



TURNING
TO *God*

Daily Reflections
on the Lenten Readings for Mass

INTRODUCTION

Our lives as followers of Jesus are characterized by the process of life-long conversion. This demands a constant attempt to see the world the way Jesus does and act in it as he invites us to do. Conversion requires our conscious decision to live more responsibly in the light of our faith relationship to God through Jesus in the Holy Spirit. Lent is a special season when we concentrate on re-forming our self and our life by turning toward God and away from the evil forces that dominate us and our social systems. It is a life-long challenge to align ourselves and our world with Jesus' kingdom worldview and live out the obligations of the new relationship in the community of disciples. We hope that these reflections taken from our daily booklet called *Words of Grace* and that are related to the Church's daily Lectionary readings will help you draw closer to God and to others this Lent.

— Steve Mueller, Editor

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Maria Boulding, *The Coming of God* (Canterbury Press, 2001). Walter Brueggemann, *Inscribing the Text: Sermons and Prayers of Walter Brueggemann* (Fortress Press, 2004). Anthony de Mello, *Contact With God* (Doubleday, 2003). Kathleen Norris, *Amazing Grace* (Riverhead Books, 1998). N.T. Wright, *Simply Jesus* (HarperOne, 2011). Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Road to Daybreak* (Doubleday, 1988). Charles E. Miller, CM, *As Rain That Falls* (Alba House, 1988). Edward Hays, *Chasing Joy: Musings on Life in a Bittersweet World* (Forest of Peace Books, 2007). Thomas Moore, *Writing in the Sand* (Hay House, 2009). Mother Teresa, *Love: A Fruit Always in Season* (Ignatius, 1987). Richard Rohr, *Hope Against Darkness* (Franciscan Media, 2002). Madeleine L'Engle, *And It Was Good: Reflections on Beginnings* (Harold Shaw Publishers, 1983). Joyce Rupp, *Fresh Bread and Other Gifts of Spiritual Nourishment* (Ave Maria, 1985). Wayne Teasdale, *A Monk in the World: Cultivating a Spiritual Life* (New World Library, 2003). John Powell, SJ, *Through the Eyes of Faith* (Tabor, 1992). Joan Chittister, *Essential Writings* (Orbis Books, 2014). Walter Brueggemann, *The Collected Sermons* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2011). Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Letters To Marc About Jesus* (HarperCollins, 1998). Emilie Griffin, *Wonderful and Dark Is This Road: Discovering the Mystic Path* (Paraclete Press, 2004). Andrew Harvey, *Son of Man: The Mystical Path to Christ* (Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 1999). Fulton J. Sheen, *Treasure in Clay* (Doubleday, 2008). William C. Placher, *Mark* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2010). Joyce Rupp, *Inviting God In* (Ave Maria Press, 2001). Pope John XXIII, *Journal of a Soul* (McGraw-Hill, 1965).

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LIVING FROM OUR DEEP CENTER

Jl 2:12-18 / 2 Cor 5:20—6:2 / Mt 6:1-6, 16-18

To respond to the invitation to pray, you need a measure of silence in your life. In today's world silence is in short supply. Many people can, however, contrive some islands of silence in their lives. But silence is partly an interior quality; you can learn to live from your own deep center, rather than in the ego with its clamorous demands. You can make positive use of any period of silence that does occur, rather than looking on it as an empty stretch of time to be endured or filled up somehow. Silence like this is not a threat but an invitation to depth, to listening, to a loving communion in joy. Contemplation, trust and reaching out to people go together. Christ is in you, yours to give.

—Maria Boulding
The Coming of God

*How might I better use silence this Lent
to discover Christ's presence in me?*

“Merciful God, you called us forth from the dust of the earth; you claimed us for Christ in the waters of baptism. Look upon us as we enter these Forty Days bearing the mark of ashes, and bless our journey through the desert of Lent to the font of rebirth.”

—Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers

CHOOSE LIFE!

Dt 30:15-20 / Lk 9:22-25

As we begin the season of Lent, we are invited to reflect on what it means for us to be disciples of Jesus. Today's readings present us with a seeming paradox. The first reading from Deuteronomy calls us to "choose life." In the Gospel, Jesus predicts his passion, death, and resurrection and tells us that it is in losing our life that we will save it. We're called to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Jesus. He warns us of the cost of discipleship. He challenges his followers: "Can you pay the price?" Could it be that in order to truly choose life, we must be willing to lose it?

—Angeline Hubert

*How can I choose life?
Are there things that I must lose in order
to follow Jesus more fully?*

Lent (from the Germanic word for Spring) is a period 40 days (excluding Sundays) of preparation for Easter. Recalling Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness prior to his public ministry, Lent provides a time of spiritual discipline and growth for Christians by encouraging conversion through prayer, fasting and good deeds.

GOD'S IDEA OF FASTING

Is 58:1-9a / Mt 9:14-15

Too bad true fasting isn't about not eating. We know how to calorie-count, cleanse, detox and purge. Is God watching? How come we're not thin yet? Look. There's the drive-thru. It's a Friday in Lent. A fish fillet, please. But the fast that God requires of us is so much harder. Do the tedious work of changing immigration laws. Advocate for immediate, available health care for those who are mentally ill. Adopt hard to place older children who live in foster care. Visit the elderly. Care for the sick. Feed people because they are hungry. Clothe them because they are cold. And, that the world might live, take better care of the environment. Happy Lent. May your fasting be a source of renewal and grace.

—Kathy McGovern

*What difficult task will you pursue
for the kingdom of God this Lent?*

Fasting is partaking of only one full meal and two smaller meals not equaling the main meal. **Abstinence** is the voluntary self-denial of meat or of foods prepared with meat on those days prescribed by the Church as penitential (Ash Wednesday, all Fridays of Lent, and Good Friday).

OPENING OUR HEARTS

Is 58:9b-14 / Lk 5:27-32

Lent points us to conversion of heart as the chief characteristic of this season of grace. The prophetic appeal challenges us and reminds us that conversion is not to be reduced to outward forms or vague intentions, but engages and transforms one's entire existence beginning from the center of the person, from the conscience. We are invited to embark upon a journey on which, by defying routine, we strive to open our eyes and ears, but especially to open our hearts. With its invitations to conversion, Lent comes to awaken us, to rouse us from torpor, from the risk of moving forward by inertia, to remind us that it is possible to create something new within ourselves and around us.

—Pope Francis

What conversion am I most hoping for during this Lenten season?

The Romans delegated the collection of import-export taxes, customs fees and tolls for using roads, markets and harbors to Jewish nationals. So **tax collectors** were considered traitors to their nation as well as crooks. These men and their families were barred from the synagogues and forbidden to give testimony in court.

MONEY CAN'T BUY GOD'S LOVE

Dt 26:4-10 / Rom 10:8-13 / Lk 4:1-13

As vital endeavors often do, Lent begins with a test. The Evil One tempts the Lord to abandon his true and arduous mission of redemption for the lucrative benefits of comfort, power, and possessions. Jesus rejects the fleeting rewards of this world, beating Paul McCartney to the philosophical punch by centuries in declaring that “money can’t buy me love.” In the finite world love can be bought because of human exploitation, vulnerability, or opportunism. The eternal love of God, however, is not for sale. Followers of Christ reach for a higher love, risking rejection, persecution, and crucifixion for the only priceless gift that can save the world. —Jerry Welte

*How much am I willing to risk
or pay for the priceless love of God?*

The Easter Duty is the serious obligation binding Roman Catholics to receive the eucharist sometime during the Easter season (in the US, from the first Sunday of Lent to and including Trinity Sunday, 10 days after Ascension Thursday).

CHRISTLIKE COMPASSION

Lv 19:1-2, 11-18 / Mt 25:31-46

Everyone wants to receive compassion: but sadly, few show it to others. You must show compassion in this life if you hope to receive it in the next. What is human compassion like? It makes you concerned for the misery in which the poor live. What is divine compassion like? It forgives sinners. What sort of people are we if we want to take what God gives, but refuse to give when God asks? Christ is now hungry and thirsty in his poor, and what he receives on earth he returns in heaven. A poor person is begging from you, and you are begging from God. The beggar asks for a scrap to eat, you ask for eternal life. Give to the beggar, so that you may deserve to receive from Christ.

—St. Caesarius, Bishop of Arles
Sermon

Who most needs my help and compassion today?

Penance or penitence is the spiritual change (conversion of mind and heart) by which one turns away from sin, and all that it implies, toward God, through personal renewal guided by the Holy Spirit. It involves sorrow and contrition for sin, together with other internal and external acts of amendment.

ON EARTH AS IN HEAVEN

Is 55:10-11 / Mt 6:7-15

The vision of God's future is not about angels who have gone to heaven floating around in the sky with their loved ones. This vision, rather, is about God's kingdom coming on earth as it already is in heaven. God's rule where the practices of justice and mercy and kindness and peaceableness are every day the order of the day. It is a vision of the world as a peaceable neighborliness in which no one is under threat, no one is at risk, no one is in danger, because all are safe, all are valued, all are honored, all are cared for. And this community of peaceableness will come only when the vicious cycles of violent accumulation are broken.

—Walter Brueggemann
Inscribing the Text

*In what small way can I make
God's kingdom come today?*

Isaiah illustrates the Israelite belief (Gen 1:6) that at creation God separated the heavenly waters from those below by creating a dome (sky) to make dry land and keep the waters above the heavens from inundating the earth except through openings through which **“the rain and snow come down”** to water the earth.

EXAMINING YOUR DAY

Jon 3:1-10 / Lk 11:29-32

I earnestly pray you not to forget your own progress in virtue: for you are well aware that one who does not make progress in virtue, goes backwards. At night, before you go to sleep, examine your conscience, enquiring into the thoughts, words and deeds of the whole day. Look very closely into what you have omitted to do from negligence, or what you have done badly, and resolve seriously on the necessary correction, which you must then carry out with great fidelity.

If as soon as you have perceived your fault, you strive to correct it, our merciful Lord will not fail to accompany your repentance with his voluntary gifts, and turn even your past errors to your great profit by loading you with divine graces.

—St. Francis Xavier

*What obstacles to my progress in virtue
most need my attention now?*

Nineveh was a large Assyrian city located on the eastern bank of the Tigris River across from the modern city of Mosul in Iraq. From the 11th century on it was the royal residence of the Assyrian kings until its destruction in 612 BC by the conquering Babylonians.

ASK AND YOU SHALL RECEIVE

Est C:12, 14-16, 23-25 / Mt 7:7-12

Jesus' words on prayer sound so simple but behind that simple formula lies a whole way of life: a life of faith, of forgiveness of our brothers and sisters, of generosity with those in need, of unworldliness, of total trusting in and dependence on God. Petition is not just a form of prayer; it is a whole way of life. When we understand this, Jesus' words about the tremendous efficacy of prayer have great credibility. We must have a balanced diet in our prayer life with room for adoration, contemplation, various forms of prayer, meditation, the sacraments, Scripture reading, intercession—and petition. One thing, however, is clear: we never outgrow the need for making simple petitionary prayer, no matter how much we progress in prayer.

—Anthony de Mello
Contact With God

What do I most want to ask God for today? Why?

The **Book of Esther**, along with those of Tobit, Judith, Daniel and Maccabees, are later Jewish writings that help the community navigate the difficulties of living in the encroaching Hellenistic culture. Esther shows how a Jewish woman can use both her beauty and her strength to save her people from persecution.

LET YOUR ACTIONS SPEAK

Ez 18:21-28 / Mt 5:20-26

Actions speak louder than words; let your words teach and your actions speak. We are full of words but empty of actions. Happy are those whose words issue from the Holy Spirit and not from themselves! We should speak, then, as the Holy Spirit gives us the gift of speech. Our humble and sincere request to the Spirit for ourselves should be that we may bring the day of Pentecost to fulfillment, insofar as the Spirit infuses us with his grace, by using our bodily senses in a perfect manner by keeping the commandments. Likewise we shall request that we may be filled with a keen sense of sorrow and with fiery tongues for confessing the faith.

—St. Anthony of Padua
Sermon

*How can I let my actions show
my commitment to live the gospel?*

In order to stop the escalating pattern that often leads to killing, Jesus tells his listeners to avoid not only anger but also abusive and disrespectful name-calling like “you empty-head” (Aramaic, **raqa**) and “You fool” (Greek, **moros**, the root of our word moron).

BE PERFECT

Dt 26:16-19 / Mt 5:43-48

Perfectionism is one of the scariest words I know. But in the New Testament the word that has been translated as “perfect” does not mean to set forth an impossible goal, or the perfectionism that would have me strive for it at any cost. It is taken from a Latin word meaning complete, entire, full-grown. To those who originally heard it, the word would convey “mature” rather than what we mean today by “perfect.” To “be perfect,” in the sense that Jesus means it, is to make room for growth, for the changes that bring us to maturity, to ripeness. To mature is to lose adolescent self-consciousness so as to be able to make a gift of oneself, as a parent, as teacher, friend, spouse.

—Kathleen Norris
Amazing Grace

*What most keeps me from being
a more mature follower of Christ?*

The idea of God as “**perfect**” does not appear in the Old Testament and in any case is rather abstract. The connection might be to God’s holiness, which has no counterpart in our earthly experience. The word for “perfect” refers to the wholeness of God who cares for all people.

THE CROSS IS HIS THRONE

Gn 15:5-12, 17-18 / Phil 3:17—4:1 / Lk 9:28b-36

At the transfiguration, the baptismal voice is heard once more: “This is my son, my chosen one: listen to him” (Lk 9:35). This is another explicit heaven-and-earth moment. Luke suggests that the subject of Jesus’ conversation with Moses and Elijah was “his departure,” (his “exodus,” and Luke undoubtedly intended us to hear all the overtones that word would generate). This dovetails with Luke’s consistent emphasis on the divine plan that “must” be fulfilled that would send Jesus not to a throne, but to a cross—or, rather, as all four gospel writers insist, a cross that is to be seen as a throne. This is how Jesus is enthroned as “King of the Jews.” His vocation to be Israel’s Messiah and his vocation to suffer and die belong intimately together.

—N.T. Wright
Simply Jesus

*How have I experienced God’s presence
shining forth in my life?*

In Greek and Roman literature, **transfiguration** (Greek, metamorphosis, change in form) was a common motif describing the way gods appeared to humans in everyday life and especially in warfare. But Jesus’ transfiguration is different—it is a glimpse of God’s glory breaking forth from Jesus’ human form.

STOP JUDGING YOURSELF

Dn 9:4b-10 / Lk 6:36-38

Jesus came to open my ears to another voice that says, “I am your God, I have molded you with my own hands, and I love what I have made. I love you with a love that has no limits, because I love you as I am loved. Do not judge yourself. Do not condemn yourself. Do not reject yourself. Let my love touch the deepest, most hidden corners of your heart and reveal to you your own beauty, a beauty that you have lost sight of, but which will become visible to you again in the light of my mercy. Come, come, let me wipe your tears, and let my mouth come close to your ear and say to you, I love you, I love you, I love you.”

—Henri J.M. Nouwen
The Road to Daybreak

How can I show thanks to God today for loving me?

The **Book of Daniel** combines examples of God’s care for faithful Jews in their hostile Greek environment and sections depicting God’s triumph over evil in our world. It offers hope in times of crisis by stressing that God will always deliver those who remain faithful to the covenant

THE LORD'S SET DESIGNER

2 Sm 7:4-5a, 12-14a, 16 / Rom 4:13, 16-18, 22 /

Mt 1:16, 18-21, 24a or Lk 2:41-51a

As a high school campus minister, I observed that drama students could be divided into two classes of people: onstage players and behind the scenes workers. Actors were always front and center and typically reappeared for a curtain call. Meanwhile, prop managers and set decorators remained faceless and invisible, rarely coming out to take a bow. Joseph calls to mind those backstage workers. Most of his life plays out behind the scenes as he sets the stage for the Lord's mission in relative obscurity. Those whose lives fulfill similar behind-the-scenes roles deserve our grateful remembrance as they willingly embrace the task of being the Lord's prop managers or set designers so that the drama of God's love may unfold smoothly and gracefully.

—Jerry Welte

*How can I serve the Lord from behind
the scenes in subtle and selfless ways?*

In the biblical world, **betrothal** was the formal process between families before marriage that legally bound the partners to be wed. Thus it could only be dissolved by a bill of divorce. During this time, the woman does not live with the man nor have sexual relations with him.

THE RELUCTANT PROPHET

Jer 18:18-20 / Mt 20:17-28

Poor Jeremiah. Of all the prophets in the Old Testament, his life is the most similar to Jesus. Called from his mother's womb, he prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem to the kings and people of Judah. This was a terrifying thing to hear. The prophets who counseled calm and a continuation of the status quo were much beloved and ate in the palace. Jeremiah they tossed in a cistern. In retrospect, of course, we all wish we'd listened to the true prophets in our lives. We remember with humility the guidance we received from parents and teachers, and wonder why we never listened. And now we, like Jeremiah, stand before God on behalf of our own children, who aren't interested in listening to us. And so the world goes.

—Kathy McGovern

*What were the best words of advice I ever ignored?
That others ignored from me?*

Over the centuries, the **chalice** (Latin, *calyx*, a cup) has become much more ornate than the simple cup that Jesus probably used. When Jesus asks the disciples whether they can drink his chalice, he means can they share in his portion of suffering instead of just expecting rewards and glory.

IGNORING THE POOR

Jer 17:5-10 / Lk 16:19-31

What was the crime of the rich man? There is no suggestion that he had acquired his wealth dishonestly or that he had deprived others of their livelihood. He could have asked, “What have I done wrong?” The point is that he did nothing. He ignored Lazarus. His sin was one of omission, not commission. We are guilty of sins of commission and omission. Our society is filled with indigent people. Every city and town has its homeless and its hungry. In every neighborhood there are shut-ins, the handicapped and the elderly. If Lazarus is not at our doorstep, he is around the corner or up the block. We do not have to be wealthy to bear an obligation to help those in need.

—Charles E. Miller, CM
As Rain That Falls

*What can I do to notice the needs
of the poor around me?*

For the ancients the universe had three distinct levels: heaven, earth and the netherworld (under or below the earth called *Sheol*) each separated by such a **great chasm** that only God (and those God sends as messengers like the angels or Jesus) can move from one level to the other.

CURBING JEALOUSY

Gn 37:3-4, 12-13a, 17b-28a / Mt 21:33-43, 45-46

Both readings today reek with jealousy: brothers against brothers, tenants against landowners. What is it that causes such animosity? It seems from the readings that the jealousy is caused by someone being favored over someone else. The brothers were angry that their father was showing favoritism toward Joseph. The tenants were angry because, even though they had worked very hard, the inheritance was going to the son and not to them. In both cases, the cruel action is revenge. Does it get them anywhere? No. The tenants are killed and, even though the reading doesn't specify, we know that Joseph rose up to power in Egypt. When jealousy rises up within, it is important to stop and think about the consequences of actions.

—Dorothy Jonaitis

*What action did you take today that was done
for peace and not for revenge?*

The **Pharisees** were a lay group, not priests, characterized by their zeal for the Jewish law. In Jesus' time, they were influential among the ordinary people because they were living examples of what every Jew was called upon to do.

THE PRODIGAL FAMILY

Mi 7:14-15, 18-20 / Lk 15:1-3, 11-32

Being prodigal or extravagant runs in this family. We can be prodigal in a bad sense like the sons by wasting our resources and wrecking our most important relationships. But we can also be prodigal in a good sense like the father by lavishly offering our love without any strings attached. Jesus demands this prodigal love as the root of all genuine reconciliation. This kind of love is behind Jesus' desire to seek out sinners, welcome them back into a loving relationship with himself and with God, and then share a festive meal of companionship to show that they are once again back in the household. Jesus' parable challenges us to decide how prodigal we will be with our love and how far we will go to imitate the excessive and extravagant love of God.

—Steve Mueller

How can I be more prodigal with my love today?

Reconciliation is a common Christian image for the experience of salvation in which God overcomes the breakdown in our relationship caused by sin and makes the relationship right. Reconciliation presumes that an existing relationship has broken down, and describes the process by which it is restored or made right again.

“REJOICE” SUNDAYS

Ex 3:1-8a, 13-15 / 1 Cor 10:1-6, 10-12 / Lk 13:1-9

The Church, preoccupied with the need to be taken seriously by the world, is constantly cautious of appearing as foolish or silly, and so has wisely limited celebrating rejoicing to only two Sundays out of the year. One comes in the middle Lent and is called *Laetare* Sunday, Latin for *rejoice*. To live in joy, which Paul said was the will of God for us, seems to require a change in the Church’s liturgical calendar. To remind the faithful of their duty to remain joyful while confronting all of the terrible sufferings plaguing the human family—wars, violence, famine, and global poverty—the Church should have at least one *Laetare* Sunday a month! Such monthly Joy Sundays would reinforce that God’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven!”

—Edward Hays
Chasing Joy

For what do I most rejoice about today?

“We can only approach the Kingdom of Christ by *metanoia*. This is a profound change of the whole person by which one begins to consider, judge and arrange one’s life according to the holiness and love of God, made manifest in God’s Son.”

—*The Catholic Rite of Penance*

SPEAK QUICKLY, MARY!

Is 7:10-14; 8:10 / Heb 10:4-10 / Lk 1:26-38

You have heard, O Mary, the announcement of a great mystery, and you have heard how it will happen. You have reason for astonishment and rejoicing. And since to you have been given tidings of joy and gladness, let us hear the joyous reply that we long for, so we may rejoice. You have heard what is to happen and you have believed. Believe also the way you have heard it is to happen. You have heard that you will conceive and bear a son not by a man, but by God's Holy Spirit. The angel is waiting for your answer. And we too are waiting for this word of mercy. . Give your answer quickly, my Lady, speak the word which earth and heaven are waiting for.

—St. Bernard of Clairvaux

Sermon

*Like Mary, how can I say "Yes"
and let God begin to live in me today?*

"Mary is the first Christian to follow Christ, and she is the first and most perfect model of Christ. Indeed, that is why the imitation of Mary is not only relevant to women but to all Christians."

—St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein)

JUSTICE TEMPERED BY LOVE

Dn 3:25, 34-43 / Mt 18:21-35

In every sphere of interpersonal relationships, justice must be corrected by love which is patient and kind, which possesses the characteristics of that merciful love that forms the essence of the Gospel and Christianity. Merciful love is the basis of the Lord's answer to Peter's question about how many times to forgive others. In the symbolic language of the Bible, seventy times seven times means that we must be able to forgive everyone every time. Surely this is one of the most difficult and radical commands of the Gospel. Yet how much suffering and anguish, how much futility, destruction and violence would be avoided, if only we put into practice in all our human relationships the Lord's answer to Peter.

—Pope St. John Paul II
Homily, New Orleans, 9/12/1987

*What can I do today to imitate Jesus' merciful love
and extend forgiveness to others?*

Absolution (from the Latin to set free or to acquit) is the act by which the priest, acting for Christ, grants forgiveness for sins confessed by the penitent in the sacrament of reconciliation (penance).

WALKING IN THE WAY OF THE LORD

Dt 4:1, 5-9 / Mt 5:17-19

Some people are more obedient to their GPS than to any other authority. They trust that the voice they hear will lead them where they want to go. That's essentially what Moses was telling his people about the law. It wasn't an imposition from the outside, but a guide they could choose that would lead them to the good life. Jesus went to the heart of that law, showing his disciples how to fulfill it by remaining focused on the destination it promised rather than worrying about the formalities of each step along the way. He shows us that fulfilling the law, like walking on water, was easy if you only worried about the goal. The minute we focus on our own path or righteousness we're sunk.

—Mary M. McGlone, CSJ

*What can I do today to remind myself
of where God's law is trying to lead me?*

The Law and the prophets is a convenient way of identifying the two major categories of Israel's sacred scriptures, the Law (found in the first five books of the Bible or Torah) and the prophets who communicated God's messages for the covenant community.

FACING MY DEMONS

Jer 7:23-28 / Lk 11:14-23

Possession is not just a state of anxiety, and Jesus was not merely a master therapist. He wasn't curing mental illness but expurgating the demonic. Psychology concerns itself with the emotional response to being possessed; Jesus faced the demonic head-on and was able to heal a person by ridding him of the demonic influence that controlled him. If jealousy is ruining your life, you have to arrive at deep-seated realization about who you are and what life is about before that demon will depart. If envy is giving you violent thoughts, you have to change the way you see things before it will leave you alone. If greed consumes you, you have to face this adversary to be free of it.

—Thomas Moore
Writing in the Sand

*What, like the demons, seems to control me
and make it hard to respond to God at work in me?*

In earlier biblical books like Job, **the satan** or accuser is a kind of Grand Inquisitor who tests human faith. After the exile, **Satan** was understood as evil spirit, subordinate but hostile to God, struggling with God for domination of the earth, and tempting humans from following God's ways.

LOVE IS SHOWN IN DEEDS

Hos 14:2-10 / Mk 12:28-34

Love does not live on words, nor can it be explained by words—love is proved in deeds. Perhaps it is only a smile, a little visit, or simply writing a letter for a blind person, reading for someone. This is only a little bit, yes, a very tiny bit, but it will be our love of God in action. Never think that a small action done to your neighbor is not worth much. It is not how much we do that is pleasing to God, but how much love we put into the doing. That is what the good God looks for—because God is love and God made us in the divine image to love and to be loved.

—Mother Teresa

Love: A Fruit Always in Season

*How can I show my love in deeds
to those around me today?*

For biblical people, **love** was not so much the romantic personal attachment we envision today but a fierce attachment to one's group, especially the family. This attitude was matched by actions. Love presumed intense loyalty and expected one to do good for those in one's group.

THE RELIGIOUS GENIUS OF JESUS

Hos 6:1-6 / Lk 18:9-14

The absolute religious genius of Jesus is that he utterly refuses all debt codes, purity codes, religious quarantines and the searching for sinners. He refuses to divide the world into the pure and the impure, much to the chagrin of almost everybody—then and now. Jesus is shockingly not upset with sinners, a shock so total that most Christians to this day refuse to see it. He is only upset with people who do not think they are sinners: these denying, fearful and illusory ones are the blockage. They are much more likely to hate and feel no compunction. After Jesus we find out that sin lies in the very act of expelling. There is no place to expel it to. We have met the enemy, and the enemy is us.

—Richard Rohr
Hope Against Darkness

*How can I imitate better Jesus' attitudes
in my relations with others?*

Ephraim was the second son of Joseph, but he received the first-born's blessing (Gen 48:17-20) instead of Manasseh. As Joseph's primary heir, Ephraim became synonymous with the northern kingdom of Israel (comprised of 10 of the 12 tribes of Israel) as in today's first reading.

GOD IS MUCH TOO LENIENT

Jos 5:9a, 10-12 / 2 Cor 5:17-21 / Lk 15:1-3, 11-32

We are so familiar with the Prodigal Son Parable that we forget part of the message—the response of the elder brother. It seems evident that God is far more loving than we are, and far more forgiving. All God wants is for us to repent, to say, “I’m sorry, Father. Forgive me,” as the Prodigal Son does. And the father rejoices in his return. But we don’t like to recognize ourselves in the elder brother who goes off and sulks because the father, so delighted at the return of the younger brother, prepares a great feast. Punishment? A party! Because the younger brother has learned the lesson he has, in a sense, already punished himself. But, like the elder brother, we’re apt to think the father much too lenient.

—Madeleine L’Engle
And It Was Good

*When have I felt most like the elder brother?
Why and with what results?*

Sinners were those who lived outside God’s Law (Gentiles) or disregarded it in their lives or occupations—e.g., **tax collectors** who extorted more than what they needed to pay the Romans and shepherds who would pasture their sheep on other people’s land, thus stealing food for their sheep.

SIGNS & WONDERS

Is 65:17-21 / Jn 4:43-54

Meeting God and knowing God is a knowing with one's head and with one's heart and allowing it to transform us. This knowing of the other in our lives in a personal way comes about by walking through our very ordinary days, walking with a heart that is open to surprises and wonders in the simple beauty of people and events. It comes about through a listening spirit, one that is sensitive to the graced insight of the moment and aware of the feelings that accompany that insightful moment. It is based on the belief that it is out of the daily stream of business and activity, "the here and now," that we often experience the revelation of God and the blessing of sacramentality.

—Joyce Rupp

Fresh Bread and Other Gifts of Spiritual Nourishment

How have I become more aware of God's everyday presence during this Lenten season?

Although we use the word "miracles," the biblical writers used the terms "deeds of power," "**signs**" and "**wonders**" to describe Jesus' actions (cures, exorcisms, resuscitations and nature wonders) that reorder our world from the domination of Satan and evil powers to the kingdom governance of God.

DO YOU WANT TO BE WELL?

Ez 47:1-9, 12 / Jn 5:1-16

Like the notion of tough love, in which families and friends must help their loved ones escape destructive patterns by challenging them, tough grace is a gift from God to the soul in need of growth. Suffering provides us with lessons that dispose us more readily to divine union and helps us to consider those things we often take for granted. We are pushed to make decisions about our relationship with God. Tough grace highlights just what we need for the spiritual journey and counsels us to leave the rest behind. In this way, tough grace is itself a gift, though it may be the kind of gift we aren't too anxious to receive, until we witness its profound transformation effects on us. Then we understand.

—Wayne Teasdale
A Monk in the World

How have I experienced God's "tough grace" this Lent?

In ancient times, a **temple** (Latin, a consecrated space) was the place where heaven and earth met, thus making it holy because of God's presence. So, as for Ezekiel, it was the place from which earth's life-giving power, fertility and abundance (salvation) spreads out in all four directions.

I COULDN'T LOVE YOU MORE

Is 49:8-15 / Jn 5:17-30

Would God love me more if I tried harder and became a better Christian? I feel sure that God would reply, “I couldn’t love you more. I have given you all my love. Like all real love, my love is a gift. You are free to accept or reject it. Even if a mother were to forget the child of her womb, I would never forget you.” God could not love us more because God has already offered us all his love for us to accept or reject. I truly believe this is the way it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. God is love.

—John Powell, SJ
Through the Eyes of Faith

How can I accept and thank God for his love for me?

The **Rite of Peace at Mass** is a gesture or sign of blessing—e.g., a handshake—exchanged by the assembly after saying the Lord’s Prayer and before they share in Holy Communion. It is a sign of their desire for peace and unity for the Church and for the whole human family.

GOD IS IN THE DETAILS

Ex 32:7-14 / Jn 5:31-47

Life is not made up of crises; life is made up of little things we love to ignore in order to get on to the exciting things in life. But God is in the details. God is in what it takes in us to be faithful to them. God is in the routines that make us what we are. The way we do the little things in life is the mark of the bigness of our souls. The problem with dailiness is that it takes patience and persistence. It takes a willingness to give of ourselves beyond what our role descriptions demand. It requires us to pour ourselves out, not to store ourselves up for our own satisfaction.

—Joan Chittister
Essential Writings

*For whom might I do some little things
that might make their life a little better?*

“O Lord, my God, I am glad you have come to me because in your loving kindness you desire to dwell in me. You ask me to open the door of my soul so that you may enter into it with your loving kindness and dispel the darkness of my mind.”

—St. John Chrysostom

KEYS TO SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Wis 2:1a, 12-22 / Jn 7:1-2, 10, 25-30

All spiritual growth comes from reading and reflection. By reading we learn what we did not know; by reflection we retain what we have learned. Reading the Holy Scriptures confers two benefits. It trains the mind to understand them; it turns our attention from the follies of the world and leads us to the love of God. If we want to be always in God's company, we must pray regularly and read regularly. When we pray, we talk to God; when we read, God talks to us. We must first be eager to understand what we are reading before we are fit to proclaim what we have learned. Conscientious readers will be more concerned to carry out what they have read than merely to acquire knowledge of it.

—St. Isidore of Seville
Book of Maxims

What might I do to make spiritual reading, reflection and prayer more important in my daily life?

The **Jewish feast of Tabernacles** (Latin, tent, Hebrew *sukot*) also called the feast of Ingathering or Booths was a major seven day spring harvest festival at the beginning of their new year. People lived in the fields in temporary dwellings (tents) commemorating the exodus and gift of the land.

LISTENING FOR PROPHETIC VOICES

Jer 11:18-20 / Jn 7:40-53

In Jesus' day, since Jerusalem was the center of religious tradition, one who came from Galilee would have been a suspect leader. Was Jesus an authentic prophet? Was Jesus a revered rabbi? The crowds followed Jesus because they had never before heard anyone who spoke like him. This implies that the religious leaders were not giving the people the spiritual teaching they needed. What does that say to us about hearing the truth from God? Where do we get that truth and how do we hear it? Like those who condemned Jeremiah, do we condemn the prophets in our midst? Today we might be called to listen to new voices in our midst and pray for the gift of discernment to decide what is true and what is false.

—Dorothy Jonaitis

What voice should I hear that I might have been ignoring?

When Jeremiah calls Yahweh the **God of Hosts**, this has nothing to do with the little white wafers we receive at communion (Latin, *hostia*, a sacrificial victim). Instead, it identifies the angelic armies (Latin, *hostis*, a stranger or enemy, hence *hostile* soldiers) who carry out God's commands.

THE CHALLENGE OF FORGIVENESS

Is 43:16-21 / Phil 3:8-14 / Jn 8:1-11

To forgive is to break the vicious cycles of death by a fresh act of utter generosity. Forgiveness is not playacting, not romantic religion, not casual hugs. It is a decision to begin at a different place. Without forgiveness, the world works its way to death and destructiveness, generation after generation. Unforgiveness leads to death, both for the victim and for the perpetrator. The news is not just that God forgives, but that God has created a people to have as its main, single business in the world the forgiveness of sins, the cancellation of debts, the breaking of the power of fear and hate and death, in order to start again.

—Walter Brueggemann
The Collected Sermons

*How has my lack of forgiveness kept me
from being a better Christian?*

Execution by **stoning** is mentioned several times in the Bible, usually as a spontaneous event although the Jewish *Torah* prescribes it for several crimes such as idolatry, blasphemy, child sacrifice, divination, adultery, Sabbath violation, fornication by an unmarried woman, rebellion of children and an ox that gores.

STAND UP FOR LIFE

Dn 13:1-9, 15-17, 19-30, 33-62 / Jn 8:12-20

Moses told his people “I have set before you life and death” (Dt 30:19). Today’s first reading illustrates that choice with all the drama of a soap opera and gives us phrases by which to measure our own thinking and acting. The elders “suppressed their consciences,” while Daniel allowed God’s Spirit to spur him to action on behalf of the innocent victim. We know how easy it is to avert our eyes from heaven and justify whatever it is we want in spite of the cost to another. We know too that God’s Spirit labors to advocate with us on behalf of those who need our voice. Each day presents some opportunity to collaborate with the forces of life or death. Let us choose life.

—Mary M. McGlone, CSJ

*What can I do to be more attentive to
God’s Spirit spurring me to action today?*

In Semitic languages, “son of or **daughter of**” means one belonging to a certain group. Thus Daniel distinguishes between the “daughters of Israel” (the Northern kingdom) who gave in to the elders’ lustful desires and the “daughter of Judah” (the Southern kingdom), Susannah, who did not and is vindicated.

SEEKING MORE

Nm 21:4-9 / Jn 8:21-30

Let us always seek the sight, the knowledge and the love of the Creator, who will be seen in himself, who will be seen in all his creatures, ruling everything without anxiety, upholding everything without toil, giving himself and, so to speak, distributing himself to one and all according to their capacity without any lessening or division of himself. The Father will be seen in the Son, the Son in the Father, and the Holy Spirit in both. God will be seen not as a confused reflection in a mirror, but face to face. From this vision will proceed that knowledge of which our Lord says: “This is eternal life, that they should know you the one God, and him whom you sent.”

—St. Aelred of Rievaulx
A Rule of Life for a Recluse

*Where have I most experienced God
working in me and in my life this Lent?*

In John's gospel **the world** (Greek, *cosmos*, an ordered universe) usually refers to the forces that we often experience resisting God's ordering power and opposing Jesus. Though the world is hostile to God, God is not hostile to the world but sends Jesus to save it.

JESUS COMES TO SET US FREE

Dn 3:14-20, 91-92, 95 / Jn 8:31-42

Spiritual freedom is something quite different from a spiritualized freedom. The freedom Jesus gives doesn't imply that oppressors can go on oppressing, that the poor can stay poor and the hungry stay hungry, since we are now, in a spiritual respect, free. A true spiritual freedom that touches the heart of our being in all its humanity must take effect in every sphere: physical, emotional, social and global. Freedom belongs to the core of the spiritual life; not just the freedom which releases us from forces that want to oppress us, but the freedom also to forgive others, to serve them, and to form a new bond of fellowship with them. In short, the freedom to love and to work for a free world.

—Henri J.M. Nouwen
Letters To Marc About Jesus

From what shackles do I most want Jesus to set me free?

King **Nebuchadnezar** II was an historical figure who ruled Babylon from 605-562 BC. He conquered Judah, destroyed the temple and exiled the Jews (597, 587) and thus became synonymous with an evil king. In the book of Daniel, it is not this historic figure but rather the symbolic figure that is described.

MYSTICS HIDDEN AMONG US

Gn 17:3-9 / Jn 8:51-59

I believe that we are meeting mystics every day, but we do not recognize them. Their humility and modesty is such that they pass into the crowd like Jesus in today's gospel. Perhaps we could spot them by their spiritual disciplines: prayer, meditation, fasting, study, simplicity, solitude, submission, service, confession, worship, guidance and celebration. It is possible, but not likely. For real mystics practice their deep love and service to God in ways that may fly below the radar, unobtrusively, transforming the lives of others in ways that seem sublimely plain spoken and level-headed. Except when they receive extraordinary mystical gifts (not everyone does) it is hard to pick them out in a crowd.

—Emilie Griffin

Wonderful and Dark Is This Road

Who has most exemplified Christ's ways for me in my life?

The "I AM" (put in capital letters in the translation) is God's sacred personal name (4 consonant letters YHWH, pronounced *Yahweh* in English, see Ex 3:14) which was closely related to the verb "I am." LORD in small capital letters is now used in most Bible translations to indicate this personal divine name.

THE PRICE OF JESUS' NEW VISION

Jer 20:10-13 / Jn 10:31-42

Jesus was killed by both the religious and political authorities of his time because his teachings and being aimed at creating a new form of life that would make both obsolescent. Jesus was killed because his vision of human equality in God and the sacredness of every individual implicitly subverted the entire order on which both religious and political society was based. Had Jesus simply been some kind of mystic healer with some vague “spiritual” ideas, he would have been left alone. Jesus’ fatal gift was to see the cruelty of all man-made cultures and power systems, and to call for a unification of the world in the spirit of God’s justice and mercy, and to show in his being, teaching and practice that such a new fusion was real and possible.

—Andrew Harvey
Son of Man

*How can I imitate Jesus’ desire for greater justice
and mercy in relationships today?*

In the biblical world, to **blaspheme** meant to dishonor God or something holy by speech, for example by calling God abusive names or telling lies (slander) or, as in this reading, by claiming for oneself the honor and status due to God alone. It was punishable by stoning (Lv 24:16).

GOD'S IMAGE IN EVERYONE

Ez 37:21-28 / Jn 11:45-56

How can Christians assume that they are more beloved of the Creator than any other part of his creation, when God created everything, and saw that it was good? And if God created humans in his own image, then all of humankind is part of that image, known or unknown, accepted or denied. Jesus made it very clear that sometimes those who are least aware of it serve the image best. It is truer to that image to be like the publican, aware of his unworthiness, than like the Pharisee who was puffed up with the pride. It is truer to the image to say, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief,” than to dismiss the crucifixion by saying, “It is good for one man to die for the sake of the nation.”

—Madeleine L'Engle
And It Was Good

*How can I better recognize
and respect God's image in others?*

The **Sanhedrin** (Greek, council) was the official group of Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. Its members came from all the various Jewish parties—Sadducees, Pharisees, priests, scribes and elders of the chief families—and worked closely with the High Priest to deal with the legal, political and religious matters of the community.

TREASURE IN CLAY VESSELS

Lk 19:28-40 / Is 50:4-7 / Phil 2:6-11 / Lk 22:14—23:56

Humility means recognizing that our call and all the gifts to achieve it are from God. God often chooses weak instruments. The Lord came into Jerusalem on an ass. He can ride into New York and London and down the middle aisle of any cathedral in a human nature that is not much better. He is always asking people to loan him something, for we creatures cannot give; all that we are belongs to him. He borrowed a crib in which to be born; he borrowed Peter's boat in which to preach; he borrowed the sponge of a soldier to slake his thirst; he borrowed the spear of a Roman centurion to reveal his loving heart. Why, therefore, should he not take a loan on me—this lump of clay—and put a treasure in it?

—Fulton J. Sheen
Treasure in Clay

What might Jesus be asking to borrow from me today?

Paul says “every knee should bend” and this practice is what we call today **genuflection**. It was a natural sign of submission, adoration and reverence. Persons genuflect with the right knee for example in passing before the tabernacle to acknowledge the eucharistic presence of Christ.

WE ARE ALSO BETRAYERS

Is 42:1-7 / Jn 12:1-11

Judas's function in the gospel story is to be one of the Twelve and to betray Jesus. Judas is nowhere singled out as the reprehensible or weak disciple; he is simply "one of the twelve." The first real action in Jesus' betrayal, then, comes, not from the Romans or the Jewish leaders, but from one of Jesus' own followers. Particularly in the face of the horrible history of Christian anti-Semitism, but also in the face of the general Christian instinct toward self-satisfaction, Christians need to remember that the ball that rolled down the hill toward Jesus' crucifixion got its initial push from one of Jesus' own followers, one of "us."

—William C. Placher
Mark

*How have I been tempted
to betray Jesus through my behavior?*

Passover (Greek *ta pascha*, the root of our word Paschal) was the annual Jewish family celebration remembering God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt by striking down every Egyptian firstborn, both children and animals, and "passing over" those of the Hebrews who marked their doors with blood from their sacrificed lambs.

THE LONELY JOURNEY

Is 49:1-6 / Jn 13:21-33, 36-38

The Holy Week Scriptures describe Jesus' profound aloneness and loneliness during his final days: the disciples sleeping while Jesus agonized in the garden; his followers fleeing and leaving him alone with the soldiers; the betrayal by Judas and Peter's denial; only a handful of loved ones standing in compassion at the foot of his cross. It is hard enough to go through pain and heartache when we have support and encouragement. How excruciating it is to feel abandoned or misunderstood or isolated when experiencing trials and tribulations. Holy Week is a call to join with Jesus in his lonely journey. Let us look at our world and see how we can give support and encouragement to those who are on their own Calvary journey of pain and sorrow.

—Joyce Rupp
Inviting God In

*How might I reach out today
to ease someone's pain or sorrow?*

Amen is a Hebrew word used to affirm the truth of what is said. In John's gospel, Jesus uses the curious double "**Amen, amen**" to stress the importance of what he is about to say and invite his audience to pay close attention to his message.

YOU ARE MY SERVANT

Is 50:4-9a / Mt 26:14-25

On this last full day of Lent we read Isaiah's third Servant Song. As the early Christians tried to make sense of the suffering and death of Jesus, they searched the Hebrew Scriptures for meaning. They found the suffering Jesus in the Servant Songs. It's difficult to read them and not think of Jesus. Through his life, suffering, death and resurrection he has redeemed us. The vocation of the Servant is realized in him. Through the Servant's willingness to sacrifice himself for others, we are healed. He speaks; he rouses the weary; he bears suffering; and yet he does not complain. He patiently trusts in God. Prayerful reflection on this beautiful reading can help us to enter more fully into those most holy days that we are about to begin.

—Angeline Hubert

*How is Jesus, the Servant, a model
for me in times of suffering?*

The most ancient and always the central event of the liturgical year is the Easter **triduum** (Latin, three days) celebrating the passion, death and resurrection of Christ. The sacred three days (Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday) are a liturgical season in themselves and not strictly part of Lent.

RESPONDING WITH LOVE

Ex 12:1-8, 11-14 / 1 Cor 11:23-26 / Jn 13:1-15

God has made himself visible: in Jesus we are able to see the Father. Indeed, God comes towards us, he seeks to win our hearts, all the way to the Last Supper, to the piercing of Jesus' heart on the cross, to his appearances after the resurrection. God encounters us ever anew, in the men and women who reflect his presence, in his word, in the sacraments, and especially in the Eucharist. In the Church's liturgy, in her prayer, in the living community of believers, we experience the love of God, we perceive God's presence and we thus learn to recognize that presence in our daily lives. God has loved us first and he continues to do so; we too, then, can respond with love.

—Pope Benedict XVI
On Christian Love

*How has God most clearly come into my life this Lent?
With what results?*

Footwashing was not part of the Passover ritual, but a common sign of hospitality upon entering a house. This was usually a servant's task. So, when Jesus acts as a servant instead of the master that he is, what would normally be considered humiliating becomes a sign of his love.

A LIFE OF SACRIFICE

Is 52:13—53:12 / Heb 4:14-16; 5:7-9 / Jn 18:1—19:42

Life and death are the two significant and decisive elements of Christ's sacrifice. From his smile at Bethlehem to his last gasp and sob on the cross, which gathered all our sufferings into one to sanctify them, and wiped away all our sins by atoning for them, we have seen how Christ lived in this our earthly life. With this thought our prayer expands in a vast longing, in a sigh of heartfelt reparation, the longing to reach to the ends of the earth with our ministry. And we earnestly pray that the precious blood, poured out for all mankind, may at long last bring to all, to all persons everywhere, salvation and conversion, that the blood of Christ may be to all the pledge and promise of eternal life.

—Pope St. John XXIII
Journal of a Soul

*How can I help draw others to Christ
by my words and actions?*

Crucifixion was the most painful torture the ancient world had devised. When one's arms and legs were fixed to a cross by tying with rope or nailing, the victim began a slow process of asphyxiation, which could last days or be hastened by breaking the victim's legs (Jn 19:31-32).

SING ALLELUIA!

Vigil: Gn 1:1—2:2 / Gn 22:1-18 / Ex 14:15—15:1 / Is 54:5-14 /
Is 55:1-11 / Bar 3:9-15, 32—4:4 / Ez 36:16-17a, 18-28 /
Rom 6:3-11 / Lk 24:1-12

The season before Easter signifies the troubles in which we live here and now, while the time after Easter signifies the happiness that will be ours in the future. What we commemorate before Easter is what we experience in this life; what we celebrate after Easter points to something we do not yet possess. This is why we keep the first season with fasting and prayer; but when the fast is over we devote the present season to praise. Such is the meaning of the Alleluia we sing. So now praise God. That is what we tell each other when we sing Alleluia. You say to your neighbor: Praise the Lord! and your neighbor says the same to you. We are all urging one another to praise the Lord.

—St. Augustine of Hippo

How can I share my Easter joy more fully with others?

The **Easter Vigil** echoes the early Christian ritual that lasted through the night to celebrate the eucharist at dawn. Its 4 parts are: lighting the Easter candle, the scripture readings of the story of salvation, the initiation of new converts culminating in the Eucharistic celebration.