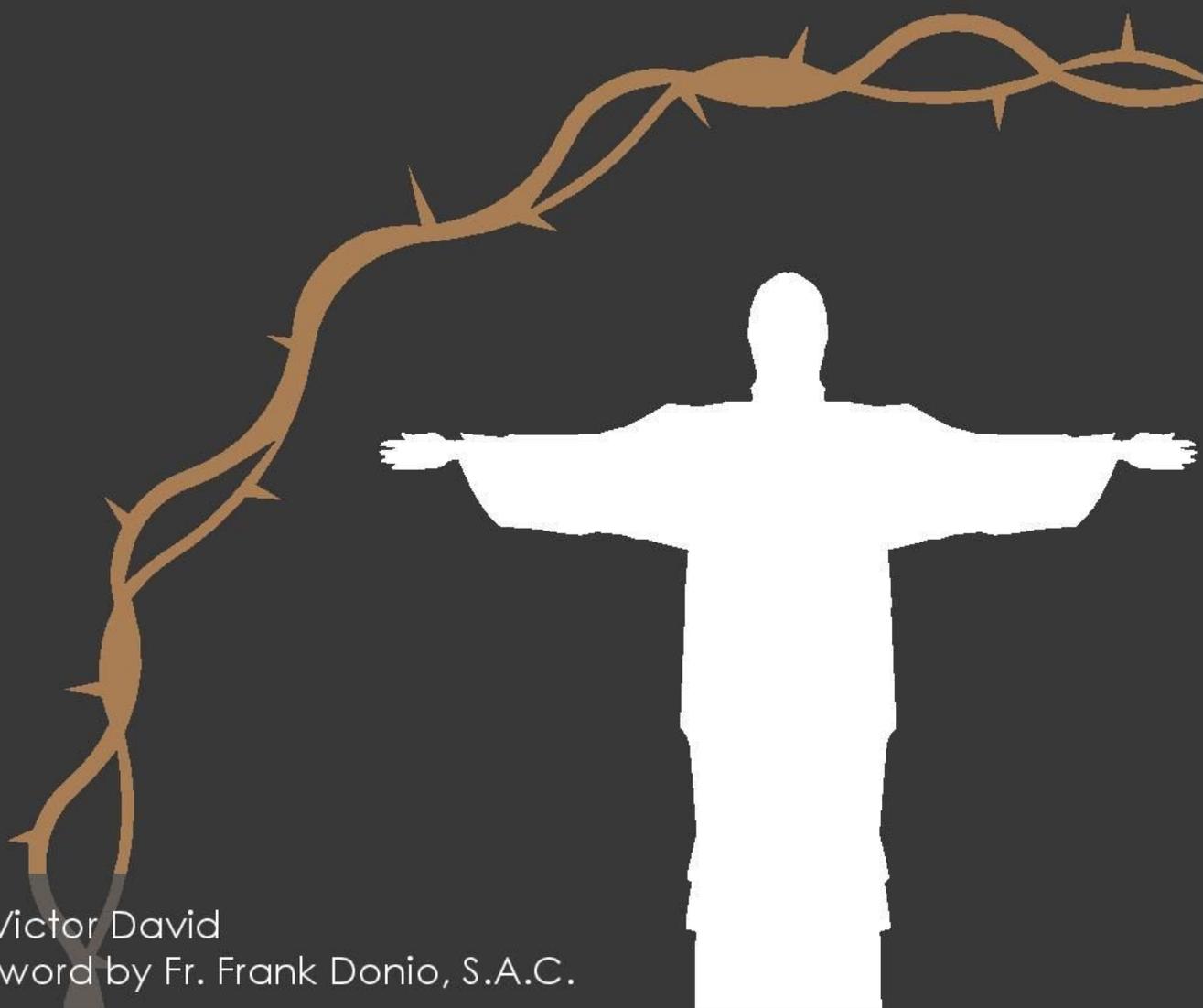


Lent and Easter

Reflections from the bloggers of
the Catholic Apostolate Center



Edited by Victor David
with a foreword by Fr. Frank Donio, S.A.C.



Table of Contents

Page 4.....Foreword from the Director

Page 5.....Note from the Editor

Page 6.....Lent

Page 20.....Easter

Page 28.....Author Biographies



Foreword

When our first e-book was published in 2014, I wrote that it was our hope that all those who read it would “reflect on and strengthen their relationship with Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is God, the Infinite Love.” Now it is with much happiness that we release our next e-book, Lent & Easter.

Much like our most recent publication, which took Advent and Christmas as its theme, this book focuses on another time of preparation and celebration, Lent and Easter. As we once again are marked on our foreheads with ashes, deepen our prayer, fast, and give alms, it is our hope that this collection of posts from our Ad Infinitum blog will encourage you to more fully participate in this solemn and then joyful time of year. As always, I thank all those authors whose writings appear in this book.

Pope Francis once remarked, “Lent is the time to start breathing again. It is the time to open our hearts to the breath of the One capable of turning our dust into humanity” (Ash Wednesday Homily, 2017). I hope each page offers the advice and encouragement needed for each of us to live out the Lenten season with hearts open to the Lord. In this way, when Easter finally arrives, we can rejoice in the knowledge that we have grown closer and closer to the Risen Christ.

In the words of our Holy Father, “Let us go then...May we allow his tenderness and his love to guide our steps” (Easter Vigil Homily, 2017).

May the charity of Christ urge us on!

~Fr. Frank Donio, S.A.C.
Director, Catholic Apostolate Center





A Note from the Editor

The following is a selection from the hundreds of posts that have appeared on the Catholic Apostolate Center's Ad Infinitum blog that coincide with the Lenten and Easter seasons.

As you read through the pages, you will gain inspiration from the saints, insights from the authors, and advice on how we all can deepen our faith during Lent and better live out the Easter message.

As in our previous books, anytime you see something underlined or flash as you turn the page, feel free to click on the item to see the author's source or further resources he or she wishes to provide.

I hope you enjoy the following pieces and pray that they may inspire you as we prepare to celebrate the life, death, and Resurrection of our Lord.

**~Victor David
Editor**



Lent



Praying with the Psalms during Lent

By Betsy Palmer

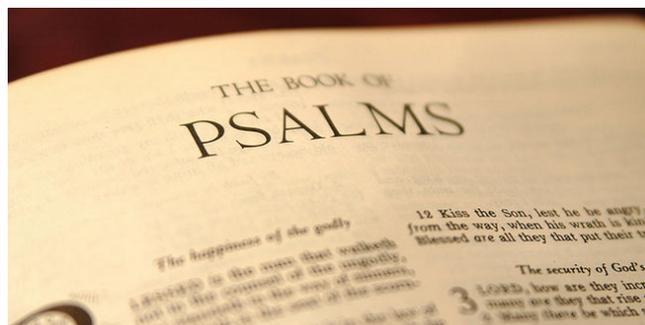
My sacrifice, O God, is a contrite spirit; a contrite, humbled heart, O God, you will not scorn.”
—Psalm 51: 19

During my graduate program at The Catholic University of America, I had a chance to take a class on the Psalms. Not only did I learn a lot of information about the psalms, but also my perspective on prayer changed. The professor taught us about the humanity of the psalms: each one is riddled with human emotion and experience. The psalms show us that our prayers to God do not have to be perfect. Rather, our prayers should be honest because we are placing our trust in Him.

For Lent, I have decided to pray more with the psalms. I've done this by praying the Liturgy of the Hours and doing Lectio Divina. Praying with and contemplating the psalms this Lent has really helped deepen my relationship with God. It has also helped me in my role as a Youth Minister. So far, God has reminded me of two principles that we should remember while reading the psalms: 1) the psalms are a mirror to your soul and 2) You should allow the psalms to be a guide to your life.

One psalm that the Church uses throughout the season of Lent is Psalm 51. Psalm 51 is titled “The Miserere: Prayer of Repentance” and the first two verses tell us that this prayer is the prayer David prayed after the prophet Nathan had told him he had sinned (cf 2 Kings 11-12). By praying this psalm throughout the season of Lent, we are reminded how much we are in need of God's mercy. No matter what we've done or what we will do, God always calls us back to himself. He constantly invites us to repent for our sins and be reconciled with him. God's mercy awaits us in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We are all sinners. By using Psalm 51 as a mirror to our own souls, we know that we are in need of repentance. Through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the Lord can wash us so that we can become “whiter than snow” (Psalm 51:9)

Psalm 51 is also a great prayer to guide a Christian's life. We are imperfect beings living in a broken world, and we encounter sin every day. It is only through God's abundant compassion that he blots out our sins. Verse 12 says: “A clean heart create for me, God; renew within me a steadfast spirit.” As Christians, we are called to repentance and conversion. God always calls us to allow him to change our hearts to bring us closer to his own heart. By continually offering our own hearts to him, God will do great things throughout our lives. Lent is a time of repentance and turning our hearts back to God to prepare for Easter. Through praying with Psalm 51, we can be reminded of our own brokenness. We can also be reminded to offer our heart to God in every prayer and action that we do in order to allow him to create in us a clean heart.



Encounter Lent

By Eric Clayton

Prayer, fasting, almsgiving. At the heart of these Lenten pillars, we hear a call to go out and, as Pope Francis reminds us, encounter. In our prayer, we lift up the needs of our global family. Through our fasting, we empty ourselves, giving up something to make room for the needs of another. And in our almsgiving, we pour out our own gifts and resources so as to lift up those who are in need, near and far. Lent is a time to remember that we are all part of God's one human family, and that means we have responsibilities to one another. And we come to understand and fulfill those responsibilities by building a culture of encounter.

To build a culture of encounter, we must start from within ourselves, from our personal call to discipleship. God knows our true selves, desiring that we, too, discover the person God has called us to be. Through prayer, we encounter ourselves before God; we see ourselves as God sees us. And we realize that God delights in every member of our human family because God is truly present in each of us.

Jesus reminds us, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." To love another, we must come to know our own selves, our own hurts and triumphs, our own joys and challenges. What begins as an interior encounter necessarily goes beyond ourselves, challenging us to live in solidarity with people we may never meet. How can we hope to go to the margins, to accompany those who are most vulnerable and in need, if we haven't properly wrestled with our own vulnerability, our own need? Only then can we recognize that each person we encounter can share with us some unique insight about our world, about ourselves and, ultimately, about our God.

We meet Jesus in the desert, a time of introspection and discernment before he begins his ministry. What has he gone there to accomplish? Luke tells us that Jesus "was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days, to be tempted by the devil." There he fasts and prays—and the Enemy takes that opportunity to tempt Christ with those temptations we each encounter daily: material comfort, honor, and pride. Jesus responded by trusting in God, by emptying himself of pride and power and ultimately rejecting the invitations of the Enemy.

We, too, can better understand where we are broken and turning away from whom we are called to be by following Jesus' example and encountering ourselves through prayer and fasting. We may not go into a desert for forty days, but we can and should take the forty-day invitation of Lent as an opportunity to reorient our lives, examining how we are living in relationship with God and our neighbors.

That might mean coming to terms with troubling or disappointing truths. Can we, like Jesus, radically reject the offering of power, of influence? We all want glory, praise, a pat on the shoulder, but as Jesus turned away from the Enemy's offering, so too must we. And then, where do we turn? We go to the margins with humility and compassion. Only by encountering ourselves can we then encounter our neighbors and build up that culture of encounter. This Lent, let us commit ourselves to encounter one another anew, to encounter Christ anew. Let us commit ourselves to giving more readily and more freely—whether of our time, our resources, or our finances. Let us commit to forty days of transformation, ready to encounter Jesus in the desert, and to commit to bearing whatever fruits that encounter sows.

Lent: Discovering God in the Spiritual Desert

By Evan Ponton

If you could only take three things on a desert island, what would you bring? A common question at parties, dates, and job interviews, it's not so different from what we might ask ourselves during the season of Lent. Lent, as our Catechism says, is "a span of forty days when the Church unites herself each year to the mystery of Jesus in the desert." Just as the "desert island" question invites us to stop and consider what we really need and want in life, Lent invites us to consider our truest desires, what matters most, when it comes to uniting ourselves to Christ Jesus. To help us answer this question during Lent, our Catholic tradition gives us three spiritual keys, known as "penitential practices," namely, Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving.

Prayer

Before deciding what to "give up" during Lent, first "pick up" a new way to pray. Be specific: pick a time, place, and form of prayer. Don't commit to more than you can do, but don't be afraid to stretch yourself some. Lent primarily focuses on the practice of penitential prayer, humbly acknowledging our sins with sorrow and contrition, and turning our hearts back to God's forgiveness and mercy. Don't forget Lent is a powerful time to receive the Sacrament of Penance (also called Reconciliation, or Confession). Penitential prayer isn't meant to leave us discouraged, but should increase our desire to love and serve God. The Psalmist sings, "As the deer longs for streams of water, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, the living God" (Psalm 42:2-3). Lent is a kind of "spiritual desert" that highlights our thirst for God, which may lead us to experience what the saints of our Church call "dryness in prayer," times when we lack feelings of comfort and consolation. Rather than a sign that God isn't listening, as Mother Angelica and others have described, dryness in prayer can be a gift and invitation to find deeper satisfaction in God.

Fasting

Fasting is the spiritual practice of voluntarily abstaining from food or some other bodily need or pleasure (now we can talk of "giving something up"). Fasting is rooted in our Church's scripture and tradition, especially in imitation of Jesus who fasted for forty days in the desert (Matthew 4:2). While the Church only asks members to fast from food on occasion, I'm convinced fasting is more relevant than ever as we live in constant temptation of becoming more gratified while less grateful, more satiated while less satisfied. Fasting can be a practice of slowing down. This can mean we intentionally consume and do less, thus allowing God to speak to our souls with less interruptions from the myriad distractions and lesser goods that demand our time and attention. Spend some time in prayer considering what things or activities God is calling you to fast from.

Almsgiving

When asked, "How much money is enough," industrialist and oil magnate John D. Rockefeller famously replied, "Just a little bit more." The practice of almsgiving, on the other hand, can actually be freeing—showing that we can be happy with a little bit less. Jesus warned his disciples of putting stock in material possessions (Luke 18:18-30). Almsgiving turns the spiritual fruit we inwardly gain through prayer and fasting outward into material fruit shared with the poor and those in need. The point isn't spring-cleaning or making room in the closet for new summer fashions, but to make room in our heart for the poor and to de-clutter the way that leads to the Kingdom of God.

God is Love!

By Thomas Wong

Deus Caritas est: God is Love. How many times have we heard this simple yet profound theological truth in a homily, story, or teaching? How many times have we taken this for granted? In a world where truth often seems subjective, God's love remains a refreshing and comforting constant in the Christian life. If this were not so, for what purpose, let alone by what means, would you or I exist? It is this perfect love of God which sustains us each and every moment of eternity. In fact, it's God's very nature, so bursting with love, that wills us into being. So too must our love for our neighbors guide and give purpose to our lives.

The liturgical season of Lent is an especially wonderful opportunity for us to reorient ourselves towards God's love and mercy. As we prepare to celebrate the ultimate expression of love the world has ever known this liturgical season, we may give up something we fleetingly desire in order to be made more aware of our need to depend on the One Love, the True Love, the Infinite Love. Of course, we can do more throughout Lent, but take to heart the suggestion of my bishop: "[T]his Lent, fast and abstain when the Church requires it; give something up to make room for God and his mercy to fill you. Pray more and pray deeply and whenever you can because God listens to you: prayer puts you in touch with God and his mercy. Do something good for someone else every day; resolve to care about someone else every day, because God does, Jesus does and wants you to be like him, loving and full of mercy. Don't make this Lent a complicated regimen of resolutions and promises that will unravel a week from now. Make it simple. Make it real.

Lent is not a time of self-pity or bemoaning our spiritual shortcomings. To fail to acknowledge God's willingness to have mercy and forgive the sinner of his or her faults places sin as the end without further hope of relief, restricts one's view of God as having limits on his love, and risks committing a sin against the Holy Spirit (i.e. believing that the magnitude of a sin is greater than God's power— and continuous willingness— to forgive [CCC 1864]). While Lent brings to mind the classic images of sackcloth and ashes, the Lord desires something much more personal than just the recognition of our sins—"sincere, heartfelt repentance, change of heart, conversion" is what each of us is called to offer the Lord with the same Love He offered to those He encountered in His earthly ministry and ultimately from the Cross.

"I desire mercy, not sacrifice," our Lord, echoing the words of the prophet Hosea, declares to the Pharisees during the calling of Matthew (cf. Hosea 6:6) For us today, these words still ring true. Lent is not an easy time, but it invites us to shake us out of our spiritual complacency if we are to answer the Lord's call to conversion. This may be uncomfortable. Receiving the ashes on our foreheads tomorrow, however, signifies our commitment to God that we will endeavor each day—and not just until Easter Sunday—to change our lives to be (once again) oriented towards God in avoidance of the sin and distractions which lead us away from His love. While we seek forgiveness from God, we are also to freely forgive others, "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." Even if we fall along the way, the important thing is to pick ourselves up and start again— the Lord is patient!

A School of Charity

By Alyce Shields

We are only a few weeks into our Lenten sojourn, and I'm not sure about your experience so far, but I know that it has already been a challenge for me. And that's good! I wanted this Lent to more closely unite me to the Cross of Christ, not just for these forty days, but beyond, and God is answering this prayer in ways that I could never expect. In fact, he is delivering me from my own crosses so that I may know joy through this suffering.

So far, I've been able to take away two important lessons from my Lenten journey so far:

- 1.) "Lent is a school of charity. Life is a school of charity."
- 2.) Where my roots are planted determine how I will be conscious of God bearing me through this school of charity.

Life is hard. Our days are filled with many demands, and sometimes we fail to meet them. People will disappoint us. We may hurt others by our words or actions. We find ourselves at times feeling hopeless. But the one who hopes in the Lord knows that all of these trials bring us to the Cross and teach us sacrificial love. A priest once told me, "Lent is a school of charity. Life is a school of charity." As we navigate these crosses, God is literally stretching our hearts to be open to love – so that when we reach heaven, our hearts are like Christ's. And if he stretches our hearts through pain and sorrow, imagine how much God stretches our hearts through hope and joy! Through every trial and every gift we are being molded to become more Christ-like, capable of infinite love. If we could truly fathom this infinite love that God is preparing us for, we would live life on our knees in awe of the Cross. Truly we can say that life is a school of love, a school of charity.

Many of the readings during Lent teach us how we can plant our roots to let the Lord more fully direct our lives. We are consistently given the image of a tree whose roots are planted near running water. This tree's leaves never fade, and in even drought, it still bears fruit. For me, this tree represents my cross, whose confidence must rely solely in the Lord. God can only keep my leaves evergreen if I live off of his waters, God will perform miracles in my life if I let him. This takes confidence and prayer. In this school of charity, I've learned that even the simplest of prayers can help me submit to God each day: "Multiply my time, Lord," or "Let me see you where you need me to." When I say these prayers and trust God to fulfill them, he does. He's stretching my heart to know his love.

As you pray today over your takeaways from Lent so far, I pray that you come to find peace in how the Lord is trying to carry your cross through His school of charity, and that you call upon the grace to let him do so. I pray that you reflect on where your tree is planted and that you want to live by God's living streams. Ultimately, I pray that you know how loved you are. You are so loved that God is stretching your heart so that you may become more like him. He wants you to know infinite love, who is our Lord Jesus himself. "I pray that you, being rooted and firmly established in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the length and width, height and depth of God's love" (Ephesians 3:17-18).

Learning Forgiveness on Ash Wednesday

By Dana Edwards



While on my way to work one morning, I passed a church that had a marquee saying, "Forgive others as quickly as you expect God to forgive you."

That phrase stuck with me the entire day to the point where I just had to write it down to look back on. Forgiveness can be so difficult when we've been hurt or feel we've been wronged. That little message to me from God reminded me of the work I need to do during Lent to prepare for Easter.

The season of Lent is centered on God's forgiveness of our sins and our willingness to be penitent. As we receive our ashes on Ash Wednesday, the priest often says, "Repent and believe in the Gospel." Especially during this time of the year, we recognize the brief time we have on earth to do God's will. This is a time in which we reach out to God to experience him in a tangible way through sacrifice, almsgiving, and fasting. On Ash Wednesday, we come together to show remorse for the times throughout the year that we have failed not only God, but also our family, friends, and fellow man.

Once, during the Catholic young adult group meeting in my area, a guest speaker shared that, contrary to what we might think, shame or guilt can be positive motivators. Sometimes, we can be so harsh on ourselves in dwelling on our imperfections that we don't allow God to heal us. Acknowledging our sinfulness through guilt and accepting God's mercy and forgiveness helps us to move on in striving to fix our wrongdoings. God will always accept us. We do not need to wait to "cleanse" ourselves for him. He will help us to choose right from wrong. If God, our flawless creator, can forgive us, who are we to deny it to others or ourselves?

In Matthew 5:23-24, we are told, "If you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift."

During Ash Wednesday, let us think of the ways in which we are slaves to sin and look for ways to repent and reflect on this during Lent. How can we be more open to God and seek his guidance? How can we be more forgiving to ourselves and others?

Preparing for Christ

By Nicholas Shields

As we begin Lent, many are still wondering, “What am I doing differently this year?” Have we given up chocolate again? Have we promised to be nicer to our brothers and sisters for the 3rd year in a row? Have we committed to give up cursing for all forty days? These are all good questions and ones that we should consider as we continue our Lenten journey. However, the real question is: “is what I am doing now preparing me for Christ?” For me, this is not an easy question to answer. In fact, every year I hate thinking about it. Why? Because it reminds me that I haven’t done enough. It reminds me that I do not have Christ at the center of my life.

It is no secret that we all struggle to keep Christ at the center of our lives, but Lent provides an opportunity to pull back the curtains, open the door anew to Christ, and walk with him. This sounds great, but many of us dread it. We dread committing too much to this Lenten journey, which is why we often turn to giving up candy or junk food instead of giving ourselves wholly and fully to Christ on the cross. Despite this dread, we have nothing to be afraid of. We have only to look at this past Sunday’s Gospel to see that we are not alone: “Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days, to be tempted by the devil” (Lk. 4:1-2). Personally, this reminder that Christ also went on a “Lenten journey” of his own helps me to commit more fully to my own journey. Jesus is willing to walk this path with us, so why not commit and walk with him?

As reassuring as this is, I still find the Lenten journey difficult. And it should be, for what will we really gain unless we have to work hard to be true followers of Christ? Journeys have their ups and downs, high days and low days, successes and defeats. Our Lenten journey is not any different. When the journey gets tough, we need look no further than the Holy Family for reassurance that we are on the right path. When we look at Joseph, we are reminded to be silent and to listen to God’s word, to find strength in work and family. When we look at Mary, we are reminded that despite the pain and suffering, she said “Yes” to God and gave everything to Him—all the way to the foot of the cross. Finally we look at Jesus and we are reminded of why we take up the cross.

In January 2016, Pope Francis said “Let us not waste this season of Lent, so favourable a time for conversion! We ask this through the maternal intercession of the Virgin Mary, who, encountering the greatness of God’s mercy freely bestowed upon her, was the first to acknowledge her lowliness and to call herself the Lord’s humble servant.” During this season of Lent, let us embrace the journey, the good days and the low, because every day is a new opportunity on the path to Christ.



Resting in Brokenness

By Greg Hamilton

"I am the resurrection and the life, says the Lord; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will never die."

These lines from St. John's Gospel challenge my understanding of what it means to be compassionate. When Jesus learned that a loved one was ill, He responded in a peculiar manner. He didn't rush to the sick one's side or hurry to comfort His beloved's family. Rather, He waited two days. Why did He wait? I sure wouldn't have done that. If He knew all along that He would raise Lazarus, why would He prolong the wounded agony of Mary and Martha? How could Jesus desert those He loved in their moment of need? It seems almost like a cruel and unnecessary test.

Yet I suspect Jesus had a different intention. By waiting two extra days He was not punishing or testing Mary and Martha but inviting them to examine their own brokenness. The idea of resting in brokenness, rather than avoiding it, has been a particularly challenging concept for me. I first encountered it in Bryan Stevenson's book *Just Mercy*, in which Stevenson says "We can embrace our humanness, which means embracing our broken natures and the compassion that remains our best hope for healing. Or we can deny our brokenness, forswear compassion, and, as a result, deny our own humanity."

It seems that Jesus chose the former. When He finally arrived in Bethany and witnessed the woundedness of those He loved, He "became perturbed and deeply troubled." Then, "Jesus wept." Knowing that Jesus wept helps me reclaim my own brokenness and affirms that truly embodying compassion requires entering into the chaos of woundedness, both my own and that of the "other" person.

Prayer: God of grace, help me rest in my woundedness. When I feel most alone and deserted, remind me of Jesus' constant refrain "Do not be afraid." Help me remember that Jesus Himself, the almighty Son of God, wept for the pain of His community. Let me never forget that one of Jesus' greatest miracles of raising Lazarus from the dead was precipitated by His solidarity in suffering with those He loved dearly. Amen.

Focus on: Social Justice

How have you been wounded by the, as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. puts it, "sickness of racism, excessive materialism, and militarism?" How can you – and your surrounding communities – enter into this brokenness and encounter healing compassion?

Service Inspiration: My mother, Sue, understands part of my volunteer experience, but struggles with other components. However, I recently babysat for a colleague's children, a two-and-a-half year old and a six-month old. When I left, I was exhausted. I realized later that I watched two boys the same age difference as my brother and I, but only for a few hours. My mom did it for years, and then became my teacher and homeschooled us. She served as an enormous role model, never asking for thanks or recognition, silently taking on her children's struggles. She is an inspiration and reminder of Jesus here on Earth.

*This Lenten reflection was originally published on the Catholic Volunteer Network Blog and is used with permission.

Lenten Makeover

By Krissy Pierno

When I was younger, my family loved to watch the show “Extreme Makeover: Home Edition,” where a family’s home is rebuilt for them and everything is made-over and new. On the last day, the family sees what their house has become in a big reveal. When I think about Lent, I compare it to a time of preparing my heart for the biggest makeover and surprise “reveal” in my faith: Easter Sunday.

Something new for me this year is a daily prayer journal of reflections on the readings from each day of Lent. I have found myself able to look forward to this prayer journal each morning, and have even found a special place to reflect and start the day off on the right foot. My hopes are that this daily prayer journal becomes a habit for starting each day with God in prayer and silent reflection. As part of this daily journal exercise, I am meeting with a few other friends of mine who are also on this Lenten prayer journey. We discuss our thoughts, pray for each other’s intentions, and encourage each other to be faithful to prayer. I think this community aspect, combined with personal prayer, will help strengthen my resolve for peace and prayer this Lent and “remodel” my prayer life.

Every year, people decide what they should “give up for Lent.” Many times, Lent gets combined with a New Year’s resolution or a diet plan. Although taking a “fast” from something is an important way to remove distractions from one’s life and become closer to God, the purpose is often lost when it involves giving up something like desserts and sugar. I have challenged myself this Lent to not only give up something, but also to add something on. For example, I have decided to fast on Wednesdays in an attempt to have a reminder on that day of Christ’s suffering in the desert.

Last Lent, my class was in charge of distributing Catholic Relief Services Rice Bowls, teaching the school about the purpose behind rice bowls, and collecting them all to donate to CRS. The focus each week of Lent included a new country to think about, pray for, and learn about in hopes of empathizing with the people there. My 2nd graders started to understand that others are not as blessed as they are in Washington, DC. On one Friday, the topic of severe hunger came up, and some students didn’t realize that other people in the world do not have breakfast each morning, or that some people do not have homes to go back to at night. This empathetic realization from a few students helped them connect and compare their own lives to those of others.

For the remaining time of Lent, I leave you with this one challenge: you can rebuild, remake, or remodel your life, but the end goal is simple: prepare your hearts. Use these 40 days to pray as Christ did in the desert, fearlessly and fervently. May your actions and habits that help you grow during Lent also transfer into the rest of the year. Aim to give of yourself to others in many different ways, imitating Christ’s sacrifice for the world. Get ready for the “big reveal” when you are “made-over” in His love and are ready to celebrate the empty tomb on Easter Sunday. Then we can say, like in the home-makeover show, “Move...That....Rock!”

From "Hosanna" to "Crucify Him!"

By Jay Schaefer

"Exult greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout for joy, O daughter Jerusalem! Behold: your king is coming to you, a just savior is he, Humble, and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

Zechariah 9:9

So begins the first liturgy of Holy Week on Palm Sunday. We hear these words referenced in one of the two possible Gospel readings during the procession into the church. We start our celebration of Palm Sunday, appropriately, by proclaiming and reenacting the story in Matthew's Gospel of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, a moment of great joy and excitement. Those in the congregation welcome the priest, who enters the church in persona Christi, as we echo the words of the people of Jerusalem, "Hosanna in the highest!" What a happy occasion!

How fickle this joy seems, though, when we get to the Passion narrative. In a matter of minutes, we go from crying, "Hosanna!" to "Crucify him!" One minute, we're giving Jesus a king's welcome. The next, we're condemning Him to death. Quite the emotional roller coaster! Holy Week is exhausting. Starting with Palm Sunday, I'm attending Masses, praying the Stations of the Cross, and singing with the choir for days on end. In recent years, I've taken to spending Good Friday on pilgrimage to the National Shrine in Washington, D.C., to place myself in an intentional state of prayer and reflection. So why do I do this to myself? Quite simply, it's because I love it. It's the most rewarding experience of prayer that I have all year.

On Palm Sunday, we're reminded of what we'll bear witness to in the days to come. We're invited to reflect on what's about to be re-presented in a real-time reenactment of the focal point of Christ's earthly life. Later on Holy Thursday, we see the reenactment of the Last Supper, the very institution of the Eucharist we celebrate to this day. We're reminded, too, of the great humility we're called to emulate: "If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet." (John 13:14)

On Good Friday, we the events of Christ's Passion and death unfold before our eyes. We're called toward the sanctuary to kiss the gruesome device of our salvation, the instrument of punishment used to redeem all of mankind. And after an unceremonious Communion service, the liturgy suddenly pauses. The Church holds its breath as we wait.

And then, finally, the Easter Vigil—the happiest day of the year, of all history! We hear the truly joyous words of the Exsultet, the Easter Proclamation: "Exult, let them exult, the hosts of heaven, exult, let Angel ministers of God exult, let the trumpet of salvation sound aloud our mighty King's triumph! Be glad, let earth be glad, as glory floods her, ablaze with light from her eternal King, let all corners of the earth be glad, knowing an end to gloom and darkness."

If I arrive at Easter morning feeling exhausted but strengthened, it means that I've truly entered into Holy Week, walking with Christ as He walks with me. This Holy Week, may we walk more closely with Christ on His journey towards the cross, knowing that this journey continues with His resurrection. It is Christ's resurrection, His triumph over sin and death, that gives our Lenten journey meaning and enables us to exult with the Church and be glad!

Reflections on Good Friday

By Jennifer Beckmann

“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. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.” (John 3:16-17)

Most parents feel incredibly protective of their children and hate to see them hurting. Chances are, if you ask your mom or dad, they would say that watching you break an arm, fall off your bike, or be picked on by a bully was painful for them. Maybe you are a parent who has experienced how hard it can be to see your child in pain. God, who is infinitely perfect, loved us so much that He was willing to sacrifice His only Son so that we would have a chance at Heaven. God knew that some would chose to reject His love. He knew exactly how painful it would be, for both Himself and the Blessed Mother, to watch His Son suffering on the cross.

On Good Friday, we commemorate the ultimate sacrifice. The Stations of the Cross allow us to journey with Christ the last hours of his life on earth. Even if you are unable to physically move from station to station, it is a wonderful opportunity to mediate on all that Jesus was willing to undergo for our sake.

The First Station: Jesus is condemned to death.

The Second Station: Jesus carries His cross.

The Third Station: Jesus falls the first time.

The Fourth Station: Jesus meets His mother.

The Fifth Station: Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus to carry His cross.

The Sixth Station: Veronica wipes the face of Jesus.

The Seventh Station: Jesus falls the second time.

The Eighth Station: Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem.

The Ninth Station: Jesus falls the third time.

The Tenth Station: Jesus is stripped of His clothes.

The Eleventh Station: Jesus is nailed to the cross.

The Twelfth Station: Jesus dies on the cross.

The Thirteenth Station: Jesus is taken down from the cross.

The Fourteenth Station: Jesus is laid in the tomb.

Imagine how the Virgin Mary must have felt when she met her Son on the way to Golgotha. Her heart must have been breaking watching Him struggle to carry the cross. Her tears must have hurt Jesus' own heart.

After Jesus fell for the third time, He got back up and continued on. He didn't grumble or complain. It would have been easy to decide that it was too hard and to just stop. When we carry our own cross, however small that burden, it is incredibly easy to complain to God and to say that we cannot do it. We might not be able to on our own, but with God's help, all things are possible.

In His last moments on the cross before He died, Jesus was thinking of us. “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34) God stands ready to give us His unconditional love and forgiveness. He has already done the hard part. Through His suffering and death, He threw open the gates to Heaven. He is ready to give us the graces to get there. All we need to do is ask Him for it.

Behold, the Wood of the Cross

By Thomas Wong

As we enter into Holy Week, I invite you to reflect on the week that changed the world as understood in the Christian context: the celebration of the salvific event of the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of our Lord. Let us contemplate that great exemplification of Christianity in the symbol lifted upon Golgotha on Good Friday for the world to gaze upon: the Cross.

“Behold the wood of the Cross, on which hung the salvation of the world,” we hear on Good Friday. It’s a strange symbol, isn’t it? An instrument of ignominious death, the Cross is for Christians not a sign of defeat but of certain victory! Rare is the Catholic home or school that does not have at least one prominently displayed in it somewhere—but perhaps rarer still are Catholics who pray while actually holding not a cross, but a crucifix. Upon seeing the Crucifix, however, a person must decide whether to accept Christ’s death—including the truth of all He revealed—or to reject Him. For the faithful, it remains a powerful prayer tool, one that does not require elegant words to be meaningful. In holding a Crucifix, one is offering a very powerful prayer. The Crucifix invites us to more deeply meditate upon the precious wounds of Christ. Indeed, one is reminded of our Lord’s words to St. Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands,” while tracing one’s fingers over the tiny replica of His wounded hands, feet, side, and the crown of thorns upon His head.

Each of us is called to take up our cross and follow Christ (cf Mt 16:24). Our lives should model the Way of the Cross, which St. Mary Elizabeth Hesselblad hailed as “the most beautiful of all because on this path I have met and known my Lord and Savior.” St. Josemaría Escrivá, however, urges:

Don’t drag the Cross... Carry it squarely on your shoulder, because your Cross, if you carry it so, will not be just any Cross: it will be... the Holy Cross. Don’t bear your Cross with resignation: resignation is not a generous word. Love the Cross. When you really love it, your Cross will be... a Cross, without a Cross. And surely you, like Him, will find Mary on the way.

Whenever we are weak, how surely will our Mother at once fly to our aid when we faithfully call upon her name!

When bearing our crosses, we may be tempted to cry out, “My God, my God, why have You abandoned me?” This utterance of Christ from the cross, however, was not merely a lamentation but Him offering Psalm 22 to His Father. Let our every word, then, be a prayer, let our every action be an act of faith, our every thought be of kindness, and our every deed, one of love, the same kind offered upon the Cross. And, Pope Francis gently offers, “When everything seems too much, when it seems that the world is crashing down on you, embrace Christ’s Cross, draw close to him, and please, never let go of his hand.”



Something Strange is Happening...

By Alex Boucher

Holy Saturday is one of my favorite days of the Liturgical Year. Since donning my first altar server alb shortly after my First Communion, the celebration of the Sacred Paschal Triduum is not only the apex of the liturgical year, but mine as well. I always look forward to the day when Christ is in the tomb and we joyfully await the great Easter Vigil after sundown, with its elements that illuminate all of our senses.

Before we can glory in the Resurrection of the Redeemer, we must first wait in prayerful expectation while Christ is asleep in the tomb. The most poignant illustration of this anticipated celebration is from an "ancient homily on Holy Saturday," written by an author forgotten by the centuries, and featured prominently in the Office of Readings of the Liturgy of the Hours on Holy Saturday:

"Something strange is happening—there is a great silence on earth today, a great silence and stillness. The whole earth keeps silence because the King is asleep. The earth trembled and is still because God has fallen asleep in the flesh and he has raised up all who have slept ever since the world began. God has died in the flesh and hell trembles with fear.

"He has gone to search for our first parent, as for a lost sheep. Greatly desiring to visit those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death, he has gone to free from sorrow the captives Adam and Eve, he who is both God and the son of Eve. The Lord approached them bearing the cross, the weapon that had won him the victory. At the sight of him Adam, the first man he had created, struck his breast in terror and cried out to everyone: 'My Lord be with you all.' Christ answered him: "And with your spirit." He took him by the hand and raised him up, saying: 'Awake, O sleeper, and rise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.'"

We wait in joyful anticipation for the chanting of "Lumen Christi - The Light of Christ" that pierces the darkness and the solemn intoning of the Exsultet, the great Easter Proclamation during the Easter Vigil. In the Exsultet, we join in praying in the midst of the newly lit paschal candle, "This is the night of which it is written: The night shall be as bright as day, dazzling is the night for me, and full of gladness. ... May this flame be found still burning by the Morning Star: the one Morning Star who never sets, Christ your Son..." "

Together, we pray that Christ, the Beginning and the End, the Alpha and the Omega, may illumine our way through the darkness until we rejoice in the splendor of the Vigil of Vigils, the holiest night of the Church year. Until then we wait, for something strange is happening.

Easter



Hope Lives!

By Fr. Frank Donio, SAC

Hope lives! It might seem to be a strange phrase at first, but if we replace the word “hope” with “Jesus” or “Christ,” then it immediately makes sense to a believer in the Resurrection. The 50-day Easter season is a celebration not simply of an event that happened in the past, but is also a season filled with the hope that comes from belief in the Risen One, Jesus Christ.

What is this hope? It is the hope that all believers in Christ have that they will rise with him. It is the hope of salvation that comes through him. It is the hope that no matter the suffering, pain, challenge, and difficulty that is encountered in life, our lives as Christians belong to Christ. Our lives are meant to serve him, rather than self-serve—to do his mission, rather than our own. None of this is easy; it requires hope in the One who lives! As Pope Francis tells us, “He who hopes, hopes one day to hear these words: come to me my brother, come to me my sister, for the whole of eternity.”

The way to the hope of the Resurrection is the way of the Cross. Only through the painful experience of Good Friday do we come to Easter joy and hope. Most of us want to avoid pain as much as we can. However, I have learned the most and deepened my faith, trust, and hope, as well as become more loving and compassionate, as a result of painful, cross-like experiences. Some will say that suffering is meant to test us or is sent by God. Instead, I prefer to believe as my mother does, and say, “Stuff happens.”

Indeed, it does. Suffering happens as a consequence of personal sin, the sins of others, and also the action of evil. What do we do when these things happen? Do we curl up into a fetal position in the corner of a room and wait for life to end? No, as I learned well during my years at a Pallottine shrine dedicated to the patron saint of hopeless cases, St. Jude. The pilgrims who came there taught me by their lives and their joy that even in our suffering, in our experiences of the Cross, we strengthen our belief that hope lives. Christ calls us to continue moving forward in life and in love, sharing what we have found in him with all those we encounter.

As the Father raised the Son on that first Easter, God still provides for us today. He saves us from our sins and gives us hope. We are called to see with the eyes of faith in Christ, feel the love of Christ, and be filled in our hearts with the hope of Christ – a hope that lives now and forever.

Amen! Alleluia!



The Magnificent Hallelujah

By Victor David

On April 13, 1742 in Dublin, Ireland, Handel's famous oratorio Messiah was premiered. Surprised? When we think of the Messiah we immediately think of Christmastime. Woe to the city orchestra that dares pass the holiday season without at least one performance of one of western music's most beloved pieces. Yet, far from being a Nativity carol, the Messiah is truly an Easter gift.

Part II of the oratorio closes with one of the most well known choruses, "Hallelujah." It occurs during scene seven, titled "God's ultimate victory." This follows scenes dedicated to the Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus Christ.

Hallelujah
For the lord God omnipotent reigneth
Hallelujah

The kingdom of this world; Is become
The kingdom of our Lord, And of His Christ

And He shall reign for ever and ever
King of kings forever and ever hallelujah hallelujah
And lord of lords forever and ever hallelujah hallelujah
And he shall reign forever and ever
Hallelujah

At the beginning of Holy Week, we celebrate Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem, humbly on a donkey. We are then invited to journey with him. We are there at the Last Supper when the Eucharist is instituted. We stand with the Blessed Mother and John the Evangelist at the foot of the Cross. We mourn Jesus' death with them. We are asked, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" But then, at the Easter Vigil and on Easter Sunday, we rejoice at the news that the tomb is empty. Christ is risen, he is truly risen. At Mass, we do not exclaim "Alleluia" just once. We proclaim it three times.

The "Hallelujah" Chorus presents us with what the Triduum and Easter are all about. Christ, through his sacrifice on Good Friday, he takes on the sins of the world and opens Heaven up for the faithful. In his Resurrection on Easter Sunday, death is overcome. In conquering both sin and death, Jesus truly becomes the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. His rule knows no end, for he reigns for all time.

Tradition dictates that when the chorus is sung, all must stand out of reverence for the Messiah. During the Easter season, and indeed all our lives, we too must stand and journey with Christ. By doing so, we take part in that kingdom of our Lord. By doing so, we remain close to the Lord of Lords. By doing so, we can be part of the heavenly chorus that forever sings, "Hallelujah!"

Holy Drama

By Evan Ponton

In the small German village of Oberammergau, every ten years since 1634, roughly two thousand townspeople from all walks of life come together to stage the world's most famous "Passion Play," a dramatic re-enactment of Holy Week from Palm Sunday to the Resurrection. What that one town literally does every ten years, all Christians perform every Holy Week—and it is every bit as real.

The liturgies of Holy Week teach us that we are not merely passive spectators but living participants and actors in the ongoing story of the "Paschal Mystery," the saving life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. In our celebrations, we remember not just something that happened, but something that is happening, namely, the redemption of the world through the work Jesus Christ accomplished by His Cross and Resurrection. We are not playing someone else's role in an entirely scripted fiction, but discovering our own part and contribution within a story that God is still writing.

The basic structure of Christian existence, as a drama and extended experience of Holy Week, was one of the great lessons and insights shared throughout the life of Pope St. John Paul II, himself an actor and playwright. One of John Paul II's biographers described the pope's core vision of, "the cosmic drama of divine love being played out in the human quest for a true and pure love" (The End and the Beginning, 413). John Paul II received this vision primarily through his nourishment from Sacred Scripture. He interpreted life in light of the Gospel story of Jesus. The Passion Narrative in the Gospel of John, which some and dark, symbolizing the tension of love and sin that function almost like stage directions.

I think we experience much of our life of discipleship as a drama, which is much different from experiencing all times and aspects of life as dramatic. The drama of life is often slow, ordinary, and unremarkable. There are long periods of waiting, working, growing, and hoping, punctuated by divine breakthroughs that remind us that He has been directing and giving commands all along. I find that I need Holy Week for its power to provide context for every frustrated hope, betrayal to those I love, loss of friends and family, and struggle to stand for what is true and just.

On Holy Saturday, when things seem darkest, Jesus descends into those dark places of our world and our souls and shines a light, giving us the courage to hope that when Jesus says, "It is finished," it actually means God is not done with us yet. Just when we think it's over, the veil is torn and the curtain is raised—Christ is resurrected, and invites us not only on Easter Sunday, but anew each day, to live in the hope and joy of his victory over sin and death.



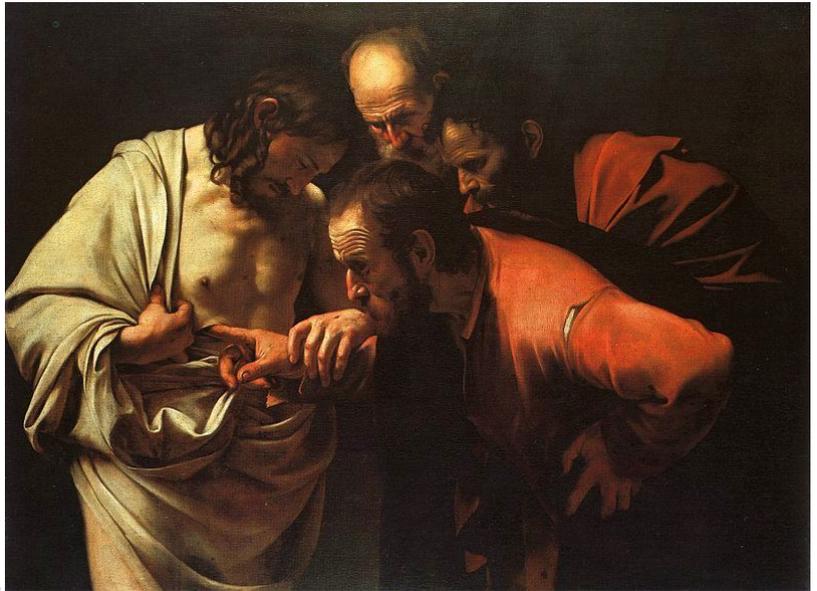
Doubting Thomas

By Elizabeth Pawelek

But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe." -John 20:25

During this beautiful liturgical season of rejoicing in the Resurrection of Our Lord, I always find this particular passage about "Doubting Thomas" extremely important to stop and reflect upon. After weeks and weeks experiencing the desert of Lent, the Passion on Good Friday, and the somber waiting on Holy Saturday, we celebrate the Father's goodness, His promise fulfilled, His Son glorified on Easter Sunday! Praise Him, for "by his wounds we are healed." (Isaiah 53:5)

On the Sunday when the Gospel passage about Thomas is proclaimed, I tend to sympathize with the "doubting" disciple. Thomas was not there the first time Jesus appeared to the disciples. I resonate with Thomas's human response of needing to touch the side of the Lord in order to believe.



What strikes me about Thomas is his initial understanding that the Resurrected Lord would have His wounds. Why did Thomas believe the Lord in His glory would still be wounded? I find myself thinking of the Lord in His glorified body as "perfect," without blemish, without the aftermath of pain, with every scar from Good Friday completely gone. Thomas, however, needed to see evidence from the Lord's action on Friday for the sake of belief. Thomas came to know the Risen Lord through His wounds.

Do you fall into the same temptation that I do, that resurrection means pain and suffering will be completely dispelled and erased, as if it never happened? This is not how the Lord comes in His glory. Jesus returns with His wounds, glorified, resurrected, transfigured. In fact, Jesus' wounds were necessary for the increasing of faith for His disciples. Christ takes on the burden of our sins in order to overcome them. He conquers man's greatest foe, death itself, and invites us to eternal life.

Are you struggling with something you see little hope in? Do you find yourself asking the Lord for a different cross? Just as Jesus' wounds and sufferings are glorified, so shall ours be if we turn them over to God. We can be sure then that our own struggles, crosses, and sufferings will be brought to glory, not forgotten, but resurrected. Our particular areas of pain can bring others to the glory of Jesus Christ! Let us ask St. Thomas to help our unbelief and truly live in the hope of the Resurrection.

"Each man in his suffering can also become a sharer in the redemptive suffering of Christ."
—St. John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*

On the Shore with Jesus

By Sophie Lorenzo

When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish that you have just caught . . . Come and have breakfast.'

—John 21: 9-10

Easter is a season of renewal, wonder, and awe. The light of Christ conquers darkness, and new life overcomes sin and death. Hope lives, as Fr. Frank wrote, and “We are called to see with the eyes of faith in Christ.”

Excitement wells up in me around this time every year when the world is waking up – new blooms appear on trees and in gardens while the sunlight lasts longer each day. Even more exciting than this change in nature is the joy that comes from the Easter Vigil, when the Church welcomes new members and we renew our baptismal promises. As the earth awakens each spring, this liturgical season also invites us to wake up to Christ’s triumphant love.

The Gospel readings following Easter Sunday and the Easter Octave are cherished stories and intimate encounters with Jesus. He appears to his disciples when their eyes are still bleary from what happened on the Cross. He has indeed risen as he said. They are called to see and to not be afraid, to touch his wounds, and to ask him questions. One such story occurs before Jesus asks Peter if he loves him.

Jesus first directs the disciples to an overwhelming catch on the Sea of Tiberius after a long night of unsuccessful fishing. Their nets overflow. They do not recognize him at first until this moment. Then, John tells Peter and the others, “It is the Lord.” Peter impetuously jumps out to join Jesus while the others row ashore. Sitting at the charcoal fire with fish and bread, Jesus invites the fishermen to come and eat breakfast. I imagine this moment filled with wonder and awe. The disciples will now be “fishers of men,” following Christ’s example and listening to his voice.

In the forty days after his Resurrection, Jesus prepares his disciples for their new life of faith and evangelization. Like a dear friend, he gives them advice, teaches them, and even cooks for them. The meal on the beach must have tasted wonderful! This scene is a gift to the senses, like the coming of springtime and the exuberance of the Easter Vigil.

What would it be like to be one of the disciples on that beach at daybreak? The cool breeze and the smell of fire caught up in the air, the morning colors dancing in the sky from the sunrise, the feeling of contentment the disciples must have had after catching so many fish, their weariness from a long night, and the sound of Jesus’ voice giving gentle direction. What would it be like to recall all the times you sat with him, to remember the day of his death, and then be present with him and eat fish and bread? This moment on the beach is an intimate encounter that we are also called to experience after the events of Holy Week and throughout all of our lives.

During this fifty-day season, I invite you to listen, to sit, talk, and eat with Jesus on the seashore.

Inconceivable Mercy

By Kate Fowler

“My daughter, tell the whole world about My inconceivable mercy.”

–Christ to St. Faustina Kowalska

In one of my graduate theology classes, a professor defined mercy as “love which keeps loving in the midst of rejection.” Pope St. John Paul II further elucidates, “And is not mercy love’s ‘second name,’ understood in its deepest and most tender aspect, in its ability to take upon itself the burden of any need and, especially, in its immense capacity for forgiveness?” This mercy, this type of love, often seems inconceivable. Christ himself concedes the inconceivable aspect of mercy to St. Faustina. He does not concede the impossibility of mercy, but places no limits on his own. God’s mercy is beyond comprehension. It is characterized by an unending, unfailing love for humanity—a humanity which has rejected him since the garden of Eden. From that moment and until today, God has worked and is working towards our salvation. His fidelity can be seen throughout Scripture and jumps from the pages of the Bible into our very lives. Jesus Christ is the face of mercy.

We especially celebrate the merciful love of the Father on the second Sunday of Easter – known formally as Divine Mercy Sunday since its establishment in 2000 at the canonization Mass of St. Faustina by Pope St. John Paul II. Divine Mercy Sunday is a powerful celebration of the mercy of a God who sent his only begotten Son in expiation for our sins. This mercy is life-changing—a truth affirmed in stories such as the woman at the well or even that of the good thief on the cross. God’s mercy inspires us and strengthens us to be men and women on fire with love—to be missionary disciples proclaiming the wonder of salvation and the infinite goodness of God.

God’s mercy, however, is meant for more than our own personal benefit. God has shown us his mercy to show us the way back to himself. We are called, therefore, to emulate it. Christ’s mercy is our beacon, our model. We are called to live mercy, to be the face of mercy to our brothers and sisters—an impossible task on our own. Christ makes the inconceivable conceivable by empowering us through the gift of Holy Spirit. Christ breathes on those in the Upper Room, saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” Mercy, much like grace, is an unmerited gift of love from God. It is meant to lead us outward in love and mercy toward our neighbor.

This can seem like a daunting task. As John Paul II concedes, “It is not easy to love with a deep love, which lies in the authentic gift of self.” However, “This love can only be learned by penetrating the mystery of God’s love. Looking at him, being one with his fatherly heart, we are able to look with new eyes at our brothers and sisters, with an attitude of unselfishness and solidarity, of generosity and forgiveness.” We love because we were first loved. We are merciful because we have first been shown mercy.

We are called, therefore, to carry this torch of mercy into the third millennium, into the here and now. We are all called to be missionary disciples spurred forth by God’s love. Let us, then, be rooted in the Eucharist and in prayer—in order to better receive and emulate daily God’s mercy. In so doing, we will have the courage and strength to go out into our hurting world, the field hospital, with the healing balm of God’s mercy. Let us make the inconceivable mercy of God conceivable by the witness of our lives. May our recurring prayer be always, as St. Faustina taught us, “Jesus, I trust in you!”

Pentecost as a Personal Confirmation

By Dana Edwards



We celebrate Pentecost 50 days after Easter, to commemorate the Holy Spirit's descent on Christ's disciples after His Ascension. We are, in many ways, celebrating the birthday of the Church and our individual commitments to God.

The Holy Spirit empowers us to share our faith, to have the ability to open our hearts in understanding one another and God's message. Through the gifts of the Holy Spirit (wisdom, understanding, counsel, knowledge, fortitude, piety and fear of the Lord), we become fully alive in our personal relationship with God so we can give better witness to His message. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says, "...the Church is sent to announce, bear witness, make present, and spread the mystery of the communion of the Holy Trinity" (CCC 738).

We can use Pentecost as an opportunity to make our faith our own while sharing God's word. By utilizing our individual talents and volunteering in some aspect of our church, we strengthen our faith and build community.

I remember wanting to be an altar server after receiving my first Holy Communion in second grade. I began serving and continued to do so until I received Confirmation. Serving during the Mass allowed me, as a young person, to better understand my Catholic faith. My parents remember me saying how I enjoyed altar serving because I had to pay attention (and stay awake) during 8 a.m. Sunday Mass. I began to fully understand and participate in the Liturgy of the Word and Liturgy of the Eucharist every Sunday. I attended Catholic school and was able to make connections between Religion class and weekly Mass. Once confirmed, I continued to volunteer in my church as a lector as well as by teaching religious education classes to grade school children. Actively participating in my parish allowed me to fully engage in my Catholic faith and grow spiritually.

No matter our age, the Catholic Church encourages us to be active participants in Mass and in our Church. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, we can come to discover where the Church needs us and how we can best share the time, talent, and treasure God has given us.

Pentecost allows us to renew ourselves to the Holy Spirit. Pope Francis challenges us to question ourselves: "What kind of heart do we have? ... Is my heart fixed upon everyday gods or is it a heart fixed on the Holy Spirit?" It is easy for us to get wrapped up in life's habitual tasks at home, work, with family, colleagues, etc. But the Holy Father encourages us that the Holy Spirit "gives us strength, gives us the steadiness to be able to move forward in life in the midst of many events."

Author Biographies

(in order of appearance)

Fr. Frank S. Donio, S.A.C., D.Min. is Director of the Catholic Apostolate Center and Provincial Rector of the Immaculate Conception Province of the Society of the Catholic Apostolate (Pallottine Fathers and Brothers).

Betsy Palmer is the Coordinator of Youth and Young Adult Ministry at St. Joseph of Fullerton Catholic Church in Baltimore, MD.

Eric Clayton works at Catholic Relief Services as part of the U.S. Church Engagement Division. He holds an MA in International Media from American University and a BA in International Studies & Creative Writing from Fairfield University. He currently lives in Baltimore, MD with his wife and hedgehog.

Evan Ponton is a seminarian for the Archdiocese of Baltimore currently in formation at St. Mary's Seminary and University in Baltimore, MD.

Thomas Wong is a young professional in Washington, D.C.

Jay Schaefer is the Production Coordinator for the Catholic Apostolate Center, where he assists with training and technical coordination of the Center's webinars.

Greg Hamilton attended Saint Michael's College in the grace-filled Green Mountain State of Vermont and is currently serving as a Jesuit Volunteer in Washington D.C. at the Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth. Most days, Greg finds a way to involve his favorite poet, Mary Oliver, in his routine.

Krissy Kirby is a teacher for the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C.

Nicholas Shields is a young professional in Washington, D.C.

Dana Edwards currently resides in Gainesville, Florida where she works as a strategic communications manager, and volunteers as a lector and young adult ministry leader at her parish, Queen of Peace.

Alyce Shields is a teacher in Washington D.C.

Author Biographies

(continued)

Jennifer Beckmann is an Administrative Secretary for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Alex R. Boucher is a seminarian preparing for the priesthood for the Diocese of Portland, Maine at Saint John's Seminary in Brighton, Massachusetts. He is a Catholic Apostolate Center collaborator and former staff member, and completed his undergraduate studies in Theology & Religious Studies at The Catholic University of America.

Kate Fowler is the Blog Editor for the Catholic Apostolate Center. She received her Master's in Leadership for the New Evangelization at the Augustine Institute.

Sophie Lorenzo works in social media marketing for a Catholic publisher in Chicago. An alum of the Echo Program at the University of Notre Dame, she enjoys bridging her background in theology with online ministry.

Elizabeth Pawelek received her Master's in Leadership for the New Evangelization at the Augustine Institute in Denver, Colorado.

Victor David is a collaborator with the Catholic Apostolate Center and a staff member at The Catholic University of America in Washington, DC.



**Catholic
Apostolate
Center**