

2022

A Camino through Lent



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Ash Wednesday—2nd March 2022

Happy Lent! It might seem a strange greeting, but it is part of the Lent tradition: here in the Northern hemisphere, Lent takes place in spring, the season we associate with new life-and cleaning! Lent is that opportunity to 'spring clean' our own personal lives, and the life of the community, we move forward in growth, aware of the new life of Easter and the impact that it can make in our lives. Our acts of 'giving up' or 'doing extra' during Lent helps us to focus on the important things of life so that we heed the call of God in the prophecy of Joel:

Come back to me with all your heart, fasting, weeping, mourning, let your hearts be broken not your garments torn, turn to the Lord your God again.
(Joel 2: 12-13)

Our mission during Lent is to be reconciled with God and with our neighbours-especially those we do not like or find it difficult to get on with. Paul begs us today **'not to neglect the grace of God that you have received...this is the day of salvation.** (2. Cor 5: 20 & 6:2). This is a time of real conversion, so needed in this difficult year when relationships may be strained, fractured and, even, destroyed by the problems associated with lockdown and the pandemic. We are invited to come forward for a new rite of the blessing of the ashes as they are sprinkled over our heads. The black ash cross that I wore as a badge of honour in previous years becomes another victim of this deadly pandemic. That smudged black cross was a talking point - it was a sign of our identity as the season of Lent begins.

However, in the gospel today, Jesus is very clear about the nature of this Lenten fast, as he tells his followers:

Be careful not to parade your good deeds before others to attract their notice. (Matt 6: 1)

Through this passage in Mark, Jesus is able to sum up the attitude that must be ours during these six long weeks: we are invited to pray, fast and give support to those in need. We are not called to show off and attract others to our lifestyle-we are Christians not narcissists. When we give alms, we must not do so in a way that will attract attention - in these difficult times there are so many small and local charities that you can help. You may be called to offer

support to family members or your friends; you can make a difference, but only if you have cash to spare yourself:

Your father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you. (Matt 6: 4)

In our prayer, we are invited into a relationship with God, rather than needing to use long and complicated words. We do not need to sit in a special place in Church to be noticed; we do not need to spend hours at bible study or prayer groups to be noticed. Jesus is quite direct:

When you pray go to your private room and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in that secret place. (Matt 6: 6)

During the Covid lockdown, when your family were forced to be crammed into your home, you might dream of having a secret place! However, remember that secret place can be your attitude of mind; can you grab just five minutes to pray on your own? I have some dear friends who end their day, as the children are getting ready to sleep, with a simple prayer advocated by Pope Francis-perhaps that can become a practice in your household this Lent



You can use each finger of your hand to help you pray in a meaningful way; in your own special time, with your family, you invite God into your life. In the

gospel of Matthew, it is at this point that Jesus gives us the great prayer, **‘Our Father’** (Matt 6: 7-15). While urging you to at least try the ‘five-fingered prayer’, can I encourage you to end whatever prayer time you might find in Lent with the ‘Our Father’.

(For a good guide to the ‘five-fingered prayer’ see:

<https://www.prayerandpossibilities.com/5-finger-prayer/>)

Finally, we come to fasting, which we associate Lent strongly with; we are encouraged to give up things that we like such as chocolates, alcohol or red meat. Jesus urges us **‘not to put on a gloomy look as the hypocrites do’ and ‘pull long faces to let others know you are fasting’** (Matt 6:16). Christianity is not an endurance test--we are not meant to meet the Lord and others through gritted teeth. Fasting and the notion of ‘giving up’ remains central to the Christian way and this global pandemic has forced us to give up so much: we could not meet friends; we could not share a full family Christmas; we have been unable to be with loved ones in hospital. Covid-19 has asked us to make so many sacrifices to stop the spread; we have been invited to put on facemasks and keep our distance even in our churches and places of worship. Only after two years, are we slowly moving to some level of normality. In these past years, we have had to fast from so much that we saw as normal and intrinsic to our happiness and well-being. Thus, I strongly urge you to consider seriously what you are going to fast from. Instead of giving up cream cakes, why not consider fasting from telling lies or spreading gossip? Why not spend less time on social media, perhaps obsessing on the latest conspiracy theory about vaccinations or the world’s political order? In fasting from the negative, you will find time for the positives in your lifetime for family, friends and prayer. Happy Lent and may your fasting be a really positive experience this year:

When you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that nobody will know that you are fasting except your Father (Matt 6:17)

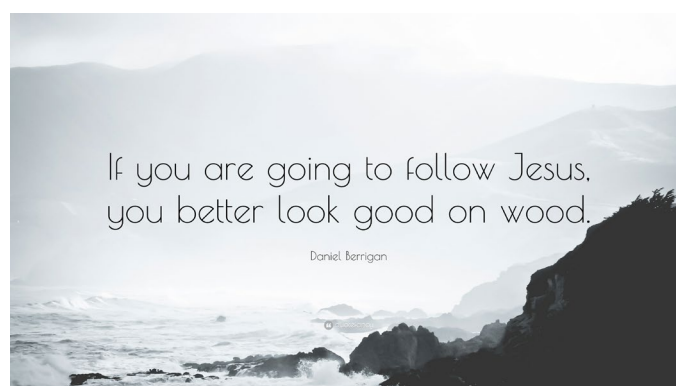
Today: think carefully about what you are going to do, for the better, this Lent



We can pray: **God of love, rich in justice and mercy, may my Lenten journey of fasting, prayer and almsgiving open my heart to reach out to others with love and joy, recognising that Christ is present. Amen.** (Cafod prayer)

Thursday 3rd March 2022

In our gospel today from Luke, we see the radical nature of being a Christian. It is not enough to say a few prayers, go to a church on Sunday and put some money into a collection. Christianity is not an 'add on', rather like we can buy extras for our mobile phone or satellite tv options. Christianity must permeate our lives fully - being a Christian becomes as natural as breathing the air we share. Jesus invites us to be true followers and **'take up the cross every day'** (Lk 6: 23); as a global family we have been given a cross to carry during these past two years. It is a cross that we have embraced with courage, fully aware of its difficulties and problems. We have been asked to turn away from those very things that make us human: a loving touch, a hug or a kiss. Each of us have a cross to carry during these difficult times - some of us can carry it better than others but carry it we must.



Today: do your best to lighten the load others-do not make demands on them

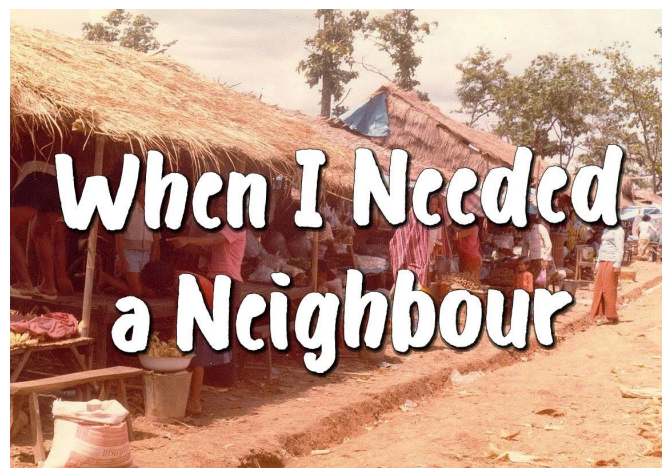
We pray: God of life, may my choices be guided by your love so that all people may live to their full potential. Amen.

Friday 4th March 2022

Today's gospel from Matthew shows potential allies of Jesus questioning the concept of 'fasting'; the followers of John want to know why they and the pharisees have to fast, while the followers of Jesus seem to have an easy time and do not have to fast. On the surface it seems petty, the stuff of playground taunts; but Jesus makes a valid point with these enquirers. The apostles of Jesus have no need to fast while he is with them, but there will be times when they will feel abandoned, alone and distraught. It is precisely in these times of emptiness that the power of fasting will enter their lives, as he reminds them, **'the time will come for the bridegroom to be taken away from them, and then they will fast.'** (Matt 9: 15). Appreciate your loved ones more than ever today: celebrate with them, laugh with them, pray with them-there may come a time when they could be just a loving memory.

Today: reach out to someone you have lost touch, perhaps over a silly row or misunderstanding.

We pray: Lord, bless those I can celebrate and enjoy life with; even in those difficult times, may I reach out to them so that they know exactly how precious they are to me in life. Amen



Listen and watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pXiHcpsMJxs>

Saturday 5th March 2022

In the gospel of Luke today we witness the call of Levi, the tax collector; like all men of his profession, Levi was disliked because he worked for the Roman army of occupation, and he forced his fellow townsfolk to pay exorbitant taxes. In thanksgiving for his calling, Levi invites Jesus to be guest of honour in his home-Jesus is sitting down at table with public sinners, those shunned by 'good society'. I love how this account is portrayed in the amazing film, 'Jesus of Nazareth'; directed by Franco Zeffirelli: we see Peter and the apostles identify with the scribes and pharisees of today's reading:

Why do you eat with tax collectors and sinners? (Luke 5: 30)

In the context of this 'scandalous' meal, Zeffirelli inserts the favourite parable, **'The Prodigal Son'** (see Lk 15: 11-32): Levi is the younger son of the story who has turned away from his father's love, while Peter, the rock is the older one who remains faithful-their embrace of friendship at the end of the scene symbolises what a good Lent is all about. Jesus' mission is not to the those who are good because **'it is not those who are well who need the doctor but the sick. I have not come to call the virtuous, but sinners to repentance.'** (Lk 5: 31-32). All of us have something to feel guilty about as we reflect on these words today; all of us have need, just like Levi and his friends, of that loving care of Jesus in our lives. Perhaps some of us need to come down from our moral high ground and fully embrace our own need for compassion, empathy and understanding. We are called to live in the 'field hospital' envisioned by Pope Francis

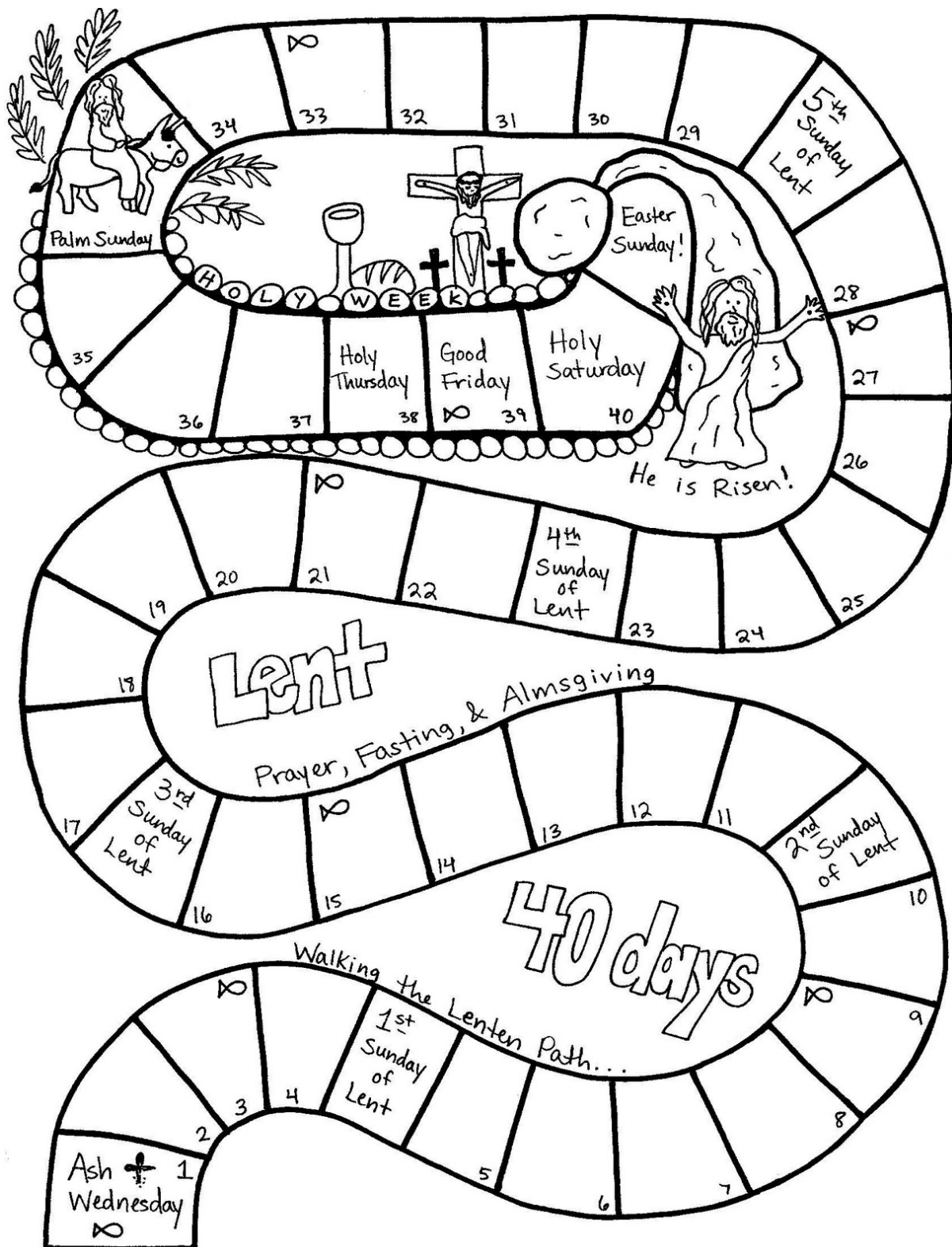
Today watch this extract from the film, 'Jesus of Nazareth':

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w7c-XY695hk>



(Rembrandt's 'Return of the Prodigal')

We pray: Lord, we thank you for the gift of forgiveness in our lives; we thank you for acceptance, care and love. Grant that, today, we can be less judgemental and more open to your message of peace and goodwill to all.





I SEE THE CHURCH AS A FIELD HOSPITAL AFTER
BATTLE. IT IS USELESS TO ASK A SERIOUSLY
INJURED PERSON IF HE HAS HIGH CHOLESTEROL
AND ABOUT THE LEVEL OF HIS BLOOD SUGARS.
YOU HAVE TO HEAL HIS WOUNDS. THEN WE CAN
TALK ABOUT EVERYTHING ELSE.

- POPE FRANCIS -

LIBQUOTES.COM

My son was lost and is found.
Luke 15:24



6th March 2022-THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

In the gospel today, we are presented with Luke's account of the Temptation of Christ (see Lk 4:1-13). It seems odd to think of Jesus, the perfect and sinless one being 'tempted by the devil' (Mk 1:12). It is here that the reality of incarnation comes home in that **'we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet he did not sin.'** (Heb 4:15). Mark presents a very simple account of Jesus being in the desert, the place of total abandonment, the place of being 'with **'the wild beasts'** and where the **'angels looked after him'** (Mk 1: 13). In the desert, we are left to our own devices: there is no Wi-Fi signal, and our mobile phones are useless. On this Sunday you might to ask yourself, "what are the wild beast that I am struggling with?" What are the situations that keep me from God and others? We would do well today to reflect on how we minister to and help others: what I can do today to make someone's life that bit easier? Can I lift burden and pain from their backs? Can I be that person who will take the word of God seriously in my life? Will I **'repent and believe the Good News'**? (Mk 1: 15). Today, and the whole season of Lent, is a time to hit the 'pause button' in our increasingly busy and complicated lives. Covid-19 has forced the world and the Church to face the business of the lives that we are invited lead; we have some to see what we can do without, even though it might cause us pain. The pandemic lockdown has, I hope, put us in touch with deep and inner feelings that we might never have had time for before. I am always glad that our friend and guide, Fr Michael Winstanley SDB can point a way forward:

We may feel disorientated by the noise and speed and stress of our world, disturbed by the individualism and greed around us, alarmed by the relentless march towards ecological disaster. As a member of the Salesian family, I am deeply concerned about the impact of this on our young people the world over. (M T Winstanley sdb **'Lenten Sundays'** Don Bosco Publications, Bolton 2011)

Jesus is in this 'Lenten desert' with us and goes before us with a message of peace and reconciliation for all. It is through His strength that we get the energy to minister to others - to be those angels of mercy and life. We can be real angels of compassion today and, remember true compassion belongs to God — God's own special virtue. He is the compassionate one. Sometimes we think of God as creating sort of like little difficulties that we might overcome

and gain merit or whatever that was. It is not true. God can only love, and we are invited to live in that love today. You should look at your negative side. If you can't look at your negative side, you can never move forward. We have got to face our negative side because only through facing this negativity, that we can face our personal pain and hurts. Nobody fully learns from success and glory, but we can learn so much from loss and pain. In the desert of failure, we learn to make a new and honest path forward

Today is a strong invitation to learn how to be patient with people, and to learn how to love the way Jesus loves: no conditions, deepening our understanding, coming and, with this kind of love, bringing yourself and others a new flowering of hope — a new and exciting life. We are all 'works in progress'

Today: reflect on and remember this:



We can pray:

For each step that we might take

Be our guide, O Lord of life

**For each load that we might bear
Be our strength, O Lord of life
For each mountain we might face
Be our power, O Lord of life
For each river that might impede
Be our safety, O Lord of life
For each place where we might rest
Be our peace, O Lord of life
For each sunrise and sunset
Be our joy, O Lord of life. (Lenten Prayer from 'Faith and Worship')**

7th March 2022-Monday of First Week of Lent



In the gospel today, we have the magnificent parable of the 'Last Judgement' as recorded by Matthew. It is sad to think that some Christians fear the judgement of God—they sense that God wants to punish us for past mistakes and sins. However, the ministry of Jesus emphasises the great love that God has for us: the message is very simple, 'go and sin no more!' In this graphic description of judgement, Jesus draws on the experience of his listeners. He draws on their rich farming experience of needing to care for sheep and

goats—the power of incarnation is vividly shown in this parable. Jesus knows and understands those he ministers to and with.

The reality of God’s judgement hits home: actually, we judge ourselves! Admission to heaven is based on how we respond to real and practical situations of hunger, thirst, illness and incarceration. Christianity is rooted in reality, and not some pie in the sky alternative: our lives are connected to each other. These past two years have made us think of others—many of us have had to bring food to a family who have been shielding, or cared for friends who have caught the virus. Our constant sanitising of our hands and our mask wearing showed our deep concern for others in the spirit of the gospel. I am sure that you have been the recipient of that deep care and concern also: it is important that we allow ourselves to receive that love.

Today: **try to offer some practical support to a stranger today**

Watch and reflect: <https://youtu.be/T4cOQZG01YE>

We can pray:

**Daily we declare that your priorities are ours,
even before our own needs and desires.**

**Every moment we live, we live for your glory—
the glory of a loving Father and a just King.**

**Free us of any distraction, craving or anxiety
that would keep us from fully following you.**

**For we acknowledge that everything we could possibly need
is yours to give us.**

**Remind us of our sinful brokenness and your gift of grace
as we encounter brokenness in others.**

**You are the answer to our every question.
You are the treasure that we desperately seek,
and it is you who invite us into your salvation,
as prodigals returning to the Father's embrace.**

**Keep us upon your path of righteousness and justice,
bearing the good fruit of your Spirit,
for it is on you, Lord Jesus, that all hope is built,**

For all of creation, now and forever more. Amen

(Jamie Arpin-Ricci, 'The Cost of Community')

8th February 2021-Tuesday

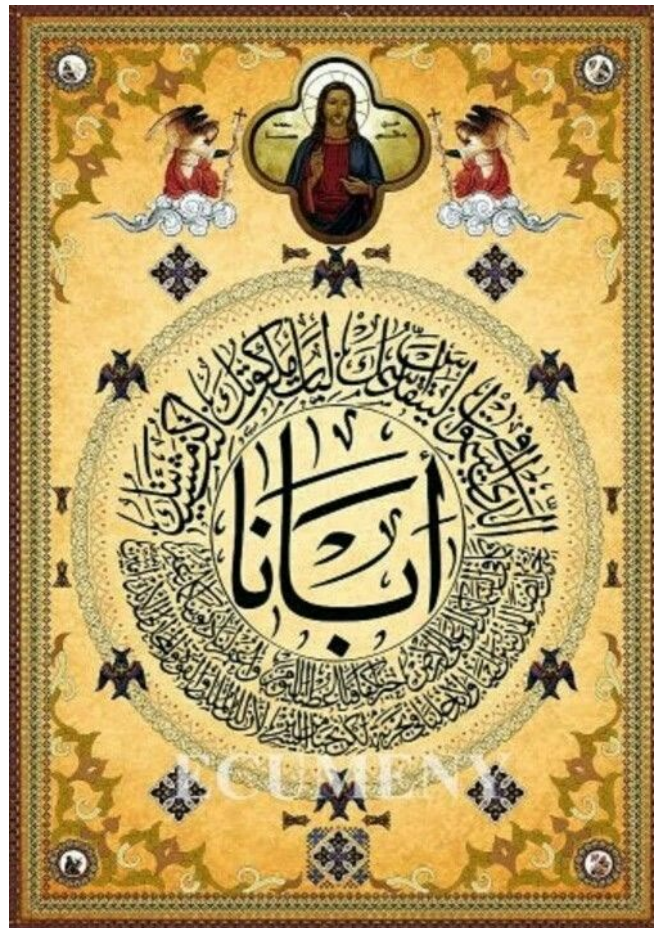
In today's gospel, Jesus invites to not to **'babble'** (Matt 6:7), using a type of 'word fruit salad'; rather, Jesus wants us to speak lovingly to **'our Father in heaven'** (Matt 6: 10), just as a child would talk their dad.

I will never forget visiting a water park in the Galilee many years ago on a school pilgrimage to the Holy Land - there are only so many 'holy places' that teenagers can cope with! It was amazing to hear little Israeli children running around calling out, "Abba, Abba!" It hit me how special and intimate this use of 'Abba' is in the ministry of Jesus; his love and unity can be seen in that simple word, 'Abba'. To stop the babbling and empty words, Jesus offers the prayer that we probably all say many times during the day. In this simple prayer, we express our unity and strong desire that the **'kingdom come ON EARTH as it in heaven'** (Matt 6:10) - our faith is not other worldly or just 'pie in the sky'.

Christianity is rooted in reality, and Christians share that as they work to make this prayer real in their lives. We pray that all be fed who are hungry; we pray for the gift of forgiveness for our faults and failures, but it is dependent on our being part of reconciliation too. Are you prepared to reach out to those who

have made your life a misery? Can you forgive those who are cruel, wicked and hurtful to you? It is a big ask, but this is the reality of being a true Christian. This daily prayer. A prayer that unites and keeps us as one, the 'Our Father' is a constant daily challenge to see how far we have advanced the reign of God in our lives. How have we fed the poor? How have we forgiven others? How have we accepted forgiveness and those little signs of reconciliation that are offered to us? Are we stubborn? Do we stand on our dignity and refuse to love as we should? Do we just babble our way through even this great prayer of unity?

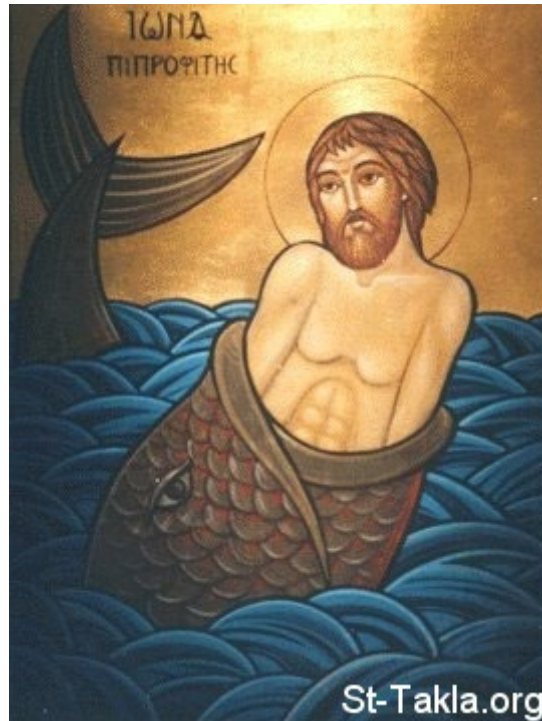
Today: **set time apart so that you can really PRAY the Our Father**



(The 'Our Father Prayer' in Arabic calligraphy)

We can pray: watch and pray <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u8jImIlg4UY>

9th March 2021-Wednesday



(St Takla icon of Jonah)

In both our readings today, we are presented with the image of Jonah: we come face to face with the Hebrew prophet who seems to have issues. In our first reading today, we see his obedience to God and warned the people of the great city of Nineveh of impending doom if they did not change their ways. They listened to the words of God, spoken through his prophet, and changed their ways for the better. Lent offers us that same chance to think deeply about our own personal relationship with God and how we can make a real difference. Just like each of us, Jonah is far from perfect, and he certainly made mistakes: Jonah is seen in the Old Testament as the most disobedient of the prophets; when God told him to go east, he went west instead. The sign of Jonah was surely not the severe dose of gastritis that he gave to that poor whale; so much so that the whale simply could not stomach him anymore and threw him up! However, imperfect as Jonah was, he was the agent of change in the lives of the people of Nineveh. Jesus asks the same from us: can you be an agent of change? Can you do something today that is going to make a difference? When we hear the word of God one cannot remain neutral anymore; hearing the word of God demands a response. When you hear the

word of God you cannot remain sitting on the fence. Hearing the word of God entails making the right decision. As a Cardinal, Pope Benedict XVI wrote these words, encouraging Christians to be involved:

Wherever Christ has been present, afterwards, it cannot be just as if nothing had happened. There, where he has laid his hand, something new has come to be. This points us back again to the fact that being a Christian as such is to be transformed, that it must involve repentance and not just some embellishment added onto the rest of one's life. It reaches down into our depths and renews us from those very depths. The more we ourselves as Christians are renewed from the root up, the better we can understand the mystery of transformation. Finally, this capacity things have for being transformed makes us more aware that the world itself can be transformed, that it will one day, as a whole, be the New Jerusalem, the Temple, vessel of the presence of God. ('God is near us' Joseph Ratzinger Ignatius Press, San Francisco 2003)

Today: do something that is going to make a difference in the life of a family member or friend.

We can pray: From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God. He said:

**"In my distress I called to the Lord,
and he answered me.**

**From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help,
and you listened to my cry.**

**You hurled me into the depths,
into the very heart of the seas,
and the currents swirled about me;**

**all your waves and breakers
swept over me.**

**I said, 'I have been banished
from your sight;**

yet I will look again

toward your holy temple.'

The engulfing waters threatened me,

the deep surrounded me;

seaweed was wrapped around my head.

To the roots of the mountains I sank down;

the earth beneath barred me in forever.

But you, Lord my God,

brought my life up from the pit.

"When my life was ebbing away,

I remembered you, Lord,

and my prayer rose to you,

to your holy temple.

"Those who cling to worthless idols

turn away from God's love for them.

But I, with shouts of grateful praise,

will sacrifice to you.

What I have vowed I will make good.

I will say, 'Salvation comes from the Lord.'" (Jonah 2:1-9)

10th March 2022 - Thursday

We are presented with the account of Jesus offering advice to his disciples:

"Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you." (Matt 7: 7-8). We are invited to put our trust in God so that our prayer can become a conversation. We are invited to 'knock' and that can be difficult for some people - we only tend to knock on the doors of people we are comfortable with-people that we like to spend time with.

Personally, I find it difficult to knock on the doors of complete strangers, yet it is needed and essential, if true pastoral ministry is going to be followed. I was lucky to work in school once where the head had an 'open door policy': whenever her office door was open, you could walk in and share your concerns and joys—it was a policy of welcome for staff and students alike. Doors play recognizable roles in our everyday lives, literally but metaphorically too. Doors open and close all the time, they provide passage and protection, they lock to ensure a certain amount of safety and privacy, they shut outside and welcome in. Doors provide opportunity but also curtailment. They convey responsibility too. We like to say that “when God closes one door, he opens another,” the implication being that it’s still up to us whether to cross the threshold. This maxim about God closing one door and opening another is not in the Bible, but something like it does show up in church liturgies for Advent. There’s an antiphon sung just before Christmas that celebrates Jesus as he **“who opens what no one shuts, and who shuts what no one opens, who breaks down the prison walls of death for those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, and who delivers his captive people into freedom.”** Today we pray that these doors do not become a barrier to us; we pray that we have an open-door policy—that we can speak honestly and fully with our God.

Today: ask God for something that you need in life-something that will make your life better.

We can pray: **Loving God, we ask you to be with us in our prayer today - help us to realise that we are pushing a door that is already open. May you come into our lives today and be that inspiration and guide that we need - especially in the difficult decisions we may have to make. AMEN**



11th March 2022-Friday

There is sometimes the misconception that Jesus was some radical who wanted to do away with ancient Jewish and traditions: that Jesus wanted to abolish the teachings of the law and the prophets. As we see throughout Matthew's gospel nothing could be further from the truth. If anything, Jesus wanted to strengthen the law and make his followers fully aware of the centrality of the Torah in their lives. Thus, the commandment 'you must not kill' takes on a much deeper meaning for Jesus: you must not be angry with your sisters, or brothers-you must not even call each other names. Jesus recognises that we can harm others by our temper and refusal to listen. We can all make mistakes, but when those mistakes become a habit, then we are not learning or open to true reconciliation and peace. We must have an open attitude in our dealings with others: of course, we are never going to murder anyone, but do we destroy people's reputations with our lies and gossip? Do we harm others in our quest to be right all the time? Can we really say that we are genuinely sorry? Lent is that wonderful time to seek true reconciliation-we can seek forgiveness in the sacrament, but it is much harder to **'leave your offering there before the altar and go to reconciled with your sister or brother'** (Matt 5:24). In going to seek forgiveness from someone you have wronged, you have to burst out of your selfish bubble and admit that you were wrong. We can make all kinds of excuses, especially in this period of lockdown; if you need to be reconciled with someone, why not pick up the phone, send an email or write a card. We are called to live the law of Christ in our lives - today you can make a difference; you can lift the terrible weight of guilt or hurt from the shoulders of another. It really does not matter whose fault it is-can you be the bigger person today?



An eye for an eye will only make the
whole world blind.

-Mahatma Gandhi

Today: reach out, in a spirit of true reconciliation, to someone who has hurt you.

We can pray: **Loving God, you have reconciled us in Christ Jesus and have given us the ministry of reconciliation. We pray for all those from whom we are estranged. Bring healing to strained or broken relationships. Forgive us for the times we have wronged others, whether by ignorance, neglect, or intention.**

Grant us the courage and the grace to seek their forgiveness and opportunity to make amends. Where others have wronged us, grant us a gracious spirit, that we might forgive even as we have been forgiven in Jesus Christ. Amen.

It only
takes one
person
to change your
life: YOU

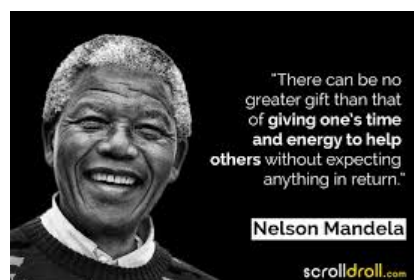
12th March 2022 - Saturday

Today we have the reality of this law of Christ hitting home: **‘love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you’** (Matt 5: 44). This injunction just seems so impossible and unrealistic-how can we offer kindness to those who hate us and make our lives difficult? How can it be possible? Jesus certainly practices what he preaches, as we see in his passion and death; from that hill of hatred and division, Jesus, nailed to a cross, cries out, **“Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing!”** (Lk 23:24). Time and time again, through history we have examples of such great forgiveness. I am always taken by the reaction of so many survivors of the Nazi death camps when they refused to join in the murder fury and understandable desire for retribution. As one survivor commented, “to do so, would mean I would have

to be reduced to their level.” Ghandi, Dr Martin Luther-King Jnr and Nelson Mandela offer us amazing examples of non-violent protest against wrong. We cannot live in a society that accepts racism or bullying, but the only effective way to stand up to these wrongs, is to ensure that our world is a safer and better place for all its citizens, regardless of creed and colour. President Nelson Mandela of South Africa often spoke of the decades he suffered imprisonment under the evil that was apartheid; he knew that he must offer true forgiveness or else he would never be able to be truly free; while forgiveness of those who hurt us is never going to be easy, it brings a real sense of freedom.

I always knew that deep down in every human heart, there is mercy and generosity. No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite. Even in the grimmest times in prison, when my comrades and I were pushed to our limits, I would see a glimmer of humanity in one of the guards, perhaps just for a second, but it was enough to reassure me and keep me going. Man’s goodness is a flame that can be hidden but never extinguished. (Nelson Mandela ‘Long Walk to Freedom’ Abacus, New York 2013)

Today: be that one who truly forgives



As a society we must give thanks to God for raising up such inspirational leaders like Nelson Mandela among us. Like us all, he had his flaws, but he had a vision for the world that we all need to share - that is his legacy, and we can all make it happen, if we want. Do you want it?

We can pray: **This day we give thanks for the life of Nelson Mandela. He led a nation on a long walk to freedom. He fought for reconciliation and not**

retribution. He argued for peace in place of war. Lord, we give you thanks for Madiba. When others surrendered to darkness he kept faith with the promise of tomorrow. He envisioned a path to “heal the wounds of the past...with the intent of constructing a new order based on justice for all.” His work inspired the world. Lord, we give you thanks for Madiba. In his time, the powers and the principalities reviled Jesus. The leaders of great nations in our time called Mandela a terrorist and a communist. Powerful interests stood up for white supremacy during the Apartheid era. Mandela stood up for the least of these. Lord, we give you thanks for Madiba. Death is not the final victory. Nothing can silence the voice of Nelson Mandela - not Robben Island, not death. His voice will echo throughout time. Lord, we give you thanks for Madiba. Let us have an ounce of his courage. Let us have an ounce of his faith. Let the work of Nelson Mandela continue in us. Lord, we give you thanks for Madiba. Amen. (Rev. Dr. Chuck Currie, Director of the Centre for Peace and Spirituality and University Chaplain at Pacific University)

Watch and pray: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fhfP7whQc5o>

For children



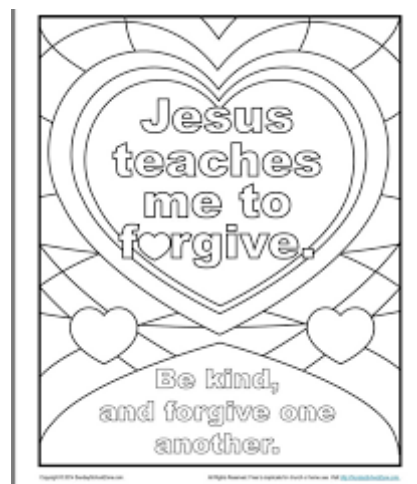
The Lord's Prayer

4



**And forgive us
our debts
as we forgive
our debtors — Matt 6:12**

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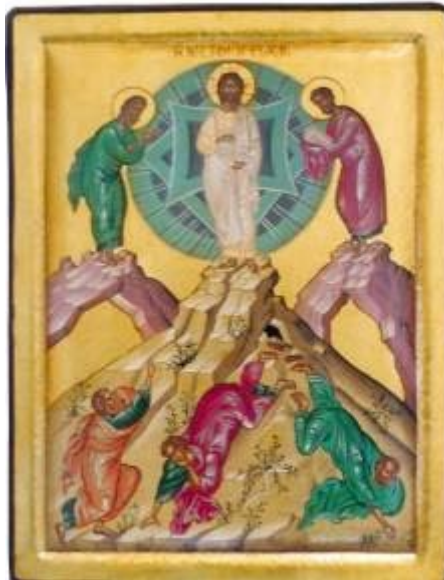
Biblical Example: Ephesians 4:32
Bible Character: Joseph, Genesis 42:45

FORGIVENESS

Choosing not to hold on
to my hurts, but to give
them to God.



13th March 2022-SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT



The Transfiguration (Theophanes of Crete, Stavronikitas Monastery, Mount Athos)

Today we see Jesus taking his inner circle of friends, perhaps his best friends, Peter, James and John on a hiking expedition. They went up the mountain **‘to pray’** (LK 9:28). I find this pastoral care of Jesus so refreshing, as we all need time outs. We cannot go along the treadmill of life without a rest; for many, this enforced change of life, brought about by the global pandemic, has given them a chance to access their priorities and see what is important in life. It is on the mountain top where they experience TRANSFIGURATION; for these special friends it was a preview of what their life with Jesus could become. In this mountainous wilderness, away from all distractions, they gain an insight into who their best friend is: **‘his face was changed, and his clothing became brilliant as lightning’** (Lk 9:29). This new faith experience would be so important for these three apostles as they tried to come to terms with the implications of Jesus’ ministry and teaching. This experience of the divine is something we are called to share; our faith is also about the yearning to see God and experience his power--it is about being touched by the Spirit and being moved by the voice of the Lord whispering in our ears. Our faith is so

rich, and our God is so good, that it makes no sense at all to limit what is possible for us to the dry bones of what we should or should not do each day. Our faith is about entertaining angels, every bit as much as it is about seeking to comfort the afflicted and to heal the sick. It is about seeing visions of a new heaven and a new earth, every bit as much as it is about seeking justice and resisting evil. It is about being refreshed by God, as much as it is about refreshing others in God's name. Luke is trying to give us a picture of heavenly glory, a glory that we share with Peter, James and John.

We are then introduced to two important figures in Hebrew scripture: Moses who gives the Law, and Elijah who is the great prophet. Both guiding law and sage prophecy will form part of the Christian way and it is Peter who wants to stay and make himself at home - he feels content and happy here. You have had experiences in life that have made you comfortable and you do not want to be challenged. Peter wants to stay in this 'heaven': **'Master it is wonderful for us to be here; so let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah'** (Mk 9:33), however, Luke notes that they were frightened by this experience, as a cloud comes down to obscure this heavenly vision; in this fear and uncertainty we have the comforting voice, a voice that we last heard at the baptism by John in the Jordan (see Mk 1:9-11): **'this is my son, whom I have chosen, LISTEN to him'** (Lk 9:35).

These chosen disciples are in no doubt about WHO Jesus is as the beloved son they are called to listen to him. While this experience is sustaining and helpful to the disciples, we need to ask, in all seriousness, did they truly LISTEN to Jesus—do we, here in 2022, truly listen to God's word? Do those words guide my life today? The plain truth is that Jesus had to walk his friends down the mountain to get on with the so-called 'real world', but that transfiguration experience never left them - they saw the divine, and that is what incarnation is all about. You may have been on pilgrimage to Lourdes, Knock or the Holy Land; you probably loved it and would be quite happy to stay; however, like Peter, you have got to get back to your family, to work and the ordinary every day. With a good pilgrimage memory, your 'every day' can be transformed and you can begin to see life in a whole new perspective. The sacred experiences that are recounted in the bible, the experiences of the divine that are recorded there, are still needed today - and they still occur today. Some catch sight of God in the beauty around them, some glimpse him during a close encounter with death, some meet him in a special way during a period of suffering, others

while they are praying at special gatherings or at mass. Never throw away those strange and mysterious experiences that have happened in your lives. Never let go of those things that you do not understand or cannot explain. Rather meditate on them, delight in them, and use them as a source of strength for your time of service in the valleys below.

Do we truly take to heart all that is expected of us? Lent is the ideal chance to start again so that we can say with the centurion after Jesus's death, **'in truth this man was the son of God!'** (Mk 15:39). Today is the call to LISTEN with an open heart that forces us to action, as Fr Michael Winstanley SDB advises:

Lent is above all a time for listening, real listening: listening to the Father's love, listening to the message of Jesus, listening to the needs of others, near and far away; listening to our beautiful and groaning world, listening to what is deep within us. ('Lenten Sundays' p. 91)

Today: spend a quiet moment to see the glory of God all around you, especially in your family and friends

We can pray: **God of love and of justice, God of holiness and of mercy, God of thunder and of the still small voice within, we pray you to shine brightly in our world today. Give us a double portion of your Spirit and help us to hear your word and understand the marvels you are performing. Grant that we may see beyond the problems of our world and see your anointed one in all his glory. Touch us and lift us into the light and peace of your presence. Strengthen us for your service as we worship you - we ask it in Christ's name. Amen**

Watch, listen and pray: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sza4rh1YzsM>

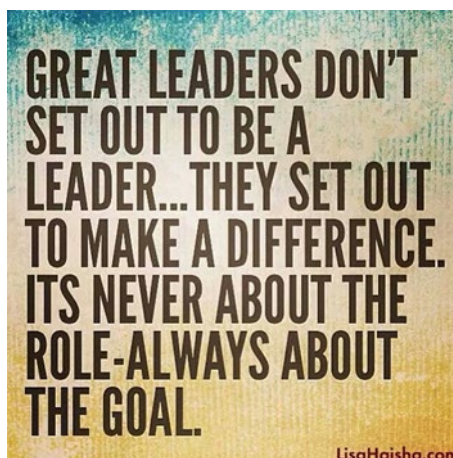
14th March 2022-Monday of Second Week of Lent

There is a great story told about a famous Prime Minister coming to visit a very poor part of Britain: in no uncertain terms, this political leader was told by the local Catholic Bishop that the government of the day lacked compassion. Today's gospel encourages us all to share compassion, **'as your Father is compassionate!'** (Lk 6:36). I have been privileged to live and work with colleagues who shared that heavenly compassion: their care and forgiving nature was always an inspiration. Jesus again reminds us, as we enter the second week of our Camino of the overwhelming need to **'grant pardon'** (Lk 6:27). Our Church must be noted for its spirit of true forgiveness and a greater willingness to grant pardon.

Today: offer your forgiveness to the one who has hurt you.

We can pray: **Create a clean heart in me, O God: a humble heart, a meek heart, a peaceful heart, a benevolent heart, a devout heart which does evil to no one, which does not repay evil for evil, but overcomes evil with good, which loves you above all things, thinks always about you, speaks about you, gives you thanks, delights in hymns and spiritual songs, and has its citizenship in heaven. Amen.**

15th March 2022-Tuesday



Today we are invited to listen to the gospel of Matthew where we see Jesus **‘addressing the people AND his disciples’** (Matt 23:1); he is preaching in the temple, the heart of the Jewish faith, but calls out the hypocrisy and vanity of the pharisees. He explains that they must be listened to as they have a special standing as they **‘occupy the chair of Moses’** (Matt 23:2). Jesus points out that it is these pharisees that place heavy burdens on others, but do nothing to support or help them; they want their places of honour and the best seats in the synagogue- **‘everything they do is done to attract attention’** (Matt 23:5). Jesus wants his leaders to be people of service as **‘the greatest among you must be your servant.’** (Matt 23:10); the Christian way is to lead by example.

It is all too easy to join in this condemnation of figures long in the past, without facing up to a similar type of clericalism that we see in our Church today. Pope Francis constantly warns us about it; clericalism could be defined as a false or sycophantic respect and esteem for clergy. It lends to the persons of priests, in view of their clerical office, an excessive deference and acquiescence. In a clericalist culture, the clergy often stand above and aloof to their flocks, to which distance the faithful can respond in a childish spirit of obedience and false reverence. Francis points out that clericalism can be a sin for both clergy and laity: for clergy, if they demand to be treated as superior to the laity; and for laity, if they resign themselves to the status quo—'Let Father or the Deacon or Sister do everything'—and shirk the responsibilities proper to their own vocation as baptized Christians. The Holy Father is uncompromising in his criticism of this clerical culture in the Church:

Here is that spirit of clericalism in the Church, that we feel: clerics feel superior; clerics distance themselves from the people. Clerics always say: ‘this should be done like this, like this, like this, and you – go away!’” It happens “when the cleric doesn’t have time to listen to those who are suffering, the poor, the sick, the imprisoned: the evil of clericalism is a really awful thing; it is a new edition of this ancient evil [of the religious ‘authorities’ lording it over others].” But “the victim is the same: the poor and humble people, who await the Lord. (Homily of Pope Francis 13th December 2013)

Today: realise your worth and do a simple act of service today

We can pray: Lord God, help us to realise that the greatest day in our Christian journey is our baptism - a sacrament that we all share. We pray that we remain true to our baptismal vows and are prepared to truly serve others; we thank God for the individual gifts that we have. Together, let us build up the Body of Christ; this prayer we make through Christ our Lord. AMEN.



(Pope Francis washing the feet at the Don Carlo Gnocchi Centre-AP
Photo/L'Osservatore Romano)

16th March 2022-Wednesday

I love the reading presented for us today: it shows the humanity and simplicity of those early followers of Christ. Jesus has an important message for them, that stresses the needed commitment in following him; he draws the twelve apostles to one side and tries to make them see the power of his words. Their trip to Jerusalem is not going to be a holiday, but the place of his execution and death at the hands of their own chief priests and teachers, but he does give them hope: **'on the third day he will rise again'** (Matt 20:19). We are dealing

with some very heavy-duty theology and reflection here; however, a loving mum wants to get to the heart of things as she asks Jesus, **“promise me that these two sons of mine may sit one at your right hand and the other at your left in your kingdom.”** (Matt 20:21). She is a good mum who has seen her sons move from the safety and security of their jobs to the life of following an itinerant preacher; in her mind there must be some sort of recompense. She is trying to say to Jesus, “I like the idea you’re going to be a KING. When the victory happens, since I asked FIRST, can my two boys get best spots in the new regime?” James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were part of that inner circle—with Peter they had witnessed transfiguration. However, Jesus preaches a gospel of equality and not exceptionalism: we do not get special treatment in the reign of God because we have a theology degree, or we go to a prayer meeting, or have our mums ask for special treatment. Jesus makes it quite clear to both his friends that they will have to experience the suffering, pain and rejection that he has already spoken about. In this way, Jesus can return to his theme of taking up the cross—so essential for authentic Christian living. The reign of God is not about hierarchy and status, it is about following the example of Jesus as best we can.

The irony is, in God’s wisdom, when Jesus comes in his kingdom on Calvary Hill, the people on his right and left do not have any power or receive any glory. When he is raised on the cross and he wins peace, forgiveness and restoration. When he brings his KINGDOM. Who are those on his left and right? Two CRIMINALS; they die with him, and that is the true nature of the kingdom Jesus is bringing!

Today: make a conscious effort to include everyone

We can pray: **Dear Gracious and Loving God, as I take this time to be still, help me to let go of anxiousness and feel your peace. Your Word says that you are love and where there is love there can be no fear. Help me to let go of fear and receive your perfect love. I come before you with heaviness because of being hurt by others. Help me to accept the effect that their actions have had in my life and to let go of this hurt. Holding onto past hurts – Holding onto resentments and judgments weighs me down. I release this hurt. I release this weight on my body and spirit. I ask your love to carry me. I let go of hurt, resentment and judgment. I forgive those who have hurt me.**

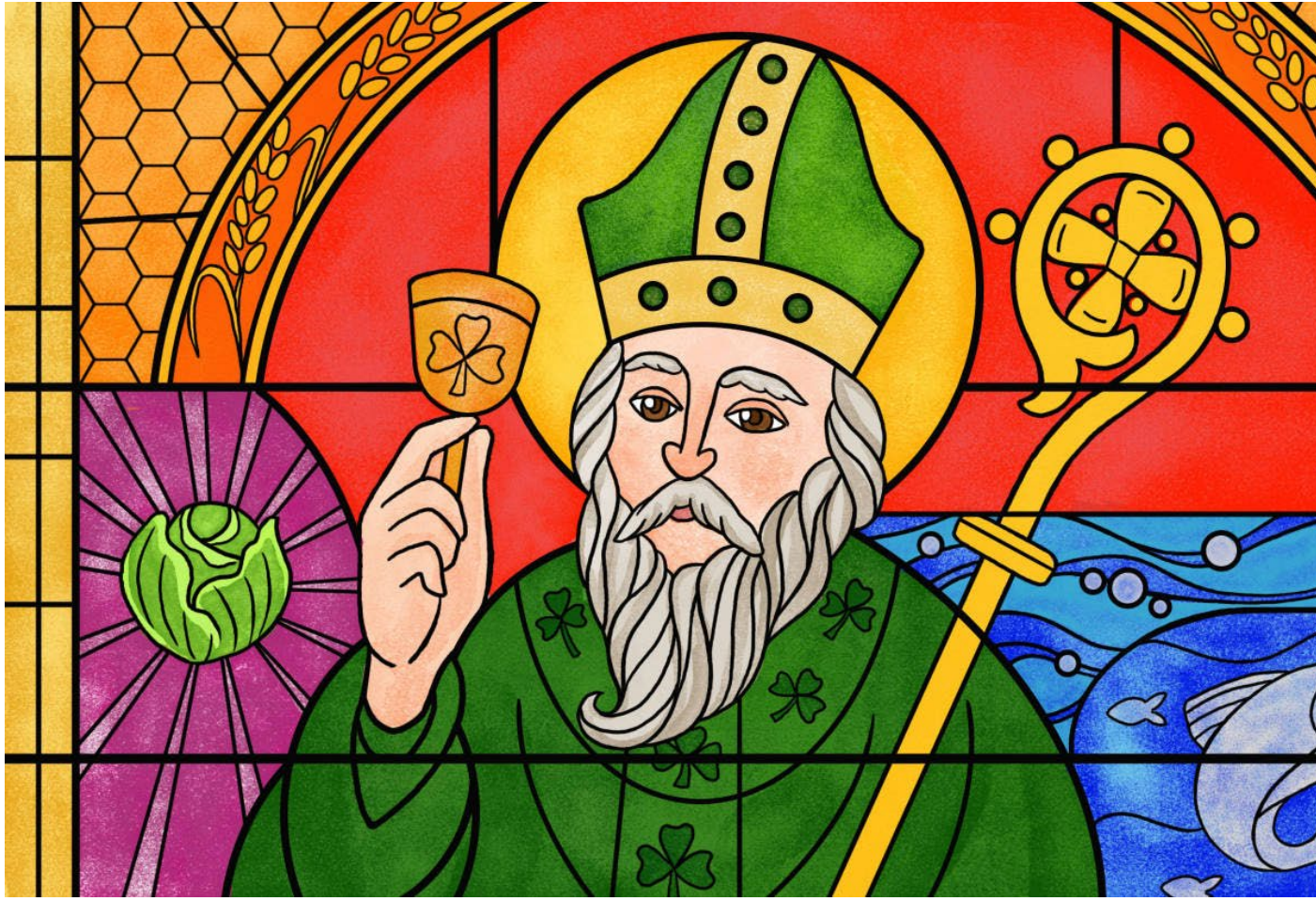
Because I practice awareness in all areas of my life, I am aware of self-criticism or poor choices. I accept my actions. I forgive myself and let go of poor choices or self-criticism. To receive or accept love, I let go of building walls of self-protection.

Help me to receive and accept love. Help me to freely give love. Help me not to strive for perfection but to make progress each day. I accept the choices I make. I can trust myself. I make good choices. Each day, help me to step into the glorious person you created me to be. I accept and find comfort in knowing I am completely loved with your divine, perfect love.

In the name of your Son whose example lights our way, Amen



17th March 2022-Thursday



Happy St Patrick's Day

Across the world, especially in the Irish diaspora, today will be a day of great excitement and celebration. For the first time in two years, St Patrick Day parades will be able to take place—it is a visible sign that we are slowly getting back to a sense of normality in these strange times. The blessing of scientists and medics need to be mentioned: we can go on holiday, visit the local cinema and enjoy the parades on this day. One of my favourite books this year has been 'Vaxxers': by Professor Gilbert and Dr Green, it tells the amazing inside story of the Oxford AstraZeneca Vaccine. I urge you to read it—I challenge those dangerous anti-vaxxers to argue against it. As they tell us:

This book is the story of how we-two scientists-were in the right place at the right time to fight back against a deadly and devastating disease. We are not 'big pharma' or 'them'. We are two ordinary people who, with a team of

others, did something extraordinary. There were days when we swore or cried with frustration and exhaustion. We lost sleep and gained weight. There were days when we met a prince, or a prime minister, and other days when it seemed we had to both save the world and get the central heating fixed.

Sarah and Catherine worked hard to offer a life-saving vaccine that has granted us true freedom. In his life, Patrick knew what it was like to have his freedom taken: as a slave he was taken to Ireland and, at rock bottom, he knew that he wanted to bring the freedom of Christ's message to the Irish. In the gospel, we have the account of the Lord appointing **'seventy-two others and sent them out ahead of him'** (Lk 10:1). Patrick helped to bring gospel values to this island and to the world, following the example of the seventy-two. Like them, Patrick lived simply, carrying no purse; his message was to bring peace, as he enjoyed the hospitality and values that his new Irish converts, and friends could bring. He accepted their spirituality and incorporated it into their infant Christian Church. Celtic Christianity is still deeply popular in our modern age, with the work of mystics, like John O'Donohue, offering great insights. Patrick was positive and life-giving, as he shared his deep faith and convictions with others.

I noticed that the Irish bishops in their various letters in regard to Covid-19 concluded their letters by quoting from St. Patrick's Breastplate in which St Patrick invoked the power of the Trinity – the three in one, and one in three; He prayed: **"I arise and bind unto myself today Christ's baptism, death, resurrection, ascension and return on the last day"**. It echoes the words of St Paul in his letter to the Ephesians where he writes: **"Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the gospel of peace. Take the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit"**. (Eph 6:13-16)

What I am saying is that we could surround ourselves with the breastplate of St. Patrick but not only around ourselves but also around the world. Write it out and say it daily or many times daily and envisage it surrounding you like a kind of aura of protection.

Today: **celebrate the feast in a fitting way—even if it means breaking your fast**

We can pray: Christ with me, Christ before me/ Christ behind me, Christ within me/ Christ beneath me, Christ above me./ Christ at my right, Christ at my left./ Christ in the heart of everyone who speaks to me,/ Christ in every eye that sees me,/ Christ in every ear that hears me

Watch and reflect: www.youtube.com/watch?v=GGHWiAGpIP0

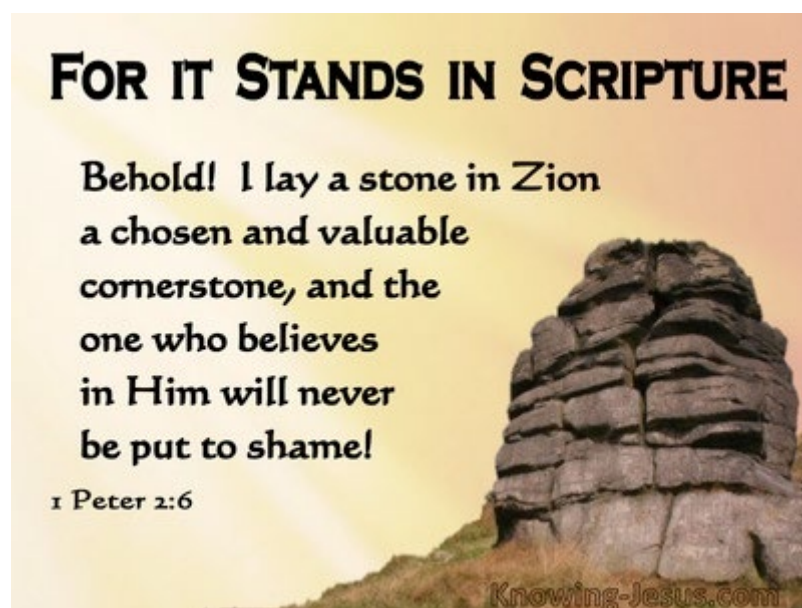
18th March 2022-Friday

In today's gospel reading from Matthew, we are presented with the parable of the vineyard; once again we see Jesus using something that his audience would readily understand—he is the great communicator. In a simple paragraph of story, he can show what happened to the prophets and messengers sent by God to the people of the Covenant—we see how they ignored and treated in the most vivid way: **'thrashed one, killed another and stoned a third'** (Matt 21:35). To become a prophet was not the best career plan, as it involved much rejection, little recognition and no retirement to look forward to. The vineyard owner finally sends his son and heir, thinking that the tenants would respect him. No, for **'they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.'** (Matt 21:39). As the good teacher, Jesus asks his audience to make the adjudication: what should happen to these wicked tenants? They have no hesitation in condemning them and offering the vineyard to those who will respect and care for it—people who will listen to the messengers and the son with respect for him. Jesus is trying to get his followers to realise that the gospel is a universal truth; we will discover the power of the gospel in the most unusual of places. The truth and power of God can be found in the most untraditional places, as we are reminded in the Psalms: **'It was the stone rejected by the builders that proved to be the keystone'** (Ps 118: 22). The image comes from the ancient quarries where highly trained stonemasons carefully chose the stones used in construction. No stone was more important than the cornerstone because the integrity of the whole structure depended on the cornerstone containing exactly the right lines. If the cornerstone was not exactly right, the entire building would be out of line; thus, builders inspected

many stones, rejecting each one until they found the one, they wanted. Jesus also saw that God can choose people for ministry that are not perfect and flawed—we can all offer something and, remember, only YOU can do your ministry. I can try to follow your example, but only you can do it effectively. Let us listen to the Word of God and live the gospel as we are called to live it.

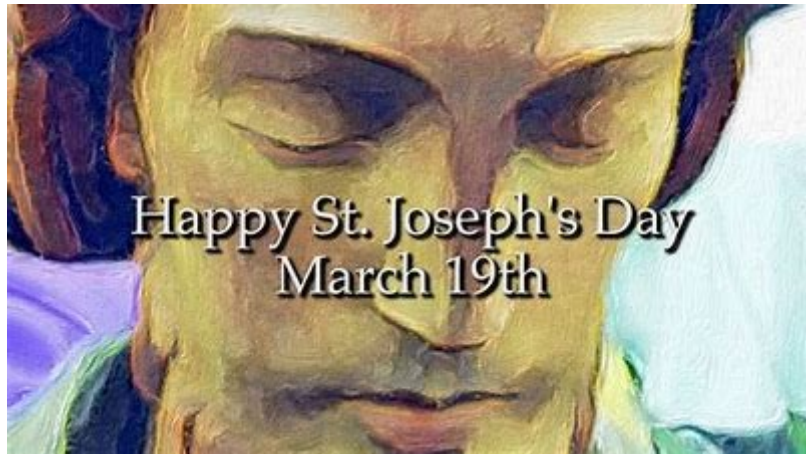
Today: try to get out of the ‘we’ve always done it this way’ mindset as it is barrier to movement.

We can pray: **Thank you, Jesus, for turning human plans upside down and making a new reality through your death and resurrection. Enliven your church today so that we are a truly faithful house built on your solid foundation. Amen.**



Watch. listen and pray: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjf0KBf-qwo>

19th March 2022-Saturday



Today we celebrate the feast of St Joseph—the faithful one who brought so much to life and ministry of Jesus. I never really liked the depiction of Joseph as some old man who cared for Mary and Jesus as a gentle grandfather—at home with his pipe and slippers. The danger of such a vision relegates Joseph to a passive character in the Holy Family who can be easily forgotten. However, the tradition of the Church sees someone very active and deeply involved in the beautiful story of salvation-standing at the crossroads of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. 2021 has been dedicated to this dynamic man who was no doddery old man. In his Apostolic Letter entitled ‘Patris corde’ (“With a Father’s Heart”), Pope Francis describes Saint Joseph as a beloved father, a tender and loving father, an obedient father, an accepting father; a father who is creatively courageous, a working father, a father in the shadows. Joseph IS the earthly father of Jesus as the infancy narratives clearly relate. Joseph is seen as the ‘man of honour’ who will not subject his beloved Mary to punishment on realising that she was pregnant. Mary’s confusion and trust is eventually shared by Joseph: the Word of God comes to him in a dream and changes his life forever. He learns, like Mary, to put his trust in a God who trusts fully in him.

Joseph is the protective presence on their Camino to Bethlehem—even with no hotel reservations, he can make a difference and ensure that the child is born in safety and security. Emmanuel, ‘God with us’ might not have had the benefits of the ‘Call the Midwife’ team, but Jesus did have love, security and care. Even in disaster, murder, exile and having to live the plight of refugees,

the Holy Family experience safety. The dreams of Joseph guided him, helping him to see a way forward amid confusion, noise and hatred. Joseph is the one who gave Jesus a start and an experience in the world of work—from their return to Nazareth to the Baptism in the Jordan, we have no biblical details about the life of Jesus: 30 years that are seen as ‘hidden’. Joseph, with his wife gave their child an excellent start in life, a life that was to change the lives of so many, as the Pope reflects:

He turned his human vocation to domestic love into a superhuman oblation of himself, his heart and all his abilities, a love placed at the service of the Messiah who was growing to maturity in his home. (‘Patris Corde’)

When the pilgrim visits Nazareth, the focus is obviously the basilica of the Annunciation, built over what is assumed to be the home of Mary. I love to visit the nearby Church of St Joseph which is referred to as the ‘Church of Nutrition’. Again, tradition tells us that this twentieth century building has its foundations in a cave that was thought to be Joseph’s workshop. It was in this place of work that Joseph earned his wage and was able to put food on the table for the Holy Family—his work provided their nutrition. It is possible but the reality was that Joseph was probably one of an army of craftsmen needed to build Herod’s new city at Sepphoris, just an hour’s walk from Nazareth.

We have no evidence, but I like to think that Jesus was apprenticed to Joseph as a ‘tekton’—the Greek word used to describe Joseph’s skills as an artisan and builder. With such an engrained background, Jesus could speak confidently about the house built on rock and not on sand (see Lk 6:48-49); Jesus understood the world of work as he was not a detached academic: the Sower went out to sow (see Lk 8:5); the man attacked by robbers, was probably on his way to work in Jericho when the Samaritan helped him (see Lk 10:30). Jesus often recognised the hard work and the ultimate dedication of shepherds (see Lk 15:4-7), while the Prodigal Son left a busy working farm only to squander his inheritance, he is seen as wanting to come back to work for his Father ‘as a hired hand’ (see Lk 15: 11-32) Jesus witnessed hard work as he travelled the Galilee region, and, in my opinion, knew what it was to earn a basic wage himself. I find it fascinating that Jesus chose people like fishermen as his first disciples: Peter, Andrew, James and John knew long hours, working in all conditions and facing disappointment as they might have toiled all night and caught nothing (see Lk 5:5). At the feet of Joseph, Jesus knew what it was to

earn a living and to work hard. The feast of Joseph helps us to appreciate all those who have toiled long and hard for us—those who have been there for us unconditionally. I think of my own dad; he was a farmer who knew long hours, lack of investment, disappointment and, thankfully, success also. The feast allows us to remember those who work so hard for us—those countless heroes who have been with us through the pandemic. We once clapped for the NHS workers on a Thursday night, but we need to also remember the shop workers, shelf stackers, sanitation operatives, teachers and all involved in school ministry. COVID-19 forced closure of so many places of work—millions across the world experienced furlough, temporary layoffs and unemployment. The world of work changed dramatically with so many of us ‘working from home’ trying to share the internet with children needing an education and a family needing entertainment and relief. The pandemic that has threatened the life and physical health of so many in these past two years, has also taken its toll on our economy, exposing working people to significant risk to their livelihoods. Working women and men have also been a casualty of COVID 19, alongside of our sisters and brothers who have died or continue to suffer.

Today: offer to do a simple job for another in your family or parish.

We can pray: **Oh, St. Joseph, whose protection is so great, so strong, so prompt before the throne of God. I place in you all my interests and desires. Oh, St. Joseph, do assist me by your powerful intercession, and obtain for me from your divine Son all spiritual blessings, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. So that, having engaged here below your heavenly power, I may offer my thanksgiving and homage to the most loving of Fathers. AMEN**

For the children





Saint Patrick

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Saint Joseph Word Search

G C A R P E N T E R
M H U S B A N D K T
E N Z L U U U S C B
V V F T J O S E P H
A P R O T E C T O R
P R O V I D E R O J
M O X L Y R R I H E
A F Y H Z U I O O S
R N V F A T H E R U
Y W N A M L N P S S

Protector
Husband

Provider
Joseph

Carpenter
Jesus

Father
Mary

LIVEWORKSHEETS