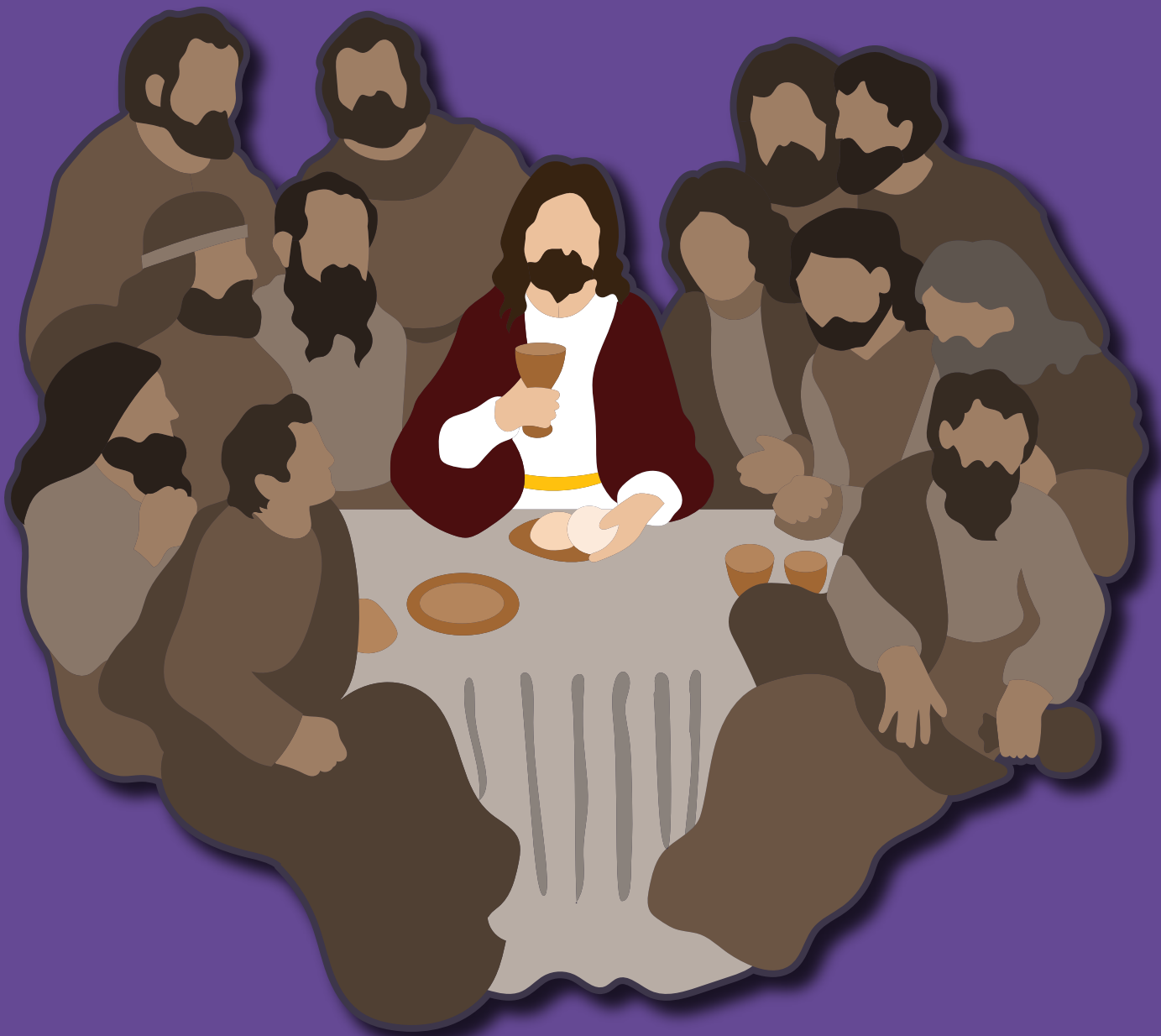


# Centred on the WORD



2023 Lenten Reflections · Year A

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# LENT MESSAGE 2023

Dear sisters and brothers,

The early Christians were hunted because they were different and did not enter quietly into some unforsaken frontier. They did not engage in a game of cloak and dagger. Wherever they went, they lived their faith boldly. This attracted people. The new villages that they found refuge in, began to notice something different about these refugees. Their behaviour set them apart. They were first witnesses of the faith before proclaimers of the faith. Their words had power only because of their testimonies.

As we embark on our Lenten journey, let the Word of God convict you of the change that needs to take place in your life. Let that change come from the love you have for the Lord. We are good and becoming better as we journey towards the Kingdom of God. The desire to grow must be a response to the invitation of Jesus, “Be perfect, therefore as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48). In becoming better, we get closer to being perfect which is a lifelong journey. Therefore, let no one think that the journey is done.

Lent, once again, invites us to put the hand on the plough (Lk 9:62) to prepare our hearts and minds for the Word to be sown so that at Easter, new life may sprout from the depths of our being, giving glory and honour to our Lord who waits for the gift of ourselves.

May the Lord bless you with graces as you begin this Lenten season with vigour and perseverance.

**Rev. Fr. Terence Pereira**  
Episcopal Vicar  
for the New Evangelisation

# THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOKLET

This resource is intended for families, RCIA groups, parish organisations, ministries, small Christian communities and neighbourhood Christian communities. It may also be used for individual reflection.

- To promote the Christian community in the neighbourhood as a place where we can hear the word of God and put it into practice.
- To give participants an experience of community and a sense of their mission by reaching out to neighbours and those in need.
- To gather parish organisations / ministries to pray together as one and put Christ back in the centre.
- To increase communication between family members. Love should be the main message in all communication, so the sessions are aimed at families sharing stories, doing meaningful activities together, sharing faith and being reconciled with one another.

# HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

These reflections may be used either (1) before participating in Sunday's liturgy, as a way of preparation to receive God's Word at Mass, or (2) after participating in the liturgy as a continuation of 'breaking open the Word of God' in our lives.

In the spirit of generosity, group members volunteer beforehand to read Scriptures and other parts of the text.

A different group facilitator can take the responsibility in each session to foster good interaction and to keep time.

Someone should record the discussion in general terms and then email it to the members who are absent.

The duration of each session is about two hours.

The time and place for the next meeting should be announced at the end of each session.

# SESSION FORMAT

## Opening Prayer

Everyone will pray the opening prayer and sing an opening hymn to foster a spirit of reflection and openness to God's Word and one another.

## Readings

The three scripture texts should be read at least twice, allowing some time for a silent listening to the Word.

Then the passages are explained by the leader or group facilitator using the given write up. Preparation is recommended for the leader or group facilitator to read and understand prior to the meeting.

## Reflections

Someone reads this section, which is meant to deepen our reflection(s) on the readings of the week. Allow adequate time for reflection(s).

## Sharing Questions

This section is divided into Personal and Group Contextual sharing. The latter is meant to prompt sharing based on the specific context i.e., Small Christian Communities, Ministry or Family. Allow time to reflect on these questions and time for everyone to respond.

## Take Home

Discern how the Word of God is inviting us collectively or individually to respond through concrete action(s).

## Doing Your Bit

Your action to reach out or evangelise to another person to share the Good News of Jesus.

## Closing Prayer

The session ends with a prayer being prayed by everyone in the group. Everyone will pray for each participant and then for the community.

## Appendix: Activities

The appendix section contains activities that further enrich our spiritual journey with our fellow sisters and brothers in Christ.

# FACILITATING GROUP REFLECTION

*For where two or three meet in my name, I am there with them - Matthew 18:20*

Be mindful of Christ's presence. Adopt a humble and reverent manner when speaking or acting within the group. Read the text meditatively and give your best attention to the words of the Scripture readings.

*May they all be one, just as, Father, you are in me and I am in you - John 17:21*

Help everyone to feel at home and take special care to welcome newcomers. Treat each person as a beloved member of the community and invite one another to participate in the session by taking turns to read the text. Use a language that everyone can understand so that no one feels left out.

*...and their great men make their authority felt. Among you this is not to happen - Mark 10:42-43*

Avoid being authoritative or domineering by acting aggressively, flaunting knowledge or telling others what to do. If there is advice to be given, do so after the reflection is done. Choose words that are easily understood by all when speaking. Avoid giving lengthy and verbose sharing that consume other people's opportunities to offer their sharing.

*If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross every day and follow me - Luke 9:23*

At the core of these reflections is the Word of God, the teachings of the Church and the invitation for our conversion towards Christ. If the group wanders away from this during the session, gently invite one another to re-focus.

*Because when the time comes, the Holy Spirit will teach you what you should say - Luke 12:12*

There is no need to prepare sharing in advance or to appoint people to share. Wait patiently for God's Spirit to inspire generosity and remember to give thanks after someone volunteers to contribute their own faith experience.

*...your light must shine in people's sight, so that, on seeing your good works, they may give praise to your Father in heaven - Matthew 5:16*

These reflections challenge us to do the will of God - to reflect the love of Christ to others we meet. Spend some time at the start of the next group session sharing with one another how each one has tried to do this over the past week.



## CATHOLICSG RADIO

brings you the audio version of 2023 Lent Reflection Booklet.

Join our presenters as they take you through the reflection via the CatholicSG Radio app.

Broadcast times will be on every Thursday at 8:00am starting from 23 February 2023

Besides listening via a web browser: <https://radio.catholic.sg/>, the CatholicSG Radio app is available for downloading via the following app stores:



Apple App Store



Google Play Store



Huawei App Gallery

## Podcast Versions

The same reflections will be available as podcasts on the app itself

# SUNDAYS OF LENT (YEAR A)

## CENTRED ON THE WORD

Week	Readings	Theme
<b>1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent</b>	Genesis 2:7-9, 3:1-7 Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 4:1-11	Listening to the Word
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent</b>	Genesis 12:1-4; 2 Timothy 1:8-10; Matthew 17:1-9	Transfigured by the Word
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent</b>	Exodus 17:3-7; Romans 5:1-2,5-8; John 4:5-42	The Word Nourishes us
<b>4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent</b>	1 Samuel 16:1, 6-7, 10-13; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41	The Word is a Light to my Path
<b>5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent</b>	Ezekiel 37:12-14 Romans 8:8-11 John 11:1-45	The Word gives Life
<b>Palm/Passion Sunday</b>	Matthew 21:1-11 Isaiah 50:4-7 Philippians 2:6-11 Matthew 26:14 – 27:66	Living the Word



1st Sunday of Lent

# Listening to the Word

## OPENING PRAYER

*Everyone will pray the opening prayer and sing an opening hymn to foster a spirit of reflection and openness to God's Word and one another.*

Lord our God and maker, out of love You created us and in You we have the hope of attaining the joy of heaven at the end of our lives. To be able to receive this gift of life, we attach ourselves closer to You, the Author of Life. As we begin the season of Lent this week, open our eyes to identify what attachments distract us away from You, and we pray for the courage to trust in Your providential love. Amen.

## READINGS

*The three readings and their accompanying commentaries must be read out loud, allowing some time for a silent reflection.*

*Then the readings are explained by the leader or group facilitator using the given commentaries. Preparation is recommended for the leader or group facilitator to read and understand prior to the meeting.*

### **1st Reading:**

#### **Genesis 2:7-9, 3:1-7**

In this first reading, we see the beginning of the human race where God our Father fashioned Adam from the dust of soil. It is easy to forget this or to take man's existence for granted. It is timely that we get this reminder to keep us humble when the season of Lent begins. We are God's beloved, and the truth of our origin needs to be deeply instilled in our hearts. This is the truth we need to treasure in our hearts always as we make our way to heaven; the final goal when our lives end on this earth. Making this goal firmly rooted in our lives, will enable us to journey through Lent and the discipline of Lent in a meaningful way.

### **2nd Reading:**

#### **Romans 5:12-19**

St. Paul takes pains to describe how sin entered the world through Adam, although he doesn't name the first man as Adam. However, sin has no final claim on the human person. St. Paul states in the second paragraph how the coming of Jesus Christ is an abundant free gift to humankind as He has, by His death and resurrection, given every human person the ability to be made righteous. Adam may have brought sin into mankind, but Jesus overcame man's fall and enabled man to be made righteous by the grace of forgiveness of sins by God our Father. Going frequently for the Sacrament of Reconciliation helps us to set the target of our lives toward heaven despite the fact that we may have chosen the path of sin in life.

# READINGS

## **Gospel:** **Matthew 4:1-11**

Everyone experiences temptations in life, and in this Sunday's Gospel text, we see Jesus Himself being led by the Spirit out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. In it, we see three temptations of the devil that Jesus repels.

The three temptations are specific in the ways that the devil tries to lure Jesus to sin. Firstly, He is tempted to satisfy His human hunger pangs where the devil tells Jesus to turn stone into bread: a sin of relying on oneself and going against nature to satisfy one's wants. Jesus flatly rejects this temptation and retorts the devil by quoting Scripture where He reminds the devil that *'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'* (v 4)

The second temptation sees Jesus being taken to stand at the parapet of the Temple, and the devil tells Jesus that if He is the Son of God, He can throw himself down from the parapet as the angels will come to His rescue: a sin of not taking responsibility for one's action. Again, Jesus quotes Scripture saying that *'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'*(v 7)

Finally, Jesus is taken to a very high mountain, where the devil shows Jesus the world and its splendour. All these, the devil says, will be given to Jesus if He falls at the devil's feet and worships him: a sin that invites us to have false gods; sin against the first commandment. True to Jesus' nature, He responds by quoting Scripture, saying that *'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'* (v 10)

Of course, human beings are tempted in life, but not necessarily in this order. However, the teaching that Scripture is giving us Christians, is to show how stealthy the devil can be in his luring of the human person to fall from grace and to be steeped in sin.

## REFLECTIONS

*Another person reads this section, which is meant to deepen our reflection(s) on the readings of the week. Allow adequate time for reflection(s).*

Lent is a time of deep inner reflection. Lent is also a time to identify the crosses we carry in life as human beings. The late Cardinal Hume once wrote a book entitled "The Mystery of the Cross", where he wrote about how he met a Mother Superior of a convent once, and how she saw one of her junior sisters with a very furrowed look on her face. She asked the nun why she had this look, and her answer was that the cross she has in life was extremely burdensome. The Mother Superior told the sister "don't drag your cross. Carry it and carry it with grace". I found this to be very realistic of the older Sister.

We sometimes look at people around us (the in-law, the boss, the colleague and so on) who are difficult or needy as burdens and therefore the crosses that we are meant to carry. One can make anything to be a cross in life and even blame it on God

our Father as the cause of this dreadful cross in life. Our cross in life is not the fact that I have cancer or a hole in the heart. The true cross is the one that we carry because we are trying to live the Word of God. The cross is the rejection of others who do not accept this new way of looking at life. The cross is the burden of living this Word to resist the sin that had a residence in our heart for all these years.

In the second reading, St. Paul began by saying how sin entered the world through one man, and through sin, death has spread through the whole human race because everyone has sinned. St. Paul was clear in saying that death reigned over all, from Adam to Moses even though their sin was not a matter of breaking a law.

If it is through one man's fall that so many died, divine grace that comes

## REFLECTIONS

through Jesus Christ came to so many as an abundant free gift. Salvation is an undeserved gift from God to all of humanity; sadly, many do not accept it or take it for granted. The season of Lent is a great gift to all disciples of Christ to articulate their gratitude for this gift of salvation through Christ. Righteousness is something that so many of us take for granted, without much of a thought of thanks in our hearts to God for being the recipient of salvation.

In the gospel reading, the three temptations that Jesus went through are rather systematic if you take time to analyse them. The first temptation was to take matters into one's own hand, be the author of one's own life. The second was to abandon reason and responsibility for one's action and to put God to the test, and the third was to part ways from worshipping God alone, something that is

often done when someone or something is more important than God our Father. We face all forms of temptations in our lives. This gospel text displays the only way to defeat the devil and sin. Jesus' replies were all from scripture. Jesus offers a way to resist the devil and his tactics. It helps if we stop before falling into temptation by asking what is the root of this temptation.

God is speaking to us consistently in the season of Lent. May your heart and ears be open to sensing Him touching you, guiding you and guarding you in the forty days that lead us to the wondrous season of Easter.

# SHARING QUESTIONS

*This section is divided into Personal and Group Contextual sharing. The latter is meant to prompt sharing based on the specific context i.e., Small Christian Communities, Ministry or Family. Allow time to reflect on these questions and time for everyone to respond.*

## **Personal Reflection & Sharing Questions**

*Take time to reflect on the following, then share if you are in a group.  
What struck you from the passages of scripture?  
What stirs your heart? Remain with it for a while.*

- Do you see Jesus willingly embracing humility in the Gospel passage?
- How do you plan to live with humility this week and the entire season of Lent?

## **Group Contextual Sharing Questions**

*You may wish to reflect on one of the following questions according to your context.*

### **For Small Christian Communities**

*We talk about what struck us in the passages of scripture.  
Let us share a bit about the scripture that we have just heard.*

- Do you think that as a community, members can help to identify the root temptations that is preventing the community to be more united?
- How do you think the community can assist individuals to realise what their core temptations are?

# SHARING QUESTIONS

## **For Ministry**

*We talk about what struck us in the passages of scripture.*

*Let us share a bit about the scripture that we have just heard.*

- What are the constant temptations that the ministry faces being together?
- How can members counter the allure of sin when the devil comes to take members away from the life of grace?

## **For the Family**

*Let us as a family share about what stood out in the passages of scripture.*

*Let us share a bit about the scripture that we have just heard.*

- What are the temptations that your family faces?
- Do you see one another as crosses that you have to bear?
- What are the crosses that the family will have to endure in listening to the Word and putting into practice?

## TAKE HOME

*Discern how the Word of God is inviting us collectively or individually to respond through concrete action(s).*

We often deal with sin on a superficial level and do not see the deeper insidious root of a sin.

## DOING YOUR BIT

*Your action to reach out or evangelise to another person to share the Good News of Jesus.*

Buy a pleasant looking notebook. Write in it the scripture verses that have touched you.

## CLOSING PRAYER

*The session ends with a prayer being prayed by everyone in the group. Everyone will pray for each participant and then for the community.*

Lord our God and maker, out of love You gave us the Eternal Word, Jesus Christ. Lord God, we give You thanks for this moment of reflection. As we have been blessed to reflect upon the Eternal Word, enable our listening and reflection at this time to flow into our daily lives. Let this listening never end even as we close this time with You. Your love is beyond our understanding. During this time of Lent, let it be for us a time of growing in a deeper relationship with You and Jesus and the Holy Spirit, God forever and ever. Amen.





2nd Sunday of Lent

# Transfigured by the Word

## OPENING PRAYER

*Everyone will pray the opening prayer and sing an opening hymn to foster a spirit of reflection and openness to God's Word and one another.*

Lord our God and maker, out of love You created us and in You we have the hope of attaining the joy of heaven at the end of our lives. In Jesus, You reveal to us the fullness of Your glory. A glory that You call us to dwell in so that the world may know the greatness of Your presence through our words and deeds. We pray through Jesus Christ our Lord in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## READINGS

*The three readings and their accompanying commentaries must be read out loud, allowing some time for a silent reflection.*

*Then the readings are explained by the leader or group facilitator using the given commentaries. Preparation is recommended for the leader or group facilitator to read and understand prior to the meeting.*

### **1st Reading:**

#### **Genesis 12:1-4**

Abram is called by God to leave his home and kin and go to an unknown land. He had a livelihood, familiar surroundings and did not have the vigour of a young man to venture into the unfamiliar. However, in an act of great trust, he obeys and walks in faith. His experience of God our Father's presence had a lasting effect on the direction of his life and thus, he becomes Abraham, father of a great nation. Despite his many transgressions and missteps, God our Father keeps His promise because Abraham practices a habit of faithfulness which sustains and guides him on his journey of transformation. His endurance through trials and finally to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, gave Abraham the utmost conviction that God Almighty would raise his son from the dead. The blessings from his actions of faithfulness now extends to us and out to the world.

### **2nd Reading:**

#### **2 Timothy 1:8-10**

St. Paul is awaiting execution and his primary message exhorts Timothy and all believers to hold fast to authentic Gospel living. All who follow Jesus can expect to participate in the Paschal Mystery in our own lives – Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. St. Paul insists that in each of our encounter with Christ Jesus, we are gifted with the grace and strength to endure all for the sake of the Gospel because we are not alone. Jesus has shown and made the way for us and is always with us.

## READINGS

### **Gospel:**

#### **Matthew 17:1-9**

In the transfiguration, Peter, James and John encounter God our Father and experience the divine presence in the transformed Jesus Christ. The change in His face, which shone like the sun and His clothes which became “white as light” are a reference back to Moses’ appearance after receiving the Ten Commandments: also, an encounter with God our Father. The transfiguration also foreshadows the resurrection of Jesus. In His appearance to Mary of Magdala at the tomb, He also had bright white clothes, and clearly something was significantly different about His appearance, for Mary did not recognise Him.

Our mountaintop encounters with God may be through a miraculous healing, a retreat or in the sacraments where we feel so close to God. There is not much vegetation on the tallest mountains. Mountains in the bible represent a place where there is little to draw our attention away from God. So, our mountain top may just be places of emptiness and barrenness. What in our lives represent such places? Could they be places of encounters with God?

The hardest part about going up a mountain is that you must come back down. It is important to remember that Jesus and the apostles didn’t stay up on that mountain. They had to return, for Jesus was headed to Jerusalem to His death. There was work to be done for the Kingdom of God.

## REFLECTIONS

*Another person reads this section, which is meant to deepen our reflection(s) on the readings of the week. Allow adequate time for reflection(s).*

Real faith is an action in trust. It requires a willingness to listen and obey. Faith is not a belief in a set of principles or values. It is obedience to a person. The three readings tell us what it means to be transfigured in our own lives by living this obedience. God our Father doesn't tell us why He chose Abram, a man of 75 years to get started on mission. He doesn't tell us why we are beset with crises, chronic illness, a family member we cannot get along with, or injustices you face that you cannot make sense of. The solution begins with obedience: Abram went as the Lord directed him after his "mountain top" encounter. He made friends with uncertainty, confusion, and insecurity of the unfamiliar and found an abundance of friends, resources, and new life.

Might we not find our mountain top encounter through the events and people in our lives like Abraham? On this mountain, Jesus is encircled by holy men but not long after, he is encircled by devious men. We, too, are often caught off-guard by the turn of events in our lives. Do we look at Jesus who comes to us or do we miss Him at such turns because we cannot bear the disappointment? We forget who God our Father is.

God our Father does not want us stuck in sin or lack of life. He comes to us, involves us, and asks for our cooperation in relationship. Much like Abraham and St. Paul, our hope lies ahead of our trials. Through the transfiguration of Christ, we see what's ahead of us: a glorified life with God our Father. He will call us to the next mountain top each day and when He does, are we ready to answer the call?

## SHARING QUESTIONS

*This section is divided into Personal and Group Contextual sharing. The latter is meant to prompt sharing based on the specific context i.e., Small Christian Communities, Ministry or Family. Allow time to reflect on these questions and time for everyone to respond.*

### Personal Reflection & Sharing Questions

*Take time to reflect on the following, then share if you are in a group.*

*What struck you from the passages of scripture?*

*What stirs your heart? Remain with it for a while.*

- When did I last encounter God's presence? How did it change me?  
*(You may want to go to a quiet place and remember a time when you felt particularly close to God. Don't rush through it. Remember the sights, the sounds, the smells. After spending some time there, think about what made that time so special and you may want to write it down.)*
- Am I open to being transformed? What does God our Father want me to do to walk closer with Him?

### Group Contextual Sharing Questions

*You may wish to reflect on one of the following questions according to your context.*

#### For Small Christian Communities

*We talk about what struck us in the passages of scripture.*

*Let us share a bit about the scripture that we have just heard.*

- Does your community inspire you to take the path less travelled?
- Are you a community of faith? If so, did others give you this feedback?
- In what ways have you remained at the mountain top – remained where you all are without growing any further?

# SHARING QUESTIONS

## **For Ministry**

*We talk about what struck us in the passages of scripture.*

*Let us share a bit about the scripture that we have just heard.*

- Has your ministry had a 'mountain top' encounter?
- When was the last encounter? Will that be the last?
- Has that changed your ministry?

## **For the Family**

*Let us as a family share about what stood out in the passages of scripture.*

*Let us share a bit about the scripture that we have just heard.*

- Is your family culture resistant to the Lord's encounter?
- How can you help your family to find the 'mountain-top' encounter with God?

## TAKE HOME

*Discern how the Word of God is inviting us collectively or individually to respond through concrete action(s).*

Our encounter with God will change our hearts and minds to be single-minded to obey Him. There is a need to keep remembering the encounters to journey forward.

## DOING YOUR BIT

*Your action to reach out or evangelise to another person to share the Good News of Jesus.*

Write in that book the ways you have changed because of those inspired words that had touched you.

## CLOSING PRAYER

*The session ends with a prayer being prayed by everyone in the group. Everyone will pray for each participant and then for the community.*

Lord our God and maker, out of love You gave us the Eternal Word, Jesus Christ. Lord God, we give You thanks for this moment of reflection. Let the listening that begun last week transfigure the way we think and the way we live in this world of distractions. As we remember Jesus being transfigured, let our hearts not be satisfied with what is happening now but always yearn for a closer walk with You. Just as Moses' face became white because he was so close to You, may our lives radiate Your presence to all around us. As we walk the plains of every day with Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, may it be pleasing to You, Lord God. Amen.





3rd Sunday of Lent

# The Word Nourishes Us

## OPENING PRAYER

*Everyone will pray the opening prayer and sing an opening hymn to foster a spirit of reflection and openness to God's Word and one another.*

Lord our God and maker, out of love You created us and in You we have the hope of attaining the joy of heaven at the end of our lives. Lord, in this season of Lent, open our hearts and minds to see You anew in our lives through Your Word that nourishes our failing hearts worn out by the worries of this world. As we come together in this time to listen and learn from You, give us the grace to remain focused on You and Your Word. Amen.

## READINGS

*The three readings and their accompanying commentaries must be read out loud, allowing some time for a silent reflection.*

*Then the readings are explained by the leader or group facilitator using the given commentaries. Preparation is recommended for the leader or group facilitator to read and understand prior to the meeting.*

### **1st Reading:**

#### **Exodus 17:3-7**

At the start of this reading, it says that the entire community of Israelites have left 'the desert of Sin, travelling by stages as God ordered'. What they have left behind is the deliverance from slavery and the feeding of manna, all done by God our Father. They now find themselves in a new predicament - there is no water! Despite having experienced God's salvific actions in the crossing of the Red Sea and the feeding of manna, the Israelites are still of hardened hearts. They complained to God indirectly through Moses in their murmuring: 'Why do you take us out of Egypt only to make us, our children and our livestock, die of thirst?' Akin to the grumbling that we do when things do not work according to our way. Despite the ungratefulness of the Israelites, God never fails in coming to lift them out of misery. In this instance, He lets water come forth from a rock. This text is a reminder to us 'Do not harden your hearts as at Meribah, as at the time of Massah in the desert, when your ancestors challenged me, put me to the test, and saw what I could do!' (Ps 95:8-9)

### **2nd Reading:**

#### **Romans 5:1-2, 5-8**

'Christ died for the godless'. This is quite mind-boggling because even if we are unaware or do not have God in our lives, God our Father still sent His Son to die for us, so that we are made right and justified before Him. St. Paul tells us that this hope is not about wishing for something to come but a sure certainty of God's faithfulness to keep His promise. It is a promise of God's act of salvation which we can all depend on. While we were still sinners, God our Father acted by sending His Son to die for us (v 8). If God our Father has done this for us when we were still ignorant, how much more He will do for us now that we are conscious of His love for us.

## READINGS

### **Gospel:**

#### **John 4:5-42**

Water is the compelling image of life in the Bible. In this familiar text of the Samaritan woman at the well, what looks like a simple request for water to quench the thirst is really God the Father's deep desire in love to draw His children. When Jesus asked for water from the Samaritan woman, who is considered an enemy by the Jews, Jesus broke many social rules of the Jewish community, and the message is clear: no one is excluded from the saving grace of our loving Father.

Jesus offered himself as the 'living water' echoing the text in Isaiah 55:1 'Oh, come to the water all you who are thirsty; though you have no money, come!' 'Why spend money on what cannot nourish...' (Isa 55:2) expresses clearly the intent of the Lord to give Himself to all so that all may receive eternal life as seen in the exchange between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. Jesus thirsts for all humanity to be made right and justified before God our Father where His thirst can only be satiated by giving Himself to draw all to our Father.

## REFLECTIONS

*Another person reads this section, which is meant to deepen our reflection(s) on the readings of the week. Allow adequate time for reflection(s).*

Our body has an inbuilt mechanism for growth and survival that can come in the form of a craving for certain types of food such that the body gets the necessary nutrients. Often, we are not even aware that some of our cravings are due to deficiency in our body. It is rather similar in our spiritual lives too, as we are often not aware of what we truly need. However, God our loving Father has created us with an inbuilt mechanism for eternal life and has never failed to provide us with the necessary 'nutrients' for an everlasting life. Beginning with providing the physical needs of the Israelites through food and water in the desert as from the first reading to sending His Son, Jesus to be the 'food' so that we may be fed: These are sure sign of a loving God whose only desire is for all humanity to enjoy abundant life.

At the receiving end of this gratuitous love, we are sometimes like the Israelites, who 'murmur' at the inconvenience when things do not go according to our own desires. Sometimes we are completely unaware of

what Jesus is doing in our lives and we go on living an unfulfilled life, not realising what we are missing out. Deep down, we yearn and thirst for something more. What might this 'something more' be? It is to know that we are loved and are to flourish as who we are meant to be - as children of God with dignified and purposeful lives that are filled with the joy and peace of the Lord. The Lord Jesus comes to us in the Word to fill and nourish us so that we may be filled with the goodness and truth of God the Father. The 'living water' is available to all who are thirsty and who believe in Jesus. (Cf. John 7:37)

Let us be convinced of this 'nourishment' that is available to us, make a resolution to center our lives on the Word and let this everlasting Word nourish us richly to grow ever deeper in love for our Lord. If you have been ignoring and not allowing the Word of God to nourish you, this is a good time to reconcile and renew your relationship with the Lord.

## SHARING QUESTIONS

*This section is divided into Personal and Group Contextual sharing. The latter is meant to prompt sharing based on the specific context i.e., Small Christian Communities, Ministry or Family. Allow time to reflect on these questions and time for everyone to respond.*

### **Personal Reflection & Sharing Questions**

*Take time to reflect on the following, then share if you are in a group.*

*What struck you from the passages of scripture?*

*What stirs your heart? Remain with it for a while.*

- Recall an incident where you received encouragement from others that nourished you. How did it make you feel?
- Consider the scripture passages that have nourished you in the different moments of your life. What are they? What have you done with these passages?

### **Group Contextual Sharing Questions**

*You may wish to reflect on one of the following questions according to your context.*

#### **For Small Christian Communities**

*We talk about what struck us in the passages of scripture.*

*Let us share a bit about the scripture that we have just heard.*

- What are some ways to ensure that the life of the community is centred on the Word of God?
- How can we use the Word of God to nourish and encourage each other? Is there a scripture text that the community uses to motivate each other? What is that Word?

# SHARING QUESTIONS

## **For Ministry**

*We talk about what struck us in the passages of scripture.*

*Let us share a bit about the scripture that we have just heard.*

- How is the Word of God being the centre in the life of your ministry?
- How can the ministry inculcate a discipline of letting the Word of God inspire and direct the work of the ministry?

## **For Family**

*Let us as a family share about what stood out in the passages of scripture.*

*Let us share a bit about the scripture that we have just heard.*

- Share with the family one incident on how the Word of God nourished the family.
- What habits do we need to inculcate in our family so that the Word of God can be our family centre?

## TAKE HOME

*Discern how the Word of God is inviting us collectively or individually to respond through concrete action(s).*

To grow in relationship with the Lord is to allow the Word of God nourish us daily.

## DOING YOUR BIT

*Your action to reach out or evangelise to another person to share the Good News of Jesus.*

Write down the nourishment you receive from the Lord through the Word and share with a friend.

## CLOSING PRAYER

*The session ends with a prayer being prayed by everyone in the group. Everyone will pray for each participant and then for the community.*

Lord our God and maker, out of love You gave us the Eternal Word, Jesus Christ. Lord God, we give You thanks for this moment of reflection. O loving Jesus, thank You for pouring Your life out for us. Teach us to rise from the ashes of our old ways and be renewed and nourished by Your Word daily. Give us the grace to be docile to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and see You moulding and making us grow. Amen.





4th Sunday of Lent

# The Word Is A Light To My Path

## OPENING PRAYER

*Everyone will pray the opening prayer and sing an opening hymn to foster a spirit of reflection and openness to God's Word and one another.*

Lord our God and maker, out of love You created us and in You we have the hope of attaining the joy of heaven at the end of our lives. God our Father, direct the eyes of our minds and hearts to Your Son, who reveals the guiding light through His words and actions. Grant that we be receptive to Him through His Word of life and grant us courage to follow Him faithfully, trusting that His way is better than ours. Amen.

## READINGS

*The three readings and their accompanying commentaries must be read out loud, allowing some time for a silent reflection.*

*Then the readings are explained by the leader or group facilitator using the given commentaries. Preparation is recommended for the leader or group facilitator to read and understand prior to the meeting.*

### **1st Reading:**

#### **1 Samuel 16:1, 6-7, 10-13**

We are presented with insights to how we can make decisions that are better aligned with God our Father's will, and ways that defy conventional thinking and processes. After being corrected for judging Jesse's son based on external appearances, Samuel took the teaching to heart and allowed God to lead in identifying David as His anointed one. He no longer made assumptions, but patiently listened to God's voice and did not give up even after six rejections. Samuel learnt that even when he was carrying out God's mission, the thoughts of the Lord are unraveled with time as he moves along and is ready to accept them more openly.

### **2nd Reading:**

#### **Ephesians 5:8-14**

St. Paul was reminding the Ephesian community of their new identity in Christ, who offers a new way of living. Using the contrast of darkness and light, he exhorted them to transform their hidden sinful lives so that their reformed lives would be visible

to all. This requires being fully aware of one's state of consciousness and making deliberate choices, using Christ as their model. By their works, they would in turn reflect the love and presence of Christ in the world.

### **Gospel:**

#### **John 9:1-41**

In this miracle, Jesus did more than just restore the sight of a blind man. Through the encounter, the blind man became an evangeliser and believer of Christ. However, everyone else present who did not witness the healing process but heard the testimony of the recovered man, chose to reject the miracle. They questioned its authenticity and legality, even deriding Jesus and the man. Various obstacles stood in the way of these persons to see the truth and be converted: lack of faith (neighbours), fear (parents) and pride (Jews).

## REFLECTIONS

*Another person reads this section, which is meant to deepen our reflection(s) on the readings of the week. Allow adequate time for reflection(s).*

As believers, we have been gifted with various instruments to help us better live our lives as children of God our Father and disciples of Christ. Among these is Holy Scripture, His “word as a lamp to my feet, a light on my path.” (Psalm 119:105), provided we consistently engage in prayerful reflection. However, God speaks to us through other means too, namely the events and people we encounter in our lives. Admittedly, it requires a particular disposition to be able to hear Him addressing us in such instances, starting with awareness and openness, combined with a willingness to change as part of our response to the Word. It helps that these experiences stand out for their specific characteristics. Like the prophet Samuel, the encounter jolts one to question a commonly held perspective or practice that is often shaped by societal narratives. The other distinctive feature is that the source conveying the message is completely unexpected and hence, easily overlooked. God our Father chose to

communicate to the Jews through Jesus, a poor carpenter, who in turn evangelised through the blind man. The two men could not be more ordinary in the eyes of the Jews, which labelled both as “sinners”, people who are despised and most definitely undeserving to be listened to and respected. We may not categorise people into saints or sinners, but we do appraise them based on external appearances or other criteria valued by society. Those with more attractive physical attributes or possess impressive qualifications tend to have more credibility. Yet, if we pay close enough attention, we will realise that powerful lessons could similarly be delivered by individuals without lofty credentials – an elderly lady at the train station, a migrant worker, a lay person within the parish or even a child. We just need to open our hearts and minds to be able to see and appreciate such counter-cultural signs like Jesus Himself.

## SHARING QUESTIONS

*This section is divided into Personal and Group Contextual sharing. The latter is meant to prompt sharing based on the specific context i.e., Small Christian Communities, Ministry or Family. Allow time to reflect on these questions and time for everyone to respond.*

### Personal Reflection & Sharing Questions

*Take time to reflect on the following, then share if you are in a group.*

*What struck you from the passages of scripture?*

*What stirs your heart? Remain with it for a while.*

- Describe an encounter which unexpectedly challenged a long-held belief you had and how this change in perspective drew you closer to God.
- Which character do you identify most with and why: Samuel, Pharisees, blind man, his neighbours or parents?

### Group Contextual Sharing Questions

*You may wish to reflect on one of the following questions according to your context.*

#### For Small Christian Communities

*We talk about what struck us in the passages of scripture.*

*Let us share a bit about the scripture that we have just heard.*

- Are we as a community quick to judge others who are not like us?
- What can we do as a community to better emulate the disposition and response of the blind man?
- How has supporting our community members contributed to the well-being and growth of the parish?

# SHARING QUESTIONS

## **For Ministry**

*We talk about what struck us in the passages of scripture.*

*Let us share a bit about the scripture that we have just heard.*

- What kind of culture prevails within the ministry regarding the less popular members, the troublesome members, the quiet members and the new members?
- Are our ministry tasks hindered by the ministry's biasness in trusting only a few members and regarding them good enough to trust and lead?

## **For Family**

*Let us as a family share about what stood out in the passages of scripture.*

*Let us share a bit about the scripture that we have just heard.*

- What is the biasness that is prevalent in the family that prevents open dialogue?
- Are we as a family closed to the idea that even the youngest can be an instrument of the Lord?

## TAKE HOME

*Discern how the Word of God is inviting us collectively or individually to respond through concrete action(s).*

Judge not by the external appearances and experiences we have had but be open to the ways and thoughts of our Lord.

## DOING YOUR BIT

*Your action to reach out or evangelise to another person to share the Good News of Jesus.*

Compose and write in that book a psalm or two that you want as a lamp unto your feet as you go through life.

Also, write down the Word of God that you can use to remind yourself as to how you should behave in difficult times (of anger, depression, hopelessness, confusion, loss or frustration), and also in joyful times (of feeling loved, understood or appreciated).

## CLOSING PRAYER

*The session ends with a prayer being prayed by everyone in the group. Everyone will pray for each participant and then for the community.*

Lord our God and maker, out of love You gave us the Eternal Word, Jesus Christ. Lord God, we give You thanks for this moment of reflection. God our Father, we thank You for the many moments of enlightenment through Jesus Christ. Enable us to see Your light every time we read or listen to the Holy Scriptures. Grace us to be attentive to Your Word in the different circumstances of our lives so that we may be able to respond in ways that reflect Your glory. Amen.





5th Sunday of Lent

# The Word Gives Life

## OPENING PRAYER

*Everyone will pray the opening prayer and sing an opening hymn to foster a spirit of reflection and openness to God's Word and one another.*

Lord our God and maker, out of love You created us and in You we have the hope of attaining the joy of heaven at the end of our lives. You sent Your Son, the divine Logos and Word of Life, to walk with us on the journey of life. Your Word, Jesus Christ, came to teach us how to live in a world torn by strife and self-centeredness. As we prepare to celebrate the mystery of our redemption, open our hearts by Your grace to receive the Word that gives us life. We ask this in the most holy name of Jesus and in the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## READINGS

*The three readings and their accompanying commentaries must be read out loud, allowing some time for a silent reflection.*

*Then the readings are explained by the leader or group facilitator using the given commentaries. Preparation is recommended for the leader or group facilitator to read and understand prior to the meeting.*

### **1st Reading:**

#### **Ezekiel 37:12-14**

The prophet Ezekiel conducted his ministry during the time when Jerusalem was invaded and destroyed by the Babylonians, while the people were taken into exile. This exile had a purpose. It was calling the people to a change of heart, to have a new heart. The people in exile were like the dead whose bones are lifeless and dry. They had lost all hope for the future. Can these bones come to life? Is there hope for the future? God will give flesh, breath and spirit to these bones and bring them to life again. God, in His power, will restore Israel.

### **2nd Reading:**

#### **Romans 8:8-11**

*'People who are interested only in unspiritual things can never be pleasing to God.'* St. Paul does not mean that we should be cut off from the material necessities of this world. We all need to work and to manage our households. The unspiritual person is the one who thinks

he does not need God. The spiritual person, on the other hand, is guided by the teachings of Jesus in everything he does. Only by living this way will we find life and fulfilment.

### **Gospel:**

#### **John 11:1-45**

Jesus asks Martha, *'If anyone believes in me, even if he dies, he will live. Do you believe this?'* We do profess this in our faith and in a mysterious way, we are already living an eternal life. Just that the full understanding of it, is something we have yet to experience. We do seem to experience suffering and dying a lot more. What is eternal and glorious will only be revealed in the presence of the Lord now or in the future. If we are spiritual people, then our pattern of life is founded on the promises and teachings of Christ. In this, we find hope.

## REFLECTIONS

*Another person reads this section, which is meant to deepen our reflection(s) on the readings of the week. Allow adequate time for reflection(s).*

At some point in our lives, we have all been confronted by the finality of death, when we realize that someone we love is gone and will never be a part of our lives in the same way again. We face this finality in other ways as well, when a business venture collapses, when a limb is lost or when a friend does not want to be friends any longer. Just like the family of Lazarus and the exiles in Babylon, we can lose all hope and give in to despair. Where is God? How could God allow this to happen?

The paschal mystery that we are about to celebrate confronts us and helps us to reflect on this question. Do we believe that God our Father, through the mission of His Son and the Holy Spirit, is offering us new life and new hope? Do we believe that God oversees all things and guides all things according to His plan?

For Lazarus' family and the exiles, it is when they are at their lowest point, when confronted by loss and when they felt like dry bones, that they learned to trust in God's grace and redemption. It may not happen overnight, but the words of Jesus are words of life. They offer a promise that calls us to faith and gives us hope.

During His last hours, Jesus was also confronted with abandonment. No matter how difficult things got, He never gave up hope. He knew and trusted that His Father will save Him and raise Him up. As we walk with Jesus on His last journey, may His words and example give us courage and life.

*'If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, then he will give life to your own mortal bodies.'*

## SHARING QUESTIONS

*This section is divided into Personal and Group Contextual sharing. The latter is meant to prompt sharing based on the specific context i.e., Small Christian Communities, Ministry or Family. Allow time to reflect on these questions and time for everyone to respond.*

### Personal Reflection & Sharing Questions

*Take time to reflect on the following, then share if you are in a group.*

*What struck you from the passages of scripture?*

*What stirs your heart? Remain with it for a while.*

- ‘And you will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and raise you from your graves.’ Recall and reflect upon a time when you were confronted with a loss. Where did you draw strength from?
- Did the Word of the Lord give you new life in those situations of loss?

### Group Contextual Sharing Questions

*You may wish to reflect on one of the following questions according to your context.*

#### For Small Christian Communities

*We talk about what struck us in the passages of scripture.*

*Let us share a bit about the scripture that we have just heard.*

- Do you know people who are grieving, suffering or who have lost hope? How can you offer them hope?
- St. Paul constantly reminds the Christian communities to be guided by the Spirit of God. Does your community rely on the Holy Spirit for guidance? How is this done?

# SHARING QUESTIONS

## **For Ministries**

*We talk about what struck us in the passages of scripture.*

*Let us share a bit about the scripture that we have just heard.*

- Is your ministry like the dry bones in the prophet Ezekiel's vision? Is there life in the work that the ministry has been doing repeatedly? How can the Word of life raise the ministry to new life?
- In what ways can we be open to receive a new heart in the service of God's people?

## **For Families**

*We talk about what struck us in the passages of scripture.*

*Let us share a bit about the scripture that we have just heard.*

- The Word gives life. How often has your family indulged in the Word of God?
- Are family members shy or afraid to speak about the Word of God and to live it?
- As Jesus' words give us courage and life, how can we journey together as a Christian family through our ups and downs?

## TAKE HOME

*Discern how the Word of God is inviting us collectively or individually to respond through concrete action(s).*

In all our troubles, suffering, confusion and grief, God's word offers us life and hope.

## DOING YOUR BIT

*Your action to reach out or evangelise to another person to share the Good News of Jesus.*

Write down the passages that you would say to someone who is facing a loss: a loss of a loved one, a loss of a job, a loss in a relationship or a loss of direction in life.

## CLOSING PRAYER

*The session ends with a prayer being prayed by everyone in the group. Everyone will pray for each participant and then for the community.*

Lord our God and maker, out of love You gave us the Eternal Word, Jesus Christ. Lord God, we give You thanks for this moment of reflection. Father of mercy, we give You praise and thanks for the gift of Your Word. Your Word - Jesus Christ, has given us life, courage, and hope. As we have been blessed through Your Word of life, empower us to share this life and hope with those who need to know and experience it today. We ask this through Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit. Amen.



## Palm/Passion Sunday

# Living the Word

### OPENING PRAYER

*Everyone will pray the opening prayer and sing an opening hymn to foster a spirit of reflection and openness to God's Word and one another.*

Lord our God and maker, out of love You created us and in You we have the hope of attaining the joy of heaven at the end of our lives. We come together to reflect on the painful and redemptive Passion of Your Son. Send into our hearts the graces that will inspire us to testify with steadfast faith to the Word that offers life. Let this sacred moment of prayer and reflection fill us with conviction to live this way, where it will inspire us and in turn inspire others to the Living Word which is set out for all to hear. Let Your Word transform hearts and grant us the grace to live in the way You desire us to. Amen.



## READINGS

*The three readings and their accompanying commentaries must be read out loud, allowing some time for a silent reflection.*

*Then the readings are explained by the leader or group facilitator using the given commentaries. Preparation is recommended for the leader or group facilitator to read and understand prior to the meeting.*

### **Procession:**

#### **Matthew 21:1-11**

The reading for the palms procession commemorates Jesus's triumphant entry into Jerusalem when the crowd placed the palms, a symbol for royalty, before Jesus as he rode into the city. The crowd shouted "Hosanna", glorifying Jesus as the king descended from King David himself. The irony of this event was that the populace would later turn against Jesus and treat Him like a criminal. Jesus knew of His imminent rejection from a prophesied king to a crucified criminal. Today, we say the same praises during Eucharistic Prayer. Have we, like the crowd, fallen into the same trap of glorifying Jesus in one moment and crucifying Him in another moment by our lack of focus during the Eucharistic celebration? Jesus was prepared to be hated for the sake of our Father.

### **1st Reading:**

#### **Isaiah 50:4-7**

This passage from Isaiah is taken from a series of poems often called the servant songs. In these songs, God the Father called His servant, a prophet, to bring Israel back to God in Jerusalem. God's people who were previously exiled by the oppressive Babylonian empire in foreign lands, had lost faith in God's saving power. Despite this divine mission, however, the servant suffered insults, abuses and beatings. From the beginnings of the Church, Christians have always interpreted this servant as Jesus, who faithfully carried out His mission to save us from sin and death. Yet, like the servant, Jesus suffered and died a horrific death. Just because God has given us a mission, it does not mean that it will be smooth sailing. Knowing this, are we willing to become bearers of the Good News?

## READINGS

### **2nd Reading:**

#### **Philippians 2:6-11**

This beautiful hymn in St. Paul's letter sings that despite His divine nature, Jesus voluntarily emptied Himself to being human and taking the form of a servant. The famous Greek word for this emptying is "kenosis". As if this was not scandalous enough, Jesus went further. As God, He went down the path of a humiliating death. Yet, the hymn tells its listeners that death was not the end. Immeasurable glory awaited Christ. By quoting this hymn, St. Paul indicated his desire to imitate Christ. He too, like Christ, wanted to empty himself for the sake of the Gospel. He also hoped, by the example of Jesus and his own, that the church in Philippi would be encouraged to do the same. He wanted them to cultivate humility and build unity. After thousands of years, St. Paul's message remains relevant today. Are we willing to empty ourselves? Are we willing to imitate Christ and St. Paul in their humility and mission despite the difficulties? Can we set aside our quarrels and focus on what truly matters?

### **Gospel:**

#### **Matthew 26:14 – 27:66**

The gospel reading is a long narrative about the suffering of Jesus at the hands of the authorities, who alone held the authority to condemn criminals to death. There is value in paying close attention to Jesus's cry on the cross, when He exclaimed, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" It is a heart-wrenching moment. This cry, which is situated within the context of Psalm 22, is also the responsorial psalm text for Palm Sunday. Since Jesus exclaimed the first verse of the psalm, the gospel writer implied that Jesus was praying the entire psalm. Psalm 22 helps the one praying to express both great anguish and deep faith at the same time. It is an honest cry of a helpless child to God. However, it is also a recognition that God eventually will come to help, as He had done so in the past.

## REFLECTIONS

*Another person reads this section, which is meant to deepen our reflection(s) on the readings of the week. Allow adequate time for reflection(s).*

The readings of Palm Sunday are ultimately about the suffering and death that Jesus endured in order to save all of creation. They express the terrible reality of sin and death in a fallen world. At the same time, they also hint that evil and death do not have the last word. In short, the biblical texts serve as a constant reminder of the reality of salvation brought about by Jesus, the Son of God, into a world in need of rescuing.

St. Paul reminds us that Jesus Christ is the firstborn of all creation (Col 1:15-18) and that we should have the kind of mindset that Jesus had (Phil 2:5). In other words, the readings do not only tell us stories of which we are a passive audience, instead, they call us to actively imitate Jesus.

In the procession reading, we are told that Jesus was extremely popular with the crowd in Jerusalem. He was single-minded in fulfilling the will of our Father. Already in the first reading, there was a hint that the servant of God would have great difficulty. There would be opposition and abuses. However, the prophetic servant in the Book of Isaiah never wavered, placing his faith in the God whom he knew would help him. The second reading elaborated further on how we can be like that prophetic servant. The hymn found in

Philippians invited us to empty ourselves and to be humble, so that the glory of God may shine out from that self-emptying. Without this, there can be no real unity with Jesus Christ and our communities. No real witnessing of the saving work of Christ is possible without the union with Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Finally, the gospel shows us that Jesus chose the path of non-violence against the violence of the Romans and the betrayal of Judas. We were shown the immense suffering of Jesus as He accepted the cup and the mission willed by our Father. We saw moments when Jesus was truly vulnerable and truly human. Yet, He carried through with faith and obedience.

Jesus' work on earth was finished. The response to such great sacrifice is in our hands. Can we follow the example of Christ who suffered for the sake of His love for us? Can we keep watch together with Him in the darkness and uncertainty of Gethsemane even as we struggle through our own lives? Can we keep the faith, even in our lowest moments, when we remind ourselves that the glory of Easter awaits us too?

## SHARING QUESTIONS

*This section is divided into Personal and Group Contextual sharing. The latter is meant to prompt sharing based on the specific context i.e., Small Christian Communities, Ministry or Family. Allow time to reflect on these questions and time for everyone to respond.*

### Personal Reflection & Sharing Questions

*Take time to reflect on the following, then share if you are in a group.*

*What struck you from the passages of scripture?*

*What stirs your heart? Remain with it for a while.*

- The event of the triumphant entry of Jesus bids us to remember that we do not live for the glory of the moment. Have you lost hope in others because the good times that you had with them have turned sour now?
- Are true friends made through just good times and good rapport or are they made through the trials of misunderstandings, forgiveness and a desire to move closer?

### Group Contextual Sharing Questions

*You may wish to reflect on one of the following questions according to your context.*

#### **For Small Christian Communities:**

*We talk about what struck us in the passages of scripture.*

*Let us share a bit about the scripture that we have just heard.*

- Have members run away from your community because of disunity, quarrels and differences of opinions?
- How can we, as a community, be of the same mind as Jesus in humility and stay united despite challenges and differences?

# SHARING QUESTIONS

## **For Ministry:**

*We talk about what struck us in the passages of scripture.*

*Let us share a bit about the scripture that we have just heard.*

- Do the readings remind us that we need to die to our own way of thinking and doing things?
- How can we, as a ministry, strive to have the humility of Christ and keep the unity despite challenges and threats of walkouts?

## **For Family:**

*We talk about what struck us in the passages of scripture.*

*Let us share a bit about the scripture that we have just heard.*

- When someone fails to do something for the family, it might cause suffering to another family member. Do the sufferings and misunderstandings in the family bring us to a deeper understanding of one another and the Gospel way of life?
- How can we, as one family, cultivate humility and open-mindedness to one another as we journey together in a fallen, yet redeemed world, full of challenges to our unity?

## TAKE-HOME

*Discern how the Word of God is inviting us collectively or individually to respond through concrete action(s).*

Jesus suffered greatly for the world, for us, because He loved deeply. When I have to suffer, I need to remember this: Suffering was not the Lord's plan for any of us.

## DOING YOUR BIT

*Your action to reach out or evangelise to another person to share the Good News of Jesus.*

Write in your book, how you were able to overcome sufferings, rejections and humiliation through the Word of God that gave you light, hope and faith.

On Easter Sunday give this book to someone who needs to read about your inspirations and how you have lived your life centered on the Word of God.

## CLOSING PRAYER

*The session ends with a prayer being prayed by everyone in the group. Everyone will pray for each participant and then for the community.*

Lord our God and maker, out of love You gave us the Eternal Word, Jesus Christ. Lord God, we give You thanks for this moment of reflection. Remind us to carry in our hearts the memory of the suffering and love of Your only Son who died for our sake. Let the thoughts You inspired within us today be manifested in the way we live henceforth. Let Your loving invitation to imitate Christ, through the Scriptures, continue to be heard despite our hardness of heart. As we approach the end of the holy season of Lent, let the words of Scripture seep through the soil of our souls. Let us put You, once again, at the centre of our lives, as You renew our faith. May we love as Your Son did. Amen.



## LENT ACTIVITIES

Lent is the forty-day liturgical season of fasting, prayer and almsgiving in preparation for Easter. The name “Lent” comes from Anglo-Saxon word ‘*lencten*’, meaning spring. The number “forty” is first noted in the Canons of Nicaea (A.D. 325), likely in imitation of Jesus’ fast in the desert before His public ministry. The season of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and officially ends with the proclamation of the *Exsultet*, “Rejoice O Heavenly Powers,” during the Mass of Holy Saturday.

Lent is often portrayed as a journey where we reflect on God’s salvific plan to bring His people from darkness into light and how we respond to His call to holiness and conversion of heart.

### **What are you doing for Lent this year?**

Most Catholics will probably say they are giving up a favourite food or pastime. Giving up something for Lent is great as it fosters self-discipline and tempers our desire. It is a form of fasting and penance, and it promotes spiritual growth. Perhaps this year, think about the possibility of doing more to increase your knowledge of faith, strengthen your spiritual life or perform special acts of mercy and kindness at home, at work, in your parish or in your community.

### **Lenten Prayer and Devotion**

- Begin each morning with the prayer: “Lord, I offer you this day, and all that I think, and do, and say.”
- Attend Daily Mass as often as possible.
- Pray the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary
- Pray the Stations of the Cross at home or in a parish celebration.
- Read Scripture for 10 minutes every day.
- Pray the Seven Penitential Psalms (Psalm 6, 31, 37, 50, 101, 129 and 142)
- Spend some time in quiet prayer before the Blessed Sacrament.
- Abstain from meat for an extra day or two each week.
- Keep a Lenten journal with your spiritual insights, special intentions, people you want to pray for, hurts and disappointments that you want to offer up, and progress reports on your Lenten resolutions.





# LENT ACTIVITIES

## Making Jesus a Gift for Others

Having faith in Jesus means that we do not keep him to ourselves, instead we share with everyone the goodness of Jesus. We can do this by showing love to other people, and telling them that you love because Jesus loves. This way, others will know that God is a loving God.

Make a crucifix and choose someone to give your crucifix to, one who needs God's love most (Hint: it could be someone who is feeling lonely, or someone who is sick).

Below is a prayer session while making the Lenten Crucifix where you can do it together as a family or in a group.

### Making Lenten Crucifix:

*What you need:*

One cardboard cross per person – about 21cm high and 15cm wide; play-doh or art plasticine; toothpicks & paper clips; large candle.

*Instructions:*

1. Put the cardboard crosses, play-doh, toothpicks and paper clips around a table.
2. Gather the family, or families, by placing the lighted candle in the middle of the table.
3. Each person will make a crucifix. Use the guided meditation provided below to help each family member mould and fashion his or her own figure of Jesus. You can play soft music while everyone is working. They can use the toothpick and paper clips to make the details on the figure.
4. At the end of this session, invite everyone to secure their figure of Jesus onto the cardboard cross using pins. Pray the closing prayer to conclude the activity.



# LENT ACTIVITIES

## Guided Meditation

*Sing or play a recording of a chant and repeat until everyone has quietened down. Invite someone to light the candle. Then, leader begins with a prayer:*

**Leader:**

Centre yourself in Jesus. Get into your quiet inner self. That place inside you where you meet Jesus. Talk to God in your heart before you make your crucifix. Think of how much Jesus loves you. Remember that “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.” Thank Jesus for His love as you make this art piece. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you. You will be amazed at the results!

*After a short pause...*

Let us begin to form our own figure of Jesus. What you make will be beautiful because it will spring from your inner self where you and Jesus meet, where you are friends. It will have a quality that is uniquely you and Jesus. It will bring you into an even closer relationship with Jesus. No one else will have a crucifix like yours.

Work quietly so everyone can concentrate. Be reverent in what you are doing and in how you do it.

*When everyone has made their crucifix, end the session with a prayer.*

**Closing Prayer**

*Invite each one to take turns to say the “Prayer” and all to say the “Response”.*

**Leader:**

Jesus you walk beside us all our lives. You never fail to be with us, especially when we need you most.

**Response:** So that we can walk with you together.

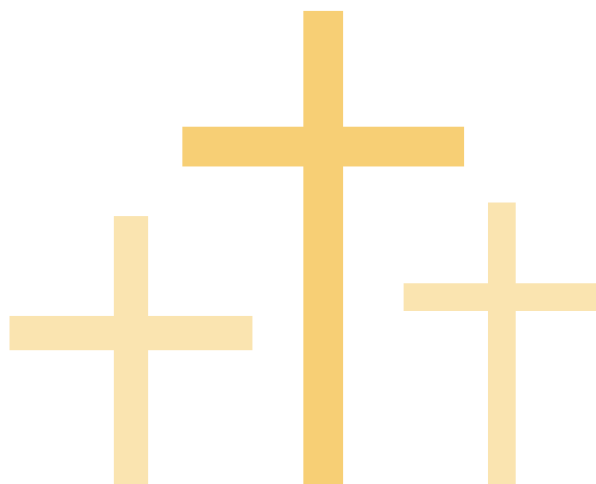
**Prayer:**

1. Jesus, help us to love and share with one another.
2. Jesus, help us to care for the sick, the lonely and the poor.
3. Jesus, help us to forgive others and ask others for their forgiveness.
4. Jesus, help us to be kind to strangers.
5. Jesus, we especially pray for the person who will be receiving the crucifix. May you bless <name of the person> and <your intention for the person>. *(Each member to say this prayer until all have prayed)*

**Leader:**

Lord, thank you for this time with you. Help us to remember this Lent and all the days of our lives and reflect You when we live a life for others. We make this prayer in your name, Amen.

*Sing an appropriate hymn to end the session.*



# LENT ACTIVITIES

## Stations of the Cross for the Family

A family way of the cross can be a simple quiet time of prayer or an opportunity for meditative and contemplative reflection on each station. Before you start, here are a few pointers for your consideration:

- You may choose to pray the Stations of the Cross using the stations in your parish or you may use paintings/pictures based on each station (you could use different pictures each week) – an opportunity for your family to experience God through liturgical art.
- Remind your family members that this is a prayer. We pray the Stations of the Cross to help us enter deeper into the mystery of Jesus' passion, death and resurrection.
- You may choose to do all stations at a time or you may choose to reflect on one or a few stations at a time.
- When you begin at a station, spend a few moments looking at the image before you. As you begin your prayer, reflect on what each station means to you, what touches you, what Jesus is saying to you here, whether you could identify with the people in this station, what you are thankful for, etc.

### Materials Needed / Environment:

- Pictures representing each of the 14 stations
- Lighted candles for the first 12 stations
- Snuffer
- Matches
- Darken the room – but leave a lamp or the light in a nearby room on so you can still read.

### Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, you love us so much that You gave yourself totally on the Cross to make us holy. We want to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. Show us the way to holiness as we meditate on the Way of the Cross.

*(Light all candles for the first 12 stations.)*

Begin each station with: "We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You. Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world." After each station you say an Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be...



## LENT ACTIVITIES

### **First Station:**

#### **Jesus is condemned to death**

Jesus is brought before Pilate by people he knows – the chief priests and elders. Although he is innocent, no one stood up for him. Pilate sees that he can do nothing and not wanting further trouble, he sentences Jesus to death.

*Look at Jesus:*

*Has anyone ever said mean or hurtful things about you, or has anyone ever told a lie about you? If someone did that to you, look at your heart and see how you felt. Maybe you were scared, or hurt, or maybe you felt very angry.*

*Show your heart to Jesus. See Jesus loving you when you show Him what happens in your heart. Then, when you are ready, you can ask Jesus to make your heart more like His. Maybe you want to ask Jesus to help you to remember that God is always with you.*

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...  
(*Snuff the candle for the first station.*)

### **Second Station:**

#### **Jesus carries his cross**

After Jesus has been flogged by the soldiers, mocked at and spat upon, He is made to carry the heavy cross by Himself from the city to Calvary (or Golgotha).

*Look at Jesus:*

*Have you ever had something happen to you that was very difficult for you? Sometimes we are not treated nicely or someone in our family falls very sick. Sometimes we just can't have things the way we want them.*

*Take some time to look at what your heart is like when this happens. Then, when you see what your heart is like, show your heart to Jesus. See Jesus loving you when you show Him what happens in your heart. When you are ready, you can ask Jesus to help make your heart more like his.*

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...  
(*Snuff the candle for the second station.*)



## LENT ACTIVITIES

### Third Station:

#### Jesus falls the first time

Jesus falls to the ground for the first time, exhausted by the weight of the cross. The cross keeps pushing into his shoulder, and the stones on the road hurt his feet. People yell and push him; the soldiers shout for him to move faster. How tired Jesus is!

#### *Look at Jesus:*

*Falling really hurts, doesn't it? When people make mistakes, it is like falling. And when that happens, their heart sometimes feels like it is hurt.*

*Can you remember a time when you fell, when your heart felt hurt? As you remember that time, and look at how your heart felt, show your heart to Jesus. See Jesus loving you as you show Him your heart. When you are ready, you can ask Jesus to help make your heart more like His.*

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...  
*(Snuff the candle for the third station.)*

### Fourth Station:

#### Jesus meets His mother

Jesus sees His mother. Amidst the angry crowd, she is there, watching. Both Mother and Son can feel the other's pain. There is nothing they can do to make the pain go away but both are able to offer comfort with their presence.

#### *Look at Jesus:*

*If you can remember a time when you were very sad, show Jesus what your heart looked like when you felt that way. Picture Jesus loving you when you show Him your sad heart. Then, when you are ready, you can ask Jesus to help make your heart more like His.*

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...  
*(Snuff the candle for the fourth station.)*



## LENT ACTIVITIES

### **Fifth Station:**

#### **Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus to carry His cross**

On the way to Calvary, the soldiers grab a man to carry the cross for Jesus. The passer-by is Simon of Cyrene, who happens to be heading for Jerusalem from the country. They continue on the long road, carrying the cross together.

#### *Look at Jesus:*

*Sometimes helping someone can be difficult, for so many different reasons. Maybe you haven't finished something that you like to do, when someone asks you for help. Or maybe you just don't feel like helping that person.*

*Can you think of a time when you were asked to help someone and did not want to help? Show Jesus what it was like when that happened, and picture Jesus loving you as you show Him your heart. Maybe you can even hear Jesus whisper, "Thank you for helping." When you are ready, you can ask Jesus to help you to have a helping heart.*

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...  
*(Snuff the candle for the fifth station.)*

### **Sixth Station:**

#### **Veronica wipes the face of Jesus**

Jesus is hot, tired, and sweating. His face is covered in sweat, blood and dust from the long walk. Filled with compassion, Veronica steps out from the crowd to wipe His face with a cloth.

#### *Look at Jesus:*

*Sometimes you may have done something that you thought was very small or unimportant: bringing a glass of water or juice to someone, or even giving someone a helping hand with a chore. Maybe you just smiled at someone who looked sad!*

*As you think of the times you helped, show Jesus your heart. As you picture Jesus loving you, maybe you can also picture Jesus leaving a picture of His face on your heart. What a wonderful heart you have!*

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...  
*(Snuff the candle for the sixth station.)*



## LENT ACTIVITIES

### **Seventh Station:**

#### **Jesus falls the second time**

Jesus falls to the ground for the second time. The cross grows heavier and heavier. The noise from the crowd and from the soldiers makes him feel even worse. It gets harder to get up. Jesus gets up and keeps going.

*Look at Jesus:*

*Have you ever had a hard time with something? Or you feel as if you keep messing up on something? Nothing seems to improve after all your efforts at making things better.*

*How does your heart feel when that happens? Maybe your heart feels the way Jesus' heart felt when He fell this second time. When you show Jesus how your heart felt, picture Jesus loving you. Jesus knows how your heart felt.*

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...  
*(Snuff the candle for the seventh station.)*

### **Eighth Station:**

#### **Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem**

A great number of people follow Jesus, and among them are women who are beating their breasts and wailing as they watch Him suffer. He tells them to take care of others, and especially to take care of their children: "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and your children."

*Look at Jesus:*

*Sometimes it is easy to just think about ourselves -- about what is not going the way we want it, or about problems that we have. It is very hard, then, to think about other people. How does your heart look when you do that, when you think only about yourself?*

*Show your heart to Jesus, and picture Jesus loving you with your heart that way. When you are ready, can you ask Jesus to help you to have a heart like His, a heart that thinks about other people and remembers other people? That's the kind of heart Jesus has.*

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...  
*(Snuff the candle for the eighth station.)*



## LENT ACTIVITIES

### **Ninth Station:**

#### **Jesus falls a third time**

Jesus falls to the ground, yet again, for the third time. The journey seems so long and hard to bear. However, with great courage and endurance, Jesus continues towards Calvary. His love for us overcomes His pain.

*Look at Jesus:*

*And Jesus gets up again, even though it is hard for Him to do. When we have really tried to do our best, and have not been able to succeed, it is easy to give up. Sometimes other people just keep yelling about something we do, or sometimes other people make fun of the way we do something.*

*Can you remember a time when you felt this tiredness in your heart, when you seemed to be having a sad or hard time with someone or something? Look at how your heart felt, and show your heart to Jesus. When you are ready, ask God to help you when you feel this way.*

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...  
(*Snuff the candle for the ninth station.*)

### **Tenth Station:**

#### **Jesus is stripped of His garments**

The soldiers take Jesus' clothes and divide them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also take His tunic; now the tunic is seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So, they say to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it." Jesus stands in front of the crowd with only a small piece of cloth covering part of His body.

*Look at Jesus:*

*Is it hard to share or to give away something that you like? Do you sometimes like to keep everything for yourself? Do you ever let something of yours be the reason for bad feelings or bad words between you and someone else?*

*If you remember a time when something like this happened, remember how your heart felt. Then, show your heart to Jesus. You can ask Jesus to help you to have a heart that is like his heart.*

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...  
(*Snuff the candle for the tenth station.*)





## LENT ACTIVITIES

### **Eleventh Station:**

#### **Jesus is nailed to the Cross**

It is nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified Him. The inscription on the charge against Him reads, "The King of the Jews". And with Him they crucify two bandits, one on His right and one on His left. There are many people who passed by; some stop to mock and taunt Him. How much Jesus hurts as the soldiers nail Him to the cross. But He looks at the people who have hurt Him and He asks God to forgive them.

*Look at Jesus:*

*Can you think of a time when someone hurt you with unkind words or actions? Was it hard for you to forgive that person?*

*Jesus knows that forgiving is hard to do. That's why Jesus will help to change your heart when you ask Him to help you to forgive someone. See how your heart looks, after you ask Jesus to do this.*

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...  
*(Snuff the candle for the eleventh station.)*

### **Twelfth Station:**

#### **Jesus dies on the Cross**

It is now about noon, and darkness comes over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun's light fails, and the curtain of the temple is torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, says, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, He breathes His last.

*(Remain in silence for a moment.)*

*Look at Jesus:*

*Did you ever feel that you wanted to make something better, or that if you only tried harder, something would change the way you want to change? Or maybe you felt that you did not try hard enough at something, and something bad happened.*

*If you can think of a time like that, then show Jesus your heart, and let Him love you. When you are ready, you can ask Jesus to help your heart be more like His heart.*

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...  
*(Snuff the candle for the twelfth station. Room is now in darkness except for a lamp/light nearby for reading.)*



## LENT ACTIVITIES

### **Thirteenth Station:**

#### **Jesus is taken down from the Cross**

Joseph of Arimathea asks Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gives him permission; so he comes and removes His body. Mary holds the lifeless body of her Son, Jesus in her arms as she thinks about Simeon's words, "And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

*Look at Jesus:*

*Is there someone you love who has died? When you remember that person, how does your heart look? You can show your heart to Jesus, and show Jesus what you miss about the person who died. Jesus knows what your heart looks like, and loves you when you show Him your heart. He can even help your heart become more like His.*

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...

### **Fourteenth Station:**

#### **Jesus is laid in the Tomb**

Joseph and Nicodemus take the body of Jesus and wrap it with spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. They wash His body and wrap it in a clean sheet. Then they put His body into a tomb. When they are finished, they push a very large stone over the entrance, so that no one can go inside.

*Look at Jesus:*

*Can you remember a time when you were very sad to say "Good-bye" to someone? Maybe you were leaving the person for only a short time, or maybe it was for a long time. Maybe you said "Good-bye" to someone you loved when that person died.*

*Take a few moments to think about one of those times you were sad saying "Good-bye," and show Jesus how your heart felt then. Try to picture Jesus loving you, and being with you with your sad heart.*

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...

#### **Leader:**

Without Christ, the world is plunged into total darkness. When Jesus died, it seems that all is hopeless. But we know this is not the end of the story. We know that on the third day after His death, Jesus rose again. The light of the Risen Christ overcame death and brings us life.

#### **Closing Prayer**

O Lord, we unite ourselves with You in death so that we may unite ourselves with You in a resurrected life. Teach us Your ways, O Lord, so that we turn away from sin and grow in holiness.



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## WHAT COULD WE HAVE DONE BETTER?

Thanks for using this booklet! We hope that the reflections have helped you and your community to grow in faith. Did this booklet meet your expectations? What else would you like to see in future booklets?

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