

The background features a purple textured surface with a repeating pattern of small, circular, embossed designs. A white, torn-edge paper strip is layered over the top and right portions of the image.

Giving Witness

TO THE

Word

LENT

REFLECTION BOOKLET | 2024 (YEAR B)

OFFICE FOR THE NEW EVANGELISATION



Inaugurated in September 2013,
the **Office for the New Evangelisation (ONE)** is an office in the
Catholic Archdiocese of Singapore working to realise the
Archdiocese's vision of being a vibrant,
evangelising and missionary Church.

As a catalyst for the New Evangelisation,
ONE's mission is to facilitate processes and initiatives
to move baptised Catholics into becoming missionary disciples.

This initiative is supported by the
GIFT Programme under the Catholic Foundation.

enquiries.one@catholic.org.sg

Giving Witness TO THE *Word*

LENT REFLECTION BOOKLET | 2024 (YEAR B)

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2024 Lenten Message

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The witness of the early Christians inspired others to wonder about Jesus Christ. They wondered what kind of hold Jesus Christ had on these early Christians to forgo their families, if need be, to forgo a comfortable life, and to sacrifice their very lives. Their courage to embrace Jesus, even if it meant being rejected by others, intrigued the onlookers.

Witnessing is a strong impetus for others to want to know more about Jesus Christ. When we adhere to the teachings of Jesus Christ, we will appear different to others. We are not being different because we want to be different, but the values of Jesus and His ways are different from those of the world.

Who has the ultimate knowledge of what is to come when our lives on earth end? Jesus, of course. This means that living by the standards of others will only lead us to a certain level of truth, not the whole truth. Witnessing the love of Jesus had in the past turned towns and cities to take up the ways of Jesus and to embrace Him. This Lent, let us do just that.

May the Lord bless you with grace as you begin these Lenten reflections with sincerity 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 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 sharings. The latter is meant to prompt sharings based on the specific context i.e., Small Christian Communities, Ministry or Family. Allow time to reflect on these questions and also 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.

Facilitating Group Reflection

***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 2024 Lenten Reflection Booklet.

Join our presenters as they take you through the reflection via the CatholicSG Radio app, starting from 15 February 2024.

Live broadcast: Thursdays at 8am

Same day encore at 9pm

Repeat broadcasts:

Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday, at 8am, 11.45am, 3.45pm, and 9pm

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 B)

Giving Witness to the Word

Week	Readings	Theme
1st Sunday of Lent	Genesis 9:8-15 1 Peter 3:18-22 Mark 1:12-15	Giving Witness to the Covenant
2nd Sunday of Lent	Genesis 22:1-2, 9-13, 15-18 Romans 8:31-34 Mark 9:2-10	Giving Witness to God's Providence
3rd Sunday of Lent	Exodus 20:1-17 1 Corinthians 1:22-25 John 2:13-25	Giving Witness to God's Wisdom
4th Sunday of Lent	2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23 Ephesians 2:4-10 John 3:14-21	Giving Witness to God's Love
5th Sunday of Lent	Jeremiah 31:31-34 Hebrews 5:7-9 John 12:20-33	Giving Witness to Jesus' Obedience
Palm/Passion Sunday	Mark 11:1-10 Isaiah 50:4-7 Philippians 2:6-11 Mark 14:1-15:47	Giving Witness to the Passion of Christ

1st Sunday of Lent

Giving Witness to the Covenant

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.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the season of Lent. It is a time that is pregnant with opportunities to grow in faith and love. We want to come to You with the right dispositions and attitudes to purge and change the habits that keep us away from You. Only You can give us a heart for renewal and growth so that we may daily walk closer to You, our magnanimous God. Amen.

Readings

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

Next, 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.

Commentaries for:

1st Reading: Genesis 9:8-15

The Hebrew word 'beriyth' used in Scripture, translated as 'covenant', has different meanings. Beriyth could refer to fellowship or agreement. It could also refer to a commitment or to an allotment, suggesting sharing. In this text from Genesis, the covenant God the Father made with Noah is perhaps referring to all these different meanings. It is a commitment from God to fellowship and to share His divinity with all humankind and creation. It is significant that this covenant was made after the flood as a prefigurement of the water of baptism. By washing us clean of sins and saving us through the water of baptism, God our Father is committed to drawing the baptised to live a shared life eternally with the Trinity. The 'bow in the clouds' testifies to this covenant.

1st Sunday of Lent

Giving Witness to the Covenant

2nd Reading: 1 Peter 3:18-22

The author of the first letter of Peter wants to affirm Christians that no ultimate harm can befall them and they can live virtuous lives with confidence. This is because Jesus Christ suffered, died, was resurrected, and sits at the right hand of God the Father. His suffering was not just a model for Christians to emulate; it was meant to *'lead you to God'*. (v.18) His death and triumphant resurrection through the power of Father God mean all Christians can enjoy the fullness of life, free from evil and death. Jesus' proclamation to the *'spirits in prison'* (v. 19) is a victory cry that God the Father's power triumphs over all threatening evil in the cosmos. Baptism, which is clearly stated in verse 21, saves us by renewing our interior lives. This enables us to live transformed lives with hope after experiencing the redemptive power of God.

Gospel: Mark 1:12-15

The word 'tempted' in Greek used in the Gospel has the meaning of scrutinising and putting on trial to test. Jesus being driven by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested after His baptism in the river Jordan is a reminder to keep watch for all the baptised, as we too may experience more aggressive attacks from the tempter, urging us to give up the new life conferred at our baptism. Just as Adam and the Israelites were tested, so too was Jesus Christ, who is fully human. Unlike Adam and Israel, however, Jesus overcame the temptations. This shows us that by keeping filial love for God the Father, it is possible to withstand the ways of the devil. Keeping time for prayer and fasting prepares us interiorly for the work of God the Father, just as Jesus emerged ready to proclaim, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' (Matt 4:17)

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).

God our Father's covenant with Noah is made visible in the life of Jesus Christ. In Jesus' suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension, God's love and commitment to humankind became tangible. Jesus' fellowship with all, especially the poor and marginalised of society, is a witness to God's promise of fellowship with humankind. By dying and rising, Jesus draws all who believe in Him to live eternally in the divine presence, thus sharing life with God our Father to the fullest. Indeed, there is no greater love and commitment than having the beloved Son take on human form, die to redeem, and draw all to enjoy the right relationship with Father God forever.

Baptism is the sign of salvation through Jesus Christ, as found in 1 Peter 3:21. It is the covenant that shows God our Father's intent for full life through Jesus and for the baptised to respond with a commitment - a 'yes'. Therefore, our baptism is the 'yes' to this full life from God our Father that starts with a transformation of our interior life. This 'yes' then is a commitment from us, a pledge to lead a life according to the gospel. This is a life that starts inside but moves out through our actions and words. Jesus overcoming all evils in the cosmos through His death and triumphant resurrection provides hope and confidence for us to remain true to our commitment despite difficulties and challenges. When others see the hope and faith exhibited in our lives, we become witnesses to the covenant made at our baptism.

As we begin the season of Lent, the Church provides us with the opportunity to relook at the commitment we made at our baptism. How have we been keeping our part of the covenant in our relationship with God our Father? What is the state of our interior lives? Lent is more than the exterior actions of prayer, almsgiving, and fasting. These actions must come from a conviction that our lives must conform to our baptism, accompanied by a personal commitment to God our Father, to continually grow in faith with hope and joy despite life's challenges. Let us choose to spend this time of Lent growing in our relationship with God our Father, so that we may be witnesses to His covenantal love.

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

Everyone to reflect silently on the below question(s). Then, share your reflections if you are in a group. We talk about what struck you in the passages of scripture and how you can share the Word of God with others.

- What does baptism mean to you, and how have you lived as a baptised person?
- What can you do this Lent to deepen your understanding of your baptism?

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 and how we can share the Word of God as a community.

- What are the vows we make at our baptism, and are we, as a community, living out those vows?
- How can we encourage each other to live out our baptismal vows more intentionally?

For Ministry

We talk about what struck us in the passages of scripture and how we can share the Word of God as a ministry.

- How evident is God our Father's covenant in our ministry?
- What can we do to renew our hearts and become faithful witnesses to God our Father's love through our ministry?

For Family

We talk about what struck us in the passages of scripture and how we can share the Word of God as a family.

- Recall and share our baptisms with each other. If we have photographs, take them out and look at them. What is significant to us as we look at these photographs and recall those moments?
- This season of Lent, how can we as a family grow in our baptismal vows?

Take Home

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

It is through our conviction in our baptism that we give witness to the covenant.

Doing Your Bit

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

In prayer, choose five verses of scripture that speak about giving love, hope, and living in faith. Take note of these verses.

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.

Heavenly Father, You never fail to draw us into Your loving presence so that we may become better witnesses to You this season of Lent and beyond. Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection are a testimony to Your love for all humanity and the sealing of the everlasting covenant between You and us. Thank You for Your everlasting presence in our world and lives. Amen.

2nd Sunday of Lent

Giving Witness to God's Providence

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.

Heavenly Father, the source of life from whom we receive unwavering care and protection. Help us to recognise Your presence in all the situations of our lives. Grant us the grace to respond as Jesus, Your beloved Son, did, so that, through our witnessing, others may come to know and experience Your love for them. We make this prayer through Christ, our Lord, Amen.

Readings

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

Next, 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.

Commentaries for:

1st Reading: Genesis 22:1-2, 9-13, 15-18

We are presented with Abraham, who resolutely sought to carry out God our Father's unthinkable command without any bargain or protest. The first time God referred to Isaac as Abraham's only child, it came across as a dare, but the next two times this same description was uttered, it was to express God's marvel at Abraham's love for Him. This was a test, and God never intended for Isaac to die. Regardless of Abraham's response, He would have granted the blessings that were already sealed earlier with a covenant.

2nd Sunday of Lent

Giving Witness to God's Providence

2nd Reading: Romans 8:31-34

This short passage attempts to capture and convey God our Father's love for us, His children. To save us from our sins and to reconcile with Him, He willingly sacrificed His own Son, who received an unjust sentence from mankind but was subsequently acquitted by God our Father, who raised Him from the dead. Jesus continues with His efforts to help us attain this gift of eternal life with God our Father.

Gospel: Mark 9:2-10

This episode revealed Jesus' divine nature and offered a glimpse of His glory, manifested visually and through His conversing with the two most important characters from the Old Testament: Moses (representing the Law) and Elijah (representing the Prophets). Coming on the back of his master's first prediction of a fateful end, it was no wonder that Peter wanted to stay. This was the second time that God our Father affirmed His Son's identity following Jesus' baptism. This time, God our Father addressed the apostles with an added command: to obey Jesus. With this command in their hearts, the apostles became credible witnesses for the Lord when they eventually experienced the providence of God our Father and came to understand the significance of this experience.

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).

In our lifetimes, we take tests of various kinds. As much as they evoke fear and dread, we recognise the purpose they serve. However, there is one type of testing that most of us prefer to do without: those imposed upon us by difficult people and events in our lives.

Jesus had His fair share of these during His time on earth. In fact, He chose to undertake His biggest challenge of concealing His divinity, revealing it only at selective moments, so that the crowds and His disciples would come to believe in Him as the Son of God. All that time, He held back from using His powers as a means to prove His identity according to the demands of the hostile religious establishments. Not once did He rely on His supremacy for His personal benefit.

Our Lord was able to fully embrace His humanity because He experienced and trusted in God our Father's care for Him. Apart from affirmation of His identity, God our Father also kept Him safe until the end of His mission. Joseph and Mary would also have likely shared with Him how their family had been protected from various dangers.

We are not called to seek suffering. However, when such times arise that make exacting demands on us, let us view these experiences as opportunities to rely on God our Father's providence and allow Him to help us navigate through these difficult circumstances. Instead of clinging onto our natural tendencies of flight or fight, we learn to respond in ways that reflect our confidence in God's assurance and claim to His gift of salvation and eternal life after Christ's hard-fought victory. It is not about passing tests but about receiving and reciprocating God's love. Such witnessing helps us to participate in Jesus' divine nature and hopefully lead others to God.

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

Everyone to reflect silently on the below question(s). Then, share your reflections if you are in a group. We talk about what struck you in the passages of scripture and how you can share the Word of God with others.

- What are the concrete moments in my life when I have received the providence of my Father in heaven?
- How have I given testimony to His providence?
- What are my thoughts and reactions when I am called to suffer for Jesus?

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 and how we can share the Word of God as a community.

- What Bible passages do I rely on for comfort during difficult moments? Why?
- God our Father takes care of us more than we ask for. Have I shared this in our community?

For Ministry

We talk about what struck us in the passages of scripture and how we can share the Word of God as a ministry.

- How has our Father provided for our ministry?
- Is Jesus seen when we respond to situations or parishioners that we struggle to understand? Why or why not?

For Family

We talk about what struck us in the passages of scripture and how we can share the Word of God as a family.

- Abraham trusted without protesting, arguing, or bargaining. Is this trust seen in our family life?
- In what ways does our family give glory to Jesus?

Take Home

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

As our Father provides, we ought to give Him glory before others.

Doing Your Bit

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

Write down the five verses of scripture that we identified last week on five separate cards. Have fun decorating the cards!

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.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for giving us Your Son, Jesus. We want to become more and more like Him, clinging onto His words and following His examples so that we can better live out our lives in His footsteps, thus giving greater glory to You. We make this prayer through Jesus. Amen.

3rd Sunday of Lent

Giving Witness to God's Wisdom

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.

Heavenly Father, You who created heaven and earth, knew our every breath, thought, and deed even before we were conceived. We give You thanks for all that You are and all that You do for us, and we ask for a heart that yearns for You and longs to hear Your Word. As we stumble along our journeys here on earth, we pray that we learn to rely on Your ever-merciful and ever-lasting love as You continue to guide and protect us. Amen.

Readings

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

Next, 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.

Commentaries for:

1st Reading: Exodus 20:1-17

God our Father lays down His laws for the Israelites, then, and for us, today, to follow and obey. He is extremely clear and forthright, especially in exhorting what we should NOT be doing (verses 2 to 7, 13 to 17). He may seem like an over-controlling parent. However, just like a parent who cares for his child, God our Father sets these laws to be followed for our own good. In His wisdom, He knows that our true flourishing is only possible if we continue to keep our eyes fixed on Him and not on the idols of the world. Inevitably, over the centuries, all these laws have been broken by us. Yet, despite our sinful nature, God our Father continues to love and forgive us.

3rd Sunday of Lent

Giving Witness to God's Wisdom

2nd Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:22-25

The wisdom of God our Father exceeds all human understanding. During Jesus' time, the symbol of the crucifixion represented humiliation, defeat, and suffering. Yet, as St. Paul writes, we proclaim a *'crucified Christ'*. The cross takes on new significance in Jesus as a symbol of God the Father's triumph over sin and death. He uses our human weakness for His glory. Let us then not seek miraculous signs like the Jews did or philosophical understanding like the Greeks. Instead, let us seek first the Kingdom of Heaven and strive to glorify Him in all we do in order to see God in the everyday things and in everyone.

Gospel: John 2:13-25

As the temple's business people were taking advantage of the underprivileged by charging exorbitant rates, Jesus drove them out of the temple, and thus He issued His own death sentence. For when questioned for a sign, Jesus foretold His death and resurrection by saying, *'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.'* To the Jews, Jesus' response was audacious, as the temple was a sign of God our Father's presence. This scene at the beginning of the Gospel of John foreshadows Jesus' death and eventual glorification.

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).

In Exodus, when God our Father was laying down His commandments, He came across as authoritative, all-knowing, and full of wisdom. He decreed that the Israelites should obey Him and left no doubt that He expected them to remain faithful to the Covenant.

Now, St. Paul professes in his first letter to the Corinthians that true believers, as members of the New Covenant, do not look for signs from God our Father. In comparing God's 'foolishness' to the best of human wisdom, we are reminded how insignificant we truly are when compared to our Almighty Father. At a time when there was already division within the Church, St. Paul's reminder to those who kept asking God for signs is stern, almost like a rebuke. Indeed, signs of His presence, His wisdom, and His love are all around us!

This is borne out in the gospel according to John, where the Jews clamoured for a sign from Jesus, demanding justification for His act of clearing out the market square. Of course, since Jesus already knew what was to come (His passion, death, and resurrection), He demonstrates His divine wisdom by issuing a challenge to the Jews: destroy the temple. In the same breath, Jesus proclaims how He would restore it within three days, foretelling the miracle of His resurrection.

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

Everyone to reflect silently on the below question(s). Then, share your reflections if you are in a group. We talk about what struck you in the passages of scripture and how you can share the Word of God with others.

- Can I recall a time when God our Father revealed His wisdom to me?
- How did that revelation change the way I lived?

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 and how we can share the Word of God as a community.

- How has God's wisdom helped bring our community together to weather difficult periods/storms?
- What steps can we, as a community, take to consciously rely on God's wisdom?

For Ministry

We talk about what struck us in the passages of scripture and how we can share the Word of God as a ministry.

- In our ministry, how do we handle disagreements or differences of opinion?
- How can we, as a ministry, remember to turn to the scriptures and pray consciously, relying on God's wisdom?

For Family

We talk about what struck us in the passages of scripture and how we can share the Word of God as a family.

- How have the actions or words of a family member reflected our Father's wisdom in our family?
- Recall a time when a misunderstanding within our family caused by human wisdom brought about mistrust or hurt. What can we learn from that experience?

Take Home

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

God our Father's plan for each one of us transcends human wisdom and is centred on His love for us.

Doing Your Bit

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

Pray to the Lord for wisdom to choose whom you should give each of the five cards that you made last week.

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.

Heavenly Father, as we gathered as Your children during this time of sharing, Your Word inspired us and Your Wisdom strengthened our faith. Relying more on You and less on our own wisdom brings us closer to You. We thank You for this graced time that we have shared together through Jesus. Amen.

4th Sunday of Lent

Giving Witness to God's Love

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.

Heavenly Father, You are the source of all salvation. Your saving word accepted only through humble hearts, is truly Your gift to us in grace. Out of Your desire to save humanity, You sent Your Son into our world to proclaim Your gospel in word and deed. Inspired by this, we want to speak words and carry out actions that invoke in others the memory and presence of Jesus. May our joy in Your gospel cause others to know Your love and come to You. Amen.

Readings

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

Next, 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.

Commentaries for:

1st Reading: 2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23

Defeat befalls the Israelites because they have forgotten their covenant with God our Father and all His mighty deeds that made them the mighty nation they once were. The two icons of Israel's identity – the temple and the kingdom – are shattered. Those who survive are deported far from home and forced to live under the rule of a foreign king. Thankfully, the punishment is not permanent. After seventy years in exile, Israel is once again set free by the power of God our Father. However, this time God's deliverance is not spoken through a prophet or wrought by the acts of a hero of Israel's own, but by a foreigner.

4th Sunday of Lent

Giving Witness to God's Love

2nd Reading: Ephesians 2:4-10

St. Paul reminds the baptised community at Ephesus that they have decisively begun a new life in Christ. From the short-sightedness of human depravity, from wicked words and deeds, they have been raised up by God our Father – resurrected like Christ in grace – and immersed as God's new creation to do good with a view to eternity. St. Paul makes it clear that good deeds do not earn a single ounce of God's grace. Rather, it is grace that makes goodness possible for those who have become the '*handiwork*' of God. Grace produces in Christians the words and deeds that give witness to God's kingdom.

Gospel: John 3:14-21

John's gospel strongly affirms the heavenly identity of Jesus when the question of His divine nature was still debated among the early Christians. In Jesus, salvation is no longer restricted to people of a certain historical lineage. Eternal life is now freely offered to every person when they respond to Jesus in faith. The gospel writer testifies that those who '*live in truth*' and love the Word of God will always be drawn by their faith '*to the light*' – towards Jesus whose words and deeds are revealed truly as acts of the God our Father who saves.

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).

God's Revelation in Word and Deed

Words and deeds are not merely means of communication; they are often the message itself. From what a person says and does, we can discern their personality, character, and purpose. Human civilisation is built up from ideas that are transmitted by word and materialised by the productive action of work. God our Father chose to communicate divine revelation to humankind through words and deeds, convincing us of His loving kindness. Beginning with the covenants, to the prophets of Israel, and finally, culminating in the incarnation of the Divine Word itself - Jesus.

We Receive God's Revelation with Joy

Like the Israelites returning to their homeland after being in exile, Christians are also freed by receiving God's liberating Word into their hearts. We become free to act and speak in God, as John's gospel tells us - this freedom is meant to be celebrated with great joy! Pope Francis writes in *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel), 'Those who accept Christ's offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness, and loneliness. With Christ, joy is constantly born anew.' Since we enjoy a loving relationship with Jesus, we should not be 'Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter'!

To Witness God's Word in Life

Having received the gospel, Christians are called to deepen their lives in the Word of God through constant recourse to Sacred Scripture and the Eucharist. The Church, especially the laity, has the mission to speak and act in Christ's love in every aspect of life. Holiness can be described as the pursuit of the perfection of love. Through Christian holiness, the world - sacred and secular - draws closer to God our Father and the reality of God's kingdom. How each of us carries out this witnessing will depend on how we love the people whom God our Father put into our midst, the different charisms He has endowed upon us, and the diversity of professions and states of life in which we pursue holiness. Discernment is needed to witness God our Father's love meaningfully in our own unique setting.

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

Everyone to reflect silently on the below question(s). Then, share your reflections if you are in a group. We talk about what struck you in the passages of scripture and how you can share the Word of God with others.

- Recall the moments when you experienced the love of God our Father.
- How have you shared or shown this love to others?

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 and how we can share the Word of God as a community.

- How can we deepen our appreciation of God's love in our community?
- How can we share the love of the Lord and bring light to the lives of those around us?

For Ministry

We talk about what struck us in the passages of scripture and how we can share the Word of God as a ministry.

- Do our meetings give witness to the love of our Father?
- What actions can the ministry take to be a loving ministry rather than an efficient ministry?

For Family

We talk about what struck us in the passages of scripture and how we can share the Word of God as a family.

- Recall and share with each other the times that we experienced the love of the Lord.
- How can we, as a family, show God our Father's love to one another?

Take Home

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

God our Father's love for us is so evident that when we acknowledge it before others, we become more aware of His love.

Doing Your Bit

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

Think about the reason why you want to give the card to these five persons and write a note to each of them.

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.

Heavenly Father, thank You for the gift of Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. At His incarnation, He showed the depth of Your love by being present to us as a human being. Such great emptying of oneself invites us to do the same by being present to others, especially those who have turned away from the path that leads to eternal life. Let our witness be a channel of Your grace as we continue to turn ourselves during this Lent towards the light of Your Kingdom, through Jesus. Amen.

5th Sunday of Lent

Giving Witness to Jesus' Obedience

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.

Heavenly Father, in all things great and small, You are present. Such is the depth of Your love for us. To walk in Your ways, Jesus came to be an example. His total obedience to Your will shows us the way to You. In following Jesus, may we be Your trustworthy instrument for Your honour. May Your will be done. Amen.

Readings

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

Next, 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.

Commentaries for:

1st Reading: Jeremiah 31:31-34

Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, prophesied to a nation that turned a deaf ear for 50 years to his repeated warnings against idolatry. He lived to see the destruction of Israel just before his people were completely exiled to Babylon. Despite the continual and repeated betrayal of His people, God our Father did not abandon them but instead bound Himself to them in an even more intimate way. He makes a great promise of a new covenant, where man and God share a relationship more intimately than ever before.

5th Sunday of Lent

Giving Witness to Jesus' Obedience

2nd Reading: Hebrews 5:7-9

In this text, the author emphasises the dual nature of Jesus as both God and man. As man, Jesus experienced human suffering without sin. He demonstrated His compassion towards humanity and obedience to God our Father by carrying out His mission on earth. In the passage, the term 'perfect' is translated from the Greek word 'teleo'. Jesus became a perfect high priest through suffering. Through His divinity, His single sacrifice offers eternal salvation to believers. The text encourages obedience and faith, suggesting that salvation's full realisation depends on enduring obedience until completion.

Gospel: John 12:20-33

As Pope Benedict XVI wrote, 'the mystery of the Cross is inscribed right at the heart of the parables'. In his exegesis of this parable in *Jesus of Nazareth*, he shows how this story summarises and unveils His numerous seed parables. The Kingdom of God is the smallest of all seeds (Matt 13:31-32) and thus easy to overlook. Yet it bears a whole tree within it. The seed symbolises the future glorification of Christ in a hidden way. The grain of wheat is Jesus Himself. What seems to be His 'failure' on the Cross is, mysteriously, the way He draws all men to Himself. And His body, the Church, is the instrument by which He continues this work of salvation 'to the end of the age' (Matt 28:20).

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 Trinitarian God, in His very own nature, is a community of love. Trinity (tri-unity) is the unity of the three persons of God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God, who is love and lives in love, desires for all to share in the common unity (community) of love in Him. Despite man's continual failings and sin throughout history, God endures in teaching us how to love through His precepts and laws. In the course of history, Jesus (who is God Himself) descended to dwell among us. He came to live by example a life lived in perfect love and to suffer a death that brings life to those dead in sin.

Through Jesus' life, we begin to understand obedience. Obedience is not the blind forsaking of one's will but aligning one's will to the will of the Beloved and for the common good. The call for Jesus to die in the way He did was daunting, and He even confessed that His soul was 'troubled' (John 12:27). Yet He declares the cross to be His very purpose. *'Rarely will anyone die for a righteous person'* (Rom 5:7), but Jesus came to die for His very enemies – all of humanity who have sinned against Him. He was focused on glorifying His Father's name and on drawing all men to Himself so that they might share in heaven. He did not only become the high priest; He Himself became the sacrifice, the Lamb of God. In perfect love and obedience, He offers all of Himself to His Father.

This Good News is offered to all, and the work of redemption that Jesus began through His sacrifice continues in His body: the Church and the Eucharist. Christ calls all to follow Him to the Cross and learn obedience as He did. By carrying our crosses, we free ourselves from selfishness and learn to love unconditionally, as Jesus did. We begin to understand the great paradox of Christianity: to 'hate' our lives by offering them all in faith to God the Father, who loves us to the end. In the words of St Augustine, 'It is not the punishment but the cause that makes the martyr.'

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

Everyone to reflect silently on the below question(s). Then, share your reflections if you are in a group. We talk about what struck you in the passages of scripture and how you can share the Word of God with others.

- What are the moments in my life when I obeyed God's Word instead of my own will?
- What prevents me from obeying God's statutes?

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 and how we can share the Word of God as a community.

- Are we an obedient community? Why or why not?
- What is stopping us from being obedient to the will of God our Father?

For Ministry

We talk about what struck us in the passages of scripture and how we can share the Word of God as a ministry.

- Does our service to others reflect our obedience to Jesus and our Father? Why or why not?
- In our service, is the commandment of Jesus - '*love one another as I have loved you*' - evident?

For Family

We talk about what struck us in the passages of scripture and how we can share the Word of God as a family.

- In what ways can I yield my will for the good of my family as inspired by the Word of God?
- In what ways can I show that Jesus' obedience to our Father is present in my life with my family?

Take Home

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

Jesus' sacrifice shows us the true meaning of love. We are called to do the same as His disciples so that others may know the obedience of Jesus.

Doing Your Bit

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

Present the cards and the notes to the persons that you have chosen. Share with them your Lenten journey.

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.

Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us our Lord Jesus, who lived in our weakened world. His suffering and death reveal His unfathomable love for You. A love revealed through obedience to Your plan of salvation for all mankind. Amen.

Palm Sunday

Giving Witness to the Passion of Christ

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.

Heavenly Father, as we gather in Your name to meditate on Your life-giving Word, we know that Your Presence is truly with us, giving us wisdom and strength to be living witnesses to the Passion of Your Son. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Readings

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

Next, 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.

Commentaries for:

Procession: Mark 11-1-10

'Hosanna' is a cry of praise and adoration, especially here in the Gospel of Mark, where the crowds are proclaiming, '*blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord*' and '*blessed is the kingdom of David that is coming*'. What is coming? It is the Saviour who is bringing about the promised kingdom, the reign of divine love that overcomes human suffering and death. This makes clear the more ancient meaning of '*hosanna*' (please save!) - a cry for help to God to save us from darkness and distress, which Jesus does by willingly entering His passion, which is also our passion.

Palm Sunday

Giving Witness to the Passion of Christ

1st Reading: Isaiah 50:4-7

'He provides me with speech', 'Each morning he wakes me to hear', 'The Lord comes to my help;' – these verses tell us that in the depths of distress and rejection, the suffering servant paradoxically experiences God our Father's initiative to intervene with His empowering grace and constant consolation. God our Father is with us every step of the way, especially in our moments of struggle and darkness. God our Father is with us in a powerful way, and so we can confront and embrace every trial and difficulty (*'so that I may know how to reply to the wearied', 'I made no resistance, neither did I turn away', 'I set my face like flint, I know I shall not be shamed'*).

2nd Reading: Philippians 2:6-11

This ancient hymn about Christ highlights His self-emptying (*kenosis* in Greek) – first emptying His divinity to become human, and then, as a human person, He accepted the most shameful and painful death on a cross. As a consequence, from the depth of His utmost *kenosis*, God the Father could raise Him to the heights of utmost glory, giving Him the title 'Lord' (*Kyrios* in Greek). In the New Testament, *Kyrios* refers to the divine, to God Himself. Therefore, by willingly self-emptying His divinity, Jesus is acclaimed by His Father as divine, the Lord of all. This is the mystery of our Christian journey.

Gospel: Mark 14:1-15:47

The reading of the account of the Passion (meaning 'suffering' in Latin) takes us into the multi-faceted pain that Jesus experienced: betrayal by a companion (literally: one who shares bread), persecution by the hierarchy, misunderstood by His followers, abandonment by His friends, denied by His chosen successor, condemned by the crowd, scourged to the bone, pained by His mother's pain, rubbed raw by the cross' weight, stripped naked for humiliation, left hanging by His pierced wrists, experienced the overpowering darkness of being abandoned by God our Father, and felt His last breath leaving His earthly body. In summary, there is no aspect of our pain that Jesus did not experience.

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).

Jesus' experience of His Passion sums up the whole gamut of human experiences - from being celebrated and welcomed to being humiliated and condemned to the point of sacrificing His life. Sometimes we wonder how we can cope with life's situation and deal with our corresponding emotional response. Yet here we have our Lord Jesus Christ showing us that He has plumbed the depths of human suffering. Even more than that, He has redeemed this suffering - our suffering. In other words, by daring to enter the depths of human suffering and through His resurrection to new life, He takes with Him all kinds of suffering and breathes His saving life into human emptiness and pain.

'Take up your cross and follow me' (Matt 16:24); this is Jesus' beckoning call to us, His disciples. The only way to true human freedom is to heed the divine call to die to our (false) selves and empty ourselves of our self-exalting wants. This emptying is not an end in itself, but done so that we may avail ourselves to be filled by none other than Love Himself. St. Francis of Assisi laments that 'Love is not loved', which means that God, who is Love itself, is not loved in return. Hence, St. Francis' journey is one of radical poverty of spirit, freeing himself completely to let the Kingdom of God, the reign of love, overtake and possess him (*'for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven'* (Matt 5:3)).

If St. Francis, the Lover of the Cross, followed his Lord Jesus Christ so intimately and intensely, we too, with the power and grace of the Holy Spirit, can do the same this Holy Week.

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

Everyone to reflect silently on the below question(s). Then, share your reflections if you are in a group. We talk about what struck you in the passages of scripture and how you can share the Word of God with others.

- Recall a moment when I experienced suffering in my life. In what ways did Jesus reveal Himself to me amidst my difficulties?
- How do I give witness to Jesus in my suffering?

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 and how we can share the Word of God as a community.

- Do we show Jesus to our members who are going through times of suffering? How can we ensure that we do so going forward?
- How can our community be an evangelising witness to the Passion (suffering) of Christ?

For Ministry

We talk about what struck us in the passages of scripture and how we can share the Word of God as a ministry.

- How can we ensure that we show the love of Jesus to those who are going through times of suffering?
- In what ways is our ministry witnessing the Passion of Christ?

For Family

We talk about what struck us in the passages of scripture and how we can share the Word of God as a family.

- How are we called to 'take up your cross' and experience the liberating fullness of life in our interactions within the family?
- How can we show our faith in Jesus through times of suffering?

Take Home

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

Jesus entered willingly into His Passion, emptying Himself in a radical way.

Doing Your Bit

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

Call the five persons individually and ask about their experiences after they received the card and note from you. Invite them to the Easter Vigil or Easter Sunday Eucharistic Celebrations.

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.

Dearest Jesus, Your determination to embrace Your Passion and ultimate death is beyond our understanding. In our suffering and pain, we often forget how focused You were, trusting that the road ultimately leads to our Father. In our trials and tribulations, we now have an example to follow. In following Your example, let it be a witness to our love for You. In Your most holy and precious name, we pray. Amen.

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?

Your feedback is important to us. Let us know!



one.org.sg/feedback

Appendix

Appendix 1: Forms of Prayer

The season of Lent is a time when we are called to renew and strengthen our relationship with God our Father. To assist us in this endeavour, the Church proposes the three pillars of Lenten practices: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Of these, the most important is prayer. This Lent, let us delve deeper into the Church's practice of prayer.

All prayer is a raising of the heart to God our Father, but every believer responds to God our Father's invitation differently, so this raising of the heart can be expressed in many ways. Christian Tradition has particularly recognised three primary expressions of prayer: vocal prayer, meditation, and contemplation (CCC 2699).

Vocal Prayer

It goes without saying that prayer can be vocal. From birth, we articulate sounds to express and communicate our needs. We spend our lives engaged in conversation with others, and it is so natural and authentically human to speak aloud. What, then, does it mean to pray with our voices?

Just as speech is necessary to human survival and thriving, vocal prayer is necessary to spiritual growth and holiness. We read above that prayer is defined by the inner movement of the heart towards God our Father. However, we are bodily beings with voices and ears, so it is fitting that the content of our hearts be expressed outwardly in words. In this way, we pray with our whole being—body and spirit – and we are also able to pray with others. In doing so, we follow the example of Jesus, who prayed vocally in the synagogue with friends, family, strangers, and in private by Himself (CCC 2700–2704).

We are well versed in the rich depository of vocal prayers in the Church. Examples of vocal prayer include spontaneous prayer, the Rosary, and the Divine Mercy Chaplet. However, did you know that journaling is also a

form of vocal prayer? Although not expressed vocally, a written prayer to God our Father can just be as effective! Journaling also brings out other benefits, such as clarity of thought and decreased stress levels.

Tip for Lent: At noon each day, stop whatever you are doing and spend three short minutes to pray the Angelus. In doing so, we acknowledge the humility of our Lord Jesus Christ for taking on human form, and the obedience of Mother Mary in her "yes" to God our Father.

Mental Prayer: Meditation and Contemplation

As vocal prayer is natural to humanity, so too is the natural progression to non-verbal means of communication. Have you had the experience of being with a close family member or friend and being able to communicate with him or her with a look or body language, or even knowing what he or she was going to say intuitively? We can and often do communicate silently because of our deep knowledge of those close to us. This gives us a glimpse into internal or mental prayer: meditation and contemplation.

Meditation

Meditation, properly speaking, is active mental prayer: "Meditation engages thought, imagination, emotion, and desire. This mobilisation of faculties is necessary in order to deepen our convictions of faith, prompt the conversion of our hearts, and strengthen our will to follow Christ." (CCC 2708)

Meditation requires concentration and commitment that can be difficult to sustain, but there are many things that can help us. First among these are the Scriptures and other spiritual books. As previously mentioned, meditation is a central part of lectio divina. Engaging the drama of Scripture or a spiritual work with our minds, imaginations, and emotions allows us to enter the scene as a character. We get a chance to react to the situations and engage the other characters. In this way, we get to learn about ourselves by evaluating our reactions, and we open ourselves up to God our Father's presence in His Word (CCC 2705).

In addition to the Scriptures and writings of spiritual authors, we can find inspiration for meditation in the actions and words of the liturgy, in icons, and other sacred art, or in God our Father's work in creation, history, and our own lives. If we are humble and faithful, all these things can move our hearts to thoughtful reflection so that we can discover how God our Father might be speaking to us through them and what He wants us to do in response (CCC 2706).

Tip for Lent: Make it a point to wake up 15 minutes earlier each day and spend some time meditating on the Gospel passage for the day. What is God our Father trying to speak to you through the Word today?

Contemplation

Meditation is of great value in actively engaging our thought, imagination, emotion, and desire, but our prayer can go further—from meditation on the mysteries of Christ to union with Christ Himself and the experience of His love in contemplation.

Contemplation takes place when our prayer goes beyond words to let us simply be in God our Father's presence for a time. That's it! Contemplation is to make ourselves quiet, "gather up" our hearts, sit in silence, and spend time with God our Father. It's like when a married couple just sits together, holding hands, or when a baby rests silently in her mother's arms. It's a time of profound communion and rest.

This sounds simple, but it's not always so easy. It requires making time for the Lord and a firm determination not to give up in seeking to know Him. When thoughts, boredom, distractions, or emotions pull our mind in many directions, we need to allow God our Father to pull our will back to silence and recollection. Then the Holy Spirit can continue pouring His love into our hearts.

Just like a human relationship where we only grow through the process of building trust and openness, contemplative prayer is only possible if we make ourselves vulnerable to God our Father. In doing so, we allow God our Father into our souls in a deeper and more profound way. This

involves effort on our part, but ultimately, contemplation is a grace that God gives. This is an important point: all prayer involves both our own effort and God our Father's grace. We cooperate with God our Father's grace in willing acceptance of His invitation to spiritual growth, and this cooperation makes the experience of God our Father's love in contemplative prayer an attainable goal (CCC 2713).

Tip for Lent: Set aside a regular time in your routine to adore the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. Acknowledge the distractions and thoughts that enter our minds, and set them aside for now. Sit before Him and simply soak in His lovely presence.

Content adapted from the St. Paul Centre for Biblical Theology
(<https://stpaulcenter.com/an-introduction-to-the-types-of-prayer/>)

Appendix 2: Lenten Sacrifices

“What are you giving up for Lent?” This question often comes up in conversations with our Catholic family and friends in the lead up to Ash Wednesday. Perhaps this year we will choose to give up social media or sugary drinks. Do we, however, understand the meaning behind the Lenten sacrifice?

Many of us have heard the verse, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). In other words, we must be willing to let go of our desires and plans in order to allow Him to renew our souls. That is what Lent is really about; not that giving up candy for 40 days is going to get us into heaven, but to rid ourselves of our sinful ways so that we can be filled with His Spirit and become more like Him. As Jesus went into the desert to face temptation, we too let ourselves go through temptation by challenging ourselves and asking Jesus to help us through it. We undergo a “spiritual death” so that on Easter, we may rise with Him.

This year, let us take some time to consider the areas of our lives where we want to die to our desires. Here are a few tips to help us decide our Lenten sacrifices.

1. Lent isn't meant for dieting fads

It is common to find someone who is giving up sweets and/or coffee for Lent. Some may have a real addiction to something that is truly harming their body, and, in that case, giving up something food-related would be appropriate. However, in other cases, it's important to look at what you are really worshipping—God our Father, or your body? Is the food we are giving up really going to put you through an emptiness that you can fill in with Jesus, or is it just a convenient (but not so holy) time-frame to use to begin a new diet?

Instead, let us perform an examination of conscience and discover the areas of our lives that require His healing touch (see below for an example). Perhaps we are suffering from a vice such as pornography or drunkenness. This Lent, let us ask God our Father for the grace and

strength to overcome these sins that are preventing us from truly loving Him and our neighbour as we should.

2. You can add something

The common question for the season is, “What are you giving up for Lent?” However, did you know that we can actually add something, like additional prayer or attending daily Mass? The real purpose of this new practice is to be challenged spiritually and strengthen our prayer life and relationship with Him.

We can also choose to be more loving to those around us. It is common for us to fail to show love to those closest to us. Let us then strive to be loving in our words and deeds towards family members this season. It can be something as simple as wishing our spouse a good day at work or going out of our way to buy our parents’ favourite dish.

3. Give up AND add something

How many of us have claimed that we don’t have time to pray? In fact, the bigger question is, are we treating Jesus like an item on our to-do list? For example, we can sacrifice watching our new Korean drama or Netflix binge to spend time in prayer instead. Alternatively, replace a bad habit with something spiritual, such as giving up smoking and donate the money that you saved from not buying cigarettes to a charity. With Lent, we are supposed to rid ourselves of what distracts us from Christ, empty ourselves of worldly things, and set our hearts and minds on things above.

4. Charity

Along with prayer and fasting, almsgiving is one of the three pillars of Lenten practices. Being selfless and in solidarity with the poor is a great way to empty ourselves for Christ. We remember that Jesus had a great love for the last, lost, and least in society: therefore, acts of charity help us to do His work. Find a charity or a non-profit organisation whose work and mission you resonate with and enquire about volunteering with them this Lent!

Content adapted from Catholic Link (<https://catholic-link.org/lent-isnt-meant-to-be-sweet/>)

Appendix 3: A Brief Examination of Conscience (Based on the Ten Commandments)

I: I am the Lord your God: you shall not have strange Gods before me.

Have I treated people, events, or things as more important than God?

II: You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

Have my words, actively or passively, put down God, the Church, or people?

III: Remember to keep holy the Lord's Day.

Do I go to Mass every Sunday (or Saturday Vigil) and on Holy Days of Obligation? Do I avoid, when possible, work that impedes worship to God, joy for the Lord's Day, and proper relaxation of mind and body? Do I look for ways to spend time with family or in service on Sunday?

IV: Honour your father and your mother.

Do I show my parents due respect? Do I seek to maintain good communication with my parents where possible? Do I criticise them for lacking skills I think they should have?

V: You shall not kill.

Have I harmed another through physical, verbal, or emotional means, including gossip or manipulation of any kind?

VI: You shall not commit adultery.

Have I respected the physical and sexual dignity of others and of myself?

VII: You shall not steal.

Have I taken or wasted time or resources that belonged to another?

VIII: You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

Have I gossiped, told lies, or embellished stories at the expense of another?

IX: You shall not covet your neighbour's spouse.

Have I honoured my spouse with my full affection and exclusive love?

X: You shall not covet your neighbour's goods.

Am I content with my own means and needs, or do I compare myself to others unnecessarily?

*Content adapted from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
(<https://www.usccb.org/resources/Examination-of-Conscience-Ten-Commandments.pdf>)*

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Writer & Editorial Team

Agnes Ngou
Arthur Goh
Daphne Leong
Desmond Soon
Gillian Yeong
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Jervis Kang
Looi Wan Sue
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Rev. Fr. Terence Pereira
Sara Wee







Translations:

Archdiocesan Commission for the Apostolate of Mandarin-speaking (ACAMS)
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Designer:

Paschal East Design



-  2 Highland Road #02-19 S(549102)
-  6911 0420
-  one.org.sg
-  enquiries.one@catholic.org.sg
-  [@officeforthenewevangelisation](#)
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