

2015
Lenten

Reflection Guide

*Spending forty days with the four pillars of faith-based service:
Spirituality, Social Justice,
Simple Living, and Community*

A resource brought to you by:



Catholic Apostolate Center
Reviving Faith • Rekindling Charity • Forming Apostles

About this resource:

“Through prayer, charity and humility before God, people receive a heart which is firm and merciful, attentive and generous, a heart which is not closed, indifferent or prey to the globalization of indifference.”
- Pope Francis, 2015 message for Lent.

As current and former volunteers, you have known the richness of opening your hearts to the needs of the world. While living out the pillars of faith-based service: spirituality, social justice, simple living, and community, you have encountered God in many transformative ways. Catholic Volunteer Network and the Catholic Apostolate Center would like to support your journey in a special way during this season of Lent.

In this Lenten Reflection Guide, we have put together reflections, prayers, and tips based on each week's Gospel reading. Each reflection is written by a different contributor, and each offering their unique insights and experiences. Many of the contributors are also former volunteers who are actively working to keep service and prayer as integral components of their lives. Some will provide you with thought-provoking reflection questions, while others share practical suggestions of how you can apply the virtues of the four pillars to your Lenten observance.

We are thankful for the opportunity to accompany you during this holy time. May God speak to you through the pages of this guide over the next forty days!

About us:



The Catholic Apostolate Center, a ministry of the Society of the Catholic Apostolate (Pallottines) - Immaculate Conception Province, was founded in 2011 to respond to the needs of the Church through: Developing, in collaboration with dioceses and other institutions and organizations, formation programs for the New Evangelization; Assisting Catholic leaders in deepening collaboration with one another; Providing formation and apostolic opportunities for members and collaborators of the Union of Catholic Apostolate. The Center takes its inspiration from the spirituality of St. Vincent Pallotti and achieves its goals through hosting conferences, seminars, webinars, and presentations as well as providing online and print resources.

For more information visit: www.catholicapostolatecenter.org



Catholic Volunteer Network is a national membership organization of Christian volunteer and mission programs that fosters and promotes full-time national and international service opportunities for people of all backgrounds, ages and skills. Catholic Volunteer Network supports and enhances the work of its membership by providing training and resources, networking opportunities, and national advocacy.

For more information visit: www.catholicvolunteernetwork.org

For additional Lenten resources, please visit Catholic Apostolate Center's resources page:
www.catholicapostolatecenter.org/lenten-resources.html

Ash Wednesday

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

“When you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.”

Reflection by Katie Mulembe, Catholic Volunteer Network Staff and Franciscan Mission Service Returned Missioner

Every Ash Wednesday for the last eleven years, I've found myself reflecting back on that one time in 2004 when I did Lent right. I gave up chocolate, television, the internet, shopping, alcohol, talking on the phone, and wearing makeup. I didn't get into a car even once, instead I walked everywhere I needed to go. I wrote letters to my family and dearest friends and was sure to tell them how much I loved them. I spent time every morning and evening in prayer, and I journaled every single day. I didn't even cheat on Sundays. It was amazing.

Okay, okay, I will come clean – I didn't actually choose to do all that for Lent, it just sort of happened that way. At the time, I was starting my mission experience, and was taking language courses in a small, remote village in Northern Zambia. I had to travel light because I only had room for one backpack on the long and crowded bus journey to the village. Life was simple out there. My days were spent taking language classes, making new friends in the village, learning how to wash my clothes by hand, and tasting new foods (sadly, there was no chocolate to be found). But every day the sun would set promptly at 6 p.m., and I was left to myself in the quiet darkness, most often only lit by the dim glow of my kerosene lamp. It was just me and God then, and I found myself experiencing a closeness that I had never known before. Through the long silences, I learned how to open up to God and share about my fears and needs. I took comfort in God on those nights when I felt especially homesick. I finished up language school on Palm Sunday, and moved back to the big city just in time for Holy Week. That year, Easter seemed to take on a whole new level of meaning for me.

I have tried to replicate that 2004 experience by giving up or taking on small things here and there. None of it seems to have the same effect. I haven't yet regained that intense awareness of God's presence that I felt during those simple days. Of course, it would be nearly impossible to give up all that I did in 2004, but today's Gospel got me thinking that maybe it's not what I do to observe Lent, it's how I do it. Jesus reminds us that when we do good deeds, or give to charity, or fast, we should not boast about them. We should do them in the quiet. So, maybe it is the quiet part that I've left out of my recent Lenten observances. As I strive to live more simply, and love more deeply this Lent, I am also taking up the challenge to carve out room for silence to hear how God is speaking to me through this Lenten season.

Prayer:

Ever-present God, I know you surround me at all times.

Within my jam-packed schedule, I can't always hear you, or see you, or feel you, but I know you are there. I pray that this season of Lent can be a time of reverence and quiet. Help me to slow down, to step away from the noise and clutter that fill my days, so I can find time to meet you. Help me to hear you when you whisper my name. Amen.

Spirituality: If you struggle with silence, Lectio Divina may be a great way to ease it into your life. This practice involves careful and repetitive reading of a particular passage in order to gain new insights. It is a quiet and introspective way to pray. Consider spending time with Psalm 139:1-18 to reflect on the constant presence of God. Want to learn more? The Carmelites provide a helpful guide to Lectio Divina here: www.ocarm.org/en/content/lectio/what-lectio-divina.

Social Justice: During his first Mass of 2015, Pope Francis urged us to take action on behalf of those who bear the burden of slavery. “All of us are called (by God) to be free, all are called to be sons and daughters, and each, according to his or her own responsibilities, is called to combat modern forms of enslavement. From every people, culture and religion, let us join our forces,” he said. Statistics indicate that nearly 36 million people are experiencing enslavement today, most of them suffering in silence. Take some time this week to learn more about modern slavery, and determine which steps you would like to take to stop it. Visit www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/human-trafficking/index.cfm for more information.

Simple Living: Have you decided to live more simply this Lenten season by giving up a favorite food or activity? Consider saving the money you would have spent on that item and making a donation to a local soup kitchen. If you are giving up an activity, carefully consider how you would like to use some of the free time to give back to your community.

Community: You do not have to walk this Lenten journey alone. Sharing the experience with your community will help you stay committed to this important time of prayer and fasting. If you live in community, suggest a weekly meeting when you can all support one another throughout Lent. If you do not live in community, consider reaching out to some friends to form a supportive prayer group for this time. You may consider starting out by taking time to reflect on past seasons of Lent and recalling how you have grown through those experiences.

First Sunday of Lent

Mark 1:12-15

“This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand.”

Reflection by Jim Lindsay, Catholic Volunteer Network Staff

Prayer:

Lord, come with me into my wilderness. Speak to my inattentive heart. Show me where addiction to power, ownership and pleasure stifle my path. Only when I am free from these can I be good news to others. Only then do I become part of the solution to the world's problems.

I, too, have known times of temptation when I felt alone except for the wild beasts --- the irrational forces that were disordering my life. Lord, you felt the influence of evil, and were tested. You were purified as you came through a difficult time. When I was in the middle of such a time, it did not always feel like God's hand, but like desolation and despair. But when I look back, I can see how God was shaping me.

Help me, Lord, to meet the challenges of the wilderness by meeting God daily, so that I may learn God's will for my life. Amen.

Have you ever experienced times in the wilderness --- you know, those occasions when we are in the desert --- feeling lost? Those times can be great opportunities to find out more about ourselves, about God's plan for us and about what is most important in our lives.

In today's gospel, we venture into the wilderness with Jesus. Times in the wilderness can be challenging. The questions we might ask are these: How do we deal with these challenges? Are these challenges the same as temptations? What is the difference between temptations and the challenges they cause?

Temptation is a very real part of life and is especially challenging in our times in the wilderness. We are down, disheartened, afraid, and isolated. But every temptation we encounter brings with it a consequent challenge. Meeting those trials head on is how we rise above the inducement to sin.

Jesus knows what it is like to be tempted. Jesus knows what it is like to be challenged. Jesus knows what it is like to be in the wilderness. And it was in this wasteland, following his Baptism, that Jesus struggled, mourned, questioned and endured great temptations.

Jesus teaches us that we encounter the challenges of the wilderness by meeting God daily. Jesus was prepared to meet the challenges in the wilderness because he was in contact every one of those forty days with God. This is how Jesus knew God's will for his life. It is also the way we learn God's will for OUR lives.

Spirituality: The wilderness is the place of devastation and danger, of being tempted off one's path and also of meeting God. Jesus finds God's path for him in the wilderness. Prayer is a wilderness time. It can be perilous for it brings us in touch with the evil as well as with the good in ourselves. With practice, it makes known to us the peace of God in Christ - the harmony that can be found in the desert. It is also the place of recommitment to God and of finding the strength that God offers us. What spirit drives me in the things I do? Is my heart a home for the Holy Spirit?

Social Justice: As Lent begins, I might promise God that I will be faithful to the quiet space and time that sacred space offers me. I want the reign of God to come near me. I want to believe more deeply in the good news and to seek to bring about God's justice on the earth. Ask yourself - What difference do I make to other people's lives? What do I do, within my limitations, to help remove the abuses which are part of our society?

Simple Living: In our wilderness times we are seduced to listen to the voices that lead us away from God. These voices tell us that the good in our lives is represented by money, power, security, and fame. All of these can be good things. But good things turn evil when we become persuaded that we don't need God in our lives. We get confused about what is truly meaningful in our lives and what gives our lives genuine purpose. The challenge in all of this is to live our lives knowing that God will provide everything we need.

Community: Only God could be so human as to withstand temptation. Mark's Gospel depicts Jesus as divine but also deeply human. He enters the wilderness for one reason only: to find God, to seek God and to belong to him completely. Only then does he go to Galilee and proclaim good news to others. What type of person am I in relation to my family, friends, work colleagues and other people with whom I come in contact? How involved am I as a member of my Christian community, e.g., my parish?

Second Sunday of Lent

Mark 9:2-10

“This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.”

Reflection by Julie McElmurry, Director of Franciscan Passages and Former Jesuit Volunteer

Jesus invites Peter, James and John to witness something so indescribable that words fail them and words fail even the Gospel writer himself. Of the Transfiguration, the writer can only tell us that Jesus' clothes became the brightest white imaginable. In the shock of seeing Moses and Elijah there with Jesus, our three astonished heroes could only think of offering housing to them. On top of all of this excitement, the actual voice of God booms onto the scene, telling our guys to listen to Jesus. Peter “hardly knew what to say, they were so terrified.”

An encounter with God dumbfounds us too. We scramble to make sense of what just happened and then we scramble to articulate it for ourselves. At times, we try to articulate it to others, at other times we are too afraid to talk about such deep things. Words are inadequate since they are merely symbols, pointing beyond themselves to a greater reality. Words can never fully capture that feeling, that vision, that moment when, in my heart and mind, I know God just saved me, comforted me, or guided me. My descriptions will not sufficiently paint the whole 3-D picture of such an encounter, but I'm obligated to try to share it anyhow.

Prayer:

God, you dumbfound me. You surprise and delight me. You speak to me in grand explosions of color and in subtle, quiet nudges. Sometimes, like Peter, I am terrified and hardly know what to say. You know I have a hard time articulating my experiences with you. You know I am at times terrified to even speak about you. Although I am feeble, I am sincere and I humbly ask you to give me the words and the guts to speak about us with others. Amen.

Spirituality: Ask God to dumbfound you this week. Be open to what comes next.

Social Justice: A rough-looking guy came up to her truck as we sat waiting. When asked, my boss from the homeless shelter gave him a few dollars out of her purse. “How can you do that, knowing what you know?” I asked, to which she responded “How can you sit there and not do that, knowing what you know?” During a lull tomorrow, ask your boss to explain their perspective on something you disagree on. Listen and consider what she has to say.

Simple Living: They thought I was nuts. I didn't know how to describe this “year of service” concept to my co-workers at the homeless shelter. Do your colleagues understand it? Do they ask you about it? Choose a co-worker and sit down with them, recounting in a simple way, the journey from deciding to apply to accepting the offer which brought you here today.

Community: In his terror, at least Peter managed to come up with an offer of hospitality (providing a tent) for Moses, Elijah and Jesus. On Facebook today, tell the story of a time you made a feeble yet sincere offer to others in response to an astonishing incident. Ask others to share their stories.

Third Sunday of Lent

John 2:13-25

“Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.”

Reflection by Barbara Wheeler, U.S. Catholic Mission Association Staff and Former Vincentian Service Corps Volunteer

Prayer:

Loving God, you've called us to be vessels of peace, goodness, and truth in this broken world. Forgive me for the times I have not spoken out against injustice, for the times I sat helplessly by the sidelines as others suffer. Shape in me a discerning heart, one that knows when anger is appropriate. Grant me the courage to respond when it is right. Amen.

For people who know what it means to live in community, this Gospel can come as a relief. Even Jesus got angry. It is good to know that our God is not saccharine or sentimental; this is a real person who knows what it is like to feel anger.

I have noticed that when I am friends with someone, I slowly begin to feel the way they feel about certain things. I know how certain situations will bother them and I know how other circumstances will make them happy. And the closer you grow with a person, you become not only aware of how they react to certain situations and people – you begin to feel the same way. Perhaps you never even noticed a certain noise before, and after this friendship, you share their annoyance at that same noise. Perhaps you never cared about a certain kind of music, but after this friendship, you begin to listen to it in a different way. In a good friendship where both people work to build each other up, this empathy can bring people closer and lead them to discover new aspects about the world around them.

So it is, I think, with our relationship with God. It is worth asking – what made Jesus so angry in the temple? Can we find ourselves angry at the same things that cause him to be angry: are we made angry by unjust treatment of others, at turning a place of worship and prayer into a place of trade and cheating others? There are other places in the Gospel where Jesus shows emotion. To the rich young man, Jesus, “looked at him and loved him.” Later, Jesus weeps for Jerusalem. What can we learn about who God is from such reactions?

The Father of the Church, St. Athanasius, said, “God became man so that man can become God.” Being a Christian is not simply following a set of rules or an ethical choice, though those are part of it. What does it mean to conform our lives to Christ, to respond to everything the way he responds to the world? In a particular way this Lent, how are you called to respond to the injustices in the world? There are many responses possible, but perhaps it begins with looking at the Gospel and asking ourselves to begin to see the world the way Christ sees it.

Spirituality: For this week's prayer time, you will need a few supplies. Grab a bowl and a handful of beans. Begin your prayer time as you usually do, presenting your personal needs to God. With every prayer, drop a bean into the bowl. When you run out of your usual prayers, pray for the needs of communities around the world. Keep going until you've placed all your beans in the bowl. This method of prayer will stretch you to move outside your own needs and pray for others also.

Social Justice: What social justice issues are you most passionate about? Take time this week to dig deeper into one of those issues. Read through Scripture and Catholic Social Teaching to understand the faith perspective on the issue, and find out if there is legislation supporting these concerns. Reach out to your members of Congress to share your opinions on the matter.

Simple Living: Today's Gospel shows us how Jesus reacted when he entered the Temple, take a few minutes to think about how Jesus would assess your own home? Is it a welcoming space? Are you making good use of your resources? Do you have belongings that might better serve someone in need? Identify three things that you can change – either by fixing it, cleaning it, or donating it to someone who has a greater need for it.

Community: This week, as you gather with your community, take some time to discuss the brokenness you see in your neighborhood. Find ways that you can be a source of healing and service to those in living in poverty. Agree on one community service project that you will take up during this Lenten season.

Fourth Sunday of Lent

John 3:14-21

“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.”

Reflection by Carol Lackie, Catholic Volunteer Network Staff

This is one of the most frequently quoted passages of the Bible. For many believers, simply mentioning “John 3:16” or declaring it on a bumper sticker evokes strong feelings of humility and thankfulness regarding the life and sacrifice of Jesus – especially as that sacrifice was for each one of us as individuals. As we ponder the power of this faith tenet during the Lenten season, I invite us all to challenge ourselves about what the on-going message of Jesus’ sacrifice requires of us since that message is timeless and very much alive and dynamic.

Our Christian faith proclaims we are all children of God. As such, aren’t we bound to practice the same self-sacrifice that Jesus exhibited? It is said that Jesus is the human face of God. If Jesus now lives in each of us, isn’t it true then that we all reflect the face of God and are called to serve each other as Jesus served those around him? This is the simple plea of Pope Francis – that the Church would put aside secular trappings of power and wealth and serve the poor.

There is another powerful declaration in this short phrase that qualifies our service – it must be compassionate. John states that Jesus was not sent to condemn, but to save. The compassion of Jesus is one of the qualities of his ministry most often cited in the Gospels. He reached out to all peoples – even those shunned by society – and he made clear that his healing power was available to all. When we engage in our ministries, is our embrace as free and nonjudgmental as that of Jesus?

Prayer:

God of love and compassion, guide me during these days of Lent as I try to reflect honestly on how well I have lived your call to serve those around me with compassion and respect. Help me to see, in the midst of the often frantic, busy days ahead, the gift of your presence in the faces before me. Give me clarity to appreciate when you are placing in front of me opportunities to refresh, rejoice and re-commit in my service to you. Prepare me that I may be open to relive the greatest mystery of our faith and to be renewed by the power of your unfailing love. Amen.

Spirituality: The theologian Philip Sheldrake defines Christian spirituality as “the way our fundamental values, life-styles, and spiritual practices reflect particular understandings of God, human identity, and the material world as the context for human transformation.” One’s spirituality is particular to a time and place and experience of life – an ordering of what is important and how those values reflect an understanding of and relationship with The Divine. The call to model our lives after the sacrificial life of Jesus may challenge us to reorder our priorities. During this Lenten season, perhaps we can spend time thinking about whether the true motivators in our lives – whether those things we hold dear – are truly reflective of the Divine love and compassion with which we, ourselves, have been so blessed.

Social Justice: The concept of social justice flows naturally from John. God’s love for all people is a consistent theme of his gospel and in Chapter 10:10, he quotes Jesus as saying “I have come that they (all people) may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” In our ministries, have we developed a Christian appreciation what it means to “have life” – have we discussed this with our fellow servers? Then, once we have considered that, what does it mean to possess or share this life “more abundantly”? Do we leave room in our hearts for the variety of responses to these questions that God, undoubtedly, treasures?

Simple Living: Loving everyone always seems so daunting to me – especially as I realize my very human flaws in liking some people and disliking others. Where does one begin to tackle this most challenging commandment? I try and consider this – loving means sharing. Each of us is gifted by God in some special way. We have a unique contribution to make to this world and that is why we are here. The gift we are has never walked this earth before and it will never be repeated. My challenge then is to discover that gift and to share it. I believe that the sharing of that gift brings true, heartfelt, inner joy. I believe that feeling that joy helps overcome the pettiness of limiting, human fears and resentments. A heart filled with joy has no room to hate. Simple.

Community: Sometimes it is easier to apply the teachings of Jesus in the broad, abstract way than a particular, concrete one. Make it a regular practice during Lent to check-in with those in your ministry team and ask each other if you have lived the sacrificial example of Jesus and have you done so without judgment?

Fifth Sunday of Lent

John 12:20-33

“Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit.”

Reflection by Laura Castro, Catholic Volunteer Network Staff and Former Cap Corps Midwest Volunteer

Prayer:

*As I prepare for the final weeks of Lent, I reflect on the Passion of Jesus and I wonder how I can remain hopeful. God grant me patience as I seek to better understand the mystery of faith and reverence towards the spiritual journey of all people.
Amen.*

In today's reading, Jesus reveals his death to his disciples knowing they soon would be welcomed and celebrated in Jerusalem. He sets up his teaching with a metaphor: “just as a grain of wheat must die to produce fruit, we must die to ourselves to encounter the fruit of eternal life.” This teaching stretches us to live for something beyond this world, a place we only know through our faith. We can relate to Jesus' humanity because we see how he might have found doubt in this invitation when he says, “I am troubled now.” He understands the heaviness of what lies before him, yet he follows this moment of confusion with an affirmation of his purpose in the world and ends the teaching with hope. The reading shows the complexity of Jesus and his faithfulness to God and humanity.

As Jesus reminds the people of his death, do we remain hopeful? What in our lives makes this difficult? What inspires us to be hopeful? Through our service and ministry – how have we found hope in the darkest places?

Spirituality: When speaking to the youth, Pope Francis stated, “Do not be men and women of sadness: a Christian can never be sad!” he said. “Ours is not a joy that comes from having many possessions, but from having encountered a Person,” he said. “We accompany, we follow Jesus, but above all we know that he accompanies us and carries us on his shoulders.”

Social Justice: Catholics have essential beliefs and teachings around social justice that give us direction to encounter Christ in all people and all creation. The seven themes of Catholic Social Teaching can be implemented in your daily life. Visit Catholic Apostolate Center's Catholic Social Teaching resources page for more information: www.catholicapostolatecenter.org/catholic-social-teaching.html.

Simple Living: Living simply has its challenges, especially in a consumer-centric society. You may feel daunted by the idea of adopting practices of simple living and making a lasting commitment to this new lifestyle. Don't let those worries prevent you from giving it a try today. View this Lenten season as a way to experiment with new forms of simple living – and once you've tried it, decide which practices you want to maintain for the long haul. Also, remember that integrating some practices of consuming less are forms of solidarity with those who are living in poverty.

Community: Robert Greenleaf said “The servant leader shares power, puts the needs of others first, and helps people develop and perform as highly as possible.” How are you utilizing your leadership positions to lift up your community?

Palm Sunday

Mark 14:1-15:47

“‘Take it; this is my body.’ Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it.”

Reflection by Kate Flannery, Former Catholic Volunteer Network Volunteer

Today we are met with a long and powerful reading—one imbued with significance for our Church and faith. In the Gospel of Mark, we see the culmination of Jesus’ mission. For this he came: to take on the sin of mankind and expiate it; to re-open the gates of heaven and invite us to share eternal life with the Trinity. This is powerful. God wants man to share in his divine life for all eternity. No cost was too high for him to do this, and so he came to us in the form of a man and died on the cross for our sins so that we may be with him forever. Pause for a moment to reflect on what kind of God would do that.

But what else is significant about this passage? Let’s go back to the Upper Room, to the Last Supper. Knowing he would die, Jesus did something unthinkable for humanity: he left himself with them for all eternity in the form of bread and wine. It was not enough for the Creator who breathed life into the world, who formed you in your mother’s womb, who is the Author of Reason, to be a man. He left himself in the Eucharist to nourish us and give us grace whenever we approach him in the sacrament, even if we want to do that every day. What a beautiful gift.

How often do we take advantage of the Sacraments? Do we see them simply as memorials, weird traditions made up by the Catholic Church or as gifts freely given to us by a God who wants to nourish and sustain us, who wants to be with us intimately and physically until the end of time?

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, we praise you and thank you on this Palm Sunday for the gift of yourself in your life, in your death on the Cross and in the Eucharist. Just as Adam and Eve fell through an act of eating, so too, by an act of eating, do you redeem the world in the Eucharist. Help us to better appreciate your divine gift. Help us to take up our crosses, minister to your people and be transformed into yourself this Easter season. Amen.

Spirituality: We challenge you today to reflect on the meaning of God giving us himself not only on the Cross 2,000 years ago, but every Sunday when we attend Mass and are in a state of grace. Do you thank him or approach him with awe and love? Do you cherish his presence within you, waiting only for you to allow yourself to be transformed into him? At the next Mass you attend, try to bring this understanding of God as the man Jesus to mind and see how it impacts your experience. When you form the line for Communion, know that Jesus is standing there smiling at you, beckoning you to approach him. Other ideas: Reflect on how else Christ manifests himself to you in the day to day or to spend time with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament or Eucharistic Adoration.

Social Justice: In this long passage, we also heard about the woman who bathed Christ’s feet with expensive oil. In our world of suffering, we may ask, “Why did she waste the oil? Why didn’t the woman use the oil to gain money for the poor?” The woman’s love of Christ seems extravagant, yet it places God first. He says of her, “She has done a good thing for me...She has done what she could” (Mk. 14: 6, 8). Only in placing Christ first, loving him generously and doing what we can, will we be able to serve the poor and suffering around us. How can you be extravagant and generous with Christ today? What can you do to serve him in those around you?

Simple Living: In this passage, we also meet Simon of Cyrene—the man asked to help carry Jesus’ cross. He did so reluctantly, not wanting to be associated with a criminal and threat. How might God be asking us to take up our own crosses and be in solidarity with those on the margins of society? How can we apply the cross to our own life in order to live more simply with and for others?

Community: After about three years of spending time with Jesus, witnessing his miracles and hearing him preach, the disciples still had not made a full commitment to Christ. At a point of fear and suffering, they abandon their Lord—both by sleeping in the Garden and by hiding during his Crucifixion and death. How can we as a community instill perseverance and strength in one another during moments of anxiety, doubt and fear? How can we transform our fear into boldness and proclamation, as the disciples did after Pentecost?

Easter Sunday

John 20:1-9

“When Simon Peter arrived after him, he went into the tomb and saw the burial cloths there, and the cloth that had covered his head, not with the burial cloths but rolled up in a separate place.”

Reflection by Monica Thom Konschnik, Catholic Apostolate Center Staff and Former Jesuit Volunteer

Imagine how it must have felt for Mary Magdalene to go visit Jesus’ tomb and to find it empty. Consider the thoughts that must have been running through Peter’s mind as he heard what Mary had to say. Having, in their own ways, gone through the experience of seeing their teacher and their friend crucified a few days prior, one can only imagine the range of emotions they must have been feeling seeing that empty tomb.

I think back to my year as a Jesuit Volunteer in New Orleans. We were the first group of JVs back after Katrina devastated the city. Having never visited the city prior to showing up for my volunteer year, I tried to think about what it must have been like for my co-workers and neighbors – watching their city destroyed by a flood. They must have been like Mary, Peter, and the other apostles – scared and unsure of the future after the water receded.

But as we know, Jesus was raised from the dead and the city of New Orleans continues to rebuild. For all of the darkness in the world, we need to remember that after every death, whether literal or figurative, there is new life. If we don’t go through times of uncertainty and sadness, we can never experience the true beauty of the resurrection.

Prayer:

Good and gracious God, we celebrate and give thanks for the resurrection of your Son. We pray for the courage to always look forward to hope and to appreciate the struggles and difficulties that we must endure in order to get to the joy of the resurrection. Amen.

Spirituality: Take some time to read each of the Gospel stories of the resurrection. How do each of the stories differ? Where are they the same? Which is your favorite? Why? How do the stories apply to your life? Where do you see yourself in these Gospels?

Social Justice: Even though it has been nearly ten years since Hurricane Katrina devastated the city of New Orleans, the city is still continuing to rebuild. Learn how you can help by donating time or resources. Visit www.ccano.org/ways-you-can-give for details.

Simple Living: During Lent, you may have given yourself extra simple living challenges. Why not continue those on? Try another type of fasting, prayer, or almsgiving during the Easter season.

Community: It’s Easter – celebrate! Lent is over; the Lord is victorious over death. Gather together your friends, co-workers, neighbors, and other volunteers to celebrate Easter.