

Lenten Reflections 2020



About the Cover

Christ the Redeemer Statue in Rio de Janeiro is ranked "Third" as one of the Seven Wonders of the Modern World. Each year 600,000 people climb to the top of Mount Corcovado to meditate and pray in front of this statue and inside the chapel at the base of the statue. The Statue is also nicknamed "The Hug" which is appropriate for the Lenten Season. During the Lenten Season, Christ wants to "hug" us with his vision for our world and for us using the meditations in this booklet.

Lent Reflections 2020

February 26, 2020 - Ash Wednesday

I am with you always – Matt 28:20 Come, Follow me – Matt 4:19

REFLECTION

Religious practices, such as fasting, almsgiving, and prayer, are intended to create for us a path and space in our busy lives to experience God. Sometimes, though, the structures and rules of religion can distract us by overemphasizing the letter of law at the expense of the spirit of the law, thus, obstructing our true focus, vision, which is to be aware of God being aware of us (me).

Jesus is asking us to reflect on our religious practices. What are OUR true desires, intentions, and motivations in our religious practices? Is it self-righteousness? A means to judge others? Is it to humbly, truthfully, create a space of grace, a clearer awareness and commitment to seek God's presence and action in our lives?

With the help of the Holy Spirit, all our religious practices must bring us closer in a more intimate relationship with Jesus. (Adapted from Jesuitprayers.org)

PRAYER PRACTICE

- Throughout your day simply be aware that God is aware of you – NOW, HERE, THIS
- Listen to God reminding you of his presence and action in you in the memory of a song, scripture, homily, creation, a person, etc.
- Be aware of God in your need for help now

Fr. Bill Petro
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February 27, 2020

“When a man constantly looks and looks at himself in the mirror of his own acts, his spiritual double vision splits him into two people. And if he strains his eyes hard enough, he forgets which is real.”

Thomas Merton, *No Man Is an Island* (Chapter 7)

REFLECTION

I would like to have 20-20 vision, but I need eyeglasses. Recently I got new progressive lenses. I pride myself on being a progressive Christian and justice oriented, but sometimes this gets in the way of seeing clearly, as did my glasses. It took 6 trips to the optician to get the new glasses adjusted. Initially I was seeing road signs through the computer part of the glasses and the signs were blurry.

This reminds me of how we think that something will help us to see the signs of God clearly, and what we try should work, but it doesn't. We might try lots of doing, especially good works. The temptation to excess good is strong. Thomas Merton wrote about being and doing in *No Man Is An Island*. Lent is an opportunity to practice the art of being. While we are called to live for Christ in our doing, being with Christ is what keeps us focused and helps us to see the road signs to God with clear vision. In being, we find what is real.

PRAYER PRACTICE

Today, light a candle and spend 10 minutes just being. Your only agenda is to sit in the presence of Christ and not be distracted by all that you feel compelled to do. Consider how much Christ has already done for you. Remember that only by being in Christ does your doing have meaning.

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February 28, 2020

“O Lord, make me know your ways, teach me your paths”

-Psalm 25:4 (Communion Antiphon for today’s Mass)

REFLECTION

On road trips, I love to look at maps – how I miss the old AAA flip-page TripTiks! My husband, observant in many ways, often exclaims at some point, “LOOK! Did you see that— “(insert phenomenon) “rainbow”, or “hawk”, or “eagle”, or “owl”, or “fox”, or “beaver dam??” More often than not, I mumble, “No. Where?” And miss it completely.

Here I am again, God, plotting the path of my Lenten journey, so recently embarked upon. If I really want to imitate you and follow you, I need to readjust my vision radically. I need to focus on more than MY preconceived route and ask what YOU envision for me. I need to look at my surroundings as well as my “map.” “Who do I see right in front of me? I need to notice those in need, or an injustice, and ask, “What do you want me to do, God?”

Ah, but my inner self should not be left unscrutinized, either. What is there about myself that am I not seeing clearly? Am I the Pharisee praying in thanksgiving that I’m not like the poor guy in the back — oblivious to my own poverty of spirit? Can I admit to myself and to God that I am far from the perfect person I attempt to project to others; that I need to work to correct my myopic vision?

PRAYER PRACTICE

- What do you see today, right in front of you?
- Ask God for the courage to admit a shortcoming and the grace to change it.

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February 29, 2020

If you remove from your midst oppression, false accusation and malicious speech; ... “Repairer of the breach,” they shall call you, “Restorer of ruined homesteads.” ~ Isaiah 58:9b, 12b

REFLECTION

Every four years, Leap Day brings our calendar back into alignment with Earth’s orbit around the sun. Every year, Lent offers us the opportunity to realign our lives with the God whose love creates and sustains us.

Isaiah’s words are a challenge to me. When my son was in college, he brought a girl he was working with home to dinner. Afterwards, he said she had had a good time, but that she had commented on how sarcastic I was. I was surprised; I thought I was just being amusing.

It took me some years to see that the belittling, derisive humor I had grown up with was actually a form of violence. How many people had I hurt with my careless comments? Was this how I really wanted to be seen? Was this the legacy I wanted to leave my children?

Over the years, as I have tried to be use words more to heal than to harm, I have noticed my generosity and willingness to give others the benefit of the doubt expanding. I have been repairing my presentation, God has been restoring my spirit.

I am being re-aligned with who God has created me to be.

PRAYER PRACTICE

Ask God to help you look closely at the language you use today. Notice any offhand oppression in your words, or self-serving denials that divide you from others and from your true self.

If you can, reach out at least once today and offer an apology, repair the breach.

Liz Deal

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March 1, 2020

“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before endured the cross, scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:2)

REFLECTION

As we reflect on the theme of 20/20 vision, let's look at the three temptations Satan presents to Jesus. Grounded in faith, Jesus knew and followed the will of God. The three temptations Jesus confronts are the three temptations that we as humans become blinded by in our daily lives. Let us first address instant gratification. Jesus is asked to turn the stone into bread. While Jesus is hungry, he understood that the flesh had its limits and would not completely satisfy Him. The second temptation is egoism (spectacle; testing the goodness of God). Jesus is invited to put God to the test by throwing himself off the cliff. Jesus rebukes Satan's notions of might and power. The third temptation is materialism. Jesus is promised kingdoms of the world if He kneels worships Satan. Jesus has fixed His eyes on God and understands the will of God. Satan has no power and disappears.

Today, we are called to pay attention to the many ways we are tempted by egoism, materialism, and instant gratification. Look around us and we will see organizational systems and government systems are failing their people. Misuse of power and deceit are prime examples. Look into our own hearts and see how pride keeps us isolated from others; refusing to forgive the transgressions of others. Let's look at our material possessions. Do we own our things or do our things own us?

PRAYER PRACTICE

Take an inventory of ourselves and ask, what do I refuse to see in myself? What makes it difficult to reach out for help?

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March 2, 2020

“Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?” Matthew 25:44

REFLECTION

A number of years ago, I felt a call to be more present in my daily life. I have always struggled with being an over-achiever. That might not sound like a problem and certainly I never thought it was. However, God showed me that my excessive busyness with many “good” things, left me constantly pre-occupied and not present to the people around me. I’ll never forget a phone call with a friend during that time when she said, “Have a nice vacation,” and I replied “you too” even though I was the one going on vacation. Realizing what I had done, I called her back and apologized for not being fully present to our conversation. I’m pretty sure I surprised her by doing that.

In today’s Gospel, I believe Jesus is calling us, as he called those he was speaking to at that time, to be more present to each other. Notice. Pay attention. Who might need a smile or a kind word? Who needs someone to listen? Is there ever a person on the grocery line who needs an extra dollar (or two)? We live in a time when there are so many distractions and demands on our time. It can feel like a full-time job just keeping up and juggling everything in our lives. As you journey through Lent, what are some ways you might be more present to those around you?

PRAYER PRACTICE

- Practice listening this week. Give everybody you meet your full attention. The gift of being listened to is one of the greatest gifts we can give to anyone.
- Journal about a time you felt someone was very present to you. Describe in your journal how that felt like a gift to you.

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March 3, 2020

“Just as from the heavens
the rain and snow come down
And do not return there
till they have watered the earth,
making it fertile and fruitful,
Giving seed to the one who sows
and bread to the one who eats,
So shall my word be
that goes forth from my mouth;
It shall not return to me void,
but shall do my will,
achieving the end for which I sent it.”
Isaiah 55: 10-11)

REFLECTION

Why are we here? What is the purpose of our existence?

Just as all of nature fulfills God’s design we also are called in the same way to fulfill what God has purposed us to do while here on earth. As Isaiah says in this passage we are to make fertile God’s purpose in all that we do and for all that God puts before us. Our actions, our words nurture God’s creation. This is our purpose.

As Lent continues, let each of us reflect on our fruitfulness in tending to the kingdom of God here on earth. We have come down for this purpose and when our purpose is fulfilled we will return to the Father, Son and Spirit.

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March 4, 2020

“This is what the Lord Almighty says, “Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own mind, not from the mouth of the Lord.” Jeremiah 23:16

REFLECTION

We live in a world filled with false prophets telling us what is true, what is right, and what is worthy of our support. If we buy the right car, wear the right clothes, attend the right church, or say the right things all will be well. What we often fail to ask is, what are the benefits to the prophets who are speaking to us?

A young parishioner announced to his parents he was now an atheist. His uncle was a proud atheist and he believed everything his uncle said. His parents asked his Christian friends to talk to him. They gave him books on faith development, and finally they sent him to me, his rector. The young man looked at the floor as we chatted and he asked me, “So, what do you want me to read or do?” I answered, “Nothing, I applaud your mature challenge to your parent’s faith.” Shocked he looked at me and said, “What?” I responded, “Your faith as a child is your parents’ faith, you uncle has his agenda, your parents have their agenda, and now you are finding your own agenda. Now where you come out on your faith, is up to you and God. I really do not know how you will come out but I trust in God to take you to the right place for you. Listen to your own heart, your thoughts, and your faith. Do not be swayed by other people’s agenda.”

Today he is a church-going husband, father, and faithful Christian. He listened to the month of the Lord in his heart.

PRAYER PRACTICE

- Listen to the agenda of other people with an ear toward hearing what is true for you.
- Write down in a journal what is your truth today in the face of the myriad of prophets telling us what to do, think, and buy.

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March 5, 2020

“If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask him.” Matthew 7:11

REFLECTION

In today’s Gospel, Jesus gives us a glimpse and shares “heart knowledge” of His Father. From other Gospel accounts, we know that on different occasions he surprised people by calling his Father: “Abba”. I would invite you, for a moment, to simply be with the words: “Abba”, (Daddy) or “Amma”, (Mom). What feelings surface for you when you hear yourself say these familiar words? The more informal titles of mom and dad speak of an intimacy and relationship between parent and child, which is forged over time.

This Gospel passage gives us a chance to reflect on Jesus’ on-going relationship with his “Abba” as he continued to develop moment by moment in wisdom and grace. What might have been Jesus’ experience of asking, and seeking from His father in prayer? What is your experience of asking, seeking and knocking in prayer at this time in your life?

Jesus, specifically, draws our attention to what we all know about good parents. They love their children and want to provide for them. Who of us hasn’t had the experience of “asking, seeking and even knocking” but what was asked for was not given? I believe this is when we experience the crucible. What do you say to Jesus when you have not received what you have prayed for? This is the time to listen deeply. In prayer, we share heart to heart. I believe that Jesus encourages all of us to continue to ask, seek and knock. Then to trust that our father/mother God will give us what we need.

PRAYER PRACTICE

Spend time journaling to God: (Abba, Amma) about what you need. Reflect on how you are being called now, to deepen in your relationship with God.

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March 6, 2020

“Shine like lights in the world as you hold on to the word of life.”

-Philippians 2:15 and 16.

(The Gospel Verse for Friday, March 6, 2020.)

REFLECTION

In 1673, Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque had visions of Jesus wherein He asked the Church to honor His Most Sacred Heart. In particular, Jesus asked the faithful to “receive Communion on the First Fridays, for nine consecutive months.” (Aleteia.Com)

The Most Sacred Heart of Jesus not only refers to Jesus, but it also refers to a way of living entitled SACRED HEARTEDNESS, which is contained in the Torah or the Old Testament of the Bible. Jesus teaches, exemplifies and challenges us to adopt or recommit to strive for a *sacred hearted* way of living on each of the First Fridays in the Liturgical Year. The ten characteristics of *Sacred Heartedness* are summarized below:

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| 1. Kindness | 6. Respect for the New or Out of the Ordinary |
| 2. Gratitude | 7. Detachment from persons, places or objects |
| 3. Courageous | 8. Love of Nature and protection of ecology. |
| 4. Bing Interdependent | 9. Removal of Ego and Selfishness |
| 5. Trusting | 10. Ceasing to use retaliation against evil |

PRAYER PRACTICE

- *Step One:* Prayerfully, ask God to show you how to be more SACRED HEARTED.
- *Step Two:* Read the above list of the 10 attributes of SACRED HEARTEDNESS.
- *Step Three:* Listen to God and allow God to select one item from this list just for you;
- *Step Four:* Ask God to teach you God’s vision for how to apply this attribute to your life; and
- *Step Five:* Strive to implement this attribute in your daily life during March 2020.

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March 7, 2020

REFLECTION

The first reading of today from Deuteronomy shows Moses giving the commandments of God to the people. He asks them to observe these commandments with their whole heart and soul and promises that God protects and loves each person as his own.

As we grow in our prayer life with God, we see that as a mutual love relationship. As we seek God with all our heart, walk in his ways, and follow him as best we can, God fills us more and more with his love for all creation and one another, even to the point of loving those who hurt us, as scripture terms, “our enemy.”

Total self-giving in LOVE with LOVE incarnate can be the goal of our striving this Lent in our efforts to contemplate death on the cross toward Resurrection with Jesus, the Christ as we strive for deeper 20/20 Vision of God and one another.

PRAYER PRACTICE

The above is not easy. A prayer by Lancelot Andrewes in the January edition of *Living With Christ* touched my heart and may speak to you as well:

“Lord Jesus, I give you my hands to do your work. I give you my feet to go your way. I give you my eyes to see as you do. I give you my tongue to speak your words. I give you my mind that you may think in me. I give you my spirit that you may pray in me. Above all, I give you my heart that you may love in me all that you have created. I give you my whole self that you may grow in me, so that it is you, Lord Jesus, who live and work and pray in me. Amen.”

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March 8, 2020

Help Me See Your Vision for Me

REFLECTION

As we enter the second week of Lent, help me see my life through Your eyes, Jesus.

Hold me Jesus, let me rest in Your arms.

Help me meditate on all the blessings You have given me.

Help me see each person You have placed in my path.

Help me see how I can serve them.

Help me see each event that You have placed in my path.

Help me see how I can serve in those events.

All to the glory of You, Jesus.

All to the glory of You.

Help me see where You want me to be.

Help me see...

PRAYER PRACTICE

*The Lord is my shepherd...He guides me along the right paths...
He refreshes my soul...*Psalm 23:1,3

Dear Jesus,

Help me see and reflect on the people You have put in my path today, at the time they occur. Help me see how I could serve these people to carry out Your Will. And help me see and reflect on the events you have put in my path today, at the time that they occur. And help me see how I could help with these events. Send me forth today, to be Your hands and feet today, and every day. Help me see Your Vision of how I can fulfill Your Will for me. ~Amen

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March 9, 2020

“Have mercy on me, O Lord, for to you I call all the day.”

“I have not come to call the righteous to repentance but sinners.”

Psalm 86:3, 4. Luke 5:32

REFLECTION

Today is a rainy, cloudy day. As was yesterday and will be tomorrow. Strangely enough I love the rain. It reminds me of God’s mercy being showered on us, sometimes in a gentle way, sometimes in a pounding, exciting way. I almost hear God say: ‘see what I have for you? I shower compassion, love, and mercy often!’ This for me is a true gift of love. Mercy showered upon me by a God who always loves me. Snow, also, is grace, gift, love...

As with the tax collector, Levi, God calls not the righteous, but we who are imperfect sinners. He reaches out, to us, cares for us, washes us clean. That refreshing gift often helps me remember the overreaching attentiveness of God in my life. It is I who hope to always respond, even when it does not rain.

PRAYER PRACTICE

- How has God showered his mercy on me in my life? Today I will recognize that great gift and thank God for that expression of His love.
- How has God’s mercy opened my eyes and heart as we begin live Lent in this new decade?
- How can I reconcile, show mercy to another today?

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March 10, 2020

Did Jesus ever go to the theatre?

REFLECTION

To be honest, we don't know. But one thing is for sure: he didn't like actors. In Greek (the language in which the Gospels were written), an actor is hypocritas – which translates into English as “hypocrite.” And Jesus had no time for hypocrites, especially those in high places (as today's Gospel – Mt. 23:1-12 – makes clear).

These early Lenten days repeatedly call us to conversion – which does not necessarily mean a change of religious affiliation, but which always means a change of behavior, attitude, thinking, perhaps long-held convictions, or any area of my life in which I am merely “acting a part,” going through the motions of being a Christian.

PRAYER PRACTICE

Humility means honesty, first of all with myself. Can I be honest enough – humble enough – to admit the possibility of there being even a touch of hypocrisy in my life, some way in which I am just going through the motions of being a Christian? Or if my own vision isn't “20-20,” is there someone else – a friend, spouse, loved one, confessor or spiritual director – whom I would allow to help me in this search, someone who might see what I cannot? I may have to risk being humbled – but we do know what Jesus had to say about that!

Father J. Patrick Foley, Ph.D.

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Join in my blog:

www.itinerantpapistpreacher.com

March 11, 2020

“The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for the many.” (Matthew 20:28)

REFLECTION

In the narrative leading up to this verse, there are two very different and conflicting events. Firstly, as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem with his disciples, he tells them about his approaching death and resurrection for the third time. Then, the mother of James and John asks Jesus to give her sons the best seats in his kingdom. When the others heard about it, they were upset. Why? They wanted the best seats in the kingdom.

It is hard for us to comprehend the fact that while Jesus was preparing for his upcoming death, his disciples were fighting among themselves to see who could be the greatest in his coming kingdom. Jesus uses this selfish behavior of his disciples to teach them about those who will be the greatest in his kingdom: they will be the servants. The kingdom of heaven is not like the kingdom of this world. Those who are greatest in the kingdom of heaven are selfless servants of all.

Do you see yourself as a servant? Do you wait to be served, or do you look for opportunities to serve? Do you seek to be the center of attention, or do you lose yourself in the service of others? Are you more concerned about your reputation, or about the welfare of others?

Acts of service can be simple. A smile. A simple hello. Holding the door (or the elevator door) for someone. Checking on you neighbor. Cooking or cleaning up after a meal. Buying groceries for someone. Taking someone to their doctor’s appointment. Serving a meal at the soup kitchen. Donating clothing to a homeless shelter. Spending time with a widow or widower. Mentoring a child of a single parent. The list is endless. Can you commit to an act of service today? Can you be Jesus to someone today?

PRAYER PRACTICE

- Look for opportunities to serve others today.
- Be more attentive to the needs of others around you today.

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March 12, 2020

Then Abraham said, “If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead.”

Luke 16:31

REFLECTION

Today’s Gospel story of the rich man who ignores the cries of the poor speaks to the universality of the parables Jesus taught. We need only look in the mirror. Americans make up 4% of the world’s population yet consume 30% of consumer goods. As the #1 consumers we are also the #1 polluters. The oceans now have more plastic than fish, yet we are building 5 more plastic making facilities in PA, WV, and OH. Despite warnings to reduce our carbon footprint, as the world’s temperature rises, the U.S. Military Industrial Complex is the world’s largest contributor to CO2 emissions. As continents burn and our survival as a species is threatened, the desire to make money takes priority over other’s suffering. As citizens we must reduce our consumption and demand that our government stop the endless wars.

We must reclaim our identity as “stewards” of God’s creation. This identity-shift happens when we spend less time shopping and more time sitting with creation. Reclaiming our responsibility as stewards is possible when we see the world through the eyes of Christ. This ‘transforming our perspective’ happens as we reconnect with nature through activities such as forest bathing, planting gardens, and spending time near lakes and streams. Reconnecting with our true identity as stewards, not consumers, can change the trajectory of Climate Change and restore the planet. When we embrace the compassion of Jesus for the marginalized it will reduce the suffering of many.

PRAYER PRACTICE

- List 3 ways to reduce, reuse and refuse plastic products.
- Sit quietly in a park, the woods or a nearby lake/stream and absorb the beauty of God’s creation.
- Ask God what you can do, as a steward, to reduce the suffering of those less fortunate.

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March 13, 2020

Lent – a time for less of me and more of Thee.
Wisdom from within.

REFLECTION

Today, we read about Joseph “the master dreamer” and the deadly jealousy of his brothers (Genesis 37: 3 – 28). Joseph took the risk to be himself as he wore his coat of many colors!

I never cease to be amazed at how God operates in our lives and the world we influence in our efforts to be ourselves and help others. More and more, God teaches the importance of emptying – cleaning the roughage of the past. God fills the precious space with new material for a better life. Can I and will I give myself up to God? Am I able to totally surrender? How much am I willing to lose? How willing am I to allow God to weave my true story into the empty space?

Those of us in recovery learn that telling our stories helps us create God’s new story. We almost always experience this sitting around the tables, sharing our pain and hopes within the context of the Twelve Steps. We embrace each other in a powerful spiritual love that defines any definition or clear description of God. I never cease to be amazed at how the lowest of the low of addiction can lead to the highest of the highs. The relapses, overdoses, loss of everything almost always lead to miraculous renewals.

Lent is a good time to reflect on all of this. We are invited to get smaller before God through prayer, fasting, and deeper devotion. We disappear into God and God appears into us.

PRAYER PRACTICE

- We invite you to become aware of God’s presence.
- Review your day with gratitude.
- Choose one feature of the day to pray about.
- Look toward tomorrow.

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March 14, 2020

...and when he was still far off, his father caught sight of him and was filled with compassion...and the older son, seeing his brother, became angry and refused to enter. My son, you are here with me always. Your brother was lost, but now he is found.” Luke 15: 1-32

REFLECTION

We have heard and read this parable of the prodigal son so many times over the years. When beginning to write this reflection and praying for inspiration, I came to the realization that I have always read this scripture as a parable of forgiveness. But looking deeper, I now realize that this is a teaching of unconditional love. Jesus is presenting to us the example of compassion and love that His own Father has for Him and all of mankind. We are challenged to offer ourselves and others the same great love that is offered to us.

We are reminded that we are born with a basic need to be loved, and through baptism, we are given the grace to love unconditionally as God loves each of us. But like the older son, we become distracted and entangled in the workings of the world, which draw us away from the compassion and love that our Father shows us.

We are called to be like Jesus...to love God, ourselves and others, unconditionally, as He loves us.

PRAYER PRACTICE

Think of a time when you, like the older brother, found yourself angry and resentful toward someone close to you. Examine what it is that you are holding to that keeps you from the unconditional love that brings peace and contentment within yourself?

Pray that God grant you the same compassion and love that He has for you.

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March 15, 2020

A woman of Samaria came to draw water.

Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."

The Samaritan woman said to him,

"How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?"

(For Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans) John 4:5-42

REFLECTION

Today's Gospel offers a rich account of a lengthy conversation between Jesus and a woman from Samaria. In the Bible, Samaria refers to both a city and a region. It is located in the central highland region of ancient Israel situated between Galilee to the north and Judea to the south. Also known as Palestine, Samaria was the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel. In the days of Christ, the relationship between the Jews and the Samaritans was strained because of deep-rooted prejudice.

Jesus asked the Samaritan woman for a drink. She was surprised, but was open to hearing his offer of "living water." Jesus let her know he understood her as a person. Her heart was open to learning he was the Messiah and she spread the word to her fellow Samaritans. This account offers a sense of peace, harmony, mutual respect and cooperation.

As I write this reflection, our government is doing its best to craft a Middle East peace agreement that will be acceptable to both Israel and Palestine. How wonderful it will be when the world achieves the peace, harmony, mutual respect and cooperation that Jesus and the woman from Samaria showed us.

PRAYER PRACTICE

We thank Jesus for showing us how to connect with an outsider by asking for help, showing interest in the outsider, and offering the gift of living water. In this Lenten season of reflection and preparation, we ask you to please help us open our hearts to the other and to be open to drinking the "living water."

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March 16, 2020

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. (Matthew 5:38-40 NIV)

REFLECTION

When we feel attacked or wronged, Jesus teaches us to turn the other cheek. With so much political rancor and divisiveness these days, I wonder how well we are following this command.

A longtime friend who lives many miles away began sending me political emails. I’ve always known we were on opposite sides of the political spectrum, but we have never talked about our differences. Her emails angered me. In a kneejerk reaction I emailed her back and asked her not to send me anymore of her propaganda. She cut me out of her life. I called. I emailed. I texted. Finally, I sent her a conciliatory card in the mail to which she responded with a three-page hate-filled diatribe calling me names. I was astonished and hurt.

I began praying for my friend to experience God’s wholeness. I found myself wondering if there was something going on in her life that was causing her to latch onto the anger that is dividing our nation and that had caused her to end our friendship. Perhaps with greater understanding of the suffering of others, we can find a way to sow peace.

PRAYER PRACTICE

Whenever you feel hurt and angry, do not respond in like kind. Instead, pray with St. Francis:

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon...*

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March 17, 2020

“...So also, my heavenly Father will do to every one of you,
if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

Mt 18:21-35

REFLECTION

Forgiveness...this is something that Jesus instructs us to do over and over in the Gospels. Perhaps because he knows it is so hard to do. And then later, he lived it, forgiving even as he was being tortured and crucified.

I wonder, how can I get there? Jesus tells us that not only is this forgiveness necessary for our own redemption, but He tells us to forgive from our heart. This is going much deeper. I don't know about you but for me it is a lot easier to put those hurts out of mind, bury them deep, and say, “yeah, okay, I forgive”. Forgive and forget, how often have we heard that as children? So, ...what, ...now He asks me to mean it? Let me propose to you that unless we revisit that pain, we will not, we cannot forgive from the heart. We will be stuck. It is because that is our transformational moment that brings us ever so much closer to our loving God.

So, in this season of Lent, in this age of division, let's move toward that healing grace. Go back to that place you thought you buried and find forgiveness in your heart. Begin with the Our Father. Say it again, with intention. Now, go back there and if it is too difficult, ask Jesus to go with you. Use your imagination. Take His hand and journey back there. Tell Him how you feel and allow Him to heal your heart. From there, you can forgive. From there you will receive that transformational Grace. From there, you will be free.

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March 18, 2020

God sent Jesus to show all people how to live and love on this Earth;
As long as we follow Christ, God's love for us will continue
to shine on our world.

REFLECTION

As I write this, I am keeping a daily vigil with a friend as she moves close to death. A thoroughly good person, Barb spent her life in service as a nurse and a nursing home administrator. She raised three children and four grandchildren. She cared for her parents and in-laws in their last years and for her husband who lived four years with significant limitations after a brain bleed. Indeed she has "lived and loved on this earth" as Jesus did. Through her "God's love for us continues to shine on our world."

Barb has seen many people pass through death to new life. How does one face Sister Death? In these weeks, she has offered these thoughts.

- My life has evolved in ways I could never have imagined, yet God was in all of it, the good and the bad, always there right with me! Even the pain deepened my compassion.
- My grandmother said that anyone whom I helped to die will be there to help me when I come to die. I helped many people to die, I like to remember them and know they are near.
- I am not afraid of God's judgment, but I am a little afraid of the unknown.
- Of all the people I've loved, more are with God than on this earth. I long to be with them. Still, I hate to cause my children and grandchildren pain.
- Jesus promised "I go to prepare a place for you." I hold on to that.

PRAYER PRACTICE

- Does one of these quotes attract me as I consider my final death or as I consider a current situation where I need to pass through death to life?
- When have I already died and risen to new life? Can that help me with life's daily deaths?

Sister Mary McCarrick, OSF
WVIS

March 19, 2020

He (Abraham) is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into being what does not exist. He believed, hoping against hope... Romans 4: 17-18

REFLECTION

Abraham was given a promise, a vision, of becoming the father of many nations at an old age with a barren wife. How could this be? This was Mary's question also. How can this be? Today's Gospel tells us of the obedience of Joseph to take Mary as his wife. He too most likely asked, "How can this be?" What was being asked of them did not fit into the ordinary expectation of life. There had to be doubt and grief that was smoothed by grace into possibility for Abraham, joyful Yes for Mary and acceptance by Joseph.

And so, it is with us. My best friend was diagnosed with cancer several weeks ago while her sister lay dying. "How can this be? This is not how it is supposed to be!", I cry. And I hear God say back, "and how is that? How is it supposed to be?" I am looking and listening for where God will give life and call into being what does not exist. I can think of no better definition of hope.

My courageous friend sent a poem that read, "to love life, to love even when you have no stomach for it...you hold life like a face between your palms, a plain face, no charming smile, no violet eyes, and you say, yes, I will take you, I will love you again. (The Thing is, Ellen Bass)

PRAYER PRACTICE

Recall a time when you uttered the deep cry of disbelief or grief of "How can this be?" Ask for this grace: to love whatever gets in the way until it ceases to be an obstacle. (adapted: Mark Nepos).

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March 20, 2020

“If we live by the truth and in love, we shall grow completely into Christ.”
(Eph. 4:15 – NJB trans.)

REFLECTION

I still love an old translation of Eph. 4:15 – “doing the truth in love,” summing up in five words the call to love God with head, heart, and hands. What might this mean for us during this 2020 Lenten season?

Whether the text reads “living,” “speaking,” or “doing” the truth lovingly, it calls us to a new vision in a culture where both truth and love are devalued. In a world where an unpleasant fact is called “fake,” where love publicly acknowledged is increasingly self-preoccupied, where words and living are trivialized in narcissistic self-disclosure on social media, where is there room for living/speaking/doing the truth in love?

I suggest one answer begins in the depths of our hearts. Let us first focus inward and deepen our relationship with LOVE personified. In silence, allow God to reveal the divine Self and love us into ever-greater life. Once we “see” we’re cherished by God, the Spirit of Truth can begin to form us in truth...the truth that every person is God’s beloved child, that creation is a sacred gift, that God’s will is human flourishing in dignity.

Haven’t we experienced it’s easier to share love with others if we’re secure in being loved ourselves? As we come to live intimately with God — whose two outstretched arms to the world are Truth (Jesus) and Love (the Spirit) — our lives inevitably witness to this God. Turning outward, we spread that peace, understanding, and appreciation both locally and globally...one relationship...one conversation...one family gathering...one election...one act of service...one supermarket waiting line at a time.

PRAYER PRACTICE

- What might be one small act I can do to love myself and at least one other person more intentionally throughout this Lent?
- Where are the occasions in my daily life or weekly routine where I can lovingly and gently speak a word of deep truth to another person?

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March 21, 2020

... “Two people went up to the temple area to pray; one was a Pharisee and the other was a tax collector. The Pharisee took up his position and spoke this prayer to himself, “O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity—greedy, dishonest, adulterous—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes on my whole income.” But the tax collector...beat his breast and prayed, “O God, be merciful to me a sinner.”
.... Luke 18: 9-14

REFLECTION

During Advent in a prayerful setting, a spiritual door opened unexpectedly bringing grace to see more clearly a wounded relationship. I always sensed that what I gave was viewed as lacking, so over time I stepped back. For more than a decade, ill feelings were harbored. But on this particular afternoon, the relationship was seen with compassion giving an eagerness to seek forgiveness. The sense of lacking had been replaced by an infilling of an abundance of God’s love and mercy while extending an invitation to draw closer. With a renewed spirit I could move on, knowing what I gave was GIFT, in the giving of all.

True relationship fosters total giving of self without expectations. It’s creative, life giving and welcoming to all. Do our relationships reflect the vision we hold within? Today, carrying a lighter load, I walk with Jesus on my Lenten journey. My prayer is that I see his face in the needs of others along the way, evermore asking for his mercy.

PRAYER PRACTICE

- Add just five extra minutes a day to spend in the presence of God.
- Choose one relationship and be attentive to what is being offered.
- Take refuge in remembering who we are in Christ.

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March 22, 2020

REFLECTION

The Man Born Blind is revealing scripture. The crux is that Jesus heals a blind man on the sabbath. Healing was thought the providence of God, and no work, evening healing, was allowed on the sabbath. Jesus provoked the displeasure of the Pharisees for a number of unlawful sabbath activities, like gleaning and eating grains of wheat (Matthew 12:1). The Pharisees questioned the man born blind twice on separate occasions, and his parents, yet are unmoved in their false piety. Jesus uses the opportunity not only to heal physical affliction, but spiritual as well. The blindness of the Pharisees to Jesus' identity is especially regrettable, as they had the proof but would not believe.

Jesus is challenging contemporaries, and us today, to move outside of legalistic thinking and feeling. He came to initiate freedom for the children of God. Jesus commissioned Reconciliation (John 20:23). This Sacrament restores us to right relationship with God.

Jesus made the blind to see,
but could not coax the proud,
who would not listen to his plea,
or testimony of the crowd.

If only God may heal a man,
or, so the wise men say,
let Our Lord reveal his plan
and touch our hearts today.

PRAYER PRACTICE

- Is lack of humility preventing me from a more fruitful Lent?
- Am I making or renewing my personal connection to Jesus?

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March 23, 2020

Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will not believe. Jn.4:48

REFLECTION

Do the words “you people” seem accusatory, or do these same words convey a profound understanding of our human condition? Signs and wonders draw us into the Mystery that is Pascal. But, it is through death that we rise to new life. The paradox of the Cross is the stumbling block for those without 2020 vision.

When I was seven, my heart was fixed on getting a two wheeler bike. My mother explained that we couldn't afford one. My First Communion teacher encouraged us to ask Jesus for whatever we wanted. Because Jesus had such a special love for children, the prayer would be heard. Ask him on the big day. I knew what I wanted and needed. It was the miracle of a shiny new bike. When my First Communion Day arrived, I was so happy about receiving Jesus in my heart that I forgot to ask for my coveted new bike. My unspoken prayer was never answered...Or was it?

As an adult, I shared this story with a dear friend. Sometime later, when I arrived at her home for a visit, Kathy told me she had a special gift for me. She led me to her garage. There was my bike. It was rusted. The tires were flat. She told me God always answers our prayers.

Waiting for God's time and God's way is rarely easy. It requires 20/20 vision. Seeing things in perspective is difficult when my vision is blurred. Can I see the miracle of life on life's terms? Can I see, throughout the vicissitudes of my life, that dying to my self-focused needs and wants is the only way to Resurrection? Can I seek this same vision for our disillusioned and desperate world? Can I learn to see with God's eyes?

PRAYER PRACTICE

- Use the Lord Make Me an Instrument prayer of St. Francis of Assisi. Ask that this Gospel Vision be written on your heart.
- Notice when you are disheartened. Ask God for help. Trust in the God-given miracle of a change of heart.

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March 24, 2020

“The past is history, the future a mystery. Today is a gift.
That’s why they call it the present.”

Ballcap Cathy, An AA saying

REFLECTION

Accept each day as a gift. Say YES to life moment by moment. Mindful living sounds good, but what does it mean for me?

My thinking is necessary. Studying the past, planning for the future are essential exciting parts of life. And yet, thinking is not all of me. To live more fully I need to open myself to my heart, my deeper center, the place where I am still and rest in love with the Divine Mystery.

During morning and evening prayers I quiet my mind and go to my heart in silence to love and be loved by God. Sometimes in this contemplative prayer I experience a peace that passes understanding. I know truth that is beyond rational thinking. This truth is the hope that comforts despair. The faith that confronts doubt. The joy that transforms sadness. Day by day, moment by moment this truth infuses and shapes my response to the gift of life. This truth is knowing I am God’s beloved child...and so are you!

Charlie Boll

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March 25, 2020

Three Prose Poems: Genesis 50: 15-26

REFLECTION

The stories those walls could tell. Doctor-patient confidentiality kept those tales secret, entombed in the plaster walls of the hospital. The pain, the needless suffering, the small humiliations, the desperation of generations of poor Blacks, nearly drown the anguished hallucinations of the young woman curled in a fetal position on the ER gurney and holding my hand. Addicted, battered, undocumented...an all-too-familiar story to this “street-fatigued” pastor, When, I wonder, will God, the Divine Editor, weary of the Human Story and pick up a red pencil?

155-millimeter howitzer shells whistle by so closely the percussions toss his bedraggled curls in the air like confetti. Unfazed, the unemployed musician lifts a honey-colored cello from a well-travelled case, and begins playing a Albonini’s somber Adagio that reverberates in a godforsaken wasteland of blasted and fire-gutted mosques, churches, museums, office towers, hotels, hospitals, schools, and libraries, in honor of Sarajevo’s dead, victims of the infamous Bosnian War. Why this foolhardiness, a war reporter asks the defiant artist. “I am a pacifist. I am nothing special. I am a musician. I am part of the town. Like everyone else, I do what I can. I remember a story.”

Favored son of an immigrant, now Pharaoh’s second-in-command, Joseph recalls a diptych of boyhood dreams. Bowing stalks of grain! And now... years later, bowing brothers who once upon a time, stripped him of his prized long robe, threw him in a cistern, sold him into slavery, and sentenced him to a lifetime of betrayal. What to say to these travel-weary, hungry, related-by-blood-good-for-nothings, heads bowed, standing before him with knees trembling? “Do not be afraid! Even though you intended to do me harm, God intended it for good. So have no fear; I myself will provide for you.”

PRAYER PRACTICE

Listen to Albonini’s Adagio, YouTube Mix-CELLIST OF SARAJEVO {string quartet} and remember The Story with the power to bring about a new beginning for you.

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March 26, 2020

For we walk by faith, not by sight. 2 Corinthians 5:7

REFLECTION

Reflecting on the ocular numerical designation of 20-20 for perfect visual acuity, this Lenten Season of *Anno Domini 2020* may provide the propitious time to reflect on what we see and how we see it.

For each one of us it is a uniquely personal experience. Our reaction and response to what we see is largely subjective, determined by several factors including our opinions, biases, clarity of focus and generally, all of life's experiences. We can revel in the beauty of a blue sky with billowing clouds, the velvety petal of a rose, or the smile of a loved one. At the opposite extreme, we can cringe at the sight of a serious accident, or witnessing pain and suffering – all too prevalent in today's news. (Try to imagine how Mother Mary must have felt as she looked upon the unspeakable torture and crucifixion of her Son.)

So what does this all mean in terms of our Lenten contemplation and reflections? For one thing, to self-examine how we see what we see – non-judgmentally, with understanding, compassion and gratitude. And beyond that, to contemplate what we know by faith, but see only with the eyes of our heart. Scripture reminds us that what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

PRAYER PRACTICE

For a few minutes each day, light a candle, put aside all concerns of the day, and think about how you can strengthen your faith and thereby, your vision.

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March 27, 2020

When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears, and rescues them from all their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord rescues them from them all. (Psalm 34:18-20)

REFLECTION

The Psalmist reminds us of how God, in His love, rescues us from our troubles and afflictions. No one gets through life without troubles. We lose loved ones. We contract painful and life-limiting illnesses and injuries. We may suffer from financial problems or relationship issues. These troubles are a result of our living in a broken and sinful world.

My vision of God's help during difficult times most often occurs in hindsight. When we are in the midst of suffering, it is often hard to see how God's saving grace is, working, helping us to overcome our troubles. When we reflect on those times in our past when we have suffered from hardships, it often becomes very apparent how God was working in our lives to help us to persevere and grow. God has heard us, rescued us and saved us. We have survived with God's help.

As we continue to reflect on those times when God has rescued us in the past, we develop a vision of God's love for us. We strengthen our hope that God will continue to rescue us, even when we don't actively see His work in the moment. "I know that God was working then, even though I didn't see it at the time. I have faith that God is helping me get through this trouble, even though I may not see it right now." God's love for us never ceases. God is near to us and saves us.

PRAYER PRACTICE

- Consider a time when God has rescued you from adversity in the past. How did it happen? How did you recognize God's love and grace?
- How did Jesus hear, rescue and save those he met during His journeys? Which stories have special meaning for you? Why?

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March 28, 2020
The Cyclical Horzon (adapted)

REFLECTION

As the Lenten season begins to dwell in the light of the landscape; as our vision strengthens in length, breadth and depth; as we see the augmented detail of light, dark and shade; we look forward and backward through our spiritual year for that deeper, inner light.

In a Medieval Cistercian monastery, Christ lit the center of time. His death and resurrection thus became the center of the canonical year. Everything before built up to the moment of his return; everything after drifted through a Pentecostal departure from the coast of our belonging. The year is a voyage, and we travel in language from light to space. Sometimes referred to as the windows of the soul, the eyes, according to William Blake, also serve as the “doors of perception” and not only inform us of the location of our source of light, but also draw us into the warmth of our sense of being.

As we serenely and metaphorically let the light shine and reflect inside, our other senses awaken. Through the warmth within, we smell the floral fragrances and recall the foreign nutty acidity whose memories foam unharnessed; and then we hear the crack and whistle of the wind as the weather sharply snaps us shut and pulls our forearms toward the earth.

After these Lenten reflections, we realize we do not house the spirit, but rather, the spirit lives, breathes, and returns through us. Just as the earthworms that burrow and plow our soil to weave their way out of their holes in the ground and present themselves for the first time, we realize in the company of creation that we are neither one, nor are we alone; and the soft touches of light that grace our memories with the first hints of a distant powerful source, at the same time grace our senses and hallow our inner candescence with the fragrant glow of newfound warmth. Life re-emerges with the re-emergence of light assuring us that we are not alone as we travel in prayer. When we breathe deep within, we go to an internal metaphor of place that is often sacred as we feel the presence of a home.

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March 29, 2020

“That you may believe.” (John 20:31)

REFLECTION

Today, these words cling to my heart, “I have promised; I trust; His Spirit dwells in you; I did this that you may believe.” As Sr. Pellicane always told the story of ‘receiving her vocation’ by watching the funeral procession of Cenacle Sister Lazarene, I’ve had a special affection for Lazarus and his sisters. I admired their complaining to Jesus about his tardiness: ‘If only you’d been here!’ My life has been filled with ‘if only.’ Maybe it’s a sign of my lack of faith, or perhaps a plea for comfort, for soothing words, for compassionate presence, for someone to see my need when words fail me, but I often think ‘if only’ and I yearn to believe that God’s lesson to me does not fall on deaf ears.

Jesus’ vision of this miracle seems to be captured in His hope ‘that you may believe.’ Some have childlike faith, some have ‘faith’ informed with mystical assurances, while others feel faithless; all of us function as faith-full. As I companion the dying, those challenged by terminal illnesses, and diminishing religious communities, the call is to be in Jesus’ school when He teaches “that we may believe.” Fr. Bernard Bassett, S.J. said, “Faith is a decision, not a feeling. Look at your watch, pick a time and ‘will to believe.’” This calls for adult commitment, decision making, and a vision of the more-than. A faith decision may be ‘dark vision’, a call to walk in the dark with my hand in God’s hand, to be vulnerable, ask for help, to witness to the eternal Vision.

John O’Donohue’s words expand the women mourning their brother and waiting for Jesus: The kiss of the Eternal, the blistering hurt of now: Try as best you can not to let the wire brush of doubt scrape from your heart all sense of yourself and your innermost light. If you wait, time will be good to you and you will find your feet on the fresh path of promise. As our Lenten journey continues, we affirm our belief that Jesus was like us in all but sin, and we recognize the value of acts of faith in the wisdom of Jesus’ school, “that we may believe.”

PRAYER PRACTICE

Pray for the suffering and dying. Make five acts of faith today ‘that you may believe.’

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March 30, 2020

“Let us know, let us strive to know Yahweh; that he will come is a certain as the dawn. He will come to us like a shower, like the rain of springtime to the earth”. - Hosea 6: 3

REFLECTION

How many things do I take for granted? I expect my car to be in the driveway when I go to ministry. I expect to have a warm house, food on the table, and people I can smile at and they smile back to me. I expect to see the dawn, to hear the birds, to feel the wind on my face. What gifts God gives each of us each day. How I wish I could always ‘know’ God, appreciate his gifts to me and to be more and more grateful for those things I take for granted. He will come; He is here, He will be with us, loving us, at every moment of today and each day.

PRAYER PRACTICE

Can I lift my prayer in gratitude for those gifts God graciously gives and remember Him in love?

God comes at every moment. Today I will focus on more ‘moments’ to appreciate God’s gift of always caring, always thinking and loving us.

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March 31, 2020

“Why have you brought us out of Egypt to die in this desert, where there is no food or water?” Numbers 21:5 Daily Mass

REFLECTION

There have been times in my life when I knew exactly how the Israelites felt as they wandered in the desert full of complaints, negativity, and second guessing. One such time was my family’s move from beautiful Monterey Bay in California to Huntington, West Virginia. We believed God was calling us here as we began civilian life after spending 27 years in the military. It was a time of great adjustments in every area of our lives in a place that felt like a foreign land. As I coped with the new reality of my life and the grief of what had been left behind, my vision dimmed and all I could see were the negatives: no friends, difficult adjustments of my teenage children, loss of prayer group and faith sharing group, and loss of my job. I was a fish out of water, dying in the desert. I was in need of a prescription to restore my vision.

While attending a 12 Step Meeting someone shared that she had a friend going through difficulties and each day she would continue to write 5 things for which she was grateful and that practice was helping to carry her through. I thought I would try it. Little did I know that this was the Divine Physician’s prescription to restore my vision. Knowing I was going to have to write 5 things at the end of the day for which I was grateful caused me to look for and notice those things throughout the day. My vision improved, finding more blessings each day. The Practice of Gratitude restored my Vision to 20/20 and changed my life.

PRAYER PRACTICE

- List 5 things for which you are grateful today.
- Is gratitude a part of your prayer practice?

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April 1, 2020

“We should not prefer health to sickness, riches to poverty, honor to dishonor, a long life to a short life. Our one desire should be what is more conducive to the end for which we were created.”

Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, p. 12, Puhl

REFLECTION

I struggle with this. Sure, our very existence is a gift from God, and when we desire to pray, it is God who has gifted us with that desire. Sickness? Poverty? Suffering? Can we think of those as gifts? Perhaps, if we change our focus, these too can be seen as containing gifts of grace.

A few years ago, the husband of a friend died unexpectedly. Married 40 years, she was in shock, and experienced bouts of soul-wrenching grief. A month later, another woman in the parish was widowed, and my friend came to sing in the choir, looking out over the place where, a month earlier, her own husband’s coffin had been. Did she thank God that her husband died? No. But God gave her the grace to walk lovingly with someone who was experiencing the same sort of pain.

On a more ordinary level, when heavy rain put a foot of water in my basement, I lost treasures – letters, many photos, cassette tapes of my husband’s voice. For an hour, I screamed and cried. A new sump pump was put in that night, many photos were laid out to dry, and I began to sort through the old photos. For three days, I smiled nonstop. So many beautiful memories! Am I glad the lake showed up in my basement? No. But without that flooding, the photos would have stayed in the box, and I might never have gone through them to enjoy them.

Our vision, our point of focus is key. When suffering happens, we can focus on the pain, or wait a bit, and look for God’s overwhelming grace.

PRAYER PRACTICE

- In the events that I see as painful or negative, where/how does God gift me with grace?
- In the irritations of daily life, where is God offering grace?

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April 2, 2020

Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? Or the prophets, who died? Who do you make yourself out to be? John 8:53 (NABRE)
Behold, the fresh and new has come! 2 Corinthians 5:17 (AMPC)

REFLECTION

During faith formation, my co-teacher asked our group how we would react to a friend's invitation to take an impromptu trip. Using a scale of 1 to 5 we rated our level of spontaneity. One represented the highest: Okay!! I'll grab a few things & let's go; and 5 the lowest: What's the room lay-out? What will the weather be? I better go shopping. There were responses of two, three, and four. I drew laughter when I said 10. Thankfully, Abraham embraced God's call to leave his land, relatives, and father's household in Haran and go to Canaan. God promised to make a great nation, Israel, from Abraham's descendants. Abraham would be an instrument of God's blessing to all the families of the earth (Genesis 12:1-4).

Later in history, as an occupied people under Roman rule, the Hebrews longed for freedom. They looked for the promised Messiah who would restore Israel's independence and fulfill God's promise to Abraham. Jesus encountered hostility from the religious leaders because of his teachings and ministry. I know that you are descendants of Abraham. But you are trying to kill me, because my word has no room among you (John 8:37). Does the Holy Spirit have room in our hearts to realign and refresh our vision with God's vision in our daily lives? How open are we to the new, creative ways the Holy Spirit wishes to work in and through us?

PRAYER PRACTICE

- I am mindful of God's loving presence.
- I give thanks for a particular time I was open to the Holy Spirit and expressed Jesus' word in a concrete loving action.
- I consider an area of resistance: Jesus, are you greater than ____? Am I open to ____?
- I ask God for the help I need.
- One step I will take is ____.

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April 3, 2020

REFLECTION

Today's readings are ominous. Dark. Jeremiah 20:10-13, written about six centuries before Jesus came, speaks of plots and persecution. Today's Gospel (John 10:31-42), indicates that similar thoughts were on the minds of some at the winter Feast of Dedication. Jesus had been working miracles - multiplying loaves and fishes, curing the man born blind (on the Sabbath) - and many in Judea were plotting his death. Jesus knew his days were numbered. But he taught. And they heard him. And they tried to stone him. And he continued to teach and heal.

What was on Jesus' mind during these days? Doing the work of "the one who sent him" was going to cost him his life. Yet he continued. I wonder if he was strengthened by today's Psalm, 18? "In my distress I called upon the Lord, and he heard my voice."

Who hasn't in some way, been persecuted – taunted, bullied, shunned, even physically or emotionally threatened? Jesus himself has been there: in Judea, and with you, today. When you're in a difficult situation, and there's no way but through, know that whatever the cost, Jesus stands by you - calming your pounding heart, taking your trembling hand. Can you take up your cross, and follow him? It leads beyond death, to resurrection.

PRAYER PRACTICE

*"Lord Jesus, teach me to be generous;
teach me to serve you as you deserve,
to give and not to count the cost,
to fight and not to heed the wounds,
to toil and not to seek for rest,
to labor and not to seek reward,
except that of knowing that I do your will."*

-St. Ignatius Loyola

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April 4, 2020

But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them,
“You know nothing at all; you do not understand that it is expedient
for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation
should not perish.” John 11:49-50

REFLECTION

We are about to enter into Holy Week, a time for deeper reflection on Jesus' passion and death. We are aware of Old Testament prophecies being fulfilled in and through Jesus as his time of fulfillment approaches.

Here, we read a prophecy spoken by Caiaphas, the high priest of Israel, as he proclaims that one man should die for [the salvation] of the people. He wanted Jesus handed over to be executed. He “prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.” John 11:51-52, RSV

PRAYER PRACTICE

Try to spend time with this amazing truth; God actually used Caiaphas, the enemy and the recognized head of the supreme court of the Jewish council, to express his plan of salvation. Jesus told us that he did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. God's plan would not be thwarted. He sent his Son to set us free from death and give us eternal life.

- Are you aware of Christ's personal saving grace in your life?
- Can you see how he longs to draw you deeper into his heart this Lent?

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April 5, 2020 - Palm Sunday

“When it was evening, he reclined at table with the Twelve. And while they were eating, he said, “Amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me.” Deeply distressed at this, they began to say to him one after another, “Surely it is not I, Lord?” Matthew 26: 20-22

REFLECTION

“Surely it is not I, Lord.” As I reflected on this reading for today, I could almost feel the emotional angst of the Twelve gathered with Jesus for that Passover meal. Jesus tells them one of them will betray him. It’s unimaginable. If I had been there, I can picture myself saying, “No way! How can you say that Lord?” And yet Judas did. And we do too.

In his book, *Addiction & Grace*, Gerald May says, “to be alive is to be addicted...” And, he goes on to say, “this addiction or attachment exists wherever persons are internally compelled to give energy to things that are *not* their *true desires* (emphasis mine).” For many of us, the big three attachments are safety/security, power/control, esteem/affection. I cannot count the number of times I have said to Jesus, “I am done giving in to that weakness Lord,” only to find myself tempted again often within days (or hours). Perhaps you can relate.

I believe it is important to remember that in this Gospel, Peter too claims he will never turn away from Jesus and he does just that, denying him 3 times. The difference between Peter and Judas - Peter was not consumed by his failure. He allowed himself to experience God’s grace. This is Jesus’ invitation to us too. As we enter this holiest of weeks, let us acknowledge our need for God’s grace and walk courageously with the Lord in our weakness knowing that God’s grace is sufficient for us always.

PRAYER PRACTICE

Pray that God awaken you to the addictions/attachments in your life that cause you to be less loving and less of your true self. Ask God for the grace to detach / let go of those addictions/attachments.

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April 6, 2020 - Monday of Holy Week

Here is my servant whom I uphold, My chosen one with whom I am pleased, Upon whom I have put my Spirit.... I, the Lord, have called you for the victory of justice, I have grasped you by the hand; I formed you, and set you as a covenant of the people, a light for the nations....

Isaiah 42: 1 – 7

REFLECTION

I keep a written journal, and have for many years after learning about the importance of journaling and prayer from my Spiritual Director. Sometimes quick thoughts will end up on a handy scrap of paper before they slip away. Almost always, I return to my journal entries as a gauge of where I am in my prayer and spiritual growth.

Reading the above passage from Isaiah reminds me of how journaling should be less about remembering the words and more an experience of feeling the words as God wants me to hear them in the now. It's a powerful God process. I am reminded of the words of Jesus, "I am always with you, yes, to the ends of the earth." (Matthew 28:20).

Journaling can be particularly important during this Holy Week, when the impact of the events can fade into the busyness of the many liturgies of celebration. How often do we stop and write down the particular words or events that touch our hearts and our impressions of them? How often do we look back at our journals, especially when daily events seem to get in the way? When we recall, we are always blessed!

The words of Psalm 139 also can instill that ever-abiding presence in our lives. We are never alone.

PRAYER PRACTICE

Reflect on the words of Isaiah 42 and Psalm 139. Read slowly and meditatively, as if a Lectio Divina (Divine Reading). Write down the words that touch your heart. Reflect on them as if listening to God speaking directly to you. Read again and sit with the essence of God's love.

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April 7, 2020 - Tuesday of Holy Week

“Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me. Lord, who is it?”

REFLECTION

Can you picture in your mind and feel in your heart the utter panic among the disciples. They were following Jesus now for almost three years and now this! So they pull rank, the one closest to him, Lord, is it I? The one whom I give this piece of bread. Do what you do quickly.

And Jesus’s own words “where I am going, you cannot come..” Peter, only Peter could voice this response. “Lord, why can I not follow you now! I will lay down my life for you.” “Will you lay down your life for me? Very truly, I tell you, before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times.”

As I read these words back and forth do I sense the deep sorrow in Jesus? Do I feel his pain? But mostly do I feel and know His love. That never ending, total love. A love that knows He is going to give ALL and never look back. Never change! Jesus was so human, he was troubled in spirit yet he knew this is what his father wanted him to do. Jesus’s love was so total and never changed and never will change. We should take great peace and comfort in his love.

As I continue this final week of our Lenten journey to Easter may I come to know in my deepest being the total love of Jesus in my life.

PRAYER PRACTICE

As I rise each day I will remember the deep love Jesus has for me. Then I will in some way share a loving action to someone. It does not have to be something big. A smile, hello, holding a door, looking at a person rather than a phone as I walk. See Jesus in all the faces I meet this day.

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April 8, 2020 - Wednesday of Holy Week

Psalm 27:7-9, 13-14

*Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me!
“Come,” my heart says, “seek his face!” Your face, Lord, do I seek.
Do not hide your face from me. Do not turn your servant away in anger,
you who have been my help. Do not cast me off, do not forsake me,
O God of my salvation! I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord
in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong and let your
heart take courage; wait for the Lord!*

REFLECTION

Hungry Hiddenness (a Golden Shovel poem*)

I scan the restless and hungry crowd, searching for evidences of **Your**
presence in this makeshift food pantry.
A hundred shivering bodies, bellies rumbling, **face**
the pulpit, but no one, I assure you, is leaning forward
in the pew to hear the word of the **Lord**
that will fill this holy chamber tomorrow. I **do**
what I can to amuse cranky children,
comfort sick elderly women, trusting I
will see, in the land of the half-living,
the Divine Goodness I **seek**.

**A Golden Shovel poem is created from another poem by taking a line, called a striking line, and creating a new poem using words from the original. The words of the line from the original poem are arranged, word by word, in the right margin.*

PRAYER PRACTICE

Consider fasting this day, or if that is not possible, recall a time when you were ravenously hungry. How, when, and where did you see evidences of God's presence?

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April 9, 2020 - Holy Thursday

“And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams,
your young men will see visions.” Joel 2: 28

REFLECTION

Recently I was reminded by a faithful person about the way some religious communities’ debate and find a way forward in their common life. The plan is simple yet ingenious. The entire community gathers together and the issue at hand is articulated by the leader. The next person who speaks is the chronologically youngest to speak. Everyone else listens, no cross talk, no questions, everyone is totally focused on the speaker. The process continues from youngest till they finally hear from the oldest member of the community. It takes time and patience but in almost every session by the time the senior person speaks a way forward has been articulated and agreed upon by the entire community.

We all know what we think is the best way forward in our families, our church, our cities, our state and our nation but if we fail to listen to the fire and enthusiasm of our young people, the pragmatic vision of our middle aged members, and the well matured insight from our elder members, we will not have a clear vision of any issue. Granted the way forward is often a mixture of fire/enthusiasm and matured/lived insights but that combination is a formula for success, when all sides have been heard and their individual vision valued by the community.

As we move through Lent may we learn to listen, learn, and value one another.

PRAYER PRACTICE

- Read a book or publication that differs greatly from your world view.
- Listen to others today without thinking of your response first, just listen.

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April 10, 2020 - Good Friday

“Be thou my vision” (United Methodist Hymnal)

REFLECTION

Today Christians around the world are mindful of the crucifixion and death of Jesus. Modern Christians call this day Good Friday because they know in advance the celebration of His resurrection will occur on Easter Sunday. Given this historical advantage, Jesus’ life, death and resurrection becomes the Christian’s vision for living, dying, and receiving everlasting life. The mission of the Christian life is to bear witness to the vision of hope, faith and love in the face of diversity, suffering and death.

As I write this Good Friday reflection, our young adult daughter Abigail in the matter of a week experienced the loss of her parked car to a hit and run accident, the death of her dog to an illness, learned about the death of: a superstar basketball player to a helicopter crash, a high school classmate to a car crash, and a college classmate to gunshot wound to the head. The magnitude of these losses left her feeling grieved and despaired.

Abigail reached out to us, her parents, for comfort and support as she expressed her feelings of fear, sadness, and dismay to the week's events. We responded to her pain and grief in a similar manner to the faith, hope, and love we received from people during times of great personal loss. We held her lovingly while she cried, listened compassionately while she talked, and prayed earnestly for the peace that passes all understanding that only God could provide to be graced upon her. We gave to her from what we had received, which was a vision of coping with pain, suffering, and death like Jesus, the faithful living among us, and those who had gone before us.

PRAYER PRACTICE

- Remember the Saints who through their suffering and death taught you how to live and die.
- Remember the living who have supported you through their witness of faith, hope, and love in times of suffering and death.
- Be the vision and witness of the Easter Christ to those who are suffering and dying.

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April 11, 2020 - Holy Saturday

Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue;
be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me. (Psalm 31: 2 NIV)

REFLECTION

Today is Holy Saturday a time of waiting for the glory of new life.

Ten years ago I attended a silent retreat. Many important aspects of my life were ending. My dog had just died, I'd left my job as a pastor, I'd turned sixty, and my faith was wavering. I was particularly angry at the patriarchy within the church. My sustaining hope came from my sense that in this place of silence, this time with God, I would somehow leave the darkness and move into the light. I expected to experience a celebration of new life, yet instead I found myself in tears.

Many sources of grief were revealed to me but one in particular was the awareness that my deceased mother, whom I'd greatly loved, had, like most women, been treated as if she were invisible. I too felt invisible in a patriarchal religion and yet I continued to feel strongly committed to Christ.

The last night of the retreat I awoke as if someone had entered my room. An overwhelming but gentle presence as vast as the night and as deep as the ocean surrounded me. In a moment of grace, I looked into the dark shroud and through the veil I saw my mother's smiling face. It was a healing moment for me to feel reconnected with my mother, and ergo to the feminine aspect of a God much greater than I or anyone can understand.

On Easter Sunday when we sing, He is risen, He is risen indeed, we can trust that God is with us through every anguish and every joy and especially through Christ.

PRAYER PRACTICE

Pray for God to reveal the vastness of Love to you and through you.

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April 12, 2020 - Easter Sunday

“They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we don’t know where they have put him” - John 20:2

“I am the Living One; I was dead, now I am alive” – Revelations 1:18

REFLECTION

Mary Magdala, in her grief, is the first to seek her Beloved Teacher (“rabboni”), only to discover the tomb, empty. She runs to tell Peter and John and the others. They run to the tomb and confirm her message.

WHERE IS JESUS? The witness of the Christian community and the sacred scriptures is this: He lives in the consciousness and actions of the Christian community. We are the Body of Christ, the People of God. Our sacraments are the REAL Presence and action of the living Christ through the ministry of the Body of Christ.

Jesus the Christ desires to reveal himself to each of us and wants each person to experience Him alive and the fruits of His presence: Peace, forgiveness, joy, confidence, courage, breath-Holy Spirit, a felt sense of His love, acceptance.

“Jesus, if you are alive I need to experience you now” was my encounter when I heard of my mother’s death. With the prayers of Mary, mother of God, I was gifted with peace and courage to endure the grieving and learn that ‘in Christ is my hope of glory’ (Colossians 1:27) Jesus dealt with me directly and through His Holy Spirit, continues to do so.

PRAYER PRACTICE

- Ask Jesus to reveal Himself to you directly and personally.
- Jesus reveals himself in Liturgy and Scriptures: with your imagination, place yourself in the scene, read/listen John 20, Luke 24 during the week.
- What response do you want to give to Jesus?

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