good works from my Father; for which of these are you stoning me?' The Jews answered him,

'We are stoning you, not for doing a good work, but for blasphemy; though you are only a man, you claim to be God.'

Jn 10: 31-33

This passage from John's Gospel, Chapter 10: 31, is in response to an earlier passage, John 10: 29-30, where Jesus states "The Father, for what he has given me, is greater than anyone, and no one can steal anything from the Father's hand. The Father and I are one." It is clear that Jesus and his words about himself and his relationship with the Father are just too much for his Jewish listeners! So, once again, Jesus stands firm and sets out an equation of faith: Believe in me because of the works I do. I am able to do these works because I and the Father are one.

Each day we are invited, as were Jesus' listeners, to deeper faith: to recognize our oneness in God and to respond "yes" to engaging in the works of God – to care for creation and the most vulnerable people in our worldwide human family.

PRAYER

Holy One, there are places in our lives and in our world where fetching stones has become a deafening response to encountering diversity and safeguarding the richness of creation. Be with us as we acknowledge our failure to act with active, inclusive love. May this Lent bring us closer to you and one other through our personal and collective works of prayer, almsgiving and fasting.

Amen.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Take a moment each day to become more conscious of the good work God is completing through you.

*Rita Ann Teichman, CSJ
Kalamazoo, MI*

SATURDAY - APRIL 1

SCRIPTURE

EX 37: 21-28

JER 31: 10-13

JN 11: 45-56

REFLECTION

"... as Chief Priest he unwittingly prophesied that Jesus was about to die sacrificially for the nation, and not only for the nation but so that all God's exile-scattered children might be gathered together into one people." Jn 11: 52

Jeremiah prophesied that "The One who scattered Israel will gather them together again ... and will keep their eye on them." The Psalmist proclaims that The Lord will guard us, as a shepherd guards his flock. And John reminds us that all who have been scattered will be "gathered into one people." These passages give great hope, especially in a world that is torn apart and divided, angry, and truly scattered. Our Earth, our Common Home, cries out for peace, equity, respect, inclusivity, and care for one another. We only need to recall that the Lord was born, died, and rose so that all persons, yes, all persons, can return in love to the presence of the Creator. We are all called to be one people. How we respond to this call is up to us. Our response takes reflection, prayer, action, and a belief that we are truly sisters and brothers of the one, loving, and non-judgmental Creator. Difference gives glory to God; judging the difference separates us from each other. Let us recall, reflect, and pray on the words of the Prophet: You shall be my people, and I will be your God. And break open John's reminder that "all God's exile-scattered children will (might) be gathered together into one people." This I believe!

PRAYER

Walk with me, O Lord, as I see those around me as my sisters and brothers. Rid me of those words, thoughts, and actions that separate me from living into the belief that all are One People. Help me experience the beauty and joy of all in our Common Home.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Each day I will take five to eight minutes to enjoy the beauty of those around me and will say thank you for living with me in our Common Home.

*Robert L. Funaro
Grand Rapids, MI*

APRIL 2 - PALM SUNDAY

SCRIPTURE

Is 50: 4-7

Ps 22: 8-9, 17-20, 23-24

Phil 2: 6-11

Mt 26: 14-27: 66

REFLECTION

“My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will.”

Today we enter into what is simultaneously the most powerful and most mysterious of Christian realities. Why did Jesus have to die? Why do we have to suffer? Why is suffering even a thing? And what does the “will of God” have to do with any of it? Does God will suffering? I can’t pretend to fully answer these wrenching questions, but I do have a few thoughts. While God doesn’t “will” suffering, it is in fact a painful part of human experience. Suffering can arise from human sinfulness, but it also comes for no apparent reason - weather disasters, genetic anomalies, serious disease, and the like. No one - not even the Just One - escapes it. This can easily lead to estrangement from the One who longs to accompany us even - and perhaps especially - in our pain. Jesus lived in deep awareness of being loved by a God whose values he strove to bring to birth in a world that did not - and still does not - want them. He died out of love for those values, but even more he died out of love for the Abba-God from whom they came. Jesus’ suffering teaches us that it is love that makes suffering bearable. It is love that eventually transforms our pain and death into new life.

PRAYER

Jesus, lead me in ways of wisdom. Help me to not be afraid of bringing my fear and suffering to you. I trust in your transforming love so that God’s will is done in me and in our world.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

As I enter into the mystery of this pain-filled week, how am I being called to embrace God’s will as an act of love?

*Christine Schenk, CSJ
Cleveland, OH*

APRIL 3 - MONDAY of HOLY WEEK

SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 42: 1-7

Psalm 27: 1-3, 13-14

John 12: 1-11

REFLECTION

“a bruised reed he will not break, and dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice”

Is 42: 3

“Mary took a pound of costly perfume..., anointed Jesus’ feet and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.”

Jn 12: 3

This week when we ritualize the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus, these readings show us *how to be* with the suffering and one another. As Jesus attended to the bruised and hurt, and lifted up the small and seemingly insignificant, so must we. Even in the endurance and experience of our own difficulties and suffering, our faithfulness challenges us to not cause further harm.

How do we acknowledge or help lighten the burdens, whether known or unknown to us, in our world, communities, and among our fellow humans and creatures?

Mary anoints Jesus’ feet as the women who stay with him through his death will go to anoint his body in the tomb. The fruits, the harvest of all the actions of Jesus, the women, and all of us can produce a fragrance that can enfold our suffering planet and soothe the sorrowful among us.

PRAYER

May the fragrance of all that emerges in springtime call to mind ways that we can lighten burdens, attend to the bruised and the hurt, and lift up the small and seemingly insignificant.

May we soothe the sorrowful with compassion and make way for justice to come.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

How have I lightened a burden today?

*Jill Underdahl, CSJ
St. Paul, MN*

APRIL 4 - TUESDAY of HOLY WEEK

SCRIPTURE

Is 49:1-6

Ps 71: 1-6, 15, 17

Jn 13: 21-33, 36-38

REFLECTION

"...from my mother's womb..."

Is 49:1

Jn 13: 31-32

Many times in today's readings we hear the words, from my mother's womb with reference to God's active presence in our lives. God is present to name me, identifying me as the servant whose responsibility is to show God's glory and to be light to the nations so that salvation may reach beyond what we imagine, and to be our teacher and our strength.

Here we slip to the gospel where we read "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him." Not only are Jesus and God glorified; I, too, am made glorious in His sight."

In Donna Single's book, *Stand Up, Becoming Fully Alive*, we are reminded to engage in the Life of God, invited to live up to our nature. Upon boarding a train recently, I encountered a young boy. As he looked out the window, he exclaimed, "How beautiful!" Then, quietly, in clear, pure tones, he began to sing.

PRAYER

Light of the World,
The song of a child joins with the psalmist and the angel
Proclaiming your Glory!
As the stars pierce the darkness proclaim "life" beyond,
We proclaim "life in abundance."
Glory to our Abba!
Glory to the Anointed!
Glory to our Advocate!
Glory to the Three in One!

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

How will you be Light to the nations today? How will you show God's glory, be glory?

*Pat Warbritton, CSJ
Kalamazoo, MI*

APRIL 5 - WEDNESDAY of HOLY WEEK

SCRIPTURE

Is 50:4-9a

Ps 69:8-10, 21-22, 31, 33-34

Mt 26:14-25

REFLECTION

“Surely it is not I, Lord?”

Mt. 26:14

“Surely it is not I, Lord?” As the disciples question Jesus, are they also questioning themselves— afraid that they might be the betrayer, each aware of their misdeeds and failings, each wondering – “could it be me?” Do they experience relief when Jesus responds affirmatively to the question from Judas “Surely it is not I, Rabbi?”, secure then in the knowledge that there will be someone to blame other than themselves? Do we feel this way when we can blame others – the Russians, the Democrats, the Republicans, etc. - for the political divisiveness, war, the climate crisis, etc.? When I have someone else to blame I feel relieved of responsibility. I can go on with my life without learning more about, or acting upon, issues that contribute to the suffering of others and the planet. Although comfortable, I know it is not the way I am called to live, given the awareness that love is the only thing that matters.

PRAYER

Let me refrain from blaming others and renew my resolve to live from the consciousness that love is the only thing that matters. Let me be open to our shared responsibility for each other and the planet.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Each day I will ask to learn about appropriate actions I can take to help care for others and our common home.

*Pat Gibbons – CSJ Associate
Western Springs, IL*

APRIL 6 - HOLY THURSDAY

SCRIPTURE

Ex 12: 1-8, 11-14
Ps 116: 12-13, 15-18
1 Cor 11: 23-26
Jn 13: 1-15

REFLECTION

*"I have given you a model to follow,
so that as I have done for you, you should also do." Jn 13:15*

"Be careful," Mabel's husband cautions her, when she suggests that they—a black couple in the 1960s rural South—intervene for a young white girl who's in trouble. Mabel's rebuke: "Don't say that in the Bible. 'Do unto the least of these, you have done it unto me.' Don't say nothin' about 'Be careful.'" (Where the Crawdads Sing, novel by Delia Owens/film). Mabel's point was amplified by Rev. Dr. Martin L. King, Jr. on what proved to be the eve of his assassination: "No (person) is free (who) fears death."

Mabel and Martin each knew that Jesus had read God's revelation in the same way that they had. Jesus always chose love over personal safety, even throughout his Passion, to death. True, the Synoptic narratives show Jesus in Gethsemane ("in human likeness") praying to be spared the "cup of suffering:" the prospect of calamity for his disciples and mission should all those threats of violent death come to pass. Yes, he agonized, knowing how easily they could slip over the Mt. of Olives into the Judean desert's maze of caves. Escaping Jerusalem would be "for the sake of the mission," so to continue God's work elsewhere. But no. Jesus stayed the course because he discerned the truth and it set him free.

Today we watch Jesus of the Fourth Gospel. Having wept and overcome the shadow of death at Lazarus' tomb, Jesus models the way forward for disciples of all time: humble, loving service to the dear neighbor. It is left to us to discern our "next steps" of loving with true freedom: being care-full, but not too careful.

PRAYER

O God, O Christ, O Spirit, give me the courage to live a truly discerning life. Help me to love as you love.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

What is my courageous next step in loving?
Whose "feet" am I called to "wash?"

Mary Jo Curtsinger, CSJ
Chicago, IL

APRIL 7 - GOOD FRIDAY

SCRIPTURE

Is 52:13-53:12

Ps 31: 2,6,12-13, 15, 17, 25

Heb 4:14-16, 5:7-9

John 18:1 – 19:42

REFLECTION

“He bore the punishment that makes us whole.”

Isa 53:5

I dread the Good Friday liturgy. It reminds me that execution of one human being by another still occurs in our country. Suffering of the innocent happens because of war, climate disasters, trafficking, abuse of power. Gratefully, the beautiful imagery within the Scripture readings captures for me the whole paschal mystery. One phrase in Isaiah’s Servant Song leaps at me: *he bore the punishment that makes us whole*. Jesus died and rose through the power of God’s spirit to a new life. God offers this “new life” to each of us. What does it mean to be made whole? Just imagine how each of us would be if all the good that is already in us is able to blossom because all barriers such as self-imposed limitations, doubts, and prejudices were removed. We would be what God always intended of all God’s creation: beautiful, loving, joyful.

PRAYER

Merciful, compassionate God, who raised Jesus to new life, give me the courage to confront the prejudice in my own life and in our country that prevents us from caring for one another.

Help us to act justly, love tenderly, and always walk with you.

Amen.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

What can I do today to alleviate the suffering of one person?

*Marianne Race, CSJ
Brookfield, IL*

APRIL 8 - HOLY SATURDAY - EASTER VIGIL

SCRIPTURE

Gn 1:1-2:2, Ps 104: 1-2, 5-6, 10, 12-14, 24, 35; Gn 22: 1-2, 9-13,
15-18, Ps 16: 5, 8-11
Ex 14: 15 – 15: 1, Ps Ex 15: 1-6, 17-18; Is 54: 5-14, Ps 30: 2, 4-6, 11-13
Is 55: 1-11, Is 12: 2-6; Bar 3: 9-15, 32-4:4, Ps 19: 8-11
Ez 36: 16-28, Ps 42: 3, 5; 43: 3, 4; Rom 6: 3-11, Ps 118: 1-2, 16-17, 22-23
Mt 28: 1-10

REFLECTION

“Living for God in Christ Jesus”

Rom. 6:11

“An angel of the Lord. . . rolled back the stone”

Mt. 28: 2

A story is told: A Master holds an aspiring disciple under water. Lifting the inquirer out of the water he asks, “How much did you want air?” “More than life itself,” the inquirer says. “When you want God that much, you are ready!” Do we desire God that much, for ourselves, for everyone? If so we are ready for this Vigil!

Today is tomb time--between times--Vigil time. We wait praying for heightened desire to live for God (Love). Catechumens understand. Expectantly waiting, mysteriously a boulder rolls away. Eyes, ears, heart, mind open. Illumination! What was experienced as isolated, inferior, meaningless now belongs, is noble and connected! Everything in cosmic history, every part of life--a gift--Infinite Love (Christ) rising, even in us! We too belong in Christ living only for Love! As Thomas Aquinas says: There are really two resurrections: The first is waking up in this lifetime; If we do this, the second will take care of itself. Pray!

PRAYER

Christ, crying out in Earth and her Poor, rise in us with heightened desire. Roll away boulders of separation and illusion. Illumine our minds with the radiance of your presence throughout the cosmos.

Breathe courage in us to be your transformed community alive
with your care for all creation.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

I proclaim: I DO REJECT what prevents Love’s flow through me.

I DO BELIEVE in Christ Risen in all creation! I will so live!

*Pat Bergen, CSJ
Westchester, IL*

APRIL 9 - EASTER DAY

SCRIPTURE

Acts 10: 34, 37-43
Ps 118: 1-2, 16-17, 22-23
Col 3: 1-4 or Cor 5: 6-8
Jn 20: 1-9

REFLECTION

On the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning...and saw the stone removed...So she ran...to Simon Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved and told them "They have taken him from the tomb"...So Peter and the other disciple went out and came to the tomb...and found the burial cloths there...they did not yet understand the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead. Jn 20:1-9

So, here we are again, Easter morning, standing outside the empty tomb, perhaps in the company of Mary Magdalene, the faithful women, or John and Peter. Perhaps we are alone there, latecomers to this emptiness behind the unrolled stone, where we know Jesus' body was placed Friday. What is our response today, in our time? Do we run away? Hide in some "upper" room or inside ourselves? Do we go back to the cross—last place he was seen, trembling and worshiping what was, rather than what is?

Or do we go out from there? Out into the garden, onto the road to Emmaus, to the shores of Galilee, into the broken world to meet and follow the risen Christ? Unlike Mary, John, Peter who "*did not yet understand,*" we know that Christ is risen, that Christ is right here, surrounding us, within us, alive in all of creation, in every event, encounter, experience we have. All the emptiness—of cross, tomb, even our own hearts—is alive with Christ-present if we are open to believing and seeing Resurrection.

PRAYER

Open my mind, heart, spirit to your living, loving presence in all of your sacred creation, that I may reflect the Christ-light in my being and doing today and every day.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Look for at least one opportunity today (or tomorrow) to see all of creation infused with Christ-life and light. What will I do differently because of this understanding?

*Christine Parks, CSJ
Kalamazoo, MI*

THOUGHTS & MUSINGS

THOUGHTS & MUSINGS



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