

FROM  
ASHES  
TO  
EASTER

OUR LENTEN  
JOURNEY WITH  
POPE  
FRANCIS



## INTRODUCTION

We live in a time when many people are bothered by God's absence. But the fact is that God's absence is not nearly as challenging or scary as God's presence. Responding to God's powerful presence demands reorienting and realigning our whole being so that we will experience the world with God as its ground and center. Though apparently simple, this reordering is, in fact, so extraordinary that it brings about a total transformation of our lives. This transformation has been essential to Christianity from its very beginnings and is referred to as *conversion* (Greek, *metanoia*), meaning to change your mind or self and therefore re-form your whole life.

Since conversion is the essential work of Lent, we invite you to go on your Lenten journey of conversion from Ash Wednesday to Easter with Pope Francis as your guide. Relying on a daily reflection, together with a scripture verse to contemplate and a question to prompt your response, he will help you reorder your relationships with God and others from whatever disorders them now to new and transformed relationships. This reordering or conversion will engage your whole self—intellectual, emotional, moral, religious and socio-political—and your behavior. The transformation will bring about a new way of seeing (our Christian vision) and a new way of being (our Christian vocation). We hope that this Lenten journey will be a journey like no other and change your life by leading you ever deeper into the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection. Enjoy your trip!

—Steve Mueller, *Editor*



## LET US BEGIN OUR LENTEN JOURNEY

*“Even now, return to me with your whole heart,  
with fasting, weeping, and mourning.” — JOEL 2:12*

With its various 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: “Return to me with all your heart.” 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 comes to make its prophetic appeal, to remind 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, but continues to be rich in goodness and mercy, and is always ready to forgive and start afresh. So with confidence, let us set out on the journey!

—POPE FRANCIS

*What might I most want (or need) to change as I begin my Lenten journey?*

THURSDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

## CHANGE YOUR HEART

*“Rend your hearts and not your garments, and return to the Lord.” — JOEL 2:13*

Conversion, the call to change one’s life, is not for just a moment or a time of the year, but an undertaking that lasts one’s entire lifetime. Who among us can presume not to be a sinner? No one. 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. Conversion is not to be re-

duced to outward forms or vague intentions, but engages and transforms one's entire existence beginning from the center of the person, from the conscience. We 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 attitudes and actions do I most need  
to change to become more like Jesus?*

FRIDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

## LIVING THE PASCHAL MYSTERY

*"We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life." — ROMANS 6:4*

Each year during Lent, God "gives us this joyful season when we prepare to celebrate the paschal mystery with mind and heart renewed as we recall the great events that gave us new life in Christ" (*Preface of Lent I*). The path to Easter demands that we renew our hearts as Christians through repentance, conversion and forgiveness, so as to live fully the abundant grace of the paschal mystery and thus to rediscover the joy of God's plan for creation and for each of us, which is to love God, our brothers and sisters, and the entire world, and to find in this love our true happiness. Lent is a sacramental sign of this conversion. It invites Christians to embody the paschal mystery more deeply and concretely in their personal, family and social lives, above all by fasting, prayer and almsgiving. *Fasting* invites us to change our attitude towards others and all of creation, turning away from the temptation to "devour" everything to satisfy our voracity and being ready to suffer for love, which can fill the emptiness of our hearts. *Prayer* teaches us to abandon idolatry and the self-sufficiency of our ego, and to acknowledge our need of the Lord and his mercy. *Almsgiving* helps us escape from the insanity of hoarding everything for ourselves in the illusory belief that we can secure a future that does not belong to us.

*How might I intensify my fasting, prayer  
and almsgiving during this Lenten season?*

## A NEW BEGINNING

*“Draw near to God, and God will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you of two minds.” —JAMES 4:8*

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. Christians are asked to return to God “with all their hearts,” to refuse to settle for mediocrity and to grow in friendship with the Lord. Jesus is the faithful friend who never abandons us. Even when we sin, he patiently awaits our return. By that patient expectation, he shows us his readiness to forgive. Lent is a favorable season for deepening our spiritual life through the means of sanctification offered us by the Church: fasting, prayer and almsgiving. At the basis of everything is the word of God, which during this season we are invited to hear and ponder more deeply. Lent is a good time for renewing our encounter with Christ, present in his Word, in the sacraments and in our neighbor. May the Holy Spirit lead us on a true journey of conversion, so that we can rediscover the gift of God’s Word, be purified of the sin that blinds us, and serve Christ present in our brothers and sisters in need.

*How might I better use God’s Word to direct  
my Lenten goal of conversion?*

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

## THE POWER OF GOD’S WORD

*“Indeed, the word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart.” —HEBREWS 4:12*

Today’s Gospel introduces us to the journey toward Easter, revealing Jesus remaining in the desert for 40 days, subjected to the temptations of the devil. Through this three-fold temptation, Satan wants to divert Jesus from the way of obedience and humiliation—because he knows that in this way evil will be conquered—and to lead Jesus down the false shortcut to success and glory. But Jesus blocks the devil’s poisonous arrows with the shield of God’s Word, which expresses the will of the Father. Jesus does not speak a word of his own but responds only with the Word of God. Thus the Son,

filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, comes out of the desert victorious. During the 40 days of 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, which has the power to defeat Satan. 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.


*What temptations are most bothering me lately? Why might this be?*

MONDAY, THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT

## FIGHTING TEMPTATION

*"Blessed are those who persevere in temptation, for when they have been proved they will receive the crown of life that Jesus promised to those who love him." —JAMES 1:2*

The tempter seeks to divert Jesus from the Father's plan, that is, from the way of sacrifice, of the love that offers itself in expiation, to make him take an easier path of success and power. The duel between Jesus and Satan takes place through strong quotations from Sacred Scripture.



The devil, in fact, to divert Jesus from the way of the cross, sets before him false messianic hopes: economic well-being, indicated by the ability to turn stones into bread; a dramatic and miraculous style, with the idea of throwing himself down from the highest point of the Temple in Jerusalem and being saved by angels; and lastly, a shortcut to power and dominion, in exchange for an act of adoration to Satan. These are the three groups of temptations and we, too, know them well! Jesus decisively rejects all these temptations and reiterates his firm resolve to follow the path set by the Father, without any kind of compromise with sin or worldly logic. Note well how Jesus responds. He does not dialogue with Satan, as Eve had done in the earthly paradise. Jesus is well aware that there can be no dialogue with Satan, for he is cunning. That is why Jesus, instead of engaging in dialogue, chooses to take refuge in the Word of God and responds with the power of this Word.

*How has compromising with evil led me to give in to my temptations?*

## THE POWER OF GOD'S WORD

*“Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you encounter various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.”*

—JAMES 1:2-3

Let us remember that following Jesus' example, at the moment of our temptations there is no arguing with Satan, our defense must always be the Word of God! And this will save us. In his replies to Satan, Jesus, using God's Word, reminds us that we “shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” This gives us the strength to struggle against a worldly mind-set that would lower us to the level of our primitive needs, causing us to lose our hunger for what is true, good and beautiful, the hunger for God and for God's love. Jesus also recalls that “You shall not tempt the Lord your God,” for the way of faith passes also through darkness and doubt, and is nourished by patience and persevering expectation. Lastly, Jesus recalls that “You shall worship the Lord your God and him only you shall serve.” We must rid ourselves of idols, of vain things, and build our lives on what is essential. Jesus' words will then be borne out in his actions. His absolute fidelity to the Father's plan of love will lead him to the final reckoning with the “prince of this world” (Jn 16:11), at the hour of his passion and death, and then Jesus will have his final victory, the victory of love!

*How have I been able to resist my temptations  
by imitating the example of Jesus?*

## LENT IS A TIME OF COMBAT

*“Consider how he endured such opposition from sinners, in order that you may not grow weary and lose heart. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood.”*

—HEBREWS 12:3-4

At the beginning of Lent the Church reminds us of Jesus' temptation so that it may give us the perspective and the meaning of this time, which is a time of spiritual combat against the spirit of evil. And while we cross the Lenten “desert,” we keep our gaze fixed upon Easter, which is the

definitive victory of Jesus against the Evil One, against sin and against death. We must place ourselves decisively on the path of Jesus, the road that leads to life. Look at what Jesus has done and go with him. This path of Jesus passes through the desert. The desert is the place where the voice of God and the voice of the tempter can be heard. In the noise, in the confusion of everyday life this cannot be done but only superficial voices can be heard. Instead we must go deeper into the desert, where our destiny of life or death is truly played out. And how do we hear the voice of God? 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.

*How might I discover through Scripture some better ways  
to imitate and follow Jesus?*

THURSDAY, THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT

## I WILL BE WITH YOU ALWAYS

*“And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”*

—MATTHEW 28:20

Lent is an appropriate time that should lead us to be ever more aware of how much the Holy Spirit, received in baptism, has worked and can work in us. And at the end of the Lenten itinerary, at the Easter Vigil, we can renew with greater awareness our baptismal covenant and the commitments that flow from it. And here I would like to return to my advice of reading 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. But always have the Gospel at hand. The Lenten desert helps us to say “no” to worldliness, to the “idols,” and helps us to make courageous choices in accordance with the Gospel and to strengthen solidarity with others. Now let us enter into the desert without fear, because we are not alone: we are with Jesus, with the Father and with the Holy Spirit. In fact, as it was for Jesus, it is the Holy Spirit who guides us on the Lenten journey; that same Spirit that descended upon Jesus and that has been given to us in baptism.

*Where has the Spirit of the Lord been guiding me so far  
during this Lenten season?*



## OUR SPIRITUAL STRUGGLE AGAINST EVIL

*“For our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens.” —EPHESIANS 6:12*

Jesus goes into the desert to prepare himself for his mission in the world. He does not need conversion, but as human, he must go through this trial, both for himself, to obey the Father’s will, and for us, to give us the grace to overcome temptation. This preparation consists in the battle against the evil spirit, that is, against the devil. For us too, Lent is a time of spiritual “contest,” of spiritual struggle: we are called to confront the Evil One through prayer in order to be able, with God’s help, to overcome him in our daily life. We know that evil unfortunately is at work in our existence and around us where there is violence, rejection of the other, division, war, injustice. All of these are the work of evil. We need to have the courage to reject all that takes us off course and the false values that deceive us by subtly flattering our ego. Rather, we must entrust ourselves to the Lord, to his goodness and to his project of love for each of us. Lent is a time of conversion, yes, but it is not a time of sorrow! It is a joyous and serious commitment to strip ourselves of our selfishness, of our old self, and to renew ourselves according to the grace of our baptism.

*How might I better reject evil and all its attractions in my everyday life?*

## LISTENING TO GOD’S MESSAGES

*“Blessed is the one who reads aloud and blessed are those who listen to this prophetic message and heed what is written in it, for the appointed time is near.” —REVELATION 1:3*

Someone has asked: what would happen if we were to treat the Bible as we treat our mobile phone? What would happen if we were to always carry it with us, or at least a small, pocket-sized Gospel? What if we were to turn back when we forget it saying “O! I don’t have it, I’m going back to look for it.” What if we were to open it several times a day to read

God's messages contained in the Bible as we read telephone messages? Clearly the comparison is contrived but it does make us think. 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 might I dedicate more time each day  
to read and pray about God's Word?*

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

## A NEW VISION OF WHO JESUS IS

*"But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter said in reply,  
"You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." —MATTHEW 16:15-16*

Today's Gospel presents the narrative of the transfiguration of Jesus. The Lord allowed the divine glory which could be understood through faith in his preaching and his miraculous gestures to shine within him.



The Transfiguration was accompanied by the apparition of Moses and Elijah who were "talking with him." The "brightness" which characterizes this extraordinary event symbolizes its purpose: to enlighten the minds and hearts of the disciples so that they may clearly understand who their teacher is. It is a flash of light which suddenly opens onto the mystery of Jesus and illuminates his whole person and his whole story. 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.

*How has my understanding of Jesus been changing  
the most during this Lenten season?*

## A DIFFERENT KIND OF MESSIAH

*“The Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised.” —LUKE 9:22*

In the Gospel, Jesus is decisively headed toward Jerusalem, where he will be sentenced to death by crucifixion. He wanted to prepare his disciples for this scandal—the scandal of the cross—this scandal which is too intense for their faith and, at the same time, to foretell his resurrection by manifesting himself as the messiah, the Son of God. In fact, Jesus was already revealing himself as a messiah different from their expectations of how they imagined the messiah would be: not a powerful and glorious king, but a humble and unarmed servant; not a lord of great wealth, a sign of blessing, but a poor man with nowhere to rest his head; not a patriarch with many descendants, but a celibate man without a home. It is truly an inverted revelation of God, and the most bewildering sign of this scandalous reversal is the cross. But it is through the cross that Jesus will reach the glorious resurrection, which will be definitive, not like this transfiguration which lasted for a moment, an instant.

*When have my expectations about who Jesus should be been most challenged by who he really is?*

## WE MUST LISTEN TO JESUS

*“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.”*

—MATTHEW 17:5

In the account of Jesus’ transfiguration, the mountain represents a place close to God and suitable for an intimate encounter with God, a place of prayer where one stands in the presence of the Lord. There up on the mount, Jesus is revealed to the three disciples as transfigured, luminescent and most beautiful. And then Moses and Elijah appear and converse with him. His face is so resplendent and his robes so white that Peter, awe-struck, wishes to stay there, as if to stop time. Suddenly from on high the Father’s voice resounds proclaiming Jesus to be his most beloved Son, saying “listen to him.” This word is important! Our Father

said this to these apostles, and says it to us as well: “listen to Jesus, because he is my beloved Son.” This week let us keep this word in our minds and in our hearts: “listen to Jesus!” God the Father says it to everyone: to me, to you, to everyone, to all people! It is like an aid for going forward on the path of Lent. “Listen to Jesus!”

*How might I set aside a little more time each day  
to listen to Jesus’ words in Scripture?*

WEDNESDAY, THE SECOND WEEK OF LENT

## LISTENING AND TAKING JESUS SERIOUSLY

*“Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes in the one who sent me has eternal life and will not come to condemnation, but has passed from death to life.” —JOHN 5:24*

We, the disciples of Jesus, are called to be people who listen to his voice and take his words seriously. To listen to Jesus, we must be close to him, to follow him. Jesus did not have a teaching post or a fixed pulpit but was an itinerant teacher, who proposed his teachings along the streets, covering distances that were not always predictable or easy. Let us follow Jesus in order to listen to him in his written Word, in the Gospel. I pose a question to you: do you read a passage of the Gospel every day? It is important! It is a good thing to have a small book of the Gospel, a little one, and to carry in your pocket or in your purse and read a little passage in whatever moment presents itself during the day.

In any given moment of the day, take the Gospel from your pocket and read something, a short passage. Jesus is there and he speaks to us in the Gospel. Let the Gospel be with us always, because it is the Word of Jesus in order for us to be able to listen to him.

*Which of Jesus’ words have been most challenging for me during this Lent?*

## LISTENING AND SHARING JESUS' WORDS

*“Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse.”*

—MATTHEW 7:24-25

From the event of the transfiguration I would like to consider two significant elements that can be summed up in two words: ascent and descent. We all need to go apart, to ascend the mountain into a space of silence, to find ourselves and better perceive the Lord's voice. This we do in prayer. But we cannot stay there! Encounter with God in prayer inspires us anew to “descend the mountain” and return to the plain where we meet many who are weighed down by fatigue, sickness, injustice, ignorance and both material and spiritual poverty. To these persons in difficulty, we are called to bear the fruit of that experience with God, by sharing the grace we have received. When we listen to the Word of Jesus and carry it in our heart, this Word grows in us when we proclaim it, when we give it to others! And this is what Christian life is. It is a mission for the whole Church, for all the baptized, for us all: listen to Jesus and offer him to others.

*How might I better share with others what I have learned  
from listening to Jesus' words?*

## A PREVIEW OF WHAT IS TO COME

*“Was it not necessary that the messiah should suffer these things  
and enter into his glory?” —LUKE 24:26*

The transfiguration reveals the goal of our journey of conversion, namely participation in the glory of Christ, which shines on the face of the obedient Servant, who died and rose for us. He is on his way to Jerusalem, where the prophecies of the “Servant of God” and his redemptive sacrifice are to be fulfilled. The crowds did not understand this. Presented with a messiah who contrasted with their earthly expectations,

they abandoned him. They thought the messiah would be the liberator from Roman domination, the emancipator of the homeland, and they do not like Jesus' perspective and so they leave him. Neither do the disciples understand Jesus' words about the outcome of his mission in the passion. Jesus thus chooses to give to Peter, James and John a foretaste of the glory that he will have after the resurrection, in order to confirm them in faith and encourage them to follow him on the Way of the Cross. Jesus is revealed as the Son-made-Servant, sent into the world to save us all through the cross, fulfilling God's plan of salvation. His full adherence to God's will renders his humanity transparent to the glory of God, who is love.

*How has my hope for my own resurrection been strengthened  
by my faith in Jesus' resurrection?*

SATURDAY, THE SECOND WEEK OF LENT

## LOVE TRANSFIGURES ALL

*“Father, I wish that where I am they also may be with me,  
that they may see my glory that you gave me, because you loved me  
before the foundation of the world.” —JOHN 17:24*

With Peter, James and John we too climb the mount of the transfiguration and stop in contemplation of the face of Jesus to retrieve his message and translate it into our lives. Jesus reveals himself as the perfect icon of the Father, the radiance of God's glory. He is the fulfillment of revelation. God's instruction for the disciples and for us is this: “Listen to him.” To listen to Christ entails accepting the logic of his Pascal Mystery, setting out on the journey with him to make of oneself a gift of love to others, in docile obedience to God's will, with an attitude of interior freedom and of detachment from worldly things. One must, in other words, be willing to “lose one's very life” (Mk 8:35), by giving it up so that all persons might be saved. Following Jesus' way will always entail trials, a cross, but at the end we are always led to happiness. Jesus does not deceive us. He promised us happiness and will give it to us if we follow his ways. We too can be transfigured by love. In reality, love is capable of transfiguring everything. Love transfigures all!

*How have I been most transformed by my Lenten practices?*

## I AM THE MESSIAH

*“I know that the messiah is coming, the one called the anointed; when he comes, he will tell us everything.” Jesus said to her, “I am he.”*

—JOHN 4:25-26

Today’s Gospel presents Jesus’ dialogue with the Samaritan woman. The encounter takes place as Jesus is crossing Samaria, a region between Judea and Galilee inhabited by people whom the Judeans despised, considering them schismatic and heretical. While the disciples go into the village to buy food, Jesus stays near a well and asks a woman who had come there to draw water for a drink. Going to the well to draw water is burdensome and tedious so a bubbling spring would be better. But Jesus speaks to her of a different water. When the woman realizes that the man she is speaking with is a prophet, she confides in him the details of her own life and asks him religious questions. Her thirst for affection and a full life had not been satisfied by the five husbands she had, but instead, she had experienced disappointment and deceit. Thus, the woman was struck by the great respect Jesus had for her, and when he actually spoke to her of true faith as the relationship with God the Father “in spirit and truth,” she realized that this man could be the messiah. Then Jesus does something extremely rare. He confirms it to a woman who had such a disordered life: “I who speak to you am he.”

*How does Jesus offer me a way to overcome the difficulties of my own disordered life?*

MONDAY, THE THIRD WEEK OF LENT

## OVERCOMING THE BARRIERS OF HOSTILITY

*“I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust.”*

—MATTHEW 5:44-45

When Jesus encountered the Samaritan woman, he immediately says to her: “Give me a drink.” In this way he overcomes the barriers of hos-

tility that existed between Judeans and Samaritans and breaks the mold of prejudice against women. This simple request from Jesus is the start of a frank dialogue, through which he enters with great delicacy into the interior world of a person to whom, according to their social norms, he should not have spoken. But Jesus does! Jesus is not afraid. When Jesus sees a person he goes ahead, because he loves. He loves us all. He never hesitates before a person out of prejudice. Jesus sets her own situation before her, not by judging her but by making her feel worthy, acknowledged, and thus arousing in her the desire to go beyond the daily routine. He is always the first to seek us, he takes the first step.

*When have my prejudices most hindered me  
from engaging respectfully with others?*

TUESDAY, THE THIRD WEEK OF LENT

## ASK AND YOU SHALL RECEIVE

*“O God, you are my God—it is you I seek!  
For you my body yearns; for you my soul thirsts.” —PSALM 63:2*

In his dialogue with the Samaritan woman, Jesus’ thirst was not so much for water, but for the encounter with a parched soul. Jesus needed to encounter the Samaritan woman in order to open her heart. He asks for a drink so as to bring to light her own thirst. The woman is moved by this encounter. She asks Jesus several profound questions that we all carry within but often ignore. We, too, have many questions to ask, but we don’t have the courage to ask Jesus. Lent is the opportune time to look within ourselves, to understand our truest spiritual needs, and to ask the Lord’s help in prayer. He gives his entire self, always, freely, asking nothing in return. He comes to our aid whenever we call upon him. He comes to assist us in our weakness. And his help consists in helping us accept his presence and closeness to us. Day after day, touched by his compassion, we also can become more compassionate towards others. The example of the Samaritan woman invites us to exclaim: “Jesus, give me a drink that will quench my thirst forever.”

*What needs do I most want to share with Jesus today in my prayer?*



## RENEWING OUR FRIENDSHIP WITH CHRIST

*“I have called you friends, because I have told you everything  
I have heard from my Father.” —JOHN 15:15*

The Gospel passage about the Samaritan woman actually concerns us! Jesus speaks to us as he does to the Samaritan woman. The water that gives eternal life was poured into our hearts on the day of our baptism when God transformed and filled us with his grace. But we may have forgotten this great gift that we received, or reduced it to a merely official statistic, and perhaps we seek “wells” whose water does not quench our thirst. Of course, we already know him, but perhaps we have not yet encountered him personally, spoken with him, or recognized him as our Savior. This season of Lent is a good occasion to draw near to him, to encounter him in prayer in a heart-to-heart dialogue; to speak with him, to listen to him. It is a good occasion to see his face in the face of a suffering brother or sister. In this way we can renew in ourselves the grace of baptism, quench our thirst at the wellspring of the Word of God and of his Holy Spirit; and in this way also discover the joy of becoming artisans of reconciliation and instruments of peace in daily life.

*How might I better open my whole self to Jesus in my prayer  
and daily life?*

## CHANGED BY OUR ENCOUNTER WITH JESUS

*“Who was neighbor to the robbers’ victim?”  
He answered, “The Samaritan who treated him with mercy.”  
Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.” —LUKE 10:36-37*

The disciples marveled that Jesus was speaking to this Samaritan woman. But the Lord is greater than prejudice, which is why he was not afraid to address the Samaritan woman. Mercy is greater than prejudice and Jesus is so very merciful. The outcome of that encounter by the well was


the woman's transformation: "the woman left her water jar" with which she had come to draw water, and ran to the city to tell people about her extraordinary experience. "I found a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the messiah?" She was excited. She had gone to draw water from the well, but she found another kind of water, the living water of mercy from which gushes forth eternal life. She found the water she had always sought! She ran to the village, that village which had judged her, condemned her and rejected her, and she announces that she has met the messiah: the one who has changed her life. It is a step forward, a step closer to God. And likewise every encounter with Jesus also changes our life. It is always, always this way.

*How has my encounter with Jesus most changed myself and my life?*

FRIDAY, THE THIRD WEEK OF LENT

## FILLED WITH JOY

*"Go home to your family and announce to them all that the Lord in his mercy has done for you." —MARK 5:19*



Like the Samaritan woman we likewise find the impetus to "leave behind our water jar," the symbol of everything that is seemingly important, but loses its previous value when we encounter Jesus. We all have one, or more than one! What is your interior water jar, the one that weighs you down, that distances you most from God? Let us set it aside a little and with our hearts let us hear the voice of Jesus offering us another kind of water, another water that brings us close to the Lord. We are called to rediscover the importance and the meaning of our Christian life and, like the Samaritan woman, to witness this to others. A witness of what? Joy! To witness to the joy of the encounter with Jesus for every encounter with Jesus changes our life, and every encounter with Jesus also fills us with joy, the joy that comes from within. And so we must tell of the marvelous things the Lord can do in our hearts when we have the courage to set aside our own water jar.

*What "water jar" do I most need to leave behind to draw nearer to Jesus?*

## LOVE OVERFLOWING

*“Keep yourselves in the love of God and wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.” —JUDE 1:21*

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 to see if the child who left and was lost is returning. We can speak of God’s hope: our Father expects us always and doesn’t just leave the door open for us, but God awaits us. God is engaged in the waiting for his children. And this Father also does not tire of loving the other child who, though staying at home with him the whole time, does not share in his mercy, in his compassion. God is not only at the origin of love, but in Jesus Christ God calls us to imitate his own way of loving: “as I have loved you, that you also love one another” (Jn 13:34). 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.

*What might I do to show forth God’s love by sharing it with others?*

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

## LORD, I WANT TO SEE

*“Then Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see might see, and those who do see might become blind.” —JOHN 9:39*

Today’s Gospel sets before us the story of the man born blind, to whom Jesus gives sight. The lengthy account opens with a blind man who begins to see physically and it closes with the alleged seers who remain blind spiritually. The miracle is narrated by John in just two verses, because he does not want to draw attention to the miracle itself, but rather to the repercussions it arouses. So many times a good work arouses gossip and controversy because there are some who do not want to see the truth. John wants to draw attention to something that also occurs in our own day when a good work is performed. The blind man who is healed is first

interrogated by the astonished crowd who saw the miracle and then by the teachers of the law who also interrogate his parents. In the end the blind man who was healed attains to faith, and this is the greatest grace that Jesus grants him: not only to see, but also to know him, to see in him “the light of the world.”

*When have I been most “blind” to what God is doing  
in the events of my life?*

MONDAY, THE FOURTH WEEK OF LENT

## LORD, I BELIEVE

*“I do believe, help my unbelief!” —MARK 9:4*

Jesus restores the blind man’s sight and performs this miracle with a type of symbolic ritual. First, he mixes dirt with saliva and spreads it on the blind man’s eyes. Then he orders him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. The man goes, washes and regains his sight. With this miracle, Jesus reveals himself as the light of the world. The man blind from birth represents each one of us who was created to know God but due to sin has become blind. We are all in need of a new light: that of faith, which Jesus has given us. Indeed, that blind man in the Gospel, by regaining his sight, is now opened to the mystery of Christ. Jesus asks him: “Do you believe in the Son of man?” “And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” the healed blind man replied. “You have seen him, and it is he who speaks to you.” “Lord, I believe,” the blind man said, and he prostrated himself before Jesus.

*How different might myself and my life be when exposed  
to the light of Jesus’ gospel message?*

TUESDAY, THE FOURTH WEEK OF LENT

## OPENING OUR EYES TO JESUS

*“I came into the world as light, so that everyone who believes in me  
might not remain in darkness.” —JOHN 12:46*

The blind man’s journey is a journey in stages that begins with the knowledge of Jesus’ name. He does not know anything else about him. In fact, he says: “The man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes.”

Following the pressing questions of the lawyers, he first considers Jesus a prophet and then a man who is close to God. Once the man who had been blind has been banished from the temple, expelled from society, Jesus finds him again and “opens his eyes” for the second time, by revealing his own identity as messiah to him. At this point the man who had been blind exclaims: “Lord, I believe!” and he prostrates himself before Jesus. While the blind man gradually draws near to the light, the teachers of the law sink deeper and deeper into their inner blindness. Locked in their presumption, they believe that they already have the light, therefore, they do not open themselves to the truth of Jesus. This passage of the Gospel makes evident the drama of the inner blindness of so many people, including ourselves, for sometimes we too have moments of inner blindness.

*What inner blindness most keeps me from seeing Jesus  
and drawing near to him?*

WEDNESDAY, THE FOURTH WEEK OF LENT

## NOT REMAINING IN OUR BLINDNESS

*“Have mercy on me, God, in accord with your merciful love;  
in your abundant compassion blot out my transgressions.” —PSALM 51:3*

Our lives are sometimes similar to that of the blind man who opened himself to the light, who opened himself to God, who opened himself to God’s grace. Sometimes unfortunately we are similar to the teachers of the law: from the height of our pride we judge others, and even the Lord! Today, we are invited to open ourselves to the light of Christ in order to bear fruit in our lives and eliminate unchristian behaviors. Although we are Christians, we all sometimes have unchristian behaviors that are sins. We must repent of this, eliminate these behaviors in order to journey further along the way of holiness, which began with our baptism. We, too, have been “enlightened” by Christ in baptism, so that, as St. Paul reminds us, we may act as “children of light” (Eph 5:8), with humility, patience and mercy. These teachers of the law had neither humility, nor patience, nor mercy!

*What must I most do to open myself more fully to God’s grace  
and forgiving mercy?*

THURSDAY, THE FOURTH WEEK OF LENT

## JESUS: LIGHT OF THE WORLD

*“While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” —JOHN 9:5*

This episode of Jesus healing the blind man invites us to reflect on our faith in Christ, the Son of God. At the same time, it also refers to baptism, which is the first sacrament of faith: the sacrament which makes us “come to the light,” by being reborn through the water and through the Holy Spirit as happens to the man born blind, whose eyes are opened after being cleansed in the water of the pool of Siloam. The man born blind and then healed represents us when we do not realize that Jesus is the light. He is “the light of the world,” but we are often looking elsewhere, preferring to entrust ourselves to other lights and groping in the dark. The fact that the blind man has no name helps us to see our face in his and our name in his story. We too have been “illuminated” by Christ in baptism, and thus we are called to behave as children of the light.

*What other “lights” have I most preferred to use to guide my life journey instead of Jesus?*

FRIDAY, THE FOURTH WEEK OF LENT

## CHILDREN OF THE LIGHT

*“For all of you are children of the light and children of the day. We are not of the night or of darkness.” —1 THESSALONIANS 5:5*

Acting as children of the light requires a radical change of mind-set, a capacity to judge persons and things according to another scale of values which comes from God. The sacrament of baptism, in fact, requires the choice of living as children of the light and walking in the light. What does it mean to have the true light, to walk in the light? First of all it means abandoning false lights: the cold, vain light of prejudice against others, because prejudice distorts reality and fills us with aversion to those whom we judge without mercy and condemn without appeal. When you gossip about others, you do not walk in the light, you walk in shadows. Another false light, because it is seductive and ambiguous, is that of self-interest: if we value persons and things on the basis of usefulness to us, of pleasure, of prestige, we are not truthful in our relationships and situ-

ations. If we go down this path of seeking self-interest, we are walking in shadows.

*What must I most change in my attitudes and actions  
to walk more fully in the light of Jesus' values?*

SATURDAY, THE FOURTH WEEK OF LENT

## LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE

*"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*

Lent is a time for us to return to that blazing light with which God's grace touched us at the start of our faith journey. From that flame I can light a fire for today and every day, and bring heat and light to my brothers and sisters. That flame ignites a humble joy, a good, gentle joy which sorrow and distress cannot dismay. The light goes before us, truth goes before us, beauty precedes us. God goes before us. Our joy is the Gospel, which reflects the light of Christ. The Gospel allows us to know the real Jesus, the living Jesus. It speaks to our hearts and changes our lives. We Christians are the people who have experienced this attraction and bear it within, in our hearts and in our lives. I would like to say to those who feel far from God and from the Church and to all those who are fearful or indifferent: the Lord is also calling you to be a part of his people and he does so with deep respect and love. The Lord is calling you. The Lord is seeking you. The Lord is waiting for you. The Lord loves you, and this love calls you, seeks you, waits for you, even if you do not believe or feel far away.

*With whom might I share my joy in the gospel message  
of God's merciful love for every person?*

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

## THE PROMISE OF ETERNAL LIFE

*"I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die." —JOHN 11:25-26*

Today's Gospel tells us of the resurrection of Lazarus. It is the culmination of the miraculous "signs" worked by Jesus. But this act is too great, too threatening to be tolerated by the high priests, who, learning of the

fact, decided to kill Jesus. Lazarus had already been dead four days before Jesus arrived and what he said to the sisters Martha and Mary is engraved forever in the memory of the Christian community. Jesus tells them he is the resurrection and the life and those who believe in him will never die. Because of this promise, we believe that the life of whoever believes in Jesus and follows his commandments will be transformed after death into new life, full and immortal. Just as Jesus is resurrected with his own body, though he does not return to an earthly life, so too will we be raised with our bodies which will have been transfigured into glorified bodies. He expects us to be with the Father, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, who raised him, he will also raise those who are united to him.

*How am I most preparing now to continue my relationship with Jesus in eternal life after my death?*

MONDAY, THE FIFTH WEEK OF LENT

## GRIEF BUT NOT DESPAIR

*“Amen, amen, I say to you, you will weep and mourn, while the world rejoices; you will grieve, but your grief will become joy.” —JOHN 16:20*

When Lazarus died, everything appears to have ended. The tomb is sealed by a great stone. There is only weeping and desolation. Even Jesus is “deeply moved in spirit and troubled” by the dramatic mystery of the loss of a dear friend and “Jesus wept.” This is Jesus’ heart: far from evil but close to those who are suffering. He does not make evil disappear magically, but he endures the suffering, makes it his own and transforms it. We notice, however, that amid the general despair over the death of Lazarus, Jesus does not allow himself to despair. Even while suffering himself, he asks that people believe steadfastly. He does not close himself within his weeping but makes his way again to the tomb. He does not allow the resigned, emotional atmosphere that surrounds him to seize him, but rather, prays with trust and says, “Father, I thank you.” Thus, in the mystery of suffering, Jesus offers us the example of how to conduct ourselves. He does not run away from suffering, which is part of this life, but he does not allow himself to be held captive by pessimism.

*How has my grief over a deceased loved one increased my compassion for others who are grieving?*



## COME OUT!

*“Amen, amen, I say to you, the hour is coming and is now here when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.”*

—JOHN 5:5

Before the sealed tomb of his friend Lazarus, Jesus cried with a loud voice: “Lazarus, come out!” And the dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with bandages and his face wrapped with a cloth. This cry is an imperative to each of us, because we are all marked by death. It is the voice of the one who is master of life and wants that all we all may “have it abundantly” (Jn 10:10). Christ is not resigned to the tombs that we have built for ourselves with our choice for evil and death, with our errors, with our sins. Instead he invites us, almost orders us, to come out of the tomb in which our sins have buried us. He calls us insistently to come out of the darkness of that prison in which we are enclosed, content with a false, selfish and mediocre life. “Come out!” he says to us, “Come out!” It is an invitation to true freedom, to allow ourselves to be seized by these words of Jesus who repeats them to each one of us today.

*How might I come out of the “tomb” in which  
I have locked myself by my sinfulness?*

WEDNESDAY, THE FIFTH WEEK OF LENT

## DO NOT BE AFRAID!

*“Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened,  
and I will give you rest.” —MATTHEW 11:28*

We hear directed to each one of us Jesus’ words to Lazarus: “Come out!” Come out from the gridlock of hopeless sadness. Unwrap the bandages of fear that impede the journey, the laces of the weaknesses and anxieties that constrain you. Reaffirm that God unties the knots. By following Jesus, we learn not to knot our lives around problems which become tangled. There will always be problems, and when we solve one, another one duly arrives. We can however, find a new stability, and this stability is Jesus himself, who is the resurrection and the life. With him, joy abides in our hearts, hope is reborn, suffering is transformed into peace, fear into trust, hardship into an offering of love. And even though

burdens may not disappear, there will always be his uplifting hand, his encouraging word saying to each of us: “Come out! Come to me!”

*What fears or burdens do I most want Jesus to lift from me today?*

THURSDAY, THE FIFTH WEEK OF LENT

## DESPAIR OR HOPE?

*“We know that Christ, raised from the dead, dies no more; death no longer has power over him.” —ROMANS 6:9*

A great confrontation occurred at the tomb of Lazarus. On the one hand, there is the disappointment, the precariousness of our mortal life which, pierced by anguish over death, often experiences defeat, an interior darkness which seems insurmountable. Our soul, created for life, suffers upon hearing that its thirst for eternal good is oppressed by an ancient and dark evil. This is the defeat of the tomb. But on the other hand, there is the hope that conquers death and evil, and which has a name. The name of hope is Jesus. He neither brings a bit of comfort nor some remedy to prolong life, but rather, proclaims: “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.” It is for this reason that he says decisively, “Take away the stone” and he calls to Lazarus, “Come out!”

*When have I been most tempted to give in to the despair that often accompanies death?*

FRIDAY, THE FIFTH WEEK OF LENT

## GOD’S EVERLASTING LOVE

*“See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are.” —1 JOHN 3:1*

Jesus’ act of raising Lazarus shows the extent to which the power of God’s grace can go, and, thus, the extent of our conversion, our transformation through God’s love. How many times have we loved in such a weak and intermittent way. We have all experienced this. We have loved but then that love weakened. Wishing for love, we then collided with our limitations, the meagerness of our strengths, unable to keep a promise which, in days of grace, seemed easy to fulfil. Indeed, the apostle Peter

was afraid and had to run away. He was not faithful to Jesus' love. There is always this weakness that makes us fall. We are beggars on a journey who run the risk of never entirely finding that treasure we seek from the first day of our life: love. The hunger for love that we all feel is not a yearning for something nonexistent. It is instead an invitation to discover God's unique and faithful love that is always burning for all of us.

*How has God's love most comforted me when human love has failed?*

SATURDAY, THE FIFTH WEEK OF LENT

## JESUS WALKS WITH US

*“And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him.” —LUKE 24:15-16*

The core around which Jesus' words turn is the mystery of his person, of his death and resurrection, and his return at the end of time. Our final goal is the encounter with the risen Lord. We do not await a time or a place for this encounter. Thus the problem is not “when” the last days will occur, but rather our being prepared. Neither is it about knowing “how” these things will happen, but instead “how” we have to act today in awaiting these things. We are called to live now, building our future with serenity and trust in God. Jesus is not only the destination of our earthly pilgrimage, but also a constant presence in our lives. He remains present and active in human history through the power and the gifts of his Spirit. Jesus is beside each of us even if we do not see him with our eyes. He accompanies us, he guides us, he takes us by the hand and he lifts us up when we fall down. He is close to everyone who suffers.

*When have I most experienced Jesus' presence in myself and in my life?*

PASSION/PALM SUNDAY OF LENT

## A WEEK LIKE NO OTHER

*“Shout with joy to the Lord, all the earth; break into song; sing praise.”*

—PSALM 98:4

Today's liturgy invites us to share in the joy and celebration of the people who cry out in praise of their Lord when he enters Jerusalem. But

it is a joy that will fade and leave a bitter and sorrowful taste by the end of today's Gospel account of the passion. This account seems to combine stories of joy and suffering, mistakes and successes, which are part of our daily lives as disciples. It somehow expresses the contradictory feelings that we might experience today: the capacity for great love but also for great hatred; the capacity for courageous self-sacrifice, but also the ability to "wash our hands" at the right moment; the capacity for loyalty, but also for great abandonment and betrayal. Jesus enters the city surrounded by his people and by a cacophony of singing and shouting. That outcry is the song and the spontaneous joy of all those left behind and overlooked, who, having been touched by Jesus, can now shout with joy: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." How could they not praise the one who had restored their dignity and hope? Theirs is the joy of so many forgiven sinners who are able to trust and hope once again.

*What contradictory feelings might I have  
when reflecting on the events of Holy Week?*

MONDAY OF HOLY WEEK

## LIVING HOLY WEEK

*"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead." —PHILIPPIANS 3:10-11*

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? This week begins with the festive procession as the entire populace welcomes Jesus with olive branches. The children sing, praising Jesus. But the week continues toward the mystery of Jesus' death and his resurrection. Above all it is a "time of grace" (2 Cor 6:2). God does not ask of us anything that he himself has not first given us. The cross of Christ teaches us that the apparent victory of evil vanishes before the empty tomb and before the certainty of the resurrection and the love of God which nothing can weaken. We strive to open our eyes and ears, but especially to open our hearts. With its challenging invitations to conversion, Holy Week reminds us that it is possible to create something new within ourselves and of doing a little of what he did on the day of his death. With his love, God conquered evil.

*How might I open my heart to learn more from Jesus' cross and resurrection?*

## FROM CONGRATULATION TO CRUCIFIXION

*“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” —MATTHEW 16:24*

Jesus, who accepted the “*hosannas*” of the crowd, knows full well that they will soon be followed by the cry: “Crucify him!” His humiliation reaches its utmost in the passion. He is sold for thirty pieces of silver and betrayed by the kiss of a disciple whom he had chosen and called his friend. Nearly all the others flee and abandon him. Peter denies him three times in the courtyard of the temple. He will also have to endure slanders and insults, snares and betrayals, abandonment to an unjust judgment, blows, lashes and the crown of thorns—and lastly, the way of the cross leading to the crucifixion. He had spoken clearly of this to his disciples. He never promised them honor and success but had always warned them that this was to be his path, and that the final victory would be achieved only through the passion and the cross. All this holds true for us too. Let us ask for the grace to follow Jesus faithfully, not in words but in deeds. Let us also ask for the patience to carry our own cross, not to refuse it or set it aside, but rather, in looking to him, to take it up and to carry it daily.

*What crosses is Jesus asking me to carry with him now in my life?*

## GIVING HIMSELF WITHOUT RESERVE

*“He emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.” —PHILIPPIANS 2:7-8*

Living Holy Week means entering ever more deeply into the logic of God, into the logic of the cross, which is not primarily that of suffering and death, but rather that of love and of the gift of self which brings life. In Holy Week we celebrate the crowning moment of God’s plan of love that runs through the entire history of the relations between God and humanity. Jesus enters Jerusalem to face the death with which he sums

up the whole of his existence. He gives himself without reserve, keeping nothing for himself, not even life. At the Last Supper, with his friends, he breaks the bread and passes the cup round “for us.” He offers himself to us and puts his body and his blood into our hands so as to be with us always. And in the Garden of Olives, and likewise in the trial before Pilate, he puts up no resistance, but gives himself. He is the suffering servant, foretold by Isaiah, who empties himself, even unto death. Following and accompanying Christ, staying with him, requires us to be outgoing, to come out of ourselves, out of a dreary way of living faith that has become a habit, out of the temptation to withdraw into our own plans which end by shutting out God’s creative action.

*How might I empty myself to give myself more  
to help others who are in need?*

HOLY THURSDAY

## LIVING EUCHARISTICALLY

*“For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup,  
you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” —1 CORINTHIANS 11:26*

As Jesus did with his disciples, so too he asks us today to prepare for the Last Supper. Like the disciples, let us ask him: “Lord, where do you want us to go to prepare?” Jesus does not prefer exclusive, selective places. He looks for places untouched by love, untouched by hope. Those uncomfortable places are where he wants to go and he asks us to prepare his way. How many persons lack dignified housing or food to eat? All of us know people who are lonely, troubled and in need: they are abandoned tabernacles. We are to prepare a place and a meal for these, our brothers and sisters in need. Jesus became bread broken for our sake. In turn, he asks us to give ourselves to others, to live no longer for ourselves but for one another. In this way, we live “eucharistically,” pouring out upon the world the love we draw from the Lord’s flesh. The Eucharist is translated into life when we pass beyond ourselves to those all around us.

*How might I reach out to those in need and bring the love of Jesus to them?*

## FATHER, FORGIVE THEM

*“You rejected the holy and righteous one and asked to have a murderer given to you, and you killed the author of life, whom God raised from the dead.”*

—ACTS 3:14-15

Today we hear another cry unlike the joyous shouts of Palm Sunday. It is the fierce cry of those who shout out: “Crucify him!” How hard it is for the comfortable and the self-righteous to understand the joy and the celebration of God’s mercy. How hard it is for those who trust only in themselves and look down on others, to share in this joy. It is the cry born of the show of self-sufficiency, pride and arrogance, which sees no problem in shouting: “Crucify him, crucify him.” Faced with such people, the best remedy is to look at Christ’s cross and let ourselves be challenged by his final cry. He died crying out his love for each of us: young and old, saints and sinners, the people of his times and of our own. We have been saved by his cross, and no one can repress the joy of the Gospel. No one is far from the Father’s merciful gaze. Looking at the cross means allowing our priorities, choices and actions to be challenged. It means questioning ourselves about our sensitivity to those experiencing difficulty.

*What most challenges me when I consider Jesus’ death on the cross?*

HOLY SATURDAY

## THE RESURRECTION BEGINS HERE

*“Why do you seek the living one among the dead?  
He is not here, but he has been raised.”* —LUKE 24:5-6

Today we are called to decide on which side to stand—on the side of the tomb or on the side of Jesus. There are those who allow themselves to be closed within their pain and those who open up to hope. There are those who remain trapped among the ruins of life, and those who, with God’s help, pick up the ruins of life and rebuild with patient hope. In facing life’s great “whys?” we have two paths: either stay and wistfully contemplate past and present tombs, or allow Jesus to approach our tombs. We all have a small tomb, some area that has somewhat died within our hearts—a wound, a wrongdoing endured or inflicted, an unrelenting resentment, a regret that keeps coming back, a sin we cannot

overcome. Let us identify these little tombs that we have inside, and let us invite Jesus into them. We often prefer to be alone in the dark caves within us rather than invite Christ inside them. Let us not be held captive by the temptation to remain alone and discouraged, crying about what is happening to us. The Lord instead wishes to open the path of life, that of encounter with him, of trust in him, of the resurrection of the heart. Our resurrection begins here: when we decide to come out into the light, into life with the risen Jesus.

*How might I decide to live more completely because  
of the presence of the risen Jesus in my life?*

EASTER SUNDAY

## CHRIST IS ALIVE, HE IS OUR HOPE

*“If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you,  
he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies  
through his Spirit that dwells in you.” —ROMANS 8:11*

The resurrection of Christ is the principle of new life for every man and every woman, for true renewal always begins from the heart. Yet Easter is also the beginning of the new world, set free from the slavery of sin and death: the world open at last to the kingdom of God, a kingdom of love, peace and fraternity. Christ is alive and he wants you to be alive! He is in you, he is with you and he never abandons you. However far you may wander, he is always there. He calls you and he waits for you to return to him and start over again. When you feel you are growing old out of sorrow, resentment or fear, doubt or failure, he will always be there to restore your strength and your hope. Christ is alive and he remains with us. Risen, he shows us the light of his face, and he does not abandon all those experiencing hardship, pain and sorrow. May the risen Christ, who flung open the doors of the tomb, open our hearts to the needs of the disadvantaged, the vulnerable, the poor, the unemployed, the marginalized, and all those who knock at our door in search of bread, refuge and the recognition of their dignity. Christ is alive! He is hope for each of us and for the entire world. May we let ourselves be renewed by him! Happy Easter!

*How might I open my heart to those in need to give myself and them new life?*