

HOPE

FOR RENEWAL

DAILY LENTEN REFLECTIONS FROM

POPE FRANCIS

INTRODUCTION

The word *Lent*, meaning *lengthening*, comes from Middle English and refers to the season of Spring when the days lengthen and new life begins to bud forth after the cold dark days of winter. Lent is thus the Church's Spring season when the Church prepares to celebrate its hope for the renewal of life in the great resurrection feast of Easter.

Lent is the time when our hope for renewal in our relationship with God and with others is encouraged by our self-examination and prayer, self-denial and fasting, penitence and reconciliation. Most of us don't like to turn a spotlight onto the ways in which our lives need to be transformed, but without that process there can be no movement to a deeper level of our faith and of our relationship with God and others.

In Lent we demonstrate to ourselves and to God our seriousness in the task of being renewed. Renewal is an act of both remaking ourselves and allowing ourselves to be remade into people more resembling the image of God. We are invited to do what is often painful and difficult for us with the hope that the reward will be a closer relationship with God that will lead to eternal life.

Pope Francis, whose reflections in this booklet will guide us on our Lenten journey of renewal, in his 2018 exhortation "On the Call to Holiness in Today's World" (*Gaudete et Exultate*), encourages us

“to realize the message of Jesus that God wants to speak to the world by your life. Let yourself be transformed. Let yourself be renewed by the Spirit, so that this can happen, lest you fail in your precious mission. The Lord will bring it to fulfilment despite your mistakes and missteps, provided that you do not abandon the path of love but remain ever open to his supernatural grace, which purifies and enlightens.”

—Steve Mueller, *Editor*

Ash Wednesday
.....

OUR HOPE FOR RENEWAL

“Hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the holy Spirit that has been given to us.” (Romans 5:5)

To seek God is an assurance that our journey through this world will end well. Our efforts to seek God are born of the desire for an encounter with the Lord, a personal encounter with his immense love and saving power. Lent is a renewed summons to conversion, a call to turn our eyes to the Lord and recognize his face. Lent is also a season of hope, when we turn back to God who patiently continues to care for us and his creation which we have often mistreated. Through recollection and silent prayer, hope is given to us as inspiration and interior light, illuminating the challenges and choices we face in following Jesus. Hence the need to pray (Mt 6:6) and, in secret, to encounter the Father of tender love. To experience Lent in hope means growing in the realization that, in Jesus Christ, we are witnesses of new times, in which God is “making all things new” (Rev 21:1-6). It means receiving the hope of Christ, who gave his life on the cross and was raised by God on the third day. Lent is a good time to recover the joy and hope that make us feel like beloved sons and daughters of the Father. Let us ask for the grace not to be afraid of the newness of the Gospel or of the renewal that the Holy Spirit wishes to carry out in us.

What do I most hope to happen for me as I draw closer to God during this Lenten season?

Thursday after Ash Wednesday
.....

RETURN TO GOD

“Rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to the LORD, your God.” (Joel 2:13)

Conversion of heart is the chief characteristic of this season of grace. The prophetic appeal challenges all of us without exception, and it reminds us that conversion is not to be reduced to outward forms or to vague intentions, but engages and transforms one’s entire existence beginning from the center of the person, the “heart.” We are invited to embark upon a journey on which, by defying routine, we strive to open our eyes

and ears, but especially to open our hearts, in order to go beyond our comfort zones and open ourselves to God and to others. We know that this increasingly artificial world would have us live in a culture of “doing,” of the “useful,” where we exclude God from our horizon without realizing it. But we also exclude the horizon itself! Lent beckons us to “rouse ourselves,” to remind ourselves that we are creatures, simply put, that we are not God. With its invitations to conversion, Lent comes providentially to awaken us, to rouse us from torpor, from the risk of moving forward by inertia.

What most needs to change in my relationship with God and with others?

Friday after Ash Wednesday
.....

WITH ALL YOUR HEART

“Return to me with your whole heart.” (Joel 2:12)

Why must we return to God? Because something is not right in us, not right in society and in the Church, and we need to change, to 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 God is always ready to forgive and start afresh. Returning to the Lord “with all your heart” means to begin the journey not of a superficial and transitory conversion, but rather of a spiritual itinerary with regard to the most intimate place of our person. The heart is, indeed, the seat of our feelings, the center in which our decisions, our attitudes mature. That “return to me with all your heart” involves not only individuals, but is extended to the community as a whole.

What in me do I most think I can hold back from God?



Saturday after Ash Wednesday
.....

TURN FROM EVIL

“Turn from evil and do good, seek peace and follow after it.” (1 Peter 3:11)

Lent is a time of spiritual struggle. We are called to confront evil through prayer in order to be able, with God’s help, to overcome it 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, war, injustice and exploitation. All of these are the work of evil. In our lives, we always need to convert—every day!—and the Church invites us to pray for this. In fact, we are never sufficiently oriented towards God and we must continually redirect our minds and our hearts towards God. In order to do this, we need to have the courage to reject all that takes us off course, especially 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 repentance, yes, but it is not a time of sorrow! It is a time of penance, but it is not a time of mourning. 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.

*What am I most struggling against that pulls me away
from following Jesus?*

First Sunday of Lent
.....

RESIST TEMPTATION

“Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God,
and he will draw near to you.” (James 4:7-8)

We have chosen Jesus, not the evil one. In the Gospel account of his temptation, Jesus does not reply to the devil with any of his own words, but with the words of God from scripture. We cannot dialogue with the devil, because he will always win. Only the power of God’s word can overcome him. We have opted for Jesus and not for the devil. We want to follow in Jesus’ footsteps, even though we know that this is not easy. We know what it means to be seduced by money, fame and power. For this reason, the Church gives us the gift of this Lenten season, invites

us to conversion, offering but one certainty: God is waiting for us and wants to heal our hearts of all that tears us down. God is the God who has a name: Mercy. This name is our wealth, this name is what makes us famous, this name is our power and in this name we say once more with the psalmist: “I trust in your mercy. Grant my heart joy in your salvation” (Ps 13:6).

What temptation is most difficult for me now in my life?

Monday, Week 1
.....

REDIRECT YOURSELF TO GOD

“Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” (Matthew 6:21)

If we have to return to God, it means that we have wandered off. Lent is the time to rediscover the direction of life. Because in life’s journey, as in every journey, what really matters is not to lose sight of the goal. The Lord is the goal of our journey in this world. The direction must lead to him. Our heart always points in some direction: it is like a magnet. It needs to attach itself to something. But if it only attaches itself to earthly things, sooner or later it becomes a slave to them: things to be used become things we serve. If we live for outward appearance, money, a career or hobby, they will become idols that enslave us, sirens that charm us and then cast us adrift. Whereas if our heart is attached to what does not pass away, we rediscover ourselves and are set free. Lent is the time of grace that liberates the heart from vanity. It is a time of healing from addictions that seduce us. It is a time to fix our gaze on what abides.

What do I most need to do to put God first in my life?

Tuesday, Week 1
.....

KEEP GOD’S WORD ALWAYS WITH YOU

“Whoever belongs to God hears the words of God.” (John 8:47)

During Lent we are invited to follow in Jesus’ footsteps and face the spiritual battle with the evil one with the strength of God’s Word. Only God’s Word has the strength to defeat Satan. For this reason, it is im-

portant to be familiar with the Bible: read it often, meditate on it, assimilate it. The Bible contains God's Word, which is always timely and effective. What would happen were we to treat the Bible as we treat our mobile phone? Would we always carry it with us, or at least a small, pocket-sized Gospel? Would we turn back when we forget it? Would we open it several times a day to read God's messages as we check our voicemail and text messages? 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.

What might I do to make more time to read and pray the Gospels?

Wednesday, Week 1
.....

TAKE TIME FOR WHAT MATTERS

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.” (Colossians 3:16)

Lent is a good time to make space for the Word of God. It's the time to turn off the television and open the Bible. When I was a child there was no television, but there was a Lenten custom of not listening to the radio. Lent is also a time to disconnect from your phone and connect to the Gospel, to give up useless words, gossip, rumors and to speak intimately with the Lord. It's time to devote yourself to a healthy ecology of the heart, to clean it. We live in an environment polluted by too much verbal violence, by so many offensive and harmful words that the internet amplifies. Today we insult as if we were saying “Good Morning.” We are inundated with empty words, advertising, deceitful messages. We have become accustomed to hearing everything about everyone and we risk slipping into a mundaneness that atrophies our heart. We need silence to distinguish the voice of the Lord who speaks to us, the voice of conscience, the voice of good. In the silence, Jesus invites us to listen to what matters, to what is important, to what is essential.

How might I make more time for silence to listen to God's message?

Thursday, Week 1

.....

LISTEN TO JESUS

“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.”
(Matthew 17:5)

What are the duties of the Christian? Perhaps you will say to me: to go to Mass on Sundays, to fast and abstain during Holy Week, to do this or that. Yet the first duty of the Christian is to listen to the Word of God, to listen to Jesus, because he speaks to us and he saves us by his word. We listen to Jesus’ word in order to nourish ourselves. This means that Jesus’ word is the most nourishing food for the soul. It nourishes our souls, it nourishes our faith! Each day Jesus’ word enters our hearts and makes us stronger in faith. I also suggest that you have a little Gospel to carry in your pocket or in your purse, and when you have a little time, take a few minutes and read a passage from the Gospel and notice what happens there—what Jesus says and does and how he reveals himself. And thus our minds, our hearts go forward on the journey of hope on which the Lord has placed us.

*What messages seem to be recurring most often when I read
and pray with the Bible?*

Friday, Week 1

.....

GOSPEL, CRUCIFIX, WITNESS

“We wish to see Jesus.” (John 12:21)

These words, like so many others in the Gospels, express something universal. They reveal a desire that passes through the ages and cultures, a desire present in the heart of so many people who have heard of Christ but have not yet encountered him. To those who, today too, “wish to see Jesus,” to those who are searching for the face of God, to those who received catechesis when they were little and then developed it no further and perhaps have lost their faith, to so many who have not yet encountered Jesus personally—to all these people we can offer three things: the Gospel, the crucifix and the witness of our faith. The Gospel: there we can encounter Jesus, listen to him, know him. The crucifix: the sign of the love of Jesus who gave himself for us. And a

faith that is expressed in simple gestures of love and service of others, but mainly in the coherence of life, between what we say and what we do, between our faith and our life, between our words and our actions.

*What am I doing to bring greater coherence to my thoughts,
words and actions?*

Saturday, Week 1
.....

FIXING OUR GAZE ON JESUS

“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” (John 14:9)

Where should we fix our gaze throughout our Lenten journey? It is simple: upon the crucified one. Jesus on the cross is life’s compass, which directs us to heaven. The poverty of the wood, the silence of the Lord and his loving self-emptying show us the necessity of a simpler life, free from anxiety about things. From the cross, Jesus teaches us the great courage involved in renunciation. We will never move forward if we are heavily weighed down. We need to free ourselves from the clutches of consumerism and the snares of selfishness, from always wanting more, from never being satisfied, and from a heart closed to the needs of the poor. Jesus leads us to our goal. Lent shows us this. It begins with the ashes, but eventually leads us to the fire of Easter night, to the discovery that, in the tomb, the body of Jesus does not turn to dust, but rises gloriously. This is true also for us, who are dust. If we, with our weaknesses, return to the Lord, if we take the path of love, then we will embrace the life that never ends.

*From what must I most free myself in order to move forward
on my Lenten journey with Jesus?*

2nd Sunday of Lent
.....

CHANGING OUR VIEWPOINT

“Blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear.”
(Matthew 13:16)

It is good to pause with the Lord on the mountain, to live this “pre-view” of light in the heart of Lent. It is a call to remember, especially when we pass through a difficult trial, that the Lord is risen and does

not permit darkness to have the last word. At times we go through times of darkness in our personal, family or social life, with moments of fear that there is no way out. We feel frightened before great enigmas such as illness, innocent pain or the mystery of death. In the same journey of faith, we often stumble when encountering the scandal of the cross and the demands of the Gospel, which calls us to spend our life in service and to lose it in love, rather than preserve it for ourselves and protect it. Thus we need a different outlook that illuminates the mystery of life in depth and helps us to move beyond our paradigms and beyond the criteria of this world. We too are called to climb up the mountain, to contemplate the beauty of the risen one who enkindles glimmers of light in every fragment of our life and helps us to interpret history anew through the lens of his paschal victory.

How have I been “enlightened” this Lent about Jesus and his message for me?

Monday, Week 2

.....

JESUS AWAKENS OUR HOPE

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the holy Spirit.” (Romans 15:13)

Jesus has awakened great hopes, especially in the hearts of the simple, the humble, the poor, the forgotten, and those who do not matter in the eyes of the world. He understands human sufferings. He has shown the face of God’s mercy and bent down to heal body and soul. He is God, but he lowered himself to walk with us. He is our friend and brother. He illumines our path here. Our joy does not come from having many possessions, but from having encountered a person, Jesus, in our midst. It comes from knowing that with him we are never alone, even at difficult moments when our life’s journey comes up against problems and obstacles that seem insurmountable. And in this moment comes the enemy, the devil, often disguised as an angel, and slyly speaks his word to us. Do not listen to him! Let us follow Jesus! We know that he accompanies us and carries us on his shoulders. This is our joy, this is the hope that we must bring to this world. Please do not let yourselves be robbed of hope! Do not let the hope that Jesus gives you be stolen!

When have I most experienced the joy coming from Jesus’ presence with me?

Tuesday, Week 2
.....

MEETING JESUS

“When he reached the place, Jesus looked up and said to him, ‘Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house.’” (Luke 19:5)

A person is a Christian because he or she has met Jesus. God created us with a seed of restlessness, an anxiety to find fullness, an anxiety to find God. Our hearts are restless, our hearts thirsty—thirsty for an encounter with God. Our heart looks for it many times on the wrong road. It looks for him, gets lost, then returns. On the other hand, God thirsts to meet us so much so that God sent Jesus to meet us and satisfy our longing. The Lord accompanies us because he wants to meet us. That is why we say that the core of Christianity is an encounter with Jesus. Why are you a Christian? Many people don't know what to say. Some say it's by tradition, but others do not know what to say because although they met Jesus, they did not realize that it was an encounter with him. Jesus always seeks us. When we discover Jesus, there the life of grace begins, the life of fullness, the life of the Christian journey.

When have I been most aware of meeting Jesus in my life?

Wednesday, Week 2
.....

OPEN YOUR HEART TO JESUS

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will enter his house and dine with him, and he with me.” (Revelation 3:20)

For a Christian the most important thing is the continuous encounter with the Lord. And in this way, accustomed to staying with the Lord of life, we prepare ourselves for being with the Lord for eternity. The Lord comes every day so that, with his grace, we might accomplish good in our own lives and in the lives of others. Our God is a God-who-comes, who continually comes. God will not disappoint our waiting! Perhaps God will make us wait a few moments in the dark to allow our expectation to ripen, but God never disappoints. The Lord always comes to be by our side. He comes every day to visit every man and woman who receives him in the Word, in the Sacraments, in their brothers and sisters. Every day Jesus is at the door of our heart and knocks. Do you know how to listen to the Lord who knocks, who has come today to visit you,

who knocks at your heart restlessly, with an idea, with inspiration? Be careful, notice what you feel in your heart when the Lord knocks.

What keeps me from answering when Jesus' knocks on the door of my heart?

Thursday, Week 2
.....

JESUS COMES TO MEET US

“God saved us and called us to a holy life, not according to our works but according to his own design and the grace bestowed on us in Christ Jesus.” (2 Timothy 1:9)

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

What about Jesus most attracts me to be his follower?

Friday, Week 2
.....

RESPONDING TO JESUS' CALL MEANS CHANGE

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near. Change your hearts and lives, and trust this good news!” (Mark 1:15)

The Lord never tires of calling us. The power of his love overturns every expectation and is always ready to start anew. In Jesus, God always offers us another chance. God calls us day by day to deepen our love for him and to be revived by his eternal newness. Every morning, God comes to find us where we are. When we welcome God, we are able to

embrace a brighter future, not as a possibility but as a reality. When Jesus' call directs our lives, our hearts grow young. Each one is called to convert, transforming his or her way of thinking and living. Jesus seeks companions to join in his salvific mission. The call reaches us in the middle of our daily activity. The Lord reveals himself to us not in an extraordinary or impressive way, but in the everyday circumstances of our life. There we must discover the Lord, and there he reveals himself and makes his love felt in our heart. And there—through this dialogue with him in the everyday circumstances of life—he changes our heart.

How have I most been changed this Lent by my contact with God?

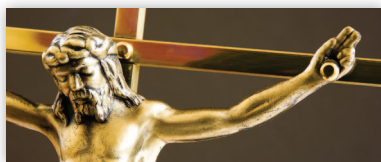
Saturday, Week 2

FOLLOWING JESUS DAILY

“If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” (Luke 9:23)

Christian life means following the Lord always. It requires listening to the Lord, having the courage to rid ourselves of something that prevents us from making haste to follow him and, finally, from taking on his mission. If we are to follow him we must first listen attentively to what he is telling us and then we must leave what we have to at that moment and follow him. When the Lord enters our life, he always says a word to us through which he gives us peace and assures us of his closeness. And when we hear this invitation and see that there is something wrong in our life, we must correct it, and be prepared to change. Even if in our life there is something good, Jesus asks us to leave it too in order to follow him more closely. Notice that Jesus never says “Follow me!” without then speaking of a mission. He always says: “follow me to do something.” Let us open our heart to receive the mission and know what to do.

What changes must I most make in my life now to follow Jesus better?



3rd Sunday of Lent
.....

GOD IS LOVE

“God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him.”
(1 John 4:16)

Being a Christian is a summons to realize that God’s love is greater than all our shortcomings and sins. One of our great disappointments and difficulties today comes not from knowing that God is love, but comes from our way of proclaiming and bearing witness to God that shows that this is not God’s name. God is love, a love that bestows itself, that calls and surprises. We can see the miracle of God, who makes of our lives works of art, if only we let ourselves to be led by his love. Throughout history, Christians have witnessed with their lives, becoming living signs of the Lord, overcoming apathy with courage and offering a Christian response to the concerns that they encountered. Today we are called to lift up our eyes and acknowledge what the Lord has done in the past, and to walk with him towards the future, knowing that, whether we succeed or fail, he will always be with us.

How might my thoughts and actions change if I really believed God is Love?

Monday, Week 3
.....

OPENING OUR HEARTS TO GOD’S WORD

“Oh, that today you would hear his voice: Harden not your hearts.” (Hebrews 4:7)

Opening our hearts to the encounter with God’s Word fills us with joy. What happens in my heart when I listen attentively to the readings? Do I pay attention to God’s Word? Do I let it touch my heart, or do I stare into space thinking of other things, and the Word goes in one ear and out the other, and does not reach the heart? What do I do to prepare myself so that God’s Word will reach my heart? The encounter with God’s Word should fill us with joy, and this joy is our strength. Christians are joyful because they have received and accepted God’s Word in their hearts, and they continually seek out and encounter God’s Word. May the Lord give us the grace to open our hearts for this encounter

with God's Word, and to not be afraid of the joy that flows precisely from this encounter with the Word of God.

*How might I be more attentive today to discover the message
God might have for me?*

Tuesday, Week 3
.....

LISTENING WITH THE HELP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

“With all prayer and supplication, pray at every opportunity in the Spirit.”
(Ephesians 6:18)

The Lord speaks to us in many ways—at work, through others and at every moment. Yet we cannot do without the silence of prolonged prayer, which enables us better to perceive God's language, to interpret the real meaning of the inspirations we believe we have received, to calm our anxieties and to see the whole of our existence afresh in God's own light. Still it is possible that, even in prayer itself, we could refuse to let ourselves be confronted by the freedom of the Spirit. We must remember that prayerful discernment requires a readiness to listen to the Lord and to others, and to reality itself, which always challenges us in new ways. Only if we are prepared to listen, do we have the freedom to set aside our own partial or insufficient ideas, our usual habits and ways of seeing things. In this way, we become truly open to accepting a call that can shatter our security, but lead us to a better life.

In what ways have I most experienced God's presence in my prayer?

Wednesday, Week 3
.....

SAYING “YES” AND “NO”

“Let your ‘Yes’ mean ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No’ mean ‘No.’
Anything more is from the evil one.” (Matthew 5:37)

There is no Christian life designed on the drawing board, scientifically built, where it is sufficient to fulfil a few commandments to soothe consciences. Christian life is a humble path of one who is never rigid and always relates to God, who knows how to repent and rely on God.

Thus we overcome the evil of hypocrisy, a duplicity of life, that is often denounced by Jesus. The key word is *repentance*, which allows us not to harden our heart but to turn a “no” to God into “yes,” and a “yes” to sin into “no” for the sake of the Lord. The will of the Father, who every day gently speaks to our conscience, is carried out only in the form of repentance and continuous conversion. In the end, everyone has two paths ahead of them: to be repentant sinners or hypocritical sinners. But what matters is not the reasoning that justifies and attempts to save appearances, but a heart that moves forward with the Lord, struggles every day, repents and returns to God.

To better follow Jesus, what might I most need to say “yes” and “no” to?

Thursday, Week 3
.....

FOLLOWING JESUS IS NOT EASY

“The God of all grace who called you to his eternal glory through Christ Jesus will himself restore, confirm, strengthen and establish you after you have suffered a little.” (1 Peter 5:10)

Following Jesus is difficult. It means “to go behind Jesus.” We are charged to follow him, to go with him and imitate him. The Christian way is not easy, but this is it. Therefore, to those who say, “I don’t feel like doing this,” the response is “if you don’t feel like it, that’s your problem, but this is the Christian way.” This is the path that Jesus invites us to. This is the reason to take the path of Jesus, which is mercy: “be merciful as your Father is merciful” (Lk 6:36). Because only with a merciful heart can we do all that the Lord advises us, until the end. And thus it is obvious that the Christian life is not a self-reflexive life but it goes outside of itself to give to others. It is a gift, it is love, and love does not turn back on itself. It is not selfish but gives itself!

What makes following Jesus most difficult for me now?



LEARNING TO LISTEN TO JESUS

“The good shepherd walks ahead of them, and the sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice.” (John 10:4)

We have to get accustomed not just to hearing the Word of Jesus, but to listening attentively to the Word of Jesus in the Gospel. Seek the word of Jesus in the Gospel and have daily contact with the Gospel and pray with the Gospel, because this is how Jesus speaks to you. He says with the Gospel what he wants to tell you. You should always carry a Gospel with you, a small one, or have one handy. When you are at home or travelling or when you have a few minutes to wait, take the Gospel, the Word of Jesus, read something and think a bit about what it says, what it is saying to you. Jesus speaks to you, he preaches to you there. And if you don't feel the passage is speaking to you, move on to another one. In this way you can always find the right word for the moment you are living in. So read and pray the Gospels and listen carefully to the Lord.

Which words of Jesus have been most important for me during this Lenten season?

TAKE TIME WITH JESUS

“When you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret.” (Matthew 6:6)

There should be no occupation or concern that can keep us away from the divine master. Everything should always be put aside because, when he comes to visit us in our lives, his presence and his word come before everything else. The Lord always surprises us. When we really listen to him, the clouds vanish, doubts give way to truth, fears to serenity, and the numerous situations of life find their rightful place. We must learn how to be in the presence of the master in order to listen to him and to be in harmony with him. It is a matter of taking a break during the day, of being in silence for a few minutes to make room for the Lord who comes and of finding the courage to remain a little while with him in order to then return, with more serenity and effectiveness, to the

demands of everyday life. Do not be carried away by things to do, but listen to the voice of the Lord so you can carry out well the tasks that life gives you.

*What most frustrates my taking time daily
for reading and praying with the Gospels?*

4th Sunday of Lent
.....

GOD IS NOT DISTANT

*“For what great nation is there that has gods so close to it
as the LORD, our God, is to us whenever we call upon him?” (Deuteronomy 4:7)*

Hope reminds us that God is present in history to lead it to its ultimate goal and to lead us to its fullness, which is the Lord Jesus Christ. God is present in the history of humanity, “God-with-us.” God is not distant but is always with us, to the extent that very often God knocks on the door of our heart. God walks beside us to support us. The Lord does not abandon us but accompanies us through the events of our lives to help us discover the meaning of the journey, the meaning of everyday life, to give us courage when we are under duress or when we suffer. In the midst of life’s storms, God always extends a hand to us and frees us from threats. This is beautiful! We have this grace of having God close to us. We await God, we hope that God shows himself to us, but God also hopes that we show ourselves to him!

What most helps me to remember that God is present with me and in me?

Monday, Week 4
.....

THIS IS HOW YOU ARE TO PRAY

*“This is how you are to pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.”
(Matthew 6:9)*

In order pray, there is no need to make noise or believe that that it is better to use more words. So how should we pray? Jesus has taught us. He says that the Father who is in heaven “knows what you need before you ask him.” Therefore, let our first word be “Father.” This is the key to prayer. Without speaking, without feeling this word, praying is not possible. To whom do I pray? The almighty God? He is too far away.

I don't feel him; neither did Jesus feel him. To whom do I pray? The God of the cosmos? Praying to this cosmic God is quite frequent nowadays, isn't it? This polytheistic model comes with a superficial culture. Rather, we must pray to the Father, who begot us. But this is not all. We must pray "our" Father, that is, not the Father of a generic and too anonymous "all," but the one who begot you, who gave you life, who gave life to you and me and so calls all of us his children.

What name do I most like to use to address God in my prayer? Why?

Tuesday, Week 4
.....

REACHING OUT FOR THE DIVINE OTHER

"As the deer longs for streams of water, so my soul longs for you, O God."
(Psalm 42:2)

Prayer belongs to men and women of every religion, and probably also to those who profess none. Prayer arises in our innermost self, in that interior place that spiritual authors call "heart." Therefore, it is not something peripheral that prays within us, it is not some secondary and marginal ability that we have, but rather it is our most intimate mystery that prays. Feelings pray, but praying is not just feeling. Intelligence prays, but praying is not simply an intellectual act. The body prays, but one can speak with God even having the most serious disability. Thus the entire person prays if one prays with one's "heart." Prayer is an invocation that goes beyond ourselves. It is something that is born in the intimacy of our person and reaches out, because it senses the memory of an encounter. Prayer is the voice of an "I" that fumbles, that proceeds unsteadily in search of a "You." The encounter between the "I" and the "You" cannot occur via calculators. It is a human encounter and we often proceed unsteadily in order to find the "You" that my "I" is desperately seeking.

What do I most want to say to God today?

Wednesday, Week 4
.....

BEING QUIET IN GOD'S PRESENCE

*"Find your delight in the LORD who will give you your heart's desire.
Be still before the LORD; wait for him." (Psalm 37:4, 7)*

Prayer is the strength of the Christian and of every person who believes. In the weakness and frailty of our lives, we can turn to God with the confidence of children and enter into communion with God. In the face of so many wounds that hurt us and could harden our hearts, we are called to dive into the sea of prayer, which is the sea of God's boundless love, to taste God's tenderness. Lent is a time of prayer, of more intense prayer, more prolonged, more assiduous, more able to take on the needs of others by intercessory prayer for the many situations of poverty and suffering. Are there moments when you place yourself quietly in the Lord's presence, when you calmly spend time with him, when you bask in his gaze? Do you let his fire inflame your heart? Unless you let God warm you more and more with God's love and tenderness, you will not catch fire. How will you then be able to set the hearts of others on fire by your words and witness? If, gazing on the face of Christ, you feel unable to let yourself be healed and transformed, then enter into the Lord's heart, into his wounds, for that is the abode of divine mercy.

How might I take more quiet time just being in God's presence today?

Thursday, Week 4
.....

FLEEING FROM GOD

"Bring me back, let me come back, for you are the LORD, my God." (Jeremiah 31:18)

We can all flee from God. This is a daily temptation: not to hear his voice, not to listen to his message, not to respond to his invitation in our hearts. Although we might make a direct getaway, there are also more subtle and sophisticated ways of fleeing from God. But why? Because our hearts are closed. When your heart is closed you cannot hear the voice of God. Are you docile to the Word of God? Yes, you want to be docile, but are you able to hear his Word, to really listen to it? Are you able to find God's Word in the events of each day, or do your ideas so govern you that you do not allow the Lord to surprise you and

Speak to you? Anyone who is a man or a woman of hope—the great hope which faith gives us—knows that even in the midst of difficulties God acts and surprises us. God always saves the best for us. But God asks us to let ourselves be surprised by his love, to accept his surprises. Let us trust God!

What most urges me to try to run away and hide from God?

Friday, Week 4
.....

HOPE IN TIMES OF DISCOURAGEMENT

“The Spirit too comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groanings.”

(Romans 8:26)

How many difficulties are present in the life of every individual and in our communities! Yet as great as these may seem, God never allows us to be overwhelmed by them. In those moments of discouragement in our efforts to face evil, to evangelize or to embody our faith as parents within the family, always know in your heart that God is by your side. God never abandons you! Let us never lose hope! Let us never allow hope to die in our hearts! Evil is present in our history, but it does not have the upper hand. The one with the upper hand is God, and God is our hope! Often a growing sense of loneliness and emptiness in the hearts of many people leads them to seek satisfaction in the ephemeral idols of money, success, power and pleasure. Let us be lights of hope! As we walk in hope, let us have joy in our hearts and work actively in building a better world.

When have I most experienced God with me during a difficult time?

With what results?

Saturday, Week 4
.....

GOD’S LOVE DOES NOT CHANGE

“Why are you downcast, my soul; why do you groan within me? Wait for God, for I shall again praise him, my savior and my God.” (Psalm 42:6)

Often what blocks hope is discouragement. Once we start thinking that everything is going badly and things can’t get worse, we lose heart and

come to believe that death is stronger than life. We become cynical, negative and despondent. Life becomes a succession of complaints and we grow sick in spirit. Men and women who pray know that hope is stronger than discouragement. They believe that love is more powerful than death, and that surely one day it will triumph, even if this be in times and ways that we do not understand. Jesus is a specialist at turning our deaths into life. With him, we too can experience a transformation from self-centeredness to communion, from desolation to consolation, from fear to confidence. Let us not keep our faces bowed to the ground in fear, but raise our eyes to the risen Jesus. His gaze fills us with hope, for it tells us that we are loved unfailingly, and that however much we make a mess of things, his love remains unchanged. This is the one, non-negotiable certitude we have in life: God's love does not change.

How have I most experienced God's unchanging love for me?

5th Sunday of Lent
.....

WITNESSING TO CHRIST WITH OUR LIVES

"We are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us."
(2 Corinthians 5:20)

Let us walk in the world as Jesus did, and let us make our whole existence a sign of our love for others, especially the weakest and poorest. Let us build for God a temple of our lives. And so we make ourselves "encounterable" to those who we find along our journey. If we are witnesses of the living Christ, so many people will encounter Jesus in us, in our witness. But, we can ask ourselves, does the Lord feel at home in my life? Do we allow him to "cleanse" our hearts and to drive out the idols, those attitudes of cupidity, jealousy, worldliness, envy, hatred, those habits of gossiping and tearing down others? Do I allow him to cleanse all the behaviors that are against God, against our neighbor, and against ourselves? Jesus recognizes what is in each of us, and knows well our desire of being inhabited by him. Let us allow him to enter into our lives, into our families, into our hearts.

*What might I need to do most to become a better witness
to Jesus and his new way of life?*

WALKING WITH THE LORD

“Jesus himself drew near and walked with them,
but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him.” (Luke 24:16)

I ask myself: Am I a Christian by fits and starts, or am I a Christian full-time? Our culture of the relative and ephemeral also takes its toll on the way we live our faith. Christ asks us to be faithful to him daily in our everyday life. He surprises us with his love, but he demands that we be faithful in following him. Even if we are sometimes unfaithful to him, he remains faithful. In his mercy, he never tires of stretching out his hand to lift us up, to encourage us to continue our journey, to come back and tell him of our weakness, so that he can grant us his strength. This is the real journey: to walk with Jesus always, even at moments of weakness, even in our sins. Never to prefer a makeshift path of our own. That kills us. Faith is ultimate fidelity. Are we open to what the Lord gives us every day, to the surprises of God that often might even make things a bit more difficult for us?

In what ways has God most surprised me during this Lenten season?

WANTING TO GIVE UP

“I keep the LORD always before me; with him at my right hand,
I shall never be shaken.” (Psalm 16:8)

The Lord knows what a strong temptation it is for us to return to the way things were before, to succumb to a tempting nostalgia for the past, of wanting to take back what we had decided to leave behind. In the face of failure, hurt, or even the fact that at times things do not go the way we want, there always comes a subtle and dangerous temptation to become disheartened and to give up. This attitude tinges everything with dejection and leads us to indulge in a soothing sense of self-pity that, like a moth, eats away at all our hope. Then the worst thing that can happen begins to appear—the grim pragmatism of a life in which everything appears to proceed normally, while in reality faith is wearing down and degenerating into small-mindedness. The Lord does not wait

for perfect situations or frames of mind: he creates them. He does not expect to encounter people without problems, disappointments, sins or limitations. He himself confronted sin and disappointment in order to encourage all men and women to persevere.

*What might most help me to persevere in the changes
I have tried to make this Lent?*

Wednesday, Week 5
.....

GOD SURPRISES US

“See, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?”
(Isaiah 43:19)

God always surprises us when we really listen to God. Jesus invites us not only to be surprised, but also to do surprising things. He is the Lord of surprises, who breaks down paralyzing barriers by filling us with the courage needed to overcome the suspicion, mistrust and fear that so often lurk behind the mindset that says, “We have always done things this way.” Jesus surprises us whenever he calls and asks us to put out into the sea of history not only with our nets, but with our very selves. Our challenge is to look at our lives and those of others as he does. God sees sons and daughters in sin to be restored, brothers and sisters in death to be reborn, and hearts in desolation to be revived. Do not fear, then, the Lord loves your life, even when you are afraid to look at it and take it in hand.

What has surprised me most about God and about myself this Lent?

Thursday, Week 5
.....

JESUS THE GUEST IN YOUR HEART

“Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over.” (Luke 24:29)

Jesus is a guest in your heart. The most important thing about the presence of a guest is that the guest is to be listened to. A guest should be welcomed as a person with a story, with a heart rich with feelings and thoughts. If you welcome a guest into your home but continue doing other things, letting him or her just sit there, both of you in silence, it is

as if he or she were of stone. We must listen to Jesus' Word, that Word which illuminates and supports all that we are and what we do. If we go to pray, for example, before the crucifix, and we talk, talk, talk, and then we leave, we do not listen to Jesus. We do not allow him to speak to our heart. Not much is necessary to welcome him as our guest. Indeed, only one thing is needed: to listen to him—be brotherly to him, let him realize he is among family and not in a temporary shelter. He says with the Gospel what he wants to tell us.

How might I spend less time talking and more time listening in my prayer?

Friday, Week 5

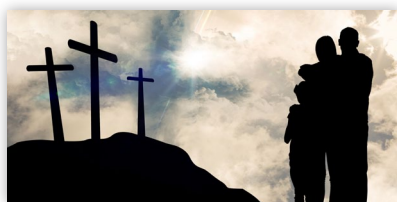
.....

THE CHRISTIAN JOURNEY WITH JESUS

“Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there also will my servant be.” (John 12:26)

Faith calls for journey, a “going out” from ourselves, and it can work wonders if we abandon our comforting certainties, if we leave our safe harbors and our cozy nests. Faith increases by giving, and grows by taking risks. Faith advances with humble and practical steps when we make our way equipped with trust in God. We advance in faith by showing humble and practical love, exercising patience each day, and praying constantly to Jesus as we keep pressing forward on our way. He alone frees us from evil and heals our hearts. Only an encounter with him can save, can make life full and beautiful. Whenever we meet Jesus, the word “thanks” comes immediately to our lips, because we have discovered the most important thing in life, which is not to receive a grace or resolve a problem, but to embrace the Lord of life. This is the Christian life: to walk, to go forward, united as brothers and sisters, loving one another.

What might most help me now to more faithfully follow Jesus and his ways?



GIVING OURSELVES IN SERVICE

“I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me.”
(Galatians 2:20)

Holy Week is a time of grace which the Lord gives us to open the doors of our heart, of our life, of our parishes, and to go out in order to meet others and bring them the light and joy of our faith. Jesus gave himself up to death voluntarily in order to reciprocate the love of God the Father, in perfect union with God's will, to demonstrate God's love for us. This is my, your and our road too. Living Holy Week means following Jesus not only with the emotion of the heart but learning to go out of ourselves in order to meet others, to go towards the outskirts of existence, to be the first to take a step towards our brothers and our sisters, especially those who are the most distant, the most often forgotten, and the most in need of understanding, comfort and help. There is such a great need to bring the living presence of Jesus, merciful and full of love, to all whom we meet!

How might I try to bring Jesus' healing presence to others this coming week?

Passion/Palm Sunday of Lent
.....

GOD'S TRIUMPH THROUGH THE CROSS

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

Every year Holy Week leaves us amazed. We pass from the joy of welcoming Jesus as he enters Jerusalem to the sorrow of watching him condemned to death and then crucified. That sense of interior amazement will remain with us throughout Holy Week. Jesus' people give him a solemn welcome, yet he enters Jerusalem on a lowly colt. His people expect a powerful liberator at Passover, yet he comes to bring the Passover to fulfilment by sacrificing himself. His people are hoping to triumph over the Romans by the sword, but Jesus comes to celebrate God's triumph through the cross. We have to follow in his footsteps, to let ourselves be challenged by him. Jesus changed history by making himself close to us and he made it, though still marked by evil, into a story of

salvation. By offering his life on the cross, Jesus also conquered death. From the open heart of the crucified one, God's love reaches each of us. We can change our lives by drawing near to him and welcoming the salvation he offers us. Let us open our hearts to him in prayer this week.

How might I change my life through a deeper understanding of Jesus' suffering and death?

Monday Holy Week
.....

CHRIST'S CROSS OF VICTORY

"He himself bore our sins in his body upon the cross, so that, free from sin, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed." (1 Peter 2:24)

The Gospels remind us that the mystery of the cross was present even from the beginning of Jesus' life. Thus the cross is not an afterthought, something that happened by chance in the Lord's life. It is true that all who crucify others throughout history would have the cross appear as collateral damage, but that is not the case: the cross does not appear by chance. Nor do the great and small crosses of humanity, the crosses of each of us, appear by chance. It is true that the cross is present in our preaching of the Gospel, but it is the cross of our salvation. Thanks to the reconciling blood of Jesus, it is a cross that contains the power of Christ's victory, which conquers evil and delivers us from the evil one. To embrace it with Jesus and, as he did before us, to go out and preach it, will allow us to discern and reject the venom with which the devil wants to poison us whenever a cross unexpectedly appears in our lives.

How might I better embrace my sufferings and join them to the sufferings of Christ?

Tuesday Holy Week
.....

KEEPING TRUE TO WHAT MATTERS

"I will heal their faithlessness; I will love them deeply." (Hosea 14:5)

Jesus suffered betrayal by the disciple who sold him and by the disciple who denied him. He was betrayed by the people who sang *hosanna* to him and then shouted: "Crucify him!" (Mt 27:22). He was betrayed

by the religious institution that unjustly condemned him and by the political institution that washed its hands of him. We can think of all the small or great betrayals that we have suffered in life. It is terrible to discover that a firmly placed trust has been betrayed. If we are honest with ourselves, we will see our many infidelities, falsehoods, hypocrisies and duplicities. We will see the many good intentions betrayed, promises broken, resolutions left unfulfilled! The Lord knows our hearts better than we do. He knows how weak and irresolute we are, how many times we fall, how hard it is for us to get up and how difficult it is to heal certain wounds. Instead of being discouraged by the fear of failing, let us refuse to betray him for whom we were created, and not abandon what really matters in our lives.

*What most makes me weaken my discipleship
by abandoning and betraying Jesus?*

Wednesday Holy Week
.....

BEWARE THE JUDAS IN ME

“What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?
They paid him thirty pieces of silver.” (Matthew 26:15)

What Judas’s life was like, we don’t know. A normal person, perhaps, but with something good that Jesus recognized because he called Judas to be a disciple. But Judas never succeeded in being one. He didn’t have a disciple’s heart. Though he was weak in his discipleship, Jesus loved him. But his love of money had led him to steal, and from stealing to betraying is only a little step. Those who love money too much are often ready to betray to get more. Thus Judas, perhaps with good intentions, ends up a traitor. Let us think of so many Judases in this world, who selfishly use and exploit people. And let us also think of the little Judas that each of us has within ourselves at the hour of choosing between loyalty or self-interest. Each of us has the capacity to betray, to sell out, to choose for our own interest. Each of us has the possibility of being attracted to the love of money or goods or future well-being and weaken our discipleship.

*How am I like Judas, who pretends to love
and kisses Jesus in order to betray him?*

Holy Thursday
.....

JESUS' RISKY SERVICE

“I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do.” (John 13:15)

See how Jesus takes risks! Before giving us his body and blood as our spiritual nourishment, Jesus washed the disciples' feet. It was a slave's work. But Jesus wanted to offer this service, to give us an example of how we should serve one another. Jesus takes this risk in serving us because he loves us so much. There really are people who do not accept this attitude of loving service—arrogant people, hateful people, people who perhaps do not wish us well. But we are called to serve them all the more. And there are also people who suffer, who are discarded by society, at least for a time, to whom Jesus goes and says: “You are important to me.” Jesus takes a chance with each of us. He is always willing to take a risk! He takes a risk with each of us, who are all sinners, to come to us and tell us that he loves us. This is service; this is Jesus. He never abandons us, never tires of forgiving us. He loves us so much.

How might I best follow Jesus' example of service to others during this week?

Good Friday
.....

GOD'S TRUE FACE

“For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.” (1 Corinthians 1:25)

What is God's true face? Usually we project what we are onto God—our success, our sense of justice and also our indignation—but raise it to the highest degree of perfection. But the Gospel tells us that God is not like that. God is different and we cannot know God by our own efforts. That's why God came to meet us and to reveal himself completely on the cross. There we learn the true features of God's face. It will do us good to look at the crucifix in silence and see who our Lord is: he is the one who does not point a finger at someone, not even against those who are crucifying him, but opens his arms to all; who does not crush us with his glory, but lets himself be stripped for us; who does not love us in words, but gives us his life in silence; who does not force us, but

frees us; who does not treat us as strangers, but takes our evil and our sins upon himself. And so, in order to free us from our prejudices about God, we look at the crucifix. And then we open the Gospel where we can encounter Jesus, listen to him and know him as he really is.

What has most surprised me this Lent about Jesus' words and actions?

Holy Saturday
.....

SEEKING THE RISEN CHRIST

“You were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.”
(Colossians 2:12)

Death affects us all, and it questions us in a profound way. But a powerful instinct within us tells us that our lives do not end with death. This thirst for life found its true and reliable answer in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. His resurrection does not only give us the certainty of life after death, but it also illumines the mystery of our own death. If we live united to Jesus, faithful to him, we will also be able to face the passage of death with hope and serenity. One tends to die as one has lived. If your life has been a journey with the Lord, trusting in his immense mercy, you will be prepared to accept the final moment of your earthly life as the definitive, confident abandonment into his welcoming hands, awaiting the face to face contemplation of the marvelous countenance of the Lord—to see him as he is, beautiful, full of light, full of love, full of tenderness. We should never tire of seeking the risen Christ who gives life in abundance to those who meet him.

How has my search for the risen living Christ been most rewarded this Lent?



Easter Sunday

CHRIST IS ALIVE!

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

The women thought they would find a body to anoint, instead they found an empty tomb. The empty tomb is the visible sign of God’s victory over evil, of Christ’s victory over the prince of this world, of the victory of light over darkness. Jesus’ tomb was not opened by a physical phenomenon, but by the Lord’s intervention. It confirms the intervention of God himself, bearer of a new era because Jesus’s resurrection initiated the final time of history, which might endure for thousands of years but the final end is now known. In this Easter Season, my wish is that everyone might have the same spiritual experience. Let us welcome in our hearts, in our homes and in our families the joyful proclamation of Easter: Christ is alive! Christ knocks at the door of your heart so you can let him in. Christ accompanies you and is always beside you on your life’s journey. Christ is indeed alive and with you always!

*How might I best continue my journey with Christ
using what I have learned this Lent?*



OUR DAILY PRAYER OF HOPE FOR RENEWAL

O Jesus, help us never to forget
the meaning of our earthly journey.
May the kindly light of faith illumine our days,
the comforting power of hope direct our steps,
the contagious warmth of love stir our hearts,
and may our gaze be fixed on God,
in whom true joy is found.

Keep alive within us the flame of hope,
so that with patience and perseverance
we may opt for dialogue and reconciliation.

In this way may peace triumph at last,
and may the words “division,” “hatred” and “war”
be banished from the heart of every man and woman.

Guard our life with your embrace,
bless and strengthen every desire for good,
give new life and nourishment to faith,
sustain and enlighten hope,
awaken and animate charity,
and guide us always on the path to holiness.

—*Pope Francis*

