

Becoming
INSTRUMENTS
OF *God's*
PEACE



LENTEN REFLECTIONS
ON ST. FRANCIS' PEACE PRAYER

INTRODUCTION

Peace is the harmony of living together in right relationships. The Bible contains God's guidelines for how a community is meant to live in harmony with God and with one another. The actions prohibited by God's 10 Commandments reveal the truest ways to destroy a community—disregarding God by worshiping and serving false gods, disregarding others by killing, lying, stealing, and violating others bodies and goods. Jesus reveals his new guidelines for life in the community desiring to live under God's kingdom rule. Following these guidelines is also our daily challenge as Jesus' disciples. St. Francis of Assisi wrote a prayer to remind his followers of their goal as Jesus' disciples—to become instruments of peace and harmony—first in themselves and then in their behavior towards others. His prayer offers us a way to use our Lenten time to reflect on how we also might become instruments of peace in a world torn by divisions, full of hatred, injury, doubt, despair, darkness and sadness that desperately cries out for love, pardon, faith, hope, light and joy. We hope that this booklet of daily reflections for Lent on the themes of Francis's prayer by many modern spiritual writers, together with an accompanying scripture quotation and question for reflection or prayer, will encourage you to become a more effective instrument of peace.

—Steve Mueller, Editor

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Lord, Make Me an Instrument of Your Peace

Ash Wednesday

THE CHALLENGE OF PEACE

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”

(Matthew 5:9)

Peace in society cannot be understood as pacification or the mere absence of violence resulting from the domination of one part of society over others. Nor does true peace act as a pretext for justifying a social structure which silences or appeases the poor, so that the more affluent can placidly support their lifestyle while others have to make do as they can. Demands involving the distribution of wealth, concern for the poor and human rights cannot be suppressed under the guise of creating a consensus on paper or a transient peace for a contented minority. The dignity of the human person and the common good rank higher than the comfort of those who refuse to renounce their privileges. When these values are threatened, a prophetic voice must be raised. Nor is peace simply the absence of warfare, based on a precarious balance of power. It is fashioned by efforts directed day after day towards the establishment of more perfect justice among persons. In the end, a peace that is not the result of integral development will be doomed. It will always spawn new conflicts and various forms of violence.

—Pope Francis

The Joy of the Gospel, #218-219

What relationships in my life need my attention to become more harmonious?

Thursday after Ash Wednesday

PEACE IS REVEALED IN JESUS

“Christ is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.” (Ephesians 2:14)

Peace is a gift of God, often hidden from the wise and the wealthy, and revealed to those who feel empty, inarticulate and poor. Where is his peace to be found? The answer is surprising but it is clear. In weakness, in our own weakness, in those places of our hearts where we feel most broken, most insecure, most in agony, most afraid. Why there? Because in our weakness our familiar ways of controlling and manipulating our world are being stripped away and we are forced to let go from doing much, thinking much, and relying on our self-sufficiency. Where we are most vulnerable,

the peace that is not of this world is mysteriously hidden. Do not give up working for peace. Keep your eyes on the prince of peace, who touches the lame, the crippled, and the blind, who speaks words of forgiveness and encouragement, who dies alone, rejected, and despised. Keep your eyes on him who becomes poor with the poor, weak with the weak, and who is rejected with the rejected. That one, Jesus, is the source of all peace.

—Henri J.M. Nouwen
Finding My Way Home

When have I most discovered peace in my weakness, fear and brokenness?



Friday after Ash Wednesday

PEACE BEGINS IN YOURSELF

“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body.” (Colossians 3:15)

The peace the world pretends to desire is really no peace at all. To some people peace merely means the liberty to exploit other people. To others it means the freedom to rob others without interruption. To still others it means the leisure to devour the earth’s goods without being compelled to feed those whom their greed is starving. And to practically everybody, peace simply means the absence of any physical violence that might hinder the satisfaction of their comfort and pleasure. Their idea of peace is only another form of war, the corruption of peace based on a policy of “every man for himself” in ethics, economics and political life. It is absurd to hope for a solid peace based on fictions and illusions! So instead of loving what you think is peace, love other persons and love God above all. And instead of hating the people you think are warmongers, hate the appetites and the disorder in your own soul, which are the causes of war. If you love peace, then hate injustice, hate tyranny, hate greed—but hate these things in yourself, not in another.

—Thomas Merton
Passion for Peace

*In what ways do I most need to pay attention to the disorders
in myself that cause conflicts?*

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

THE ATTITUDE OF PEACE

“Those of steadfast mind you keep in peace—in peace because they trust in you.”
(Isaiah 26:3)

Peace is more than the absence of conflict. It is an attitude about life. The prophet Isaiah writes that those who trust God are the ones who have peace. We can't keep all the hustle and bustle out of our lives. We can't avoid some daily conflicts and difficulties but we can give ourselves in trust to God. How? Each time we feel distress, act unlovingly, succumb to anxious worrying or get caught in a whirlwind of activity, we can refocus our inner self. We can turn our hearts toward peace by asking ourselves some questions: What will all this mean after I die? What is the value here? What do I need to let go of and entrust to God? Peace of mind and heart is simple. Isaiah knew that. It means trusting that God is with us and that this gift is all we really need for our happiness.

—Joyce Rupp
Inviting God In

What most keeps me from trusting God and entrusting my life to God?

Week 1: Where There is Hatred, Let Me Sow Love.

First Sunday of Lent

HATRED IS THE GREATEST EVIL

“Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses.” (Proverbs 10:2)

There is nothing more evil than hate. Long years of good work can go to waste because of a single spasm of hate. You may have spent a long time cultivating a relationship, and one day you become confused and perceive that friend is an enemy to your happiness. You suddenly explode in anger, lose control and hurt your friend verbally or physically. We hear about this every day in circumstances ranging from domestic violence to all-out war. The great mass killings of the twentieth century had hate as their root and persistent cause. If there is a nuclear holocaust that ends all life on this planet, it will not be caused by nuclear technology or by political, religious, or economic disagreements. It will be caused by hate. The positive imprints

of virtuous actions, the seeds of future insight and freedom planted by the work of learning, reflection and contemplation, all the positive developmental energy we accumulate in a lifetime of effort can be destroyed by hate. Hate can create an instant hell, a nightmare of death, and a horrific awakening.

—Robert Thurman
Inner Revolution

How has hatred most deteriorated my relationships and my life?



Monday, Week 1

JUST ONE MORE WAR

“Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weakling say, ‘I am a warrior.’” (Joel 3:10)

I have learned that an age in which politicians talk about peace is an age in which everybody expects war. The great men of the earth would not talk of peace so much if they did not secretly believe it possible, with one more war, to annihilate their enemies forever. Always, “after just one more war” the new era of love will dawn: but first everybody who is hated must be eliminated. For hate is the mother of their kind of love. Unfortunately the love that is to be born out of hate will never be born. Love cannot come of emptiness. Hatred destroys the real human being in fighting the fiction which it calls “the enemy.” For a person is concrete and alive, but “the enemy” is a subjective abstraction. A society that kills real people in order to deliver itself from the phantasm of a paranoid delusion is already possessed by the demon of destructiveness because it has made itself incapable of love. It is dedicated not to concrete relations of person with person, but only to abstractions about politics, economics, psychology, and even, sometimes, religion.

—Thomas Merton
Seeds

How have I been influenced by the idea that violence is the answer to problems?

Tuesday, Week 1

YOUR KINGDOM COME!

“Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

(Matthew 6:10)

The life of this planet, and especially its human life, is a life in which something has gone wrong, and badly wrong. Every time that we see an unhappy face, an unhealthy body, hear a bitter or despairing word, we are reminded of that. The occasional dazzling flashes of pure beauty, pure goodness, pure love which show us what God wants and what God is, only throw into more vivid relief the horror of cruelty, greed, oppression, hatred, ugliness and also the mere muddle and stupidity that frustrate and bring suffering into life. Unless we put on blinkers, we can hardly avoid seeing all this; and unless we are warmly wrapped up in our own cozy ideas, and absorbed in our own interests, we surely cannot help feeling the sense of obligation, the shame of acquiescence, the call to do something about it. To say day by day “Your Kingdom Come” means, or should mean, “Here am I! Send me” (Is 6:8)—active, costly collaboration with the Spirit in whom we believe.

—Evelyn Underhill
The Practical Mystic

*Where might God now be sending me to make my situation
more just and relationships more peaceful?*

Wednesday, Week 1

THE CROSS WILL COME

“Servants are not greater than their master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you.” (John 15:20)

To preach the cross of Christ today means to commit oneself and all one’s energies for a world where love, peace and a community of sisters and brothers living in openness and self-surrender to God will be less difficult. This means denouncing situations that generate hatred, division and practical atheism in structures, values, practices and ideologies. It means proclaiming, and practicing—in commitment, love and solidarity—justice in the family, in the school, in the economic system and in political relations. The consequence of this engagement will be crisis, suffering, confrontation and the cross. Acceptance of this confrontation is to carry the cross as our Lord carried it: it means suffering, enduring for the sake of the cause we

support and the life we lead. The cross is the symbol of the rejection and violation of the sacred rights of God and the human being. It is the product of hatred. To accept the cross is to be greater than the cross. To live thus is to be stronger than death.

—Leonardo Boff
Passion of Christ, Passion of the World

What difficulties most confront me when I try to stand up for justice and peace?

Thursday, Week 1

JESUS' PEACE IS DIFFERENT

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you.” (John 14.27)

It may help us, when we are painfully conscious of turmoil, to remember that Christ's gifts are more than a spiritualized version of secular commodities. As the love he gives us is a love that has made itself vulnerable to all that hatred can do and has conquered hatred, as the life he gives is a life that has been through death and proved the stronger, so the peace he gives is something more than an absence of stress. The gift may sometimes be offered and received within the turmoil, in the eye of the storm. You have to wait in hope, waiting for the mystery to unfold, going on doing ordinary things but all the time listening, learning, pondering, growing and energetically serving. You have to be silent before the mystery. By your closeness to Christ his mind is being formed in you, and he is leading you into his own experience, his own joy and longing, and his own knowledge of the Father.

—Maria Boulding
The Coming of God

What most keeps me from experiencing Jesus' peace in myself and my life today?

Friday, Week 1

THE DAILY STRUGGLE OF LOVE & HATE

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” (Romans 12:21)

We can't avoid the news, the war, the terror alerts, the fear. We're doing what we can to change the world in our own small way, but new ideas and more compassionate forces seem overwhelmed by their opposites. A few things seem to be getting better, but many things seem to be getting much worse. Just when love seemed to be the hot new topic, hatred sounded its clarion call. And the entire world could not but hear. The most important

thing to remember during times of rapid transition is to fix our eyes anew on the things that don't change. Eternal things become our compass during times of rapid transition, binding us emotionally to a steady and firm course. They remind us that we, as children of God, are still at the center of divine purpose in the world. They give us the strength to make positive changes, wisdom to endure negative changes, and the capacity to become people in whose presence the world moves toward healing.

—Marianne Williamson
The Gift of Change

What evils do I most need to eliminate in my relationships and my life now?

Saturday, Week 1

CHOOSING TO STOP HATE

“Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.” (Romans 12:17)

Sometimes well-intentioned artists have painted Mary as prostrate under the cross, the wounded mother, helplessly distraught, paralyzed by grief, an object for sympathy. But that does not honor what happened there nor teach its lesson. Prostration, in this situation, is weakness, collapse, hysteria, resignation. In the Gospels, “standing” is a position of strength. Mary “stood” under the cross. She was strong there. Still, why the silence and why her seeming unwillingness to act or protest? In essence, what Mary was doing under the cross was this: her silence and strength were speaking these words: “Today, I can't stop the crucifixion; nobody can. Sometimes darkness will have its hour. But I can stop some of the hatred, bitterness, jealousy, and heartlessness that caused it—by refusing to give it back in kind, by transforming negativity rather than retransmitting it, by swallowing hard, in silence, and eating the bitterness rather than giving it back in kind.”



Ronald Rohlheiser
Sacred Fire

When have I been guilty of responding to evil with more evil? With what results?

Week 2: Where There is Injury, Pardon.

2nd Sunday of Lent

FORGIVE & BE FORGIVEN

“If you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”
(Matthew 6:14-15)

Forgiveness is a very significant part of being reconciled, of being healed. Forgiving another is difficult. I don't have to do this instantly, and I don't have to renew a relationship with that person—maybe the person in question has died or has abused me in some way. But I do need to come to a point where I do not wish that person harm. Until I have peace within myself regarding the relationship, I have not fully forgiven the other person. Praying for someone I need to forgive or be reconciled with has helped me. I pray by simply naming that person, bringing him or her to God for a blessing each day. I don't specify what he or she needs. I let God take care of that. My intention is to make an act of love with a desire for each of us to find peace. I can't change someone else nor can I instantly get rid of all my unwanted emotions like anger or vengefulness. But prayer can soften the heart and open it. And that is what forgiveness requires.

—Joyce Rupp
Inviting God In

Whom do I need to forgive and from whom do I most need to ask forgiveness?

Monday, Week 2

RESTORING RELATIONSHIPS

“My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness.” (Galatians 6:1)

Jesus, many mystics, and other wisdom traditions—such as the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous—show that sin and failure are, in fact,



an opportunity for the transformation and enlightenment of the offender. Mere counting and ledger-keeping is not the way of the Gospel. Our best self wants to restore relationships, and not just blame or punish. This is the “economy of grace.” (The trouble is that we defined God as “punisher in

chief” instead of Healer, Forgiver, and Reconciler and so the retribution model was legitimized all the way down!) What humanity really needs is an honest exposure of the truth and accountability for what has happened. Only then can human beings move ahead with dignity. Hurt needs to be spoken and heard. It does not just go away on its own. This can then lead to “restorative justice,” which is what the prophets invariably promise to the people of Israel (e.g., Ezekiel 16:53; Isaiah 57:17-19) and is exemplified in Jesus’ story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) and throughout his healing ministry. We lose that and we lose the Gospel itself.

—Richard Rohr

Breathing Under Water: Spirituality & the Twelve Steps

What broken relationships do I most need to try to restore?

Tuesday, Week 2

STEPS TO FORGIVENESS

“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.” (Luke 6:27-28)

The first step is the refusal to seek revenge. No more “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” The second step is the genuine, heartfelt hope that the oppressor be liberated. The victim cannot change the heart that is filled with fear and hate, but one may hope and pray that one day the oppressor’s heart of stone may become a heart of flesh. The third step is the desire to understand the oppressors: how and why their indifference or hardness of heart has developed, and how they might be liberated. The fourth step is the recognition of our own darkness. We, too, have hurt people and perhaps have contributed to the hardness of the oppressors. The fifth step is patience. It takes time for a victim to be freed from blockage and hatred; it takes time for an oppressor to evolve and to change. Reconciliation is a bilateral affair; it is the completion of the forgiveness process, the coming together of the oppressed and the oppressor, each one accepting the other, each acknowledging their fears and hatreds, each accepting that the path of mutual love is the only way out of a world of conflict.

—Jean Vanier

Essential Writings

With whom do I most need to be reconciled and how might I go about it today?

Wednesday, Week 2

RADICAL FORGIVENESS

“Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, ‘Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.’” (Matthew 18:21-22)

Few people, thank God, have to deal with forgiving someone who has murdered a loved one, or a beloved child who is defeated in life and ends his or her pain by committing suicide. But all of us must deal on a regular basis with thoughts about people we feel have hurt us, abandoned us, spoken badly about us, hurt our feelings, damaged our reputations, manipulated, provoked, or just plain annoyed us. They can be parents, relatives, friends, bosses, employees, even strangers. But it is not these people we need to forgive so much as our thoughts about them, the angry, unforgiving thoughts that gnaw at our consciousness, burn us, haunt us, won't let us go, because we can't let them go. Forgiveness is a paradox: we cannot heal ourselves if we do not forgive others, but if we do forgive, it is we ourselves who benefit the most. I have learned that radical forgiveness, asked for and given, seventy times seven times, is the only way out of that prison.

—Antoinette Bosco
Radical Forgiveness

*Which of my thoughts about others who have wronged me
do I most need to eradicate?*

Thursday, Week 2

FORGIVENESS & COMPASSION

“Be on your guard! If another disciple sins, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive.” (Luke 17:3)

Forgiveness is about letting go, really letting go of resentment and bitterness—both personal and global. Forgiveness requires strength of character and a courage that needs to be replenished daily and rekindled when it falters. Forgiveness requires a commitment to something other than revenge and the natural desire for retribution and/or an apology. It requires, since there are events and behaviors that are unforgivable, ultimate compassion. Many people are under the illusion that forgiveness lets the misdoer off the hook; it does not. Genuine forgiveness is not about condoning awful behavior. Forgiveness and compassion do not green light what has been done. There's no question that perpetrators who are in a position to hurt again

need to be stopped. Ironically, the clearer we are, the less saddled with the negativity of previous transgressions, the more creative and effective we can be in stopping further violations. The fewer resentment blocks you have, the more access you have to saying no; cursing the behavior appropriately and in a resilient fashion protects you or anyone else who needs it.

—Beth Miller

The Woman's Book of Resilience

What bitterness and resentment towards others do I most need to let go of?



Friday, Week 2

FORGIVENESS CHANGES US

One who forgives an affront fosters friendship, but one who dwells on disputes will alienate a friend.” (Proverbs 17:9)

*F*orgiveness can change both our heart and our life: severity and harsh judgments recede and leave room in our hearts for goodness and kindness. And we become capable of seeking to understand rather than to be understood. Nothing is more tenacious than the memory of past wounds and humiliations. When we seek tirelessly to forgive and to be reconciled, a future opens up beyond all our expectations. You want to follow Christ, and not look back. Are you going to make your way through life with a heart that is reconciled, even amid the most crippling tensions? Suppose people distort your intentions and you are judged wrongly because of Christ, forgive and then forgive again. That is the highest expression of loving. You forgive not to change the other person, but simply to follow Christ. Dare to rejoice in what God is accomplishing through you and around you. Then all forms of pessimism about yourself and about others, which were waging war on your soul, will melt away.

—Brother Roger of Taizé

Essential Writings

How have I been changed by forgiveness and reconciliation with someone else?

Saturday, Week 2

THE CURSE OF UNFORGIVENESS

“Whether one wears a splendid crown or is clothed in the coarsest of garments—there is wrath and envy, trouble and dread, terror of death, fury and strife.”
(Sirach 40:4-5)

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. The curse of unforgiveness leads to abuse and dehumanization, to despair and brutality. It makes some rich and powerful, while others are exploited and end finally in crime and in poverty. Families play the same game of unforgiveness, generation after generation. Families end in abuse, and communities end in hostility. Nations play the game of unforgiveness, and it leads to repression and inequality and war and terror. Unforgiveness leads to death, both for the victim and for the perpetrator. The good 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

When and for what reasons have I been most guilty of unforgiveness?

Week 3: Where There is Doubt, Faith.

3rd Sunday of Lent

CHOOSING TO BELIEVE

“O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” (Matthew 14:31)

Doubt is unavoidable in the life of faith. Without ever questioning or doubting what we know (or think we know) about the teaching of our spiritual tradition, our faith could never grow. We could not clear away the layers of misconception and superficiality that our spiritual laziness—our sloth—has wrapped around the mystery of our salvation. Doubt is the

price we pay for having a mind, for being made free. For the essence of our faith in Christ lies not in understanding who he is so clearly, so completely, that we are compelled to believe in him: that it becomes impossible for us not to believe. The essence of faith is that it is free, that we choose to believe and trust him whom we cannot understand but whom we have encountered and love. We search for Christ, we long to find him, we enter into a relationship with him because, and only because, in him we encounter and recognize God.

—Irma Zaleski
Finding Christ Within

What doubts most hinder my choice to entrust myself to Christ in a relationship?



Monday, Week 3

FORCING A CHOICE

“Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!” (Luke 12:51)

Living faith does not mean decorating life with a little religion, as if it were a cake and we were decorating it with cream. Faith means choosing God as the criterion and basis of life. For this reason Jesus says “I came to bring division.” It is not that Jesus wishes to split people up. On the contrary Jesus is our peace, he is our reconciliation! But this peace is not the peace of the tomb, it is not neutrality. This peace is not a compromise at all costs. Following Jesus entails giving up evil and selfishness and choosing good, truth and justice, even when this demands sacrifice and the renunciation of our own interests. And this choice indeed divides; as we know, it even cuts the closest ties. Jesus does not bring neutrality. His peace is not a compromise at all costs. It is not Jesus who creates division! He establishes the criterion: whether to live for ourselves or to live for God and for others; to be served or to serve; to obey one’s own ego or to obey God.

—Pope Francis

What most keeps me choosing to live for myself rather than for God and others?

Tuesday, Week 3

LIVING OUR FAITH, SHARING OUR LIFE WITH GOD

“In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.” (John 14:19-20)

God moves toward us so that we may move toward each other and thereby toward God. The way God comes to us is also our way to God and to each other: through Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. This is our faith, confessed in creed and celebrated in the sacraments. Confessing faith is incomplete unless it becomes a form of life. Living faith in the God of Jesus Christ means being formed and transformed by the life of grace of God’s economy: becoming persons fully in communion with all; becoming Christ to one another; becoming by the power of the Holy Spirit what God is: love unbounded, glory uncontained. God, who dwells in inaccessible light and eternal glory, comes to us in the face of Christ and the activity of the Holy Spirit. Because of God’s outreach to the creature, God is said to be essentially relational, ecstatic, fecund, alive as passionate love. Divine life is therefore also our life. The heart of the Christian life is to be united with the God of Jesus Christ by means of communion with one another.

—Catherine Mowry LaCugna
God for Us

*When have I most experienced God the Father, Jesus and
the Holy Spirit present and working in me?*

Wednesday, Week 3

DOING FAITH

“God has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8)

The gospel is “good news” not for adherents but rather for practitioners. And the practice of Christianity is made possible not by intellectual assent to propositions but by an existential embrace of worthiness. It is a call not to accept a formula for salvation but to act on an unearned inheritance: that we are created by God, children of God, beloved by God, and accepted by God. It means that every morning, we can wake up worthy and walk. This is the grace that brings radical freedom and the end of striving. Faith is

something we do, against the odds, in loving defiance of a world gone mad. We do not become a good person by believing in God; we become a good person by loving God, especially the God we meet in every living thing. The most important question we can ask now is not about what we believe. It is about how we relate.

—Robin Meyers
Saving Jesus From the Church

What might I do today to act more lovingly towards others?

Thursday, Week 3

JESUS' HEALING PRESENCE

“O LORD, be gracious to me; heal me, for I have sinned against you.”

(Psalm 41:4)

Jesus, I pray that this Lenten period may make me more aware of your forgiving presence in my life and less concerned about performing well in the eyes of my world. Let me recognize you in the depth of my heart where you dwell and heal me. Let me experience you in that center of my being from which you want to teach and guide me. Let me know you as my loving brother who holds nothing—not even my worst sins against me, but who wants to touch me in a gentle embrace. Take away the many fears, suspicions and doubts by which I prevent you from being my Lord, and give me the courage and freedom to appear naked and vulnerable in the light of your presence, confident in your unfathomable mercy. I know how great my resistance is, how quickly I choose the darkness instead of the light. But I also know that you keep calling me into the light, where I can see not only my sins but your gracious face as well. Be with me every hour of my days.

—Henri J.M. Nouwen
A Cry for Mercy

What healing do I most want Jesus to work in me today?

Friday, Week 3

FAITH & LOVE

“Truly I tell you, 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)

Faith implies public testimony and commitment. A Christian may never think of belief as a private act. Faith is choosing to stand with the Lord so as to live with him. This “standing with him” points towards an under-

standing of the reasons for believing. Faith, precisely because it is a free act, also demands social responsibility for what one believes. Faith without love bears no fruit, while love without faith would be a sentiment constantly at the mercy of doubt. Faith and love each require the other, in such a way that each allows the other to set out along its respective path. Indeed, many Christians dedicate their lives with love to those who are lonely, marginalized or excluded, as to those who are the first with a claim on our attention and the most important for us to support, because it is in them that the reflection of Christ's own face is seen. Through faith, we can recognize the face of the risen Lord in those who ask for our love

—Pope Benedict XVI
The Door of Faith, #10, 14

How might I better translate my faith into loving action for others today?

Saturday, Week 3

SEEING WITH THE EYES OF FAITH

“Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” (Luke 7:50)

Jesus tells men and women that they can rise above the vindictiveness and estrangement that fill their lives. He says there are resources of healing and self-realization that can be called upon if a person believes deeply enough. Only a faith whose content recognizes and symbolizes the fact that men and women can always find fuller lives—only that faith can ever make them whole. Faith is intimately involved in the human story, and



religious faith takes us more deeply into it rather than farther away from it. The eyes of faith permit us to see ourselves as we are—and the selves we can yet be. It is the spark that dances across these flash points of experience all the days of our lives. Faith, then, is far from a frozen set of dogmas, and it has little resemblance to

wishful thinking. Faith, insofar as it organizes us and orients us to what is really happening in and around us, situates us in reality rather than in some escapist illusion about life.

—Eugene Kennedy
Believing

When have I most experienced a living faith energizing my life?

Week 4: Where There is Despair, Hope.

4th Sunday of Lent

HOPE ACTIVE IN LOVE

“Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?” (Matthew 25:44)

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 and given drink to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger and clothed the naked, or spent time with the sick and those in prison (Matthew 25:31-45). 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.

—Pope Francis

How might I reach out more to those who are in need or close to giving up?

Monday, Week 4

ENCOURAGED BY HOPE

“Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us, even as we hope in you.”

(Psalm 33:2)

Hope is not just one single quality or promise. Hope has to do with believing beyond today—knowing there’s a garden of beauty that awaits me. Hope encourages me to follow my dreams, to believe in the part of me that envisions my wholeness. Hope is trusting that what is happening will eventually make sense, or if it never does become meaningful, it will still offer an opportunity for growth. Hope assures me each morning that my life is of value no matter how unsettling or disturbing my current situation is. Hope encourages my heart not to give up and nudges me when it’s time to move on. Hope doesn’t need words or proofs or conditions. Hope accepts mystery and offers the gift of solid trust in the unknown. Hope doesn’t pretend that I’ll get all I want nor does hope deny that there will still be

struggles down the road. Hope tucks promises of growth and truth inside the pockets of my struggles.

—Joyce Rupp
The Cup of Our Life

*What encouragement comes from my hope in God
as my companion moving to the future?*

Tuesday, Week 4

HOPE IN GOD'S NEWNESS

*"I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?"
(Isaiah 43:19)*

With Jesus has come the real power of God's newness. Everyone noticed that where Jesus was present, old patterns of hurt and guilt and despair and injustice were broken. Wherever Jesus went, the power for death was broken and new life became possible. For some, that was a threat because they did not want to change. For others, it was the best news they ever had, because the power of death no longer could control their lives. God is doing a new, new thing, new things in the world, new things for you, to grant you a new beginning free of what has been old and tired and angry and broken. God has made a move toward new power in the world, power for life. It is a word, a gesture, a gift. And you may seize it. You may decide to act on the basis of the newness. You may decide that your anger has been answered and you are free of it. You may decide that the old guilt has been forgiven and you can start again. God has done newness.

—Walter Brueggemann
The Collected Sermons

What new things might Jesus be inviting me toward in my life now?

Wednesday, Week 4

HOPE GROUNDED IN LOVE

*"Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."
(1 Corinthians 13:7)*

In the practice of conscious love you begin to discover a hope that is related not to outcome but to a wellspring, a source of strength that wells up from deep within you independent of all outcomes. It is a hope that can never be taken away from you because it is love itself working in you, conferring the strength to stay present to that highest possible outcome that

can be believed and aspired to. Everything that is tough and brittle shatters; everything that is cynical rots. The only way to endure is to forgive, over and over, to give back that openness and possibility for new beginning which is the very essence of love itself. And in such a way love comes full circle and can fully sustain and make fruitful, and the cycle begins again, at a deeper place. And conscious love deepens and becomes more and more rooted.

—Cynthia Bourgeault
Love Is Stronger than Death

What new beginnings have I been drawn to and tried out this Lent?

Thursday, Week 4

DECIDING TO 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)

Prophetic faith does not see the primary battle as the struggle between belief and secularism. It understands that the real battle, the big struggle of our times, is the fundamental choice between cynicism and hope. The prophets always begin in judgment, in a social critique of the status quo, but they end in hope—that these realities can and will be changed. The choice between cynicism and hope is ultimately a spiritual choice that has enormous political consequences. Hope is not a feeling; it is a decision—a spiritual and even religious choice. And the decision for hope is based on what you believe at the deepest levels—what your most basic convictions are about the world and what the future holds—all based on your faith. You choose hope, not as a naive wish, but with your eyes wide open to the reality of the world—just like the cynics who have not made the decision for hope. And the only difference between the cynics and the saints is the presence, power, and possibility of hope.

—Jim Wallis
God’s Politics

How has my decision to hope changed my attitudes and actions this Lent?

Friday, Week 4

HOPING IN GOD’S PRESENCE

“Hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen! But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.” (Romans 8:24-25)

True hope is not hoping for something I desire or hoping that it will

come to pass. True hope is hoping in the reality of God, present in the fabric of life—even those aspects of reality that break our hearts. There is within us a sustaining force that cannot be defeated, one that by nature lives even when I despair. My resistance to the inclination to hopelessness reveals the persistent nature of hope to “bounce back,” to grow, and to become better, stronger, more compassionate and wise through life’s ups and downs. Hope is a virtue, not a feeling. Living a hopeful life, like living a loving life, is a matter of the will. It is a decision that must be made over and over again as we face situations that seem to be beyond our ability to endure. In fact, there is much that is beyond us, but there is nothing that we cannot find the strength to cope with when we draw upon God’s hopeful presence within.

—Tom Stella
A Faith Worth Believing

What most challenges my desire to live a hopeful life?

Saturday, Week 4

HOPING & WISHING

“Nothing will be impossible for God.” (Luke 1:37)

Only hope can orient us toward the fullness of reality if indeed the fullness of reality lies in the future. For hope is an openness to the breaking in of what is completely unpredictable and unanticipated from the point of view of what is considered to be possible by ordinary standards of expectation. Hoping is not the same as wishing. Wishing is a mode of desire that is oriented entirely from the individual’s present. It tends to imagine that the future will turn out the way I would like, on the basis of what pleases me now. Wishing can give rise only to fantasies and illusions. But hoping, as a communally shared aspiration, renounces such illusions and opens itself to a future that may turn out to be quite different from the one I wish for. Hoping is openness to the radically new and “impossible” in a way that wishing is not. Hoping, therefore, can be considered a realistic, indeed the most realistic, stance our consciousness can take. Hoping is faith’s way of embracing reality.

—John F. Haught
The Revelation of God in History

How has my hoping in God encouraged me to desire the future that God is creating?

Week 5: Where There is Darkness, Light

5th Sunday of Lent

PEACE DISPELS DARKNESS

“Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going.”

(John 12:35-36)

So many people today live in the night; a few live in the day. We all know about night and day, darkness and light. We know about it in our hearts, in our families and communities, in our world. The peace that the world does not give is the light that dispels some of this darkness. With that peace in your heart you will have new eyes to see and new ears to hear and gradually recognize that same peace in others. When we trust that the God of love has already given the peace we are searching for, we will see this peace breaking through the broken soil of our human condition and we will be able to let it grow fast and even heal the economic and political maladies of our time. Let us pray for the light. It is the peace the world cannot give. May his light shine in our darkness and may I be ready to receive it with joy and thanksgiving.

—Henri J.M. Nouwen
Finding My Way Home

What darkness most permeates my life and relationships now?

Monday, Week 5

BE SHINING LAMPS

“You are the light of the world... Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

(Matthew 5:14, 16)

Baptism illuminates us from within with the light of Jesus. In virtue of this gift the baptized are called to become themselves “light”—the light of the faith they have received—for their brothers and sisters, especially for those who are in darkness and see no glimmer of light on the horizon of their lives. We who are baptized Christians are missionary disciples called to become a living Gospel in the world. We will carry the light of Christ through our holy life and the witness of genuine love. We must keep the light we have received from Jesus, protecting it and safeguarding it. The Christian should be a luminous person; one who brings light, who always

gives off light! We carry this light that is not ours, but a gift from God, a gift from Jesus. If a Christian extinguishes this light, he is a Christian by name only and his life has no meaning. How do you want to live? As a lamp that is burning or one that is not? It is truly God who gives us this light and we must give it to others. Shining lamps! This is the Christian vocation.

—Pope Francis

How might I shine the light of my faith into the darkness surrounding me today?

Tuesday, Week 5

THE QUESTIONS OF DARKNESS

*“God uncovers the deeps out of darkness, and brings deep darkness to light.”
(Job 12:22)*

*W*e can never live for very long without some dark moments pushing their way into our days. This is life’s way of inviting us to grow. Whether or not the darkness is a gift depends on our attitude toward it and how we respond. Any kind of darkness can call us, push us, nudge us and urge us onto the path of inner growth. Darkness can wake us up and stir questions in us that we’d rather not face? Whom or what have I taken for granted? Have I been attentive to the deepest longings of my soul? Out of these deep, stirring questions of darkness, we can be led to clearer awareness regarding our strengths and weaknesses. They can give us a new vision about “the way life is,” helping us to discover greater inner freedom to be who we are meant to be. The questions of darkness can gift us with a willingness to live with insecurity and to find deeper joy in the things of life we so easily assume will always be there for us.

—Joyce Rupp

Little Pieces of Light

What questions has my darkness challenged me to respond to? With what results?

Wednesday, Week 5

A TINY FLAME

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

(John 1:5)

*W*e are not saints, we are not heroes. Our lives are lived in the quiet corners of the ordinary. We build tiny hearth fires, sometimes barely strong enough to give off warmth. But to the person lost in the darkness, our tiny flame may be the road to safety, the path to salvation. It is not given us to

know who is lost in the darkness that surrounds us or even if our light is seen. We can only know that against even the smallest of lights, darkness cannot stand. A sailor lost at sea can be guided home by a single candle. A person lost in a wood can be led to safety by a flickering flame. It is not an issue of quality or intensity or purity. It is simply an issue of the presence of light.

—Kent Nerburn

Make Me an Instrument of Your Peace

What small lights shining from those around me have led me out of my darkness?

Thursday, Week 5

DEALING WITH DARK TIMES

“God is light, and in God there is no darkness at all. If we walk in the light as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with one another.” (1 John 1:5, 7)

Understand that the path of holy simplicity has a certain sweep to it. Stages must be moved through. We crawl before we walk. Keep praying for ears to hear and eyes to see. Anxiety prevents that. You’ll know when it’s time for the next thing. How? If you are going slowly, prayerfully, without anxiety, you’ll “hear” the call when it comes. Remember that others are affected by your trajectory. Don’t let that stop you, but have compassion. Love them even when they make you angry. If they love you back, they’ll stick around to see what happens. If they respect what they see, they might try it themselves. Understand that there are dark times; times of self-doubt and discouragement; stages that feel cold; demons in the night. Remember that the simple path involves stripping. We lose social identity. We lose consoling fantasies about ourselves. We give up certain comforts and conveniences. When darkness overwhelms, read Isaiah 35 and pray to rise with Christ in the morning light.

—Paula Huston

The Holy Way

What most helped me to get out of my dark times?

Friday, Week 5

GOD’S LIGHT FROM OUT OF DARKNESS

“It is you who light my lamp; the LORD, my God, lights up my darkness.”

(Psalm 18:28)

Life begins in darkness and ends in darkness. In the beginning, there was only darkness and from this darkness, emptiness, and nothingness all

of creation comes into being. Darkness is a mystery; it evokes curiosity and fear of the unknown, and at the same time it brings us into the embrace of reality. That darkness at the heart of creation has its counterpart in the darkness living at the core of each of us. In the dark moments and struggles of our lives, we often realize the beauty and the power that lie deep within us. This darkness sheds light on our external world and helps us not only cope with, but also live effectively and more fully in, the painful situations of our lives. This light comes from the darkness at our core. This light draws us back to the very source of life. There is comfort, there is peace, and there is power in the dark cave of our being where God truly dwells.

—Paul Coutinho
Sacred Darkness

How have I most experienced God's presence lighting up my darkness?

Saturday, Week 5

JESUS' LIGHT TRANSFORMS US

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (John 8:12)

Christ has commanded us to let the light of the gospel shine forth in our service to society. The gospel is not a private opinion, a remote spiritual ideal or a mere program for personal growth. The gospel is no abstraction. It is the living person of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, the reflection of the Father's glory, the incarnate Son who reveals the deepest meaning of our humanity and the noble destiny to which the whole human family is called. The gospel is the power which can transform the world! How can we profess faith in God's word, and then refuse to let it inspire and direct our thinking, our activity, our decisions, and our responsibilities to one another? Openness to the Lord—a willingness to let the Lord transform our lives—should produce a renewed spiritual and missionary vitality among Catholics. Jesus Christ is the answer to the question posed by every human life, and the love of Christ compels us to share that great good news with everyone.

—Pope St. John Paul II
Make Room for the Mystery of God

How has my reading and praying the gospels most changed me this year?

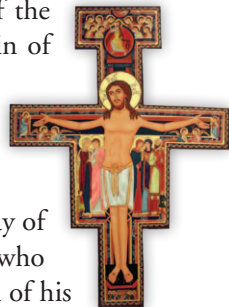
Holy Week: Where There is Sadness, Joy.

Passion/Palm Sunday of Lent

WHY THE CROSS?

“Christ humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted him.” (Philippians 2:8-9)

Jesus enters Jerusalem to die on the cross. Here his kingship shines forth in godly fashion: his royal throne is the wood of the cross! Jesus takes upon himself the evil, the filth, the sin of the world, including the sin of all of us, and he cleanses it, he cleanses it with his blood and with the mercy and the love of God. Christ's cross embraced with love never leads to sadness, but to joy, to the joy of having been saved and of doing a little of what he did on the day of his death. He is a king who loves even to the cross and who teaches us to serve and to love. And we are not ashamed of his cross but embrace it, because we have understood that it is in giving ourselves, in emerging from ourselves that we have true joy and that, with his love, God conquered evil. We proclaim that on the cross Jesus knocked down the wall of enmity that divides people and nations, and he brought reconciliation and peace.



—Pope Francis

*When have I experienced my sadness and suffering
being transformed into joy and service?*

Monday Holy Week

CUP OF SORROW, CUP OF JOY

“Amen, amen, I tell you, you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice; you will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy. (John 16:20)

Joys are hidden in sorrows! I know this from my own times of depression. I know it from living with people with mental handicaps. I know it from looking into the eyes of patients, and from being with the poorest of the poor. We keep forgetting this truth and become overwhelmed by our own darkness. We easily lose sight of our joys and speak of our sorrows as the only reality there is. We need to remind each other that the cup of sorrow is also the cup of joy, that precisely what causes us sadness can become

the fertile ground for gladness. Indeed, we need to be angels for each other, to give each other strength and consolation. Because only when we fully realize that the cup of life is not only a cup of sorrow but also a cup of joy will we be able to drink it.

—Henri J.M. Nouwen
Can You Drink the Cup?

When have I discovered some joy hidden amidst my sorrows or those of others?

Tuesday Holy Week

GOD'S MERCY IN BOTH JOY & SORROW

“The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.” (Exodus 34:6)

God's mercy is manifest in affliction as in joy, by the same right; more perhaps, because under this form it has no human analogy. Human mercy is only shown in giving joy, or maybe in inflicting pain with a view to outward results, bodily healing or education. But it is not the outward results of affliction which bear witness to divine mercy. The outward results of true affliction are nearly always bad. We lie when we try to disguise this. It is in affliction itself that the splendor of God's mercy shines; from its very depths, in the heart of its inconsolable bitterness. If still persevering in our love, we fall to the point where the soul cannot keep back the cry “My God, why hast thou forsaken me?”, if we remain at this point without ceasing to love, we end by touching something which is not affliction, which is not joy; something which is the central essence, necessary and pure; something not of the senses, common to joy and sorrow; something which is the very love of God.

—Simone Weil
Waiting for God

How have I experienced God's love when I was steeped in darkness and suffering?

Wednesday Holy Week

PUT YOUR SWORD BACK!

“Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.” (Matthew 26:52)

These are the last words—a definitive rebuke—the disciples hear from Jesus before they run away. If ever there was a moment in God's eyes when violence would be justifiable, this is it! But Jesus is clear: Put your sword

back! His followers are not allowed to respond with violence. They are not allowed to kill. They are not allowed to harm others. They are not allowed to threaten others. They are not permitted to “deter” violent crime with the use of violence. Why? Because all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword. Violence begets violence. Killing begets killing. Nukes beget more nukes. Death begets death. Jesus, the incarnation of the God of nonviolence, stands for life. He will not succumb to the way of violence. Although he knows that he will perish under the cross’s violence, he places his hope in the God of life and awaits the third day.

—John Dear
Jesus the Rebel

How might I find better ways to solve problems than through violence?

Holy Thursday

A SUPPER INVITATION FOR ALL

“I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to God.” (Acts 10:34-35)

The indiscriminate welcoming of all people to the Supper of the Lamb is very threatening. The notion that everybody is welcome radically reorders our world. The question remains. Do we fear resurrection more than crucifixion? We choose death when we refuse to come to the banquet out of snobbery or fear. The resurrection calls us all to life, to the possibility of new personal attachments and to new communal responsibilities. No wonder we resist it. The love of God is indiscriminate and out of control. No wonder many of us try to organize another banquet somewhere else. There are many such banquets—focused on religion, ideology, or prejudice. Not everyone is invited to these parties. The guest list is carefully vetted, and there is a clear line drawn between those who are “in” and those who are “out.”



—Alan Jones
Passion for Pilgrimage

*How might I better imitate Jesus’ practice opening
his table fellowship to all persons?*

Good Friday

THE ROOTS OF COMPASSION

“Blessed be the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God.” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)

The world tells us that entertainment, pleasure, diversion and escape make for the good life. The worldly person ignores problems of sickness or sorrow in the family or all around him. The world has no desire to mourn and would rather disregard painful situations, cover them up or hide them. Much energy is expended on fleeing from situations of suffering in the belief that reality can be concealed. But the cross can never be absent. A person who sees things as they truly are and sympathizes with pain and sorrow is capable of touching life’s depths and finding authentic happiness. He or she is consoled, not by the world but by Jesus. Such persons are unafraid to share in the suffering of others. They do not flee from painful situations. They discover the meaning of life by coming to the aid of those who suffer, understanding their anguish and bringing relief. They sense that the other is flesh of our flesh, and are not afraid to draw near, even to touch their wounds. They feel compassion for others in such a way that all distance vanishes.

—Pope Francis
Gaudete et Exsultate, #75-76

When has my love for Jesus prompted me to greater compassion for others?

Holy Saturday

THE GOD OF DARKNESS

“Do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart.” (1 Corinthians 4:5)

Everyone who has ever lived, who will ever live, will someday undergo a Holy Saturday of their own. Someday we will all know the power of overwhelming loss when life as we know it changes, when all hope dies in midflight. Then, and only then, can we begin to understand the purpose of Holy Saturday. Holy Saturday faith is about dealing with darkness and growing in hope. Without the Holy Saturdays of life, none of us may ever really grow up spiritually. Today, the church is empty. Today, the loss finally sets in. We sit in the empty pews, pass the empty churches, heavyhearted

from the reality of yesterday, of Good Friday and its dashing of our securities. Today, alone and bereft, we come face-to-face with the question we try so hard to avoid the rest of the year: how do we deal with the God of darkness as well as the Giver of light? Have we been abandoned? Are we left now on our own in this world? Is there nothing else?

—Joan Chittister
The Liturgical Year

*When have I most felt that God was shrouded in darkness
and distant or absent from me?*

Easter Sunday

MOVING BEYOND SADNESS

“We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.’ . . . Then he said to them, ‘Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?’” (Luke 24:21, 26)

Sometimes we don't find God because we are miserable. Life is often filled with suffering. We should not minimize the desolation of the two disciples, who seem on the brink of walking away from all that they have experienced with Jesus. Yet God has not given up on them. Jesus appears to them, in the midst of their desolation, and helps to reconcile them to what has happened. If we are patient, sometimes we are afforded a glimpse of a new way of looking at suffering; over time we can find meaning in its midst. But we must work hard at it. The disciples' eyes are fully open to seeing Jesus only after they offer him hospitality. Freed from their focus on self, the two begin to listen to the stranger, to turn outward, and then invite him to dine with them. These disciples, even in their grief, imitate Jesus through hospitality and table fellowship. They move from their own sadness to a willingness to care for someone else. And in doing so, they recognize God.

—James Martin, SJ
Jesus: A Pilgrimage

*When have I most felt the presence of the risen Jesus coming
to be with me to transform myself and my life?*

ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI PRAYER FOR PEACE

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace;
where there is hatred, let me sow love,
where there is injury, pardon,
where there is doubt, faith,
where there is despair, hope,
where there is darkness, light,
and where there is sadness, joy.
O divine master,
grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love,
for it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are
are born to eternal life. *Amen.*



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