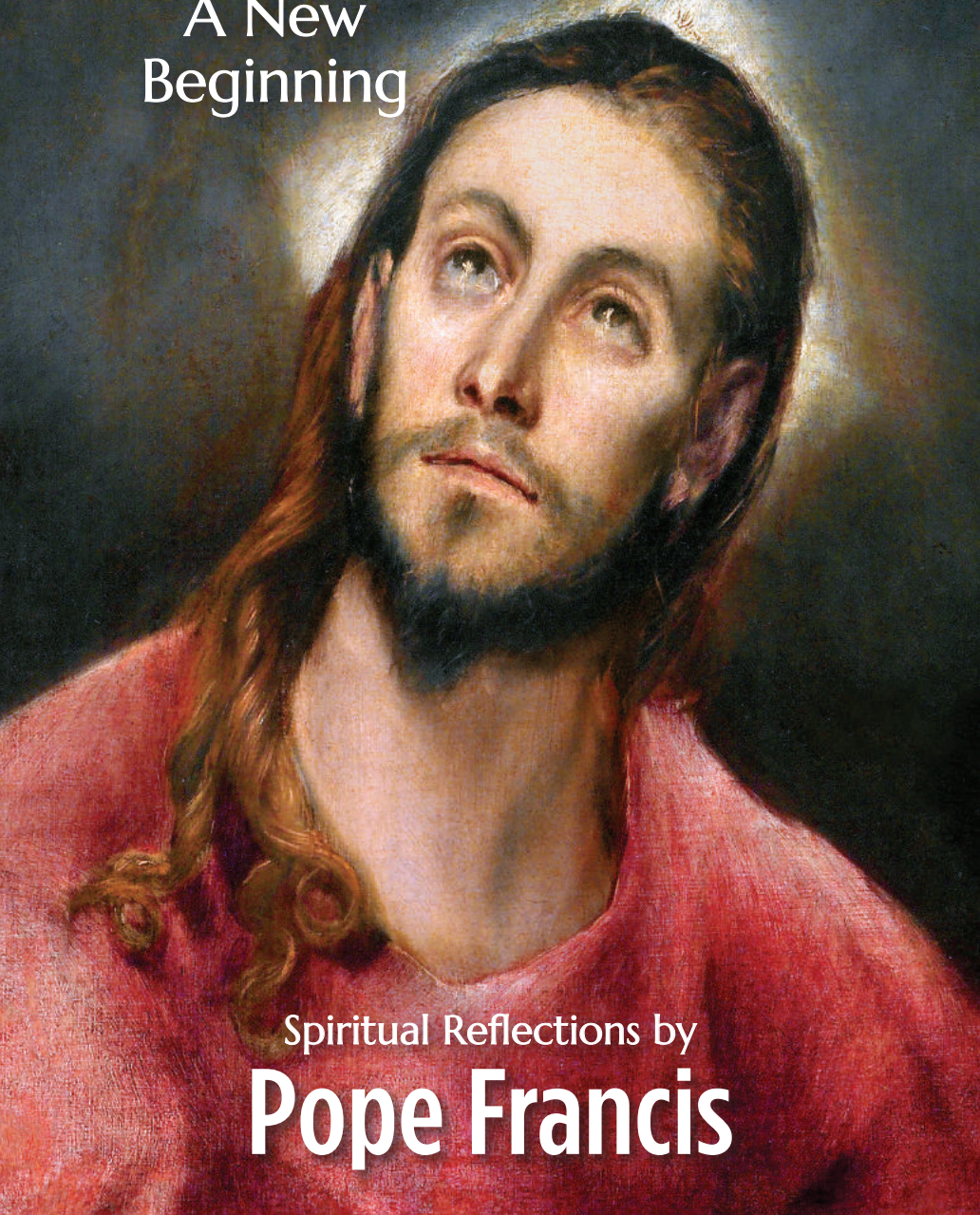


# Lent

A New  
Beginning



Spiritual Reflections by  
**Pope Francis**

# Lent

## A New Beginning

### Introduction

Pope Francis reminds us that “Lent is a new beginning, a path leading to the certain goal of Easter, Christ’s victory over death. This season urgently calls us to conversion. Lent is the favorable season for renewing our encounter with Christ who lives in his word, in the sacraments and in our neighbor. Once again Lent comes to make its prophetic appeal, to remind us that it is possible to create something new within ourselves and around us. At the basis of everything is the Word of God, which during this season we are invited to hear and ponder more deeply. Let us find inspiration in God’s Word, for it provides a key to understanding what we need to do in order to attain true happiness and eternal life. It exhorts us to sincere conversion. Let us not waste this season of Lent, so favorable a time for conversion!”

These selected reflections by Pope Francis touch on the many dimensions of our personal conversion to Christ and to his example of boundless mercy and loving service. Each day, as we connect God’s Word with the Pope’s helpful guidance, we can consider what we can do now to follow Jesus more closely. Thus our experience of conversion will grow as the Holy Spirit works within us to draw us into the mystery of God’s love and God’s desire to give us new life.

—*Steve Mueller, Editor*

Ash Wednesday

## Lent: A Time to Return to God

“Return to me with all your heart.” —Joel 2:12

With its invitations to conversion, Lent comes providentially to awaken us, to rouse us from torpor, from the risk of moving forward by inertia. The exhortation which the Lord addresses to us through the prophet Joel is strong and clear. Why must we return to God? Because something is not right in us, not right in society, not right in the Church and we need to change and give it a new direction. And this is called needing to convert! Once again Lent reminds us that it is possible to create something new within ourselves and around us, simply because God is faithful, always faithful, for God cannot deny himself. God continues to be rich in goodness and mercy, and God is always ready to forgive and start afresh. With this filial confidence, let us set out on the journey!

*In what ways will I try to move forward  
in my relation to Christ this Lent?*

Thursday after Ash Wednesday

## A Time for Prayer

“Whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

—Matthew 6:6

The first element in our Lenten spiritual journey is prayer. Prayer is the strength of the Christian and of every person who believes. In the weakness and frailty of our lives, we can turn to God with the confidence of children and enter into communion with him. In the face of so many wounds that hurt us and could harden our hearts, we are called to dive into the sea of prayer, which is the sea of God’s boundless love, to taste God’s tenderness. Lent is a time of prayer, of more intense prayer, more prolonged, more assiduous, more able to take on the needs of the brethren and by intercessory prayer to intercede before God for the many situations of poverty and suffering.

*How will I dedicate more time for prayer this Lent?*

Friday after Ash Wednesday

## A Time for Fasting

“Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?”

—Isaiah 58:6

The second key element of the Lenten journey is fasting. We must be careful not to practice a formal fast, or one which in truth “satisfies” us because it makes us feel good about ourselves. Fasting makes sense if it questions our security, and if it also leads to some benefit for others, if it helps us to cultivate the style of the Good Samaritan, who bends down to his brother in need and takes care of him. Fasting involves choosing a sober lifestyle—a way of life that does not waste, a way of life that does not “throw away.” Fasting helps us to attune our hearts to the essential and to sharing. It is a sign of awareness and responsibility in the face of injustice, abuse, especially to the poor and the little ones, and it is a sign of the trust we place in God and in God’s providence.

*From what besides food do I need to fast to draw nearer to Christ?*

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

## A Time for Generous Giving

“When you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” —Matthew 6:3-4

The third element of the Lenten journey is almsgiving: it points to giving freely, for in almsgiving one gives something to someone from whom one does not expect to receive anything in return. Gratuitousness should be one of the characteristics of the Christian, who aware of having received everything from God gratuitously, that is, without any merit of his own, learns to give to others freely. Today gratuitousness is often not part of daily life where everything is bought and sold. Everything is calculated and measured. Almsgiving helps us to experience giving freely, which leads to freedom from the obsession of possessing, from the fear of losing what we have, from the sadness of one who does not wish to share his wealth with others.

*For what reasons might I give more during this Lenten season?*

First Sunday of Lent

## A Time for Combat

“The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan.” —Mark 1:12-13

In Jesus' 40 days of solitude in the wilderness, he confronts Satan and unmasks his temptations and conquers him. Lent is a time of combat! A spiritual combat against the spirit of evil. We place ourselves decisively on the path of Jesus, the road that leads to life. Jesus' path passes through the desert, the place where the voice of God and the voice of the tempter can be heard, where our destiny is truly played out, life or death. And how do we hear God's voice? We hear it in his Word. For this reason, it is important to know Scripture, because otherwise we do not know how to react to the snares of the Evil One. So read the Gospel every day! Meditate on it for a little while, for 10 minutes. And also carry it with you in your pocket or your purse. The Lenten desert helps us to say “no” to worldliness, to the “idols,” it helps us to make courageous choices in accordance with the Gospel and to strengthen solidarity with others.

*How might I better rely of Scripture to follow the example of Jesus' courage to confront evil?*

Monday, Week 1

## A Time to Say “No”

“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” —James 4:7

In this season of grace we want to return to the merciful heart of the Father, to once again turn our eyes to his mercy. Lent is a path leading to the triumph of mercy over all that would crush us or reduce us to something unworthy of our dignity as God's children. Lent is the road leading from slavery to freedom, from suffering to joy, from death to life. So Lent is the time for saying “no.” “No” to indifference, thinking that other people's lives are not my concern, and every attempt to trivialize life, especially the lives of those who are burdened by so much superficiality. Lent means saying “no” to the toxic pollution of empty and meaningless words, of harsh and hasty

criticism, of simplistic analyses that fail to grasp the complexity of problems, especially the problems of those who suffer the most. Lent is the time to say “no” to the prayer that soothes our conscience, to almsgiving that leaves us self-satisfied, to fasting that makes us feel good. Lent is the time to say “no” to all those forms of spirituality that reduce the faith to a ghetto culture, a culture of exclusion.

*What do I most need to say “no” to so I can follow Christ better?*

Tuesday, Week 1

## A Time to Open Our Hearts

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; be converted and believe in the good news.” —Mark 1:15

A few days ago we began Lent, which is the journey of the People of God toward Easter, a journey of conversion, of struggling against evil with the weapons of prayer, of fasting and of works of charity. Conversion of heart is the chief characteristic of this season of grace. This challenges all of us without exception, and it reminds us that conversion is not to be reduced to outward forms or to 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, in order to go beyond our own “backyard.” We risk closing ourselves off to others and forgetting them. But only when the difficulties and suffering of others confront and question us may we begin our journey of conversion towards Easter. It is an itinerary which involves the cross and self-denial.

*What is most helping me center myself more on God and God’s ways?*

Wednesday, Week 1

## A Time to Turn from Sinful Ways

“Draw near to God, and God will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” —James 4:8

During Lent, the Church renews her appeal to repentance, the call to change one’s life. Conversion is not the question of a moment or

a time of the year, it is an undertaking that lasts one's entire lifetime. Who among us can presume not to be a sinner? No one. We are all sinners. But we are called to abandon the behavior of sin and fix our gaze on what is essential. This is the difference between life deformed by sin and life illumined by grace. From the heart of the person renewed in the likeness of God comes good behavior: to speak the truth always and avoid all deceit; not to steal, but rather to share all you have with others, especially those in need; not to give in to anger, resentment and revenge, but to be meek, magnanimous and ready to forgive; not to gossip which ruins the good name of people, but to look more at the good side of everyone.

*What behaviors do I most need  
to abandon to follow Christ more closely?*

Thursday, Week 1

## A Time to Serve Christ's "Little Ones"

"Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." —Matthew 25:40

We cannot escape the Lord's words to us, and they will serve as the criteria upon which we will be judged: whether we have fed the hungry, given drink to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger and clothed the naked, or spent time with the sick and those in prison. Moreover, we will be asked if we have helped others to escape the doubt that causes them to fall into despair and which is often a source of loneliness; if we have helped to overcome the ignorance in which millions of people live, especially children deprived of the necessary means to free them from the bonds of poverty; if we have been close to the lonely and afflicted; if we have forgiven those who have offended us and have rejected all forms of anger and hate that lead to violence; if we have had the kind of patience God shows, who is so patient with us; and if we have commended our brothers and sisters to the Lord in prayer. In each of these "little ones," Christ himself is present. His flesh becomes visible in the flesh of the tortured, the crushed, the scourged, the malnourished and the exiled to be acknowledged, touched, and cared for by us.

*To which of Christ's little ones might I be more attentive today?*

Friday, Week 1

## A Time to Abide in Love

“Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.”

—John 13:34

An important element in the Christian life is abiding in love. The love of Jesus Christ lasts forever. It has no end because it is the very life of God. This love conquers sin and gives the strength to rise and begin again, for through forgiveness the heart is renewed and rejuvenated. We all know it: our Father never tires of loving and his eyes never grow weary of watching the road to his home to see if the son who left and was lost is returning. We can speak of God's hope: our Father expects us always, he doesn't just leave the door open to us, but he awaits us. He is engaged in the waiting for his children. God is not only at the origin of love, but in Jesus Christ he calls us to imitate his own way of loving. To the extent to which Christians live this love, they become credible disciples of Christ to the world. Love cannot bear being locked up in itself. By its nature it is open, it spreads and bears fruit, it always kindles new love.

*In what concrete way might I show my love as Jesus did to those around him?*

Saturday, Week 1

## A Time to Die to Self

“Those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it.” —Luke 9:24

When we lose our lives for love of Jesus, we live no longer for ourselves, for our own interests and “image,” but in the image of Christ, for him and following him, with his love and in his love. This is an invitation not to be caught up with the prospects and fashions of the moment, but rather to constantly look to the Lord's cross to discover our program of life. It is an invitation to overcome all those temptations to self-absorption that prevent us from perceiving how the Holy Spirit is at work outside our familiar surroundings. If we experience this dying to ourselves for Jesus' sake, our old way of life will be a thing of the past and we will pass over to a new form of life and fellowship. To look back is helpful, but to be fixated on the past,



lingering over the memory of wrongs done and endured, and judging in merely human terms, can paralyze us and prevent us from living in the present. God's Word encourages us to draw strength from memory and to recall the good things the Lord has given us. But it also asks us to leave the past behind in order to follow Jesus today and to live a new life in him.

*What most scares me about dying to myself and my own interests?*

2nd Sunday of Lent

## A Time for Change

"And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white." —Matthew 17:2

Transfigured on Mount Tabor, Jesus wanted to show his disciples his glory, not for them to circumvent the cross, but to show where the cross leads. Those who die with Jesus, shall rise again with Jesus. The cross is the door to resurrection. Whoever struggles alongside him will triumph with him. This is the message of hope contained in Jesus' cross, urging us to be strong in our existence. The Christian cross is not the furnishings of a house or adornments to wear but rather a call to the love with which Jesus sacrificed himself to save humanity from evil and sin. In this Lenten season, we contemplate with devotion the image of the crucifix, Jesus on the cross: this is the symbol of Christian faith, the emblem of Jesus, who died and rose for us. Let us ensure that the cross marks the stages of our Lenten journey in order to understand ever better the seriousness of sin and the value of the sacrifice by which the savior has saved us all.

*How does Jesus' example in suffering help me deal with my suffering?*



Monday, Week 2

## A Time for Remembering

"I remember the days of old, I think about all your deeds,  
I meditate on the works of your hands." —Psalm 143:5

Lent is a time for remembering. It is the time to reflect and ask ourselves what we would be if God had closed his doors to us. What would we be without his mercy that never tires of forgiving us and always gives us the chance to begin anew? Lent is the time to ask ourselves where we would be without the help of so many people who in a thousand quiet ways have stretched out their hands and in very concrete ways given us hope and enabled us to make a new beginning? Lent is the time to open our hearts to the breath of the One capable of turning our dust into humanity. It is not the time to rend our garments before the evil all around us, but instead to make room in our life for all the good we are able to do. It is a time to set aside everything that isolates us, encloses us and paralyzes us.

*What experience of God's love has most encouraged me  
to make a new beginning this Lent?*

Tuesday, Week 2

## A Time to Entrust Yourself to God

"If God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?  
—Matthew 6:30

God is not a distant and anonymous being but our refuge, the wellspring of our peace and tranquility. God is the rock of our salvation, to which we can cling with the certainty of not falling. God is our defense against the evil which is ever lurking. God is a great friend, ally, father to us, but we do not always realize it and so prefer to rely on immediate goods that we can touch, forgetting and at times rejecting the supreme good, which is the paternal love of God. Entrust yourself to God who daily watches over our life. Our life passes quickly, tormented by many worries, which risk eliminating peace and balance. But this anguish is often pointless, because it cannot change the course of events. Jesus persistently exhorts us not

to worry about tomorrow, recalling that above everything, there is a loving Father who never forgets his children. Entrusting oneself to God does not magically resolve problems, but allows one to face them with the right attitude, courageously: I am courageous because I entrust myself to my Father who takes care of everything and who loves me very much.

*What most holds me back from entrusting myself  
and my life to God's care?*

Wednesday, Week 2

## A Time to Choose

“No one can serve two masters; for a servant will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other.”

—Matthew 6:24

Jesus encourages his disciples to be faithful stewards of the goods that he has given us, even the earthly goods, but without “overdoing things” as if everything, even our salvation, depended only on us. This evangelical attitude requires a clear choice because “You cannot serve God and wealth.” Either the Lord, or fascinating but illusory idols. This choice that we are called to make then has an impact on many of our actions, plans and commitments. It means choosing to act very clearly and to continually renew, because the temptation to reduce everything to money, pleasure and power is relentless. There are so many such temptations. While honoring these idols leads to tangible albeit fleeting results, choosing God and his kingdom does not always immediately bear fruit. It is a decision one takes in hope and which leaves the complete fulfillment to God. Christian hope is extended to the future fulfillment of God’s promise and does not stop in the face of difficulty, because it is founded on God’s faithfulness, which never fails. God is steadfast, a faithful father, a faithful friend and a faithful ally.

*What most helps me to choose God  
and not wealth as my focus for living?*

Thursday, Week 2

## A Time to Read God's Word

"I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word."

—Psalm 119:16

During Lent, as Christians we are invited to follow in Jesus' footsteps and face the spiritual battle with the Evil One with the strength of the Word of God. For this reason, it is important to be familiar with the Bible: read it often, meditate on it, assimilate it. The Bible contains the Word of God, which is always timely and effective. Someone has asked: what would happen were we to treat the Bible as we treat our mobile phone? Were we to always carry it with us, or at least a small, pocket-sized Gospel, what would happen? Would we open it several times a day to read God's messages as we read telephone messages? Clearly the comparison is paradoxical, but it calls for reflection. Indeed, if we had God's Word always in our heart, no temptation could separate us from God, and no obstacle could divert us from the path of good. We would know how to defeat the daily temptations of the evil that is within us and outside us. We would be more capable of living a life renewed according to the Spirit, welcoming and loving our brothers and sisters, especially the weakest and neediest, and also our enemies.

*How can I dedicate more time to reading praying about God's Word?*

Friday, Week 2

## A Time for Mercy

"Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." —Luke 6:36

If God limited himself to only justice, he would cease to be God, and would instead be like human beings who ask merely that the law be respected. But mere justice is not enough. Experience shows that an appeal to justice alone will result in its destruction. This is why God goes beyond justice with his mercy and forgiveness. Yet this does not mean that justice should be devalued or rendered superfluous. On the contrary: anyone who makes a mistake must pay the price. However, this is just the beginning of conversion, not its end, because one begins to feel the tenderness and mercy of God. God does not

deny justice but rather envelops it and surpasses it with an even greater event in which we experience love as the foundation of true justice. God's justice is his mercy given to everyone as a grace that flows from the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thus the cross of Christ is God's judgment on all of us and on the whole world, because through it he offers us the certitude of love and new life.

*How might I show more mercy  
and compassion to those around me today?*

Saturday, Week 2

## A Time of Submission

"Do not, O LORD, withhold your mercy from me; let your steadfast love and your faithfulness keep me safe forever." —Psalm 40:11

Jesus is bent on revealing the great gift of mercy that searches out sinners and offers them pardon and salvation. One can see why, on the basis of such a liberating vision of mercy as a source of new life. This is the opportune moment to change our lives! This is the time to allow our hearts to be touched! When confronted with evil deeds, even in the face of serious crimes, it is the time to listen to the cry of innocent people who are deprived of their property, their dignity, their feelings and even their very lives. To stick to the way of evil will only leave one deluded and sad. True life is something entirely different. God never tires of reaching out to us. God is always ready to listen. All one needs to do is to accept the invitation to conversion and submit oneself to justice during this special time of mercy offered by the Church. How many pages of sacred Scripture are appropriate for meditation during the weeks of Lent to help us rediscover the merciful face of the Father!

*In what ways have I most experienced God's loving mercy in my life?*



3rd Sunday of Lent

## A Time to Cleanse Our Hearts

“Give up your faults and direct your hands rightly,  
and cleanse your heart from all sin.” —Sirach 38:10

In this time of Lent we are preparing for the celebration of Easter, when we will renew the promises of our baptism. Let us walk in the world as Jesus did, and let us make our whole existence a sign of our love for others, especially the weakest and poorest. Let us build for God a temple of our lives and make it approachable for those who we find along our journey. If we are witnesses of the living Christ, so many people will encounter Jesus in us, in our witness. But does the Lord feel at home in my life? Do we allow him to “cleanse” our hearts and to drive out the idols, those attitudes of cupidity, jealousy, worldliness, envy, hatred, those habits of gossiping and tearing down others. Do I allow him to cleanse all the behaviors that are against God, against our neighbor, and against ourselves? Jesus cleanses with tenderness, mercy, love. Mercy is his way of cleansing. Let us, each of us, let us allow the Lord to enter with his mercy to cleanse our hearts.

*What most hinders God from coming to dwell in the temple of my heart?*

Monday, Week 3

## A Time for Thanks

“In Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.”  
—Galatians 3:26

The fundamental motive for our rendering thanks to God is that God has adopted us as God’s children. We are children, but we have become slaves, following the voice of the Evil One. No one else delivers us from that effective slavery except Jesus, who assumed our flesh from the Virgin Mary and died on the cross to free us from the slavery of sin and to restore us to our forfeited filial condition. This gift is also a reason for an examination of conscience, for a revision of our personal and communal life, to ask ourselves: what is our lifestyle? Do we live as children or as slaves? Do we live as people baptized in Christ, anointed by the Spirit, delivered and free?

Or do we live according to the corrupt, worldly logic, doing what the devil makes us believe is in our interests? In our life journey there is always a tendency to resist liberation; we are afraid of freedom and, paradoxically and somewhat unwittingly, we prefer slavery. Freedom frightens us because it causes us to confront time and to face our responsibility to live it well.

*What most needs to change in my life now  
to live more like a child of God?*

Tuesday, Week 3

## A Time to Live in Hope

“Hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” —Romans 5:5

What does it mean to be Christians? We are those who believe that God is Father. We are not orphans but have a Father and our Father is God. We believe that Jesus descended among us, shared our life, making himself companion above all to the poorest and most frail. We believe that the Holy Spirit works unceasingly for the good of humanity and of the world, and that even the worst suffering of history will be overcome. This is the hope that awakens us each morning. We believe that every affection, every friendship, every good yearning, every love, even the most minute and neglected, one day will find fulfillment in God. This is the power that spurs us to embrace our daily life with enthusiasm. And this is our hope: to live in hope and live in light, in the light of God the Father, in the light of Jesus the savior, in the light of the Holy Spirit who urges us to go forth in life.

*How has drawing closer to Jesus this Lent given me greater hope?*



Wednesday, Week 3

## A Time to Let God Find Me

“Last of all, as to one untimely born, Jesus appeared also to me.”

—1 Corinthians 15:8

Paul’s personal history is dramatic. He was a persecutor of the Church, proud of his convictions. He felt he was a successful man with a very clear idea of what life was about and its duties. But, into this perfect life, one day something absolutely unexpected happens: the meeting with the risen Jesus on the way to Damascus. There was not just a person who fell to the ground but one who was seized by an event that would overturn the meaning of his life. And the persecutor becomes an apostle. Why? Because he saw Jesus alive! This is the foundation of Paul’s faith, as well as of the faith of the other apostles and of all Christians. How beautiful it is to think that Christianity is essentially this! It is not so much our search for God but rather God’s search for us. Jesus took us, grasped us, won us over, never more to leave us. Christianity is grace. It is surprise and, for this reason, it implies a heart that is capable of amazement. A closed heart, a rationalist heart is incapable of amazement and cannot understand what Christianity is because Christianity is grace, and grace can only be perceived, and furthermore, it happens in the amazement of the encounter.

*When have I most experienced God searching for  
and finding me this Lent?*

Thursday, Week 3

## A Time to Be with God

“Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

—Matthew 28:20

These final words of Matthew’s Gospel recall the prophetic announcement that we find at the beginning: “‘his name shall be called Emmanuel’ (which means, God with us)” (Mt 1:23). God will be with us, every day, until the end of time. Jesus will walk with us, every day, until the end of time. These two passages communicate the mystery of a God whose name, whose identity is *to be with*. God



is not an isolated God but is a “God-with.” In particular, *with us*, namely, with human beings. Our God is not an absent God, confined to a far-off heaven but instead a God “passionate” for us, so tenderly in love as to be incapable of being separated from us. We humans are experts at severing bonds and bridges. God, however, is not. If our heart cools, God’s remains ever incandescent. Our God accompanies us always, even if by mishap we should forget God. On the ridge that divides skepticism from faith, the discovery that we are loved and accompanied by our Father, who never leaves us on our own, is decisive.

*When and how have I most experienced God with me this Lent?*

Friday, Week 3

## A Time to Come to Jesus

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.” —Matthew 11:28

Jesus’ first word is an invitation, a call to move and respond: “Come.” The mistake, when things go wrong, is to stay where we are. It seems obvious, but how difficult it is to respond and open ourselves. In dark times it feels natural to keep to ourselves, to ruminate over how unfair life is, over how ungrateful others are, how mean the world is, and so on. We have had this awful experience a few times. But in this way, locked up inside ourselves, we see everything as grim. Then we even grow accustomed to sadness, which overcomes us and is a terrible thing. Jesus, however, wants to pull us out of this “quicksand” and thus says to each one: “Come!” The way out is in connecting, in extending a hand and lifting our gaze to those who truly love us. In fact it is not enough to come out of ourselves. It is important to know where to go. Because many aims are illusory, promising comfort and distraction, they guarantee peace and offer amusement, then leave us with the loneliness there was before. Therefore Jesus indicates where to go: “Come to me.”

*What most keeps me closed in on myself and not coming closer to Jesus?*

Saturday, Week 3

## A Time to Talk to Jesus

“But as for me, my prayer is to you, O LORD. At an acceptable time, O God, in the abundance of your steadfast love, answer me.” —Psalm 69:13

Many times, in the face of a burden of life or a situation that saddens us, we try to talk about it with someone who listens to us, with a friend, with an expert. This is a great thing to do, but let us not forget Jesus. Let us not forget to open ourselves to him and to recount our life to him, to entrust people and situations to him. He awaits us; he always awaits us. Not to magically resolve problems, but to strengthen us amid our problems. Jesus does not lift the burdens from our life, but the anguish from our heart. He does not take away our cross, but carries it with us. And with him every burden becomes light because he is the comfort we seek. When Jesus enters life, peace arrives, the kind that remains even in trials, in suffering. Let us go to Jesus. Let us give him our time. Let us encounter him each day in prayer, in a trusting and personal dialogue. Let us become familiar with his Word. Let us fearlessly rediscover his forgiveness. We will feel loved and feel comforted by him.

*When have I most enjoyed sharing my inmost thoughts with Jesus?*

4th Sunday of Lent

## A Time to Bond with Jesus

“Whoever who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.”  
—Matthew 10:37

Jesus underscores two essential aspects for the life of a missionary disciple: the first, that his bond with Jesus is stronger than any other bond; the second, that the missionary brings not himself, but Jesus, and through him the love of the heavenly Father. These two aspects are connected, because the more Jesus is at the center of the heart and of the life of a disciple, the more this disciple is transparent to his presence. The two go hand in hand. The condition of a disciple demands an all-absorbing relationship with the teacher. Perhaps the first question that we must ask is: “Do you meet with Jesus? Do you pray to Jesus?” Those who allow themselves to be drawn into this bond

of love and of life with the Lord Jesus become his representatives, his ambassadors, above all in their way of living, to the point that Jesus himself, in sending his disciples on mission, says to them: “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.” (Mt 10:40). It is important that the people be able to perceive that for a disciple Jesus is truly “the Lord.” He is truly the center of his or her life.

*What has most helped me strengthen my bond  
of love with Jesus this Lent?*

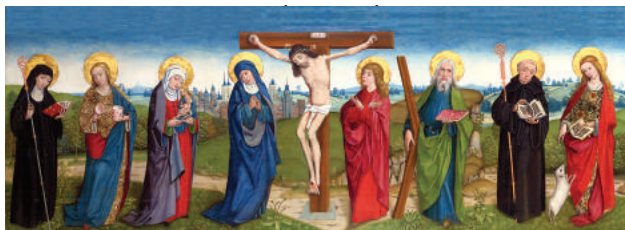
Monday, Week 4

## A Time to Let Myself Be Loved

“I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.” —Jeremiah 31:3

It does not matter if, as for every human being, you have limitations and even makes mistakes—as long as you have the humility to recognize them. The important thing is that you should not have a duplicitous heart, which is dangerous. You are either with Jesus, with the spirit of Jesus, or you are with the spirit of the world. Let us allow our hearts to be touched, let us not fear this. Let us not fear that our hearts be moved. We need this! Let us allow ourselves to be warmed by the tenderness of God. We need his caress. God’s caresses do not harm us. They give us peace and strength. We need his caresses. God is full of love: to him be praise and glory forever! God is peace: let us ask him to help us to be peacemakers each day, in our life, in our families, in our cities and nations, in the whole world. Let us allow ourselves to be moved by God’s goodness.

*What divides my heart and makes me try to keep God at a distance?*



## A Time to Be Converted

“Be converted and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out.”

—Acts 3:19

Jesus invites us to change our heart, to make a radical about-face on the path of our lives, to abandon compromises with evil—and this is something we all do—in order to decidedly take up the path of the Gospel. Being Christian is not just obeying orders but means being in Christ, thinking like him, acting like him, loving like him; it means letting him take possession of our life and change it, transform it and free it from the darkness of evil and sin. But there is always the temptation to justify ourselves. What should we convert from? Aren't we basically good people? How many times have we thought “But after all I am a good person.” “Am I not a believer and even quite a churchgoer?” And we believe that this way we are justified. The invincible patience of God and Jesus! Have you ever thought of their limitless concern for sinners? How it should lead us to impatience with ourselves! It's never too late to convert, never. God's patience awaits us until the last moment.

*What most holds me back from following Jesus more completely?*

Wednesday, Week 4

## A Time to Receive the Holy Spirit

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.” —John 14:27

We are not alone: Jesus is close to us, among us, within us! His new presence in history happens through the gift of the Holy Spirit, through whom it is possible to instill a living relationship with him, the crucified and risen one. The Spirit, flowing within us through the sacraments of baptism and confirmation, acts in our life. He guides us in the way to think, to act, to distinguish between what is good and what is bad. He helps us to practice the charity of Jesus, his giving of himself to others, especially to the most needy. We are not alone! The sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit is also the peace that Jesus gives to his disciples. It is different from what mankind hopes for or tries to achieve. Jesus' peace flows from victory over sin, over

selfishness which impedes us from loving one another as brothers and sisters. It is a gift of God and a sign of his presence. Each disciple called today to follow Jesus receives within him or herself the peace of the Christ in the certainty of his victory and in expectation of his definitive coming.

*How has the Holy Spirit been most active in me  
and my life during this Lent?*

Thursday, Week 4

## A Time to Witness

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth.” —Acts 1:8

With what spirit must disciples of Jesus carry out this mission? First of all they must be aware of the difficult and sometimes hostile reality that awaits them. Hostility is always at the beginning of persecutions of Christians because Jesus knows that the mission is blocked by the work of evil. So the laborer of the Gospel will strive to be free from every kind of human conditioning, carrying neither purse nor bag nor sandals as Jesus counseled, so as to place reliance solely in the power of the cross of Jesus Christ. This means abandoning every motive of personal advantage, careerism or hunger for power and humbly making ourselves instruments of the salvation carried out by Jesus' sacrifice. A Christian's mission of service in the world is intended for everyone and excludes no one. It requires a great deal of generosity and above all setting one's gaze and heart on God, to invoke the Lord's help. There is a great need for Christians who joyfully witness to the Gospel in everyday life. Listen to the Lord's call to follow him. Fear not! Be courageous and bring to others God's good news.

*With whom might I share my understanding of God's  
Good News of salvation today?*



Friday, Week 4

## A Time to Be Transformed from Within

“I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!”

—Luke 12:49

The *fire* that Jesus speaks of is the fire of the Holy Spirit, the presence living and working in us from the day of our baptism. This fire is a creative force that purifies and renews, that burns all human misery, all selfishness, all sin, which transforms us from within, regenerates us and makes us able to love. Jesus wants the Holy Spirit to blaze like fire in our hearts, for it is only from the heart that the fire of divine love can spread and advance the kingdom of God. It does not come from the head, it comes from the heart. This is why Jesus wants fire to enter our heart. If we open ourselves completely to the action of this fire of the Holy Spirit, he will give us the boldness and the fervor to proclaim without fear to everyone Jesus and his consoling message of mercy and salvation.

*How have I most been transformed by the cleansing fire of the Holy Spirit within me?*

Saturday, Week 4

## A Time to Really Change

“Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able.” —Luke 13:24

Jesus extends a pressing invitation to us today to go to him, to pass through the door of a full, reconciled and happy life. He awaits each one of us, no matter what sins we have committed, to embrace us, to offer us his forgiveness. He alone can transform our hearts. He alone can give full meaning to our existence, giving us true joy. By entering Jesus' door, the door of faith and of the Gospel, we can leave behind worldly attitudes, bad habits, selfishness and narrow-mindedness. When we encounter the love and mercy of God, there is authentic change. Our lives are enlightened by the inextinguishable light of the Holy Spirit. But let us think for a moment of the things inside us which prevent us from entering the door: my pride, my arrogance, my sins. Then, let us think of the other door, the one opened wide

by the mercy of God who awaits us on the other side to grant us forgiveness. The Lord offers us many opportunities to be saved and to enter through the door of salvation. This door is an occasion that can never be wasted.

*What most prevents me from entering through  
the narrow door that leads to Jesus?*

5th Sunday of Lent

## A Time to Be Forgiveness

“We had to celebrate and rejoice,  
because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life;  
he was lost and has been found.” —Luke 15:32

Jesus' parable of the prodigal son and the loving father presents the true face of God, who with open arms deals with sinners with tenderness and compassion. The parable manifests the infinite love of God who enfolds in a close embrace the son who has been found. The path to return home is the path of hope and new life. God always expects us to resume our journey, awaiting us with patience, seeing us when we are still a long way off, running to meet us, embracing us, kissing us, forgiving us. That is how God our Father is. God's forgiveness cancels the past and regenerates us in love. When God embraces us, God forgives and forgets the past. When we convert and let ourselves be re-encountered by God, reproach and sternness do not await us, because God saves and welcomes us home again with joy and prepares a feast. This fills us with a great hope because there is no sin into which we may have fallen, from which, with the grace of God, we cannot rise up again. There is never a person who can't be recovered. No one is irrecoverable because God never stops wanting our good—even when we sin!

*When have I most experienced God's forgiveness and loving mercy?*



Monday, Week 5

## A Time to Forsake Worldliness

“Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it.” —Matthew 7:13

Jesus invites us to choose between two opposing ways of life: the way of the world and that of the Gospel—the worldly spirit is not the spirit of Jesus. This is a matter of departing from the worldly spirit and values, which the devil really favors, in order to live according to the Gospel. How is worldliness manifested? Worldliness is manifested by attitudes of corruption, deception, subjugation, and it constitutes the most ill-chosen road, the road of sin, because one leads you to the other! It is generally the easiest road to travel. Instead, the spirit of the Gospel requires a serious lifestyle—serious but joyful, serious and challenging—marked by honesty, fairness, respect for others and their dignity and a sense of duty. The journey of life necessarily involves a choice between two roads: between honesty and dishonesty, between fidelity and infidelity, between selfishness and altruism, between good and evil. You cannot waver between one and the other, because they move on different and conflicting forms of logic. It is important to decide which direction to take and then, once you have chosen the right one, to walk it with enthusiasm and determination, trusting in God’s grace and the support of his Spirit.

*What signs indicate most clearly my choice to follow the godly way of Jesus and the Holy Spirit?*

Tuesday, Week 5

## A Time to Act More Justly

“Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him.” —Deuteronomy 30:19-20

Jesus urges us to make a clear choice between him and the worldly spirit, between the logic of corruption, of the abuse of power and greed, and that of righteousness, meekness and sharing. Some people conduct themselves with corruption as they do with drugs: they think they can use it and stop when they want. It starts out small: a tip here, a bribe over there. And between this and that, one’s freedom is



slowly lost. Corruption is also habit-forming, and generates poverty, exploitation and suffering. How many victims of this widespread corruption are there in the world today! But when we try to follow the Gospel logic of integrity, clarity in intentions and in behavior, of fraternity, we become artisans of justice and we open horizons of hope for humanity. In gratuitousness and by giving of ourselves to our brothers and sisters, we serve the right master: God.

*What has most enticed me to give in to the logic of corruption in my actions?*

Wednesday, Week 5

## A Time of Courage

“Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” —Matthew 6:33

*A*s Christians, we must be committed in pastoral and missionary activities as if the result depends on our efforts, with the spirit of sacrifice of an athlete, who never stops even in the face of challenges. However, we also know that the true success of our mission is a gift of grace. It is the Holy Spirit who makes the Church’s mission in the world effective. Today is a time of mission and a time of courage! Courage to strengthen faltering steps, to recapture the enthusiasm of devoting oneself to the Gospel, of recovering confidence in the strength that the mission brings to bear. It is a time of courage, even if having courage does not mean having a guarantee of success. Courage is required of us in order to fight, not necessarily to win, in order to proclaim, not necessarily to convert. Courage is required of us in order to open ourselves to everyone, never diminishing the absoluteness and uniqueness of Christ, the one savior of all. Courage is required of us in order to withstand incredulity, without becoming arrogant.

*How might I show more courage in speaking and acting more like Jesus?*



Thursday, Week 5

## A Time to Put God First

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.” —Matthew 6:19-20

A heart troubled by the desire for possessions is a heart full of desire for possessions, but empty of God. That is why Jesus frequently warned the rich, because they greatly risk placing their security in worldly goods. But security, the final security, is in God. In a heart possessed by wealth, there isn't much room for faith. If, however, one gives God his rightful place, that is first place, then his love leads one to share even one's wealth, to set it at the service of projects of solidarity and development. God's providence comes through our service to others, our sharing with others. If each of us accumulates not for ourselves alone but for the service of others, in this act of solidarity, God's providence is made visible. If, however, one accumulates only for oneself, what will happen when one is called by God? No one can take his riches with him, because—as you know—a shroud has no pockets! It is better to share, for we can take with us to heaven only what we have shared with others.

*What might I share today with others who are in need?*

Friday, Week 5

## A Time to Love

“When a woman is in labor, she has pain, because her hour has come. But when her child is born, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy of having brought a human being into the world.” —John 16:21

True love passes through the cross, through sacrifice, as with Jesus. The cross is the obligatory passage, but it is not the goal. It is a passage: the goal is glory, as Easter shows us. And during the Last Supper Jesus gave his disciples another lovely image of the mother rejoicing in childbirth. To give life, not to keep it. This is what mothers do. They give life to another. They suffer, but then they rejoice, they are happy because they have given birth to another life. It gives joy. Love gives birth to life and even gives meaning to pain. Love is the engine

that empowers our hope. Let each one ask: “Do I love? Have I learned how to love? Do I learn each day to love more?” given that love is the engine that empowers our hope.

*What most keeps me from loving and bringing life to others around me?*

Saturday, Week 5

## A Time to Look to the Cross

“Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” —John 12:24

Jesus brought new hope into the world in the manner of the seed. He became very small, like a grain of wheat. He left his heavenly glory to come among us and “fell into the earth.” But this still was not enough. To bear fruit, Jesus experienced love to the fullest, allowing himself to be split open by death as a seed lets itself split open under the ground. Precisely there, at the lowest point of his abasement—which is also the loftiest point of love—hope sprang up. Hope is born from the cross. So look to the cross, look to Christ crucified and from there you will receive the hope that never disappears, which lasts to eternal life. The love that is the life of God, has renewed everything that it touched. With Jesus, all our darkness can be transformed into light, every defeat into victory, every disappointment into hope. Hope overcomes all, because it is born of the love of Jesus who made himself as a grain of wheat that fell to the soil and died to give life, and hope comes from that life full of love.

*What gives me the most hope when  
I contemplate Christ crucified and risen?*

Passion/Palm Sunday of Lent

## A Time to Follow Jesus

“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.” —Luke 9:23

Holy Week begins with the festive procession with olive branches as all the people welcome Jesus. But this week continues to the mystery of Jesus’ death and resurrection. But what does living Holy Week

mean to us? What does following Jesus on his journey to Calvary on his way to the cross and the resurrection mean? In his earthly mission Jesus walked the roads of the holy land. He called 12 regular people to stay with him, to share his journey and to continue his mission. He chose them from among the people full of faith in God's promises. He spoke to all without distinction: the great and the lowly, the rich young man and the poor widow, the powerful and the weak. He brought God's mercy and forgiveness. He healed, comforted, understood, gave hope, brought to all the presence of God who cares for every man and every woman, just as a good father and a good mother care for each one of their children. God does not wait for us to go to him but it is he who moves towards us, without calculation, without quantification. That is what God is like. God always takes the first step, God comes towards us.

*What cross might Jesus be asking me to take up now in my life?*

Monday Holy Week

## A Time to Renounce Evil

“Christ Jesus humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.” —Philippians 2:8

Jesus attains complete humiliation through “death on the cross.” It was the worst form of death, that reserved for slaves and criminals. Jesus was considered a prophet but he died like a criminal. As we contemplate Jesus in his passion, we see reflected the suffering of humanity and we discover the divine answer to the mystery of evil, suffering and death. Many times we feel horror at the evil and suffering that surrounds us and we ask ourselves: “Why does God allow it?” It deeply wounds us to see suffering and death, especially that of the innocent. When we see children suffer it wounds our hearts. It is the mystery of evil. And Jesus takes all of this evil, all of this suffering upon himself. This week it would benefit all of us to look at the crucifix, to kiss the wounds of Jesus on the crucifix. He took upon himself all human suffering, he clothed himself in this suffering.

*How might I lessen the suffering  
of those around me in some way today?*

Tuesday Holy Week

## A Time to Conquer Evil

“We proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but...God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.”

—1 Corinthians 1:24-25

We expect God in his omnipotence to defeat injustice, evil, sin and suffering with a triumphant divine victory. Yet God shows us a humble victory that, in human terms, appears to be failure. We can say that God conquers in failure. Indeed, the Son of God appears on the cross as a defeated man. He suffers, is betrayed, reviled and finally dies. Jesus allows evil to be unleashed on him and he takes it upon himself in order to conquer it. His passion is not an accident. Truly we cannot find many explanations. It is a puzzling mystery, the mystery of God’s great humility. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (Jn 3:16). This week let us think deeply about the suffering of Jesus and let us say to ourselves: this is for my sake.

*What evil must I reject so that suffering  
will be lessened in the world around me?*

Wednesday Holy Week

## A Time to Trust in God

“You, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O LORD, from my youth.” —Psalm 71:5

When all seems lost, when no one remains, then God intervenes with the power of his resurrection. Jesus’ resurrection is not the happy ending to a nice story or a movie. Rather, it is God the Father’s intervention there where human hope is shattered. The moment when all seems to be lost, the moment of suffering, when many people feel the need to get down from the cross, it is the moment closest to the resurrection. Night becomes darkest precisely before morning light dawns. In the darkest moment God intervenes and raises Jesus, who calls us to follow him on his own path of humiliation. When at certain moments in life we fail to find any way out of our difficulties, when we sink in the thickest darkness, it is the moment of our total humiliation and despoliation, the hour in which we experience that

we are frail and are sinners. It is precisely then, at that moment, that we must not deny our failure but rather open ourselves trustingly to hope in God, as Jesus did.

*When have I felt most abandoned by others  
or by God, yet trying to hope for new life?*

Holy Thursday

## A Time to Help One Another

“Do you know what I have done to you?” —John 13:12

When Jesus washed the feet of his disciples on Holy Thursday, Peter didn't understand it at all and refused. But Jesus explained it for him. “I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you” (Jn 13:15). It is the Lord's example. He is the most important yet he washes feet, because with us what is highest must be at the service of others. Washing feet means: “I am at your service.” And with us too, don't we have to wash each other's feet day after day? But what does this mean? That all of us must help one another. This is what Jesus teaches us and this what we must do, with all our heart, because it is our duty. We must be of service. But it is a duty which comes from our heart. This is what the Lord has taught us to do. So help one another: help one another always. In this way, by helping one another, we will do some good.

*To whom might I reach out today  
to help with whatever is most needed?*

Good Friday

## A Time to Carry My Cross

“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” —John 3:16

Good Friday is the culminating moment of love. The death of Jesus, who on the cross surrenders himself to the Father in order to offer salvation to the entire world, expresses love given to the end, a love without end. A love that seeks to embrace everyone, that excludes no one. A love that extends over time and space: an inexhaustible source

of salvation to which each of us sinners can draw. If God has shown us his supreme love in the death of Jesus, then we too, regenerated by the Holy Spirit, can and must love one another. The cross of Christ bears the suffering and the sins of all humanity, including our own. Jesus accepts all this with open arms, bearing on his shoulders our crosses and saying to us: “Have courage! You do not carry your cross alone! I carry it with you. I have overcome death and I have come to give you hope, to give you life.”

*What new life have I been experiencing this Lent  
as I have drawn closer to the suffering Jesus?*

Holy Saturday

## A Time to Remember

“Remember what he told you when he was still in Galilee.  
And they remembered his words.” —Luke 24:6, 8

Jesus laid in the tomb shares with all of humanity in the tragedy of death. But the women encounter the newness of God. Jesus has risen, he is alive! Faced with empty tomb and the two men in brilliant clothes, their first reaction is one of fear. But when they hear the message of the resurrection, they accept it in faith. And the two men in dazzling clothes tell them something of crucial importance: remember. This is the invitation to remember their encounter with Jesus, to remember his words, his actions, his life. And it is precisely this loving remembrance of their experience with the Master that enables the women to master their fear and to bring the message of the resurrection to the apostles and all the others. To remember what God has done and continues to do for me, for us, to remember the road we have travelled. This is what opens our hearts to hope for the future. May we learn to remember everything that God has done in our lives.

*What might I most want to remember about my Lenten experience  
with God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit?*

Easter Sunday

## A Time for New Life

“Go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen.” —Matthew 28:7

We feel as if this invitation is also directed to us to announce to the men and women of our times this message of joy and hope because Jesus who was crucified, is raised. Death no longer has the last word. The tomb does not have the last word. Life does! This is our certainty. In light of this event which constitutes the true and real news of history and the cosmos, we are called to be new men and women in accordance with the Spirit, confirming the value of life. We will be men and women of resurrection, men and women of life, if in the midst of the events that afflict the world today, in the midst of worldliness which distances us from God, we will know how to offer gestures of solidarity and gestures of welcome, strengthening the universal desire for peace and the hope for an environment free from degradation. These are common and human signs, which if supported and kept alive by faith in the risen Lord, acquire a power that is well beyond our abilities. And this is so because Christ is alive and working in history through his Holy Spirit. He redeems our shortcomings and reaches each human heart and gives back hope to whomever is oppressed and suffering.

*How have I most experienced Christ alive and working in me and my life now through his Holy Spirit?*

