
As Christians during Lent, we are encouraged to dig deeper into each of these three areas: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. These practices are not ends to themselves, but are ways in which we can live more fully what Jesus has taught us, loving God and loving neighbor. Lent is a time where we can root ourselves in these three acts and keep them in our minds and in our hearts throughout the next forty days. The authors of the following reflections encourage us to consider how to incorporate prayer, fasting, and almsgiving into our own daily routines, and how to be especially intentional about that this Lenten season.

The authors have contemplated on the beautiful words of each week’s Gospel readings and integrated their own experiences to bring you many opportunities for reflection this Lent. We encourage you to take time each day or each week to pray with the Gospels, the words of the authors, and consider the service suggestions and prayers they provide.

In addition, I invite you to keep the following questions in mind over the next forty days:

Where in my life do I need to bring more prayer? In my own spiritual life? In my family? With my friends? At work? On my commute? When I pray, do I spend time giving gratitude to God or do I simply relay my requests and concerns? When I pray, do I allow for silence? If not, why?

What do I need to fast from this Lent? Why? Am I using fasting during Lent as a diet program or am I taking away distractions in my life that are keeping me from God and from those important to me?

Where can I give more alms this Lent? Are there particular causes to me that are important where I would like to donate? Are there ways I can do more beyond giving money? Can I donate my time?

Please know that the prayers of the Catholic Apostolate Center and Catholic Volunteer Network are with you this Lent. We hope these forty days are not only challenging, but also fruitful. As people of faith, we should wait with great anticipation for the Resurrection of Jesus, always remembering the journey it took to get there.

Sincerely,
Monica Thom Konschnik, Assistant Director of Administration, Catholic Apostolate Center and Board Chair, Catholic Volunteer Network

LOOKING FOR MORE?

Looking for more inspiration? Catholic Apostolate Center hosts an extensive library of Lenten resources on their website: [www.catholicapostolatecenter.org/lenten-resources.html](http://www.catholicapostolatecenter.org/lenten-resources.html)
REFLECTION

By Abby Belt, Maryknoll Lay Missioners

“Your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you” (Matthew 6:18)

For the longest time this Gospel, seemed an impossible challenge. As I once understood it, we’re called to be ambassadors of Christ, but never boast of Christ’s victory in our living as Christians. Alas, if one just looks at the surface story, much is misinterpreted. The task set before us in today’s Gospel is not about hiding our Christianity in public; rather, it’s about making certain our Christianity is genuine. Christ never did anything for His own glory, but for God’s. In like fashion, we’re called to live and love for the glory of God, for in doing so, we fully love and live.

None of us get this exactly right. As much as it is human to want to love and live as well as our Beloved Savior, so too is it human to fall short and occasionally seek our own glorification. After all, we do a lot of good, and we deserve to be recognized for it, right? It comes down to motivation and how we choose to serve. Do we live the way we do because we want others to think we’re great, serving ourselves? Or do we live in a way that makes our Creator proud, trying to serve as selflessly as Christ did? Are we Christian to everyone but God? Our challenge for growth, then, is to continuously redirect our hearts and motivation toward the glorification of God.

PRAYER

Create in us clean hearts, oh Love, Hearts that break for what breaks yours, Hearts that tirelessly pursue you, Hearts that guide our eyes to see like you, Hearts that guide our thoughts and words, Hearts of mercy that forgive as swiftly as you do—Both ourselves and others, Hearts to aid as bravely as you, Hearts that lead our thoughts to you, Hearts that live for the glorification of God, That we may love like you, So that in others, we see you, And with others, share agape love, With a willingness and fervor to follow where you’d call.

Focus: SOCIAL JUSTICE

Ash Wednesday is one of the most beautiful celebrations of Catholicism; a giant calling home to God’s love and push to grow from discomfort. Indeed, today’s Gospel calls us to get uncomfortable, and avoid the danger of exploiting our “good Christian living” to overlook the woes of the world. Christ calls us to be disillusioned with the idea of “I do enough” when reviewing our Christianity, and instead shift the paradigm to think, “I am enough.” Imperfect as we are, when we surrender to Christ, we’re enough for Him to work through us, keeping the “us” in justice before the “I.”

SERVICE SUGGESTION

Glorify God each day with five hurts and five heals. Trust Him with five ways you or the world hurts or have caused hurt. In this, we humble ourselves and acknowledge the world’s suffering. Then, praise God for five ways you or the world has healed and ask Him to work through you, sowing healing instead of hurt. No mistake you ever make will be bigger than God’s love for you. We put His Son on a cross and he still chooses us. When you put your glory ahead of God’s, grace yourself, let God love you, and rise again!
**Reflection**

By **Lanette Nguyen**, Salesian Lay Missioners

"**It is written: One does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.**" *(Matthew 4:1-11)*

Today’s Gospel story always begins the Lenten season. We see Jesus, after 40 days of fasting in the desert, being tempted by Satan. While reminding us why we practice 40 days of self-denial during Lent, this passage also reveals a glimpse of Jesus’s humanity. A large portion of the Gospels describe His divinity with miracles, healings, and teachings so profound that we are still learning from them 2000 years later. The divine focus is so great that we sometimes forget He was also fully human. In this reading, however, we see Him being tempted – a very human experience.

We might have difficulty relating to some of the temptations, but we can all relate to the fact that He was tempted. What does Jesus do in the face of temptation? Does He avoid them, sending Satan away the moment he shows up offering delicious bread? No, He accepts the challenge and meets it head-on. He conquers each one and presumably comes away stronger and more prepared for His ministry. We are called to do this during Lent; to identify a temptation that is hard for us to resist, meet it head-on, and come out stronger and closer to God at Easter.

**Prayer**

*As your Son faced temptation in the desert, help me to face my burdens. Grant me the strength, patience, and persistence to meet them head-on so to better myself, grow stronger in faith, and become closer to You. Help me to notice those around me in my community of family and friends who may be lost or struggling and to be there for them. Help me, also, to forget my pride when I am in need and to reach out to my community. Help us all to remember what it means to be part of a community. Amen.*

**Focus: Community**

After His temptation in the desert, Jesus doesn’t remain alone and soon gathers His disciples and creates His community. Jesus knows that God didn’t create us to be alone. We are created for community; to love, support, help, and be with each other. How much happier and easier it is to experience our challenges and joys when we have community. It is with our community of family and friends that we find fulfillment and joy in our earthly mission.

**Service Suggestion**

Think of a person or family in your community of family and friends who is struggling with his or her burdens and be a support to that person or family. Make a meal, invite them for coffee, offer to watch their children for a few hours, call them up just to say hello and ask how they are doing, or simply be a shoulder and listening ear. Let them know that they are loved and thought of. If YOU are the one struggling, reach out to your community for support.

*First Sunday of Lent | 2020*
REFLECTION

By Heidi Cerneka, Maryknoll Lay Missioners

“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” (Matthew 17:1-9)

Today’s Gospel calls us to recognize the presence of God among us, hear the voice of God commanding us to listen to Jesus’ message, and walk the road with Him. Similarly, the Transfiguration was not just a moment in the spotlight for Jesus, but a confirmation of God’s vibrant presence throughout the yet unfinished line of our history, from Moses and Elijah to the present. Jesus invited the disciples to climb the mountain with Him, but at the end of the day, they had to go back down the mountain and journey towards the passion and crucifixion. Talk about highs and lows!

The line of salvation history is long and unfinished. These are “Calvary” times. I work as an immigration attorney at the U.S. border and witness lives being shattered as migrants are denied a fair chance to ask for asylum as promised by national and international laws. Every day, Jesus, the Son of God, reveals Himself through people like Miriam, Jennifer, Juan, and Ali. St. Oscar Romero urges us, the people of God, to “come down from Tabor to Calvary” walking with Jesus, transfigured, bloodied, crucified and resurrected. God speaks to me “from the cloud” - if I pay attention. How do I hold firmly the belief that God is here right now in this Calvary moment in history and that the resurrection is not a hope, but a promise?

PRAYER

Loving God, in the Transfiguration, you are present and incarnate. Too often, we get sidetracked, wanting to “build booths on the mountain” and show others what we have experienced. Keep our sights on You. Help us to listen to You and to Your Beloved Son as you speak to us through our world and in unexpected ways.

In these difficult times of violence, greed, individualism and separation, help us to be Your presence, to walk together as community, knowing the resurrection is the end of the story and we are called to bring it to reality right here, right now.

Focus: SPIRITUALITY

Jesus called Peter, James and John to stay focused. “Do not be afraid,” he said, but he also said not to go erecting booths or blogging about what they saw. This is not about who we tell, but about how we KNOW God, how we listen to Jesus incarnate and alive. We are not called to “stay on the mountain.” God constantly reveals Godself to us, and then we must come down from the mountain and live “God among us.” It will lead us to Calvary at times, but it will also lead us to the resurrection and life.

SERVICE SUGGESTION

Jesus Christ is present among us. We are the Body of Christ. This week, seek someone who you find difficult in your life. Try to find Christ present in her or him, and in some way, try also to show Christ’s presence to that person. Too often we close our minds and our hearts and lock onto what we “know” as the only answer. Engage in a conversation by listening first. God exhorts us to “listen” to Jesus. Do the same with someone you don’t know, or don’t know well enough.
In this story from the Gospel of John, Jesus is tired. How relatable, and completely human! Jesus is exhausted from the daunting work of His ministry: the travel, the chaos, and the constant commotion. He sits for a brief rest, seeking the aid of a Samaritan woman, an outcast of Jewish society. How dare Jesus socialize with her, let alone ask for her charity! This was against everything the Jewish people believed in, and yet, here Jesus was, tired and seeking aid from a Samaritan woman. And she acquiesces, aiding Jesus in His moment of need.

How often are we also tired from our ministries? In doing God’s work, it is easy to become exhausted. Human emotions are complex; human interaction can make a spirit weary. Like Jesus, we are apt to give and give, but unlike Jesus, often forget (or refuse) to receive. Are we humble enough to ask for help when we need it? Are we willing to receive aid from the outcast and lowly of society, just as Jesus did from the Samaritan woman? What can we learn from those we might normally relegate as “other”?

Focus: SIMPLICITY

In reflecting on this passage, I am reminded of my year of service with the Colorado Vincentian Volunteers, during which I served at a daytime drop-in shelter for women and children experiencing homelessness. In my role as a Resource Advocate, I served these women day in and day out, providing meals, clothing, and countless other resources. As the year wore on though, these women provided so much more to me than I ever could have imagined. They were a listening ear as I discerned my post-service plans, a comforting presence when I was homesick, and a warm smile on a bad day. These women, who others might have labeled as outcasts, who had so very little to give, gave me so incredibly much during this transformative year.

Their lives were complex, and yet incredibly simple. Homeless, they had so little, yet so much. Out of necessity, they lived simply, and this enabled them to offer to the world what truly mattered. They taught me that simple living meant focusing on family, friends, and loved ones. It meant treasuring the small moments in life, and celebrating the big ones. I write this not to glorify homelessness, but to acknowledge the beautiful life lessons of simple living these women shared with me through their experiences. Their perspective changed my life, and nearly a decade later, I continue to reflect often on what these women taught me.

SERVICE SUGGESTION

Engage in the ministry of presence. Ask a local soup kitchen or shelter if you can visit with clients. Enjoy a meal or a cup of coffee with them, and simply engage them in conversation. Give the gift of time, and you might be surprised by what you can learn! Taking the time to pause is a gift, both to yourself and to others. If this feels too simple to you, ask the shelter/soup kitchen to stick around after the meal and help with clean up. They’ll appreciate the help, you’ll get to converse with clientele, and you’ll be able to do some messy work too!

PRAYER

Loving God, help me to be unafraid to seek help when I need it. Building God’s Kingdom is tough work, and I am up for the task, but also need help to know when to rest. Allow me the humility to be open to assistance from the most unlikely of sources as I continue Your work on this earth. Open my eyes to those around me: the downtrodden, the outcast, and the poor, as we continue our journey and learning together.
REFLECTION

By Mike Jordan Laskey, Notre Dame ECHO

“One thing I do know is that I was blind and now I see.”
(John 9:1-41)

My postgrad service experience wasn’t with the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, but I still love the unofficial motto that pops up in JV circles all the time: “Ruined for life.” I can relate. One summer during college, I helped lead high school students on faith-based service immersion experiences. I went into the work thinking of it as a mere summer job, one stop on my road to a career as a sportswriter. But then I had the most powerful few months of my life, and I had new sense of what “vocation” meant: I was going to devote my life to social justice ministry because I had no other choice. God was calling me. Everything changed, and my life plans were ruined. I know a lot of fellow volunteers have similar stories.

The man born blind in today’s Gospel passage has a similar moment of life-changing clarity. I’m not sure who this Jesus guy is, he says. “One thing I do know is that I was blind and now I see.” The world has opened up to him, and by the end of the passage, he is worshiping Jesus, his values totally transformed. We’re not always blessed with such sudden, dramatic moments of clarity – I know I sometimes hunger for the fresh energy and zeal I felt that summer 15 years ago. But God is always there, reaching out to us in quiet ways, inviting us into deeper relationship with Him and with our sisters and brothers. How might God be trying to open my eyes today?

PRAYER

Loving God, give us clear vision. Help us to see those living on the margins not as the world sees them, but as You see them. When we feel weighed down by injustice, cynicism or complacency, give us the zealous faith of the man born blind, whose encounter with Christ changed everything. This Laetare Sunday, as we rejoice in anticipation of the Resurrection, renew our spirits fill us with your peace. We pray this through Christ, Our Lord, AMEN.

Focus: SOCIAL JUSTICE

At the beginning of the passage, Jesus’ disciples want to know who sinned, the blind man or his parents, that led to the man’s suffering. His suffering wasn’t caused by anyone’s sin, Jesus corrects them. This is an important reminder. Even subconsciously, we can be tempted to blame those living on the margins of society for their own situations. But as Pope Francis reminds us when he talks about building a culture of encounter, the Gospel response to injustice is to not to judge, but to get to know people living on the peripheries and grow to love them. If we do this, we won’t be able to help ourselves from working to transform the systems and structures that oppress them.

SERVICE SUGGESTION

One theme of Laetare Sunday, this day of rejoicing and rose-colored vestments in the middle of the solemn Lenten season, is that we rejoice despite the darkness that surrounds us. Or, as Wendell Berry writes, “Be joyful though you have considered all the facts.” No matter what form of service you might participate in the remainder of this Lenten season, my invitation to you is to consciously be one level more joyful than you’d typically be going into a service experience. I don’t mean you have to be overcaffeinated or super-smiley if that’s not your way. I like this description of joy by the theologian Henri Nouwen. Bring some of this with you into service: “Joy is based on the spiritual knowledge that, while the world in which we live is shrouded in darkness, God has overcome the world.”
REFLECTION

By Megan Gaskin, Jesuit Volunteer Corps

“Did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?” (John 11:1-45)

When Jesus heads back to Judea and Lazarus is already dead, Martha and Mary are desperate for Jesus to do something for them. Jesus says to Martha as he is approaching Lazarus in the tomb, “Did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?” I feel in the act of service we witness the “glory of God” in the ones we serve each day.

During my year in the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, each day at the school I worked at I would witness great things with the students from running my bracelet club, assisting the students struggling in the classroom, and working together with my fellow coworkers in the school. The Jesuit motto of “to see God in all things” was so present throughout my year. I would see God in my share of struggles, in my happy moments and with the students. My year of service was definitely not easy. I had my share of struggles. I feel through my tough times it a way of being tested to see how strong I am. God does not give you what you cannot handle. As in the Gospel reading, after Jesus brings back Lazarus from the dead, the Jews see and realize what He has done and began to believe in Him. I feel from my year of service, that God was present with me every step of the way.

Focus: COMMUNITY

In the Gospel reading, the community is just starting to believe in Jesus that he is the Son of God. For Jesus, he must be struggling with the community he lives in because they are all not understanding and believing in who he actually is. We all are a part of multiple communities in our everyday lives. We may be a part of a parish community, a workplace community, and even your own family community. What role will each community play in your journey through Lent?

PRAYER

Lord, I pray for all those who believe in you. Help us to see God in all things in the good and the bad parts of our lives. Grant us to be a witness in our own communities in our everyday life. I pray that we can have strength to go through our struggles. May we always know that you are with us every step of the way each day.

SERVICE SUGGESTION

I challenge each one of you to talk to someone new in your everyday community. When you talk to someone new, you could learn new things from one another. This new person could be a new coworker, your new neighbor who just moved in on your block or someone you see all the time but have never spoken to. It is hard being the new person and a friendly smile and welcome could put them at ease as they head into their new community.
When you hear “Lent,” or “Stations of the Cross,” what comes to mind? Is this just an annual season before the Easter festivities, or a must-follow ritual the Church demands of you? Or, is this a period you can truly focus and reflect on the mystery of God’s love for mankind — and the mystery of one man’s sacrifice and passion for all (including those He was yet to meet, like you and I)?

Some years ago, during a discussion among friends, one person asked, “what’s the point of going through Lent and the Stations of the Cross all over again when Jesus did that already?” and the response was, “if we put ourselves through the Stations of the Cross meaningfully, we are able (even just for a few days) to put our feet in Christ’s sandals so that we would also learn to love (even to death) all mankind; regardless of how often we are hurt in the process.”

The Passion of Christ demonstrates how much we are loved and how far God will go to show love to us. Sometimes, I think Jesus may have wanted to change His mind while praying in Gethsemane, where he sought God in the midst of sorrow and distress. Sometimes, we also feel sorrow, anguish, and distress. If given the power, we would ‘run out’ of our lives. How often have we come to that point of not wanting to go any further? How often have we thought, “I’m not sure I can do this”? I know I have. Jesus turned to God for comfort and reassurance. Who do you turn to during the tough times?

When everyone Jesus knew had either ‘sold Him off,’ denied Him, or run away for their own safety, it must have felt as though He had been abandoned by those he had thought loved Him so dearly. Even today, there are people all around us who feel abandoned and do not know where or who to turn to.

Today, as we ask Jesus where He would like to celebrate Passover, His response is: “I would like to celebrate Passover in your heart.” Have you prepared your heart for the Passover feast? If we also ask Jesus, “who would you like to celebrate it with?” I am sure His response is: “the lonely, the broken, the anxious, the weary, the frightened, and the sick and with you.” As we prepare our own hearts for the Passover feast, let us extend Jesus’ invitation to those in need on His behalf.

**REFLECTION**

**Focus: SPIRITUALITY**

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**SERVICE SUGGESTION**

Journey with Jesus through the Stations of the Cross - may it not be out of a sense of obligation but because You know that Jesus needs a friend who will walk with Him through His rise and falls on this journey. Do not look too far, there may be someone closest to you who needs a friend or a listening ear for a short journey. As you take this journey, allow Jesus to prepare your heart not just for the Passover but for all His celebrations and may the way you speak and live give you away (like Peter’s speech betrayed him).

**LENT 2020**

Palm Sunday | 2020
In the words of Saint Augustine, “We are an Easter people and Alleluia is our song.” Not just today, or just this season, but each and every day, we are called to be an “Easter people” – a people enlivened by the joy of the truth of the Resurrection. And yet, the reality of the Christian life is that it can often be marked by loneliness, sorrow, and uncertainty. Reading today’s Gospel is a great reminder that in those first moments after discovering the empty tomb, the disciples were steeped in grief after the death of their friend and leader, bewildered by His mysterious disappearance. And yet, the Gospel writer tells us that even though they “did not yet understand,” they “saw and believed.”

In my life as a volunteer with Amate House, there were many times that it was a challenge to be a good Christian witness living the joy of the Resurrection. Daily in my own work I encountered people who were on the brink of eviction, or who were facing time in prison, or who were separated from their children and losing hope in ever reuniting. My housemates too would bring home stories of students going hungry and communities torn apart by gun violence. And yet there we were, together in community, left to attest to the truth that even in the darkness, the light of Christ cannot be extinguished; even in sorrow beyond understanding, there is hope for new life. Without fully understanding the mystery, we place our hope in the God who loves us, who transforms us, and who overcomes.

**Focus: SIMPLE LIVING**

One of the greatest gifts of living simply is the way it naturally leads to building community.

By living simply, we have the chance to share more deeply with one another, and to expand our community.

Simple living gives us the chance to stand with one another in candid, authentic vulnerability like the disciples in today’s Gospel - waiting together in hope.

**SERVICE SUGGESTION**

This Easter season, find new ways to be a beacon of hope for others you encounter. Whether it’s buying a cup of coffee for a stranger, packing a kit of essentials for a person experiencing homelessness, or writing a letter to someone who might feel lonely or disconnected. Share the good news of Christ and the hope of the Resurrection by practicing some personal sacrifice, spreading joy, inspiring hope, and by upholding the dignity of others by bridging connections with the community of all humanity.
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