

REPENT AND BELIEVE

Be Filled with the Love of God



Lenten Companion 2024

Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney







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Cover Image: Saint Matthæus Church's altar wall made by H. Olrik with the help of CN Overgaard. Credit: Ib Rasmussen / Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain

Christ's entry into Jerusalem by Pierre-Paul Rubens, circa 1632.

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Easter is the most important feast in the Church. It is the celebration of the saving action of a loving and merciful God, for all of those who repent and believe. The Season of Lent is an opportunity to reflect on this Sacrifice, and to take stock of where we are in our relationship with God. Lent provides the time for us to consider our response for all that God has done, and continues to do for us daily. At this time, He invites us to re-orient our lives towards Him and to conform ourselves to His will.

For us to do this well, the Church prescribes three disciplines for us during Lent: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. These disciplines help us to pause in the daily demands of our lives, helping us to focus on God and glorify Him in serving others.

The message that Jesus brings us is contrary to what the world teaches. The world teaches that for us to be happy we need to live in a way that serves our wants. Jesus teaches that for us to be happy we need to be in service of God and others. Prayer, fasting, and almsgiving are how we do this—uniting our own sacrifices to Christ's sacrifice on the Cross, interceding for the conversion and needs of others.

I pray that this resource will be a means of grace for you this Lent, and help you draw closer to Christ in preparation for Easter.

Grace and Peace,

Tania Rimac

Parish Renewal Team

How to use this *Lenten Companion*

This is a suggestion for how individuals and small groups could use this Companion. Put aside time during the week leading up to each of the Sundays, or on the day itself.

1. **Begin with the Opening Prayer** in which you entrust the time to God and ask for His grace.
2. **Prayerfully read the Gospel passage.** An ancient method of doing this is *lectio divina* (divine reading), which is outlined briefly on this page. You may find it helpful to read the Gospel passage more than once.
3. **Read the Gospel reflection.**
4. **Take some time to pray** using the questions as a guide to consider more deeply the Gospel passage and the reflection. You may find it helpful to use a journal to write down your thoughts. Groups may choose to discuss the responses to the questions together.
5. **Conclude with the Closing Prayer** in which you thank God and entrust your needs to Him.

Image at left: *Christ Carrying The Cross*, Andrea Solario, circa 1513.

Scripture from *The Jerusalem Bible*, © 1966, 1967 and 1968, Darton, Longman and Todd.

Lectio Divina

Lectio (reading)

Begin by reading the passage slowly and gently either aloud or silently. It is helpful to savour each portion, constantly listening for a word or a phrase which speaks to your heart. It is helpful sometimes to read the passage again, going back to certain words, repeating them, memorising them and allowing them to sink in more deeply.

Meditatio (meditation)

Ponder more deeply on the words or images which speak to you, allowing the words to move from the head to the heart. Continue to sit with these words, ruminating on them, engaging your mind, and reflect on what God might be saying to you through them. Give this to God and allow the light of the Word to shed new levels of meaning on them.

Oratio (prayer)

Speak to God in response to the Word or the thoughts which arose during meditation. This dialogue or prayer can take many forms – thoughts, ideas, writing, images or simply sitting in deep silent awareness of God's presence. The important thing is to speak to God just as we would with someone who knows and loves us.

Contemplatio (contemplation)

In this step, our words and thoughts subside and give way to silent presence where we rest in God's embrace. This experience may last for only a short time, or for a longer period, depending on the individual and the grace of God. Here we allow God to take over and we simply let go and receive.

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Visit www.jamberooabbey.org.au/prayer/lectio-divina-praying-with-the-sacred-scriptures/

Almsgiving

Jesus presumes our Christian life will involve three practices common to many religious traditions - prayer, fasting and almsgiving (Mt 6:1-18). While these should be part of our life throughout the year, Lent is a particular time to renew our practice of each of them as part of our ongoing journey of conversion and healing – bringing order into and renewing our relationship with God (prayer), with others (almsgiving) and with ourselves (fasting). This year, let us look particularly at almsgiving.

Almsgiving literally means sharing of our resources (alms) with the poor, those on the margins of society who are often neglected. As one of our Lenten disciplines, it is understood to embrace the whole range of acts of charity, the different ways we might help people in our community who need a hand. This could involve caring for the sick, helping people with a disability who need support, or visiting an elderly person who rarely gets visitors. It could mean reaching out to Aboriginal peoples or refugees, or engaging in some justice initiative. But whatever practical steps we take as part of our almsgiving this Lent, we can be reminded by Pope Benedict in his encyclical on love, that simply doing things for people or offering them our resources is not ultimately sufficient. These need to be expressions of love for them, “a sharing of my very self with them.” Perhaps we might put some time this Lent into personal encounter with people in need. For example, rather than simply giving some small change to a beggar in the street, I might stop and have a chat with him, acknowledging him as a fellow human being - being “personally present in my gift”, as Pope Benedict says. Closer to home, ‘almsgiving’ this Lent might also mean

seeking reconciliation with a person I have hurt and have never really apologised to. It could also mean forgiving someone who has hurt me, inviting Jesus’ healing into my pain and letting go of my hurt, always remembering how much the Lord has forgiven me.

While all these are ways we can seek to be converted in our relationships with others, let us not forget the primary meaning of almsgiving, offering material aid to the poor. Pope Francis constantly points us to the needs of those who are materially poor and on the margins. And the Catechism of the Catholic Church, when it looks at the various works of mercy, says “giving alms to the poor is one of the chief witnesses to fraternal charity; it is also a work of justice pleasing to God” (CCC 2447). A shared way in which the Church in Australia does almsgiving is through Project Compassion, the Lenten fund-raising initiative that supports people living in some of the most vulnerable communities across the world.

Whatever almsgiving might look like for each of us this Lent, let’s not forget that it is part of our journey of deeper conversion, focused particularly on conversion in our relationships with others – about moving out of myself and my sometimes narrow vision of things, and seeing the reality of the world and its needs. As Pope Benedict said, “The Christian’s programme—the programme of the Good Samaritan, the programme of Jesus—is ‘a heart which sees’. This heart sees where love is needed and acts accordingly.” Let’s get with Jesus’ programme this Lent.

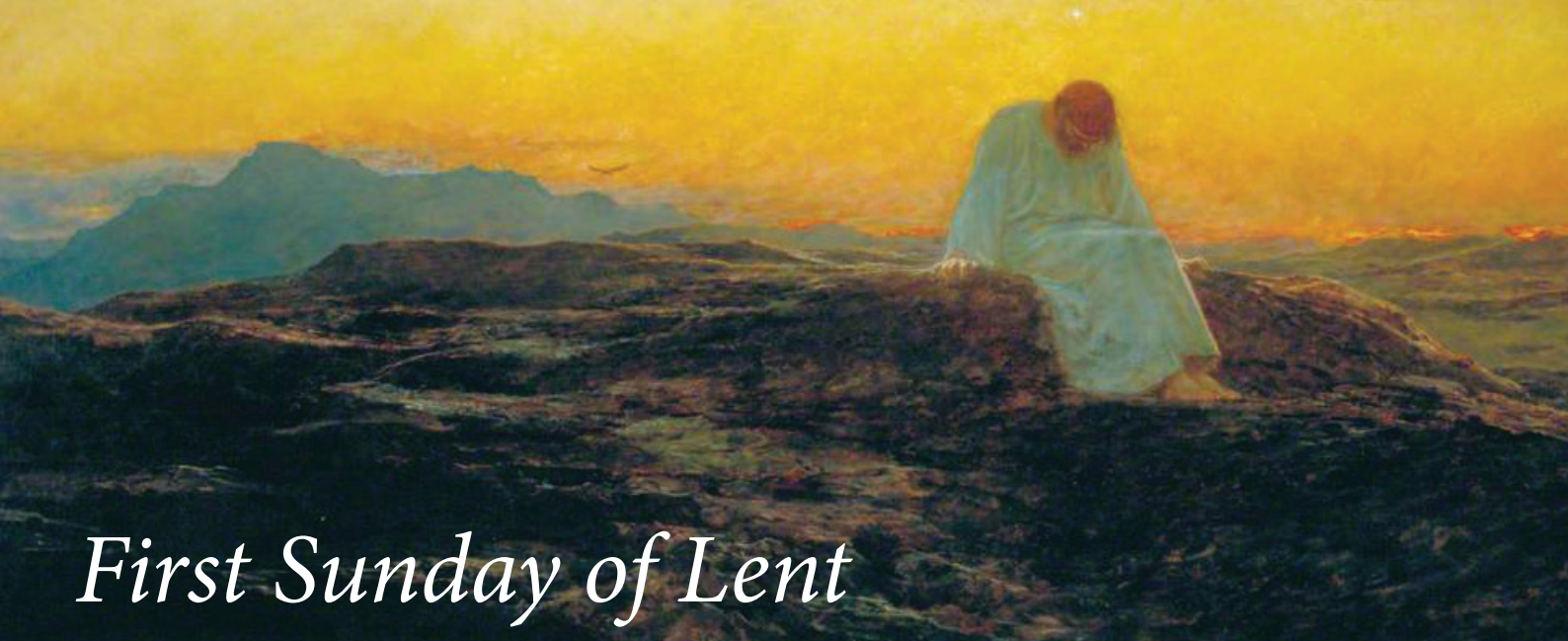
- Fr Robin Koning SJ



Saint Lawrence Giving Alms by Fra Angelico, circa 1450. Credit: Palazzo Apostolico, Vatican







First Sunday of Lent

Opening Prayer

Loving Jesus, we give you thanks for the great blessing of this Season of Lent. As we take time to reflect on your Word in this Gospel passage and reflection, help us to recognise our need to repent and believe. May we come to know how much we need you, and how others rely on us to know of your abundant love for them.

Gospel of St Mark 1:12-15

The Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness and he remained there for forty days, and was tempted by Satan. He was with the wild beasts, and the angels looked after him.

After John had been arrested, Jesus went into Galilee. There he proclaimed the Good News from God. 'The time has come' he said 'and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News.'

Gospel Reflection

By Marilyn Rodrigues

In this Gospel passage, we are led quickly from Jesus' time in the wilderness to His appearance in Galilee where He announces His Good News to the world. It might therefore be easy for us to gloss over His being tempted by Satan, and assume that it didn't cause Him to suffer since, as God, He did not sin.

But if we do that, we miss the full force of His Good News! Jesus, the only Son of His Father and truly God, is also truly one of us. He really was open to the full range of human experience in all things, but sin. This experience includes both vulnerability and human weaknesses; if this were not the case, He could not have suffered temptation, and later, His Passion. This is good news because it reveals that our own weaknesses—those imperfections that make us worry and fret—need not be an obstacle to holiness. In suffering human frailty Himself, Jesus transforms our weaknesses into our path to salvation.

*“This is good news
because it reveals that
our own weaknesses...
need not be an obstacle
to holiness.”*

Sometimes our temptations and weaknesses, especially those that bother us the most about ourselves, make us want to scurry off the path in shame; once glimpsed, we often would rather avoid facing them. Yet, all we need to do is decide, once and for all, to walk along the path of holiness with Jesus, and not to be discouraged at how many times we

trip over our feet and fall flat on our faces!

Jesus invites us to walk humbly and to acknowledge our imperfections. When we do this, we will find it easier to accept our neighbours with all of

their faults and flaws, and thereby, reveal God's love to them. Our reward will be a heart that increases with gratitude and love for Jesus, who stays with us regardless of how many times we fall.

This Lent, let us allow Jesus to meet us in our weakness, and show us the ways in which we need to change. Let Him!

Closing Prayer

Merciful Father, thank you for your great love for me. May I turn to you and rely on your strength in times of weakness. By the power of the Holy Spirit, grant me the grace that I need to fight against all temptation, and find consolation in uniting my suffering to that of your Son, Jesus Christ.

Questions

1. Which word or phrase of the Gospel or the reflection spoke to me, and what might God be saying to me?
2. Which areas of weakness and temptation in my life does Jesus want me to acknowledge and bring to Him?
3. Is there someone whom I struggle to love because of his or her weakness? How can I love that person, and witness to the love and mercy of God?

The Temptation in the Wilderness by Briton Riviere, circa 1898. Credit: City of London Corporation, CC BY-NC



Second Sunday of Lent

Opening Prayer

Loving Jesus, we give you thanks for the great blessing of this Season of Lent. As we take time to reflect on your Word in this Gospel passage and reflection, help us to recognise our need to repent and believe. May we come to know how much we need you, and how others rely on us to know of your abundant love for them.

Gospel of St Mark 9:2-10

Jesus took with him Peter and James and John and led them up a high mountain where they could be alone by themselves. There in their presence he was transfigured: his clothes became dazzlingly white, whiter than any earthly bleacher could make them. Elijah appeared to them with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus. Then Peter spoke to Jesus: 'Rabbi,' he said 'it is wonderful for us to be here; so let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.' He did not know what to say; they were so frightened. And a cloud came, covering them in shadow; and there came a voice from the cloud, 'This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him.' Then suddenly, when they looked round, they saw no one with them any more but only Jesus.

As they came down from the mountain he warned them to tell no one what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They observed the warning faithfully, though among themselves they discussed what 'rising from the dead' could mean.

Gospel Reflection

By Mark Lysaght

As we contemplate the Transfiguration during Lent, may we be inspired to ascend our own mountains of prayer, embrace transformation, and carry the light of Christ into the world, becoming beacons of hope and love in a world in need of redemption. In the heart of the Lenten Season, the Gospel reading from Mark beckons us to heed the profound call to repent and believe, so that we may be filled with the love of God. The Transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain unfolds as a Divine Revelation, a manifestation of God's overwhelming love that pierces through the darkness of sin.

As we journey through Lent, the theme of repentance resonates with urgency. The dazzling radiance of Jesus on the mountain signals the transformative power of repentance, a turning away from the shadows that cloak our hearts. Lent invites us to confront the darkness within, acknowledging our need for God's mercy and forgiveness. "Repent and believe" echoes as a timeless invitation, a call to turn our gaze toward the Light of the World. The Transfiguration scene reveals Jesus in His divine glory, a tangible expression of the love that surpasses

"The Transfiguration is a foretaste of the glory that awaits those who repent and believe..."

all understanding. Lent is not merely a season of self-denial but a profound opportunity to surrender to the embrace of God's love, to believe in the transformative power of His grace. The urgency in the Lenten readings is palpable. The disciples, much like us, are urged to listen to the voice from the cloud: "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." In the tumult of our lives, the voice

of Jesus resonates with unwavering love, inviting us to trust, to believe, and to be filled with the love of God.

The promise of eternal life with God underlines the significance of our Lenten journey. In turning away from sin and embracing the love of God, we align ourselves with the Kingdom that Jesus ushers in.

The Transfiguration is a foretaste of the glory that awaits those who repent and believe—a glimpse of the eternal joy that our hearts long for. As we reflect on the Gospel reading of Mark this Lent, let us respond to the urgent call to repentance and belief. May the love of God, revealed in the Transfiguration, illuminate our path, dispel the darkness within, and propel us toward the embrace of eternal life with Him.



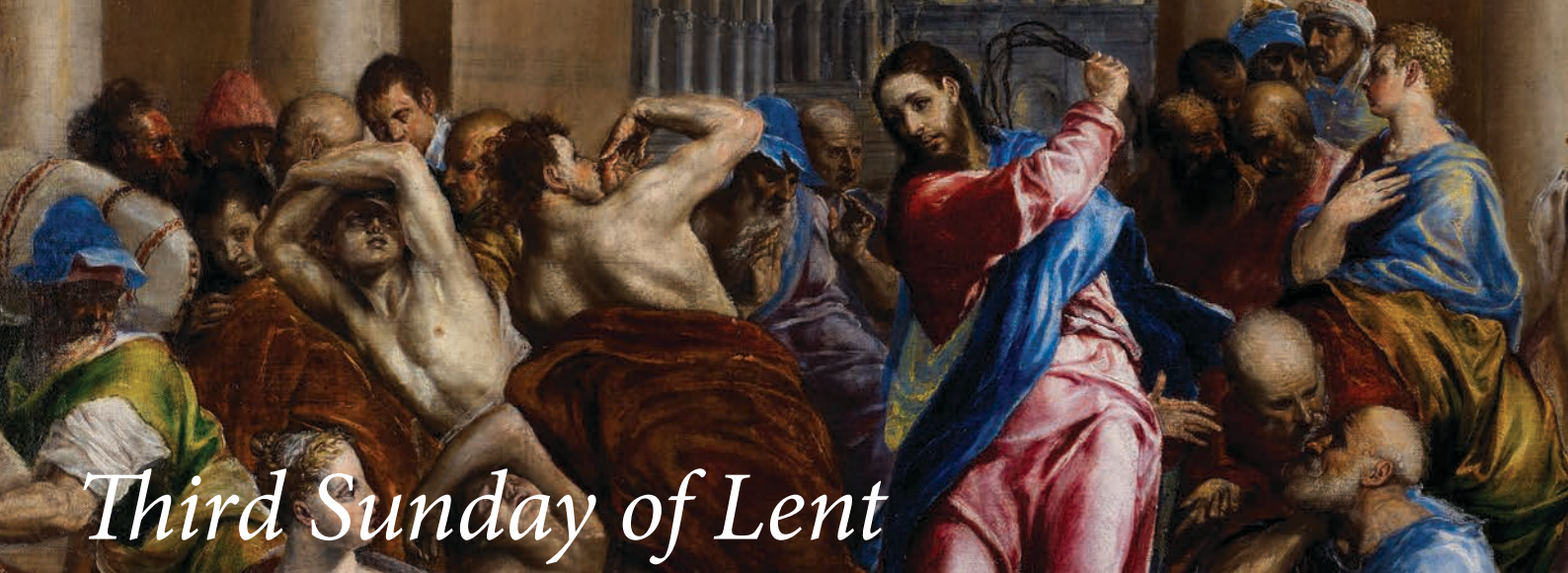
Closing Prayer

Merciful Father, thank you for your great love for me. Grant me the gift of your grace, and help me to experience the transformative power of repentance. By the power of the Holy Spirit, may the overwhelming love that you have for me pierce through the darkness of sin, that I may be united more deeply to your Son, Jesus Christ.

Questions

1. Which word or phrase of the Gospel or the reflection spoke to me, and what might God be saying to me?
2. Do I truly repent of my sins? Am I willing to go to the Confession this Lent, and be transformed by the power of His grace?
3. What is one concrete way that I can be a beacon of hope and love in a world in need of redemption?

The Transfiguration of Christ by Uidentifisert, Novgorod-skolenby, c. mid-16th century. Credit: The National Museum in Oslo / CC BY 4.0



Third Sunday of Lent

Opening Prayer

Loving Jesus, we give you thanks for the great blessing of this Season of Lent. As we take time to reflect on your Word in this Gospel passage and reflection, help us to recognise our need to repent and believe. May we come to know how much we need you, and how others rely on us to know of your abundant love for them.

Gospel of St John 2:13-25

Just before the Jewish Passover Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and in the Temple he found people selling cattle and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting at their counters there. Making a whip out of some cord, he drove them all out of the Temple, cattle and sheep as well, scattered the money-changers' coins, knocked their tables over and said to the pigeon-sellers, 'Take all this out of here and stop turning my Father's house into a market.' Then his disciples remembered the words of scripture: Zeal for your house will devour me. The Jews intervened and said, 'What sign can you show us to justify what you have done?' Jesus answered, 'Destroy this sanctuary, and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews replied, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this sanctuary: are you going to raise it up in three days?' But he was speaking of the sanctuary that was his body, and when Jesus rose from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and the words he had said.

During his stay in Jerusalem for the Passover many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he gave, but Jesus knew them all and did not trust himself to them; he never needed evidence about any man; he could tell what a man had in him.



Gospel Reflection

By Sister Maliya Suen, RSM

In this Gospel passage, we read about Jesus, who zealously overturned tables and drove the market people out of the Temple with a cord. This encounter was not designed to promote civil unrest or violence, but rather to teach us to order our zeal towards God. The zeal of Jesus is a consuming fire of love for God the Father which ultimately led Him to the Cross; Jesus' statement at the end of the confrontation, "in three days I will raise it up", referred to His self-sacrifice on the Cross and His resurrection. How eager are we to cleanse the temple of our souls and to welcome the Holy Trinity to dwell within us?

Imagine that a child wanders off on a family walk. At first the parents gently ask the child to come back. But now the child keeps moving away and is near the edge of a road with heavy traffic, and the

parents quickly move the child away from danger. Such action may appear sudden, decisive and even stern from the child's perspective, especially if he or she did not realise the imminent danger of the situation. Yet the parents acted out of love and for

the sake of the child's life. Likewise, there are times in our lives when we need the zeal of Jesus to wake us up, to turn us back to God and towards the path of holiness. Do we use these moments of being shaken up to seek the Truth?

This Lenten Season, when we receive an experience of Jesus overturning our tables in order to catch our

attention, let us take courage and allow the love of Jesus to consume us. May He enter our hearts and cleanse us, He who already knows where the stain is and how to make our temple clean again!

"There are times in our lives when we need the zeal of Jesus to wake us up, to turn us back to God and towards the path of holiness."



Closing Prayer

Merciful Father, thank you for your great love for me. Help me to decide anew to walk along the path of holiness. By the power of the Holy Spirit, may I allow you to enter my heart to cleanse me, and to always seek the truth of your Son, Jesus Christ.

Questions

1. Which word or phrase of the Gospel or the reflection spoke to me, and what might God be saying to me?
2. Am I willing to allow Jesus to cleanse the temple of my soul?
3. In which way can I help those I love to see the need for Jesus to wake them up, and to turn back to God?

Christ Driving the Money Changers from the Temple by El Greco, c. 1570-75. Credit: Minneapolis Institute of Art / Public Domain



Fourth Sunday of Lent

Opening Prayer

Loving Jesus, we give you thanks for the great blessing of this Season of Lent. As we take time to reflect on your Word in this Gospel passage and reflection, help us to recognise our need to repent and believe. May we come to know how much we need you, and how others rely on us to know of your abundant love for them.

Gospel of St John 3:14-21

Jesus said to Nicodemus:

'The Son of Man must be lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him. Yes, God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life. For God sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world, but so that through him the world might be saved. No one who believes in him will be condemned; but whoever refuses to believe is condemned already, because he has refused to believe in the name of God's only Son. On these grounds is sentence pronounced: that though the light has come into the world men have shown they prefer darkness to the light because their deeds were evil. And indeed, everybody who does wrong hates the light and avoids it, for fear his actions should be exposed; but the man who lives by the truth comes out into the light, so that it may be plainly seen that what he does is done in God.'

Gospel Reflection

By Dr Kevin Wagner

In Dostoyevsky's Crime and Punishment, the central character Raskolnikov literally gets away with murdering an elderly woman and her half-sister. As the novel unfolds, we get a penetrating glimpse into the mind of a sinner as Dostoyevsky recounts Raskolnikov's thoughts; as he plays the scene out in his head, connives to avoid capture, and tries to justify to himself his abhorrent actions.

Perhaps the reason the novel has received acclaim throughout the years is that the honest reader sees him or herself in the character of Raskolnikov. We know deep down that we have sinned, in our thoughts, in our words, in what we have done, and in what we have failed to do.

Jesus came to draw us out of the darkness of sin and into His light. Jesus truly experienced temptation. To deny this

*“Jesus truly
experienced
temptation... He
knows my heart—
He created it!—
and despite the
filth He sees in me,
He loves me.”*

would be to deny His humanity! What this means is that Jesus understands me and the temptations I wrestle with. He knows my heart—He created it!—and despite the filth He sees in me, He loves me.

Fear of being caught out in our sin can cripple us. The Christian, however, ought not fear! This week we hear that God sent Jesus to save the world, not to condemn it. On the other hand, in John 5:22-24 we read that all judgement is given to the Son. What can we make of this? The key is hearing and believing in His Word.

Jesus, the just Judge, invites us to hear His Word and to believe in God. Our belief is all He asks for. May this Lent be a time where we can each live this call more fully and encourage others to do the same. The reward for doing so is life eternal!



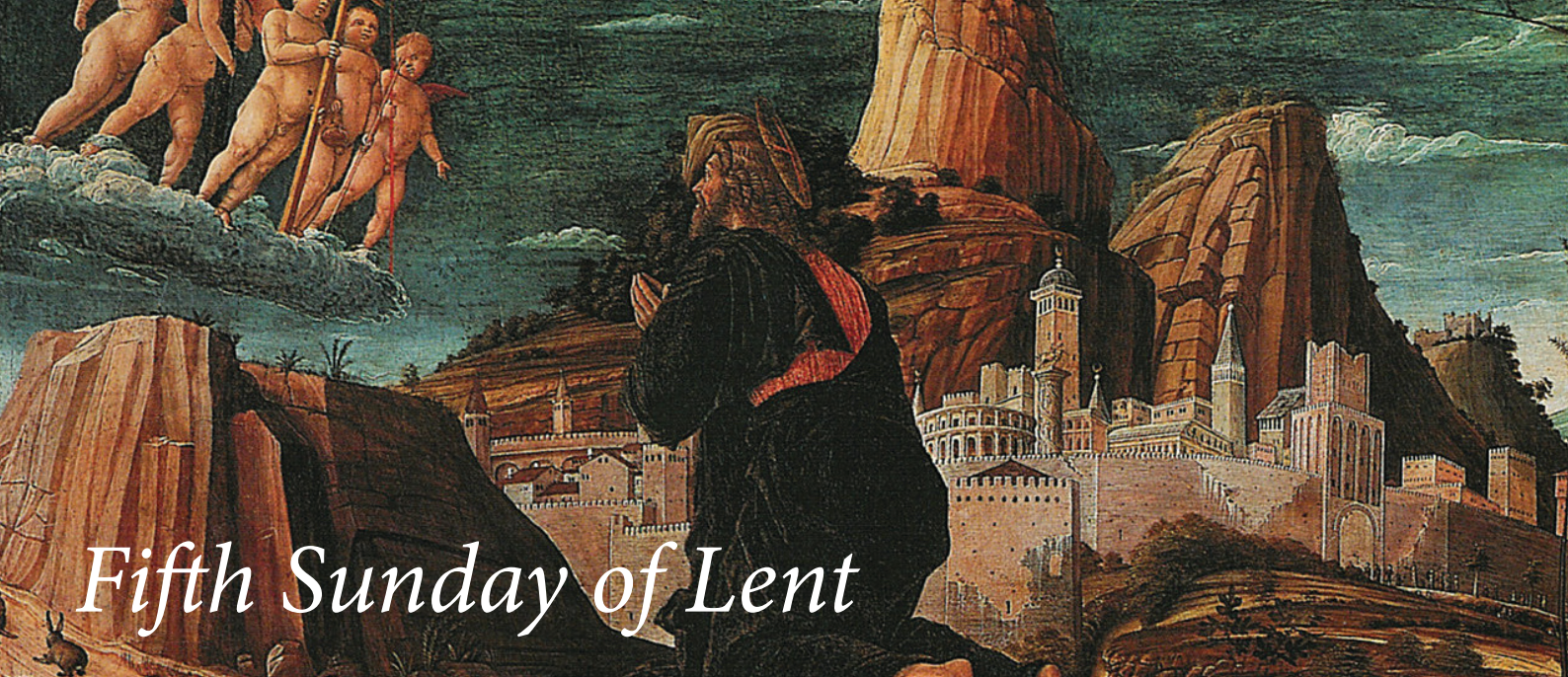
Closing Prayer

Merciful Father, thank you for your great love for me. Though I may try to justify myself to you, help me to allow you to know my heart; to see me, and to love me. By the power of the Holy Spirit, draw me out of the darkness of sin and into the light of your Son, Jesus Christ.

Questions

1. Which word or phrase of the Gospel or the reflection spoke to me, and what might God be saying to me?
2. In which moments of my life has Jesus drawn me out of the darkness of sin, and into His light?
3. Whom will I encourage this week to trust and believe in the love of God?

Jesus Christ and Nicodemus by Matthias Stom, circa between 1640 and 1650. Credit: picryl.com / Public Domain



Fifth Sunday of Lent

Opening Prayer

Loving Jesus, we give you thanks for the great blessing of this Season of Lent. As we take time to reflect on your Word in this Gospel passage and reflection, help us to recognise our need to repent and believe. May we come to know how much we need you, and how others rely on us to know of your abundant love for them.

Gospel of St John 12:20-33

Among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. These approached Philip, who came from Bethsaida in Galilee, and put this request to him, 'Sir, we should like to see Jesus.' Philip went to tell Andrew, and Andrew and Philip together went to tell Jesus. Jesus replied to them:

'Now the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you, most solemnly, unless a wheat grain falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest. Anyone who loves his life loses it; anyone who hates his life in this world will keep it for the eternal life. If a man serves me, he must follow me, wherever I am, my servant will be there too. If anyone serves me, my Father will honour him. Now my soul is troubled. What shall I say: Father, save me from this hour? But it was for this very reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name!'

A voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.' People standing by, who heard this, said it was a clap of thunder; others said, 'It was an angel speaking to him.' Jesus answered, 'It was not for my sake that this voice came, but for yours.'

'Now sentence is being passed on this world; now the prince of this world is to be overthrown. And when I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all men to myself.'

By these words he indicated the kind of death he would die.

Gospel Reflection

By Hazel Lim

In both obvious and in more subtle ways, our current sociocultural environment prescribes 'putting yourself first' as a supposed path to happiness and attaining the best life. Our Gospel reading challenges this notion and presents a starkly different, less comforting approach – we are invited by Jesus to 'die to ourselves' in order to enter into the fullness of life.

Like the visitors at the Passover Festival, we yearn to 'see Jesus' and experience His grace, mercy, and love. In His response to Phillip and Andrew, Jesus proclaims "unless a wheat grain falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest" (John 12:24). In foreshadowing His own sacrifice upon the Cross, Jesus also teaches and invites the disciples to empty themselves in love, dying to sin in order to make room for God's grace to work in us and penetrate our hearts, and by this way transform the world. It is in embracing

“Like the Blessed Mother and the great saints, we empty ourselves to be filled by grace, becoming children of light—Christ’s light—in the world.”

this Paschal Way that we can truly, completely, and intimately 'see' Jesus.

Our dying makes space for new life to arise. Immersed and renewed in God's overflowing love, we return to our true identities as God's children, and experience the abundance of life

that only a radical surrender to God makes possible. We see with new eyes, and love with a new heart. Like the Blessed Mother and the great saints, we empty ourselves to be filled by grace, becoming children of light—Christ's light—in the world (John 12:36).

The promise of new life is proven in Jesus' death and resurrection. He is the single grain that has become the Bread of Life. As we relive

the Sacrifice of the Cross, the finding of an empty tomb, and the dawn of a new day this Holy Week, may we be assured in faith that the demands of self-giving love are the path to life in its fullness, to life everlasting.



Closing Prayer

Merciful Father, thank you for your great love for me. Teach me to empty myself to you. By the power of the Holy Spirit, may I desire to die to sin in order to make room for your grace in my life, and allow my heart to be penetrated by the healing love of your Son, Jesus Christ.

Questions

1. Which word or phrase of the Gospel or the reflection spoke to me, and what might God be saying to me?
2. Do I really yearn to see Jesus? How can I make small acts of self-giving love this week so that I can experience His grace, love and mercy?
3. How can I encourage another person to make a radical surrender to God?

The Agony in the Garden by Andrea Mantegna, c. circa from 1455 until 1456. Credit: Art Gallery ErgsArt / Flickr, Public Domain



Palm Sunday

Opening Prayer

Loving Jesus, we give you thanks for the great blessing of this Season of Lent. As we take time to reflect on your Word in this Gospel passage and reflection, help us to recognise our need to repent and believe. May we come to know how much we need you, and how others rely on us to know of your abundant love for them.

*Gospel of St Mark 15:16-39**

The soldiers led him away to the inner part of the palace, that is, the Praetorium, and called the whole cohort together. They dressed him up in purple, twisted some thorns into a crown and put it on him. And they began saluting him, 'Hail, king of the Jews!' They struck his head with a reed and spat on him; and they went down on their knees to do him homage. And when they had finished making fun of him, they took off the purple and dressed him in his own clothes. They led him out to crucify him. They enlisted a passer-by, Simon of Cyrene, father of Alexander and Rufus, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross. They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha, which means the place of the skull. They offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he refused it. Then they crucified him, and shared out his clothing, casting lots to decide what each should get. It was the third hour when they crucified him. The inscription giving the charge against him read: 'The King of the Jews'. And they crucified two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left. The passers-by jeered at him; they shook their heads and said, 'Aha! So you would destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days! Then save yourself: come down from the cross!' The chief priests and the scribes mocked him among themselves in the same way. 'He saved others,' they said 'he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the king of Israel, come down from the cross now, for us to see it and believe.' Even those who were crucified with him taunted him. When the sixth hour came there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' which means, 'My God, my God, why have you deserted me?' When some of those who stood by heard this, they said, 'Listen, he is calling on Elijah.' Someone ran and soaked a sponge in vinegar and, putting it on a reed, gave it him to drink, saying, 'Wait and see if Elijah will come to take him down.' But Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the veil of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The centurion, who was standing in front of him, had seen how he had died, and he said, 'In truth this man was a son of God.'

** Excerpt from Mark 15:1-39*

Gospel Reflection

By Fr Sam Lynch

Compassion means to 'suffer with.' During Lent, the Church calls upon us to have compassion on Jesus Christ by contemplating His suffering and death. This active reception of the Word of God brings healing for us since "by his wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5). This is a great mystery: a reality that we cannot ever fully grasp, but can only enter into more and more deeply. By contemplating the Word of God, we encounter Him. In encountering Him, we receive His grace, and are transformed.

At the start of Holy Week, as we join the procession of people acclaiming Jesus as the King of Israel, the Church immediately directs our eyes towards His suffering and death, for His is not an earthly Kingdom (cf John 18:36). St Mark relates to us that Jesus gave up His spirit upon saying the words "My God, My

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His grace, and are
transformed..."*

God, why have you deserted me?" These words are the opening line of Psalm 22, in which is related what has just been seen: the Lord's garments are divided among the soldiers, they throw dice for

His robe; His hands and feet are pierced as they nail Him to the cross; He is mocked and derided by all who pass by.

Despite its first line, and its grim prophecy, Psalm 22 does not end in despair. Rather, it is an expression of hope and trust in the God of Israel and His salvation.

St Mark relates how witnessing the saving death of Jesus Christ affected the Centurion, the leader of the Roman soldiers who were putting Him to death; seeing how Jesus had died, he said: "Truly, this man was a Son of God." Standing beside the Cross of Christ, as we enter compassionately into the scene, *our* faith is also renewed.



Closing Prayer

Merciful Father, thank you for your great love for me. Help me to encounter you, to receive your grace, and to be transformed. By the power of the Holy Spirit, may my faith be strengthened and renewed this week as I contemplate the suffering and death of your Son, Jesus Christ.

Questions

1. Which word or phrase of the Gospel or the reflection spoke to me, and what might God be saying to me?
2. In which way can I be renewed in my faith this week, and stand beside the Cross of Christ?
3. How can I help others to enter into the scene of Jesus' Passion and Death this week?

The Crucifixion by Giambattista Tiepolo, c. 1745–50. Credit: Saint Louis Art Museum / Public Domain



Easter Sunday

Opening Prayer

Loving Jesus, we give you thanks for the great blessing of this Season of Lent. As we take time to reflect on your Word in this Gospel passage and reflection, help us to recognise our need to repent and believe. May we come to know how much we need you, and how others rely on us to know of your abundant love for them.

Gospel of St Mark 16:1-8

When the sabbath was over, Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices with which to go and anoint him. And very early in the morning on the first day of the week they went to the tomb, just as the sun was rising. They had been saying to one another, 'Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?' But when they looked they could see that the stone – which was very big – had already been rolled back. On entering the tomb they saw a young man in a white robe seated on the right-hand side, and they were struck with amazement. But he said to them, 'There is no need for alarm. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified: he has risen, he is not here. See, here is the place where they laid him. But you must go and tell his disciples and Peter, "He is going before you to Galilee; it is there you will see him, just as he told you."'

Gospel Reflection

By Fr Richard Sofatzis

Three women with hearts deeply moved by a sorrowful love for their Lord, Jesus, rise very early to anoint His dead body—without even giving a thought to the difficulties of rolling back the stone. One of the women, Mary Magdalene, had already been filled with Jesus' forgiving and merciful love when He saved her from the affliction of as many as seven demons. Mary was drawn to Jesus through an outpouring of His love, and with her heart burning with this gift, she accompanied Jesus to His last agony as He hung dying on the Cross. And yet now, in Mary's eyes, it looks like all hope is lost: Jesus is dead.

In this moment of confusion, Christ strikes Mary's heart once more, this time with amazement: "You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified: he has risen, he is not here." By His death on the Cross, Jesus transformed an act of destruction into

an act of love—a prayer to the Father for all mankind. And now, by His resurrection, Jesus reveals this love and proclaims definitively: the love of God is mightier than death!

At the Easter Vigil, as the priest lights the Paschal Candle from the fire he proclaims:

"May the light of Christ rising in glory dispel the darkness of our hearts and minds." The resurrection of Christ shocks us with the reality that our human vision for life, for meaning, for purpose, is too limited—God's ways are beyond our wildest expectations!

The Virgin Mary stood with these three other women at the Cross but is now noticeably absent.

For only she preserved the light amidst the great darkness, holding fast to the promises of her Son. Imploring her help, may we believe and, filled with love mightier than death, bear the light of Christ to the world!

"The resurrection of Christ shocks us with the reality that our human vision for life, for meaning, for purpose, is too limited—God's ways are beyond our wildest expectations!"



Closing Prayer

Merciful Father, thank you for your great love for me. In this Easter Season, enlighten my vision for life, meaning, and purpose. By the power of the Holy Spirit, help me to rejoice with confidence knowing that your love is mightier than death—even the death of your Son, Jesus Christ.

Questions

1. Which word or phrase of the Gospel or the reflection spoke to me, and what might God be saying to me?
2. When is a moment in my life when I have experienced that God's ways are beyond my wildest expectations?
3. How will I reveal the joy of the Risen Christ this Easter to those who are in need of His light?

The Holy Women at Christ's Tomb by Annibale Carracci, c. late 16th century. Credit: Lluís Ribes Mateu / Flickr, CC BY-NC 2.0 DEED

STATIONS OF THE CROSS

MEDITATIONS AND PRAYERS BY SAINT JOHN PAUL II

After announcing each station, repeat the following:

Prayer: *We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.* Response: *Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.*



Station 1: Jesus is condemned to death

"You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice." Pilate said in answer: "What is truth?" Jesus, the Son of the living God, the Redeemer of the world, [was] condemned to death by crucifixion. Over the centuries the denial of truth has spawned suffering and death.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, you accepted an unjust judgment. Grant to us and to all the men and women of our time the grace to remain faithful to the truth. Do not allow the weight of responsibility for the sufferings of the innocent to fall upon us and upon those who come after us. To you, O Jesus, just Judge, be honour and glory for ever and ever. *Our Father...Hail Mary...Glory be...*



Station 2: Jesus takes up his Cross

The moment that Jesus of Nazareth took up the Cross in order to carry it to Calvary marked a turning-point in the history of the cross. The symbol of a shameful death, reserved for the lowest classes, the cross becomes a key. From now on, with the help of this key, man will open the door of the deepest mystery of God.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, who accepted the Cross at the hands of men to make of it the sign of God's saving love for humanity, grant us and all the men and women of our time the grace of faith in this infinite love. By passing on to the new millennium the sign of the Cross, may we be authentic witnesses to the Redemption. To you, O Jesus, Priest and Victim, be praise and glory for ever. *Our Father...Hail Mary...Glory be...*



Station 3: Jesus falls the first time

It was our sins that crushed the divine Condemned One to the ground. It was our sins that determined the weight of the Cross that he carries on his shoulders. It was our sins that made him fall. The Redeemer of the world addresses in a wordless way all those who fall. He exhorts them to get up again.

Prayer: O Christ, as you fall under the weight of our faults and rise again for our justification, we pray, help us and all who are weighed down by sin to stand up again and continue the journey. Give us the strength of the Spirit to carry with you the cross of our weakness. To you, O Jesus, crushed under the weight of our faults be our praise and love for ever. *Our Father...Hail Mary...Glory be...*

Meditation and Prayers by Saint John Paul II (abridged)
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Station 4: Jesus meets his Mother

On the way of the Cross Mary shows herself to be the Mother of the Redeemer of the world. It is the Sorrowful Mother who speaks, the Handmaid who is obedient to the last, the Mother of the Redeemer of the world.

Prayer: O Mary, who walked the way of the Cross with your Son, your mother's heart torn by grief, but mindful always of your fiat and fully confident that He to whom nothing is impossible would be able to fulfil his promises, implore for us and for the generations yet to come the grace of surrender to God's love. Help us, in the face of suffering, rejection, and trial, however prolonged and severe, never to doubt his love. To Jesus, your Son, honour and glory for ever and ever. *Our Father...Hail Mary...Glory be...*

Station 5: Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus to carry his Cross

We can imagine that Simon did not want to do this and objected. Carrying the cross together with a convict could be considered an act offensive to the dignity of a free man. In a unique way, the Son of God has made him a sharer in his work of salvation.

Prayer: O Christ, you gave to Simon of Cyrene the dignity of carrying your Cross. Welcome us too under its weight, welcome all men and women and grant to everyone the gift of readiness to serve. Do not permit that we should turn away from those who are crushed by the cross of illness, loneliness, hunger or injustice. As we carry each other's burdens, help us to become witnesses to the gospel of the Cross and witnesses to you, who live and reign for ever and ever. *Our Father...Hail Mary...Glory be...*

Station 6: Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

The Redeemer of the world presents Veronica with an authentic image of his face. The veil upon which the face of Christ remains imprinted becomes a message for us. In a certain sense it says: This is how every act of goodness, every gesture of true love towards one's neighbour, strengthens the likeness of the Redeemer of the world in the one who acts that way.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, you accepted a woman's selfless gesture of love, and in exchange ordained that future generations should remember her by the name of your face. Grant that our works and the works of all who will come after us will make us like unto you and will leave in the world the reflection of your infinite love. To you, O Jesus, splendour of the Father's glory, be praise and glory for ever. *Our Father...Hail Mary...Glory be...*

Station 7: Jesus falls the second time

Here in the dust of the earth lies the Condemned One. Crushed by the weight of his Cross. His strength drains away from him more and more. But with great effort he gets up again to continue his march. To us sinners, what does this second fall say? More than the first one, it seems to urge us to get up, to get up again on our way of the cross.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, you fall under the weight of human sin and you get up again in order to take it upon yourself and cancel it. Give to us, weak men and women, the strength to carry the cross of daily life and to get up again from our falls, so that we may bring to future generations the Gospel of your saving power. To you, O Jesus, our support when we are weak, be praise and glory for ever. *Our Father...Hail Mary...Glory be...*



STATIONS OF THE CROSS

MEDITATIONS AND PRAYERS BY SAINT JOHN PAUL II

After announcing each station, repeat the following:

Prayer: *We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.* Response: *Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.*



Station 8: Jesus speaks to the women of Jerusalem

“Do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.” These are the words of Jesus to the women of Jerusalem who were weeping with compassion for the Condemned One...If, as we follow Christ on the way of the Cross, our hearts are moved with pity for his suffering, we cannot forget that admonition.

Prayer: O Christ, you came into this world to visit all those who await salvation. Grant that our generation will recognize the time of its visitation and share in the fruits of your redemption. Do not permit that there should be weeping for us and for the men and women of the new century because we have rejected our merciful Father's outstretched hand. To you, O Jesus, born of the Virgin Daughter of Zion, be honour and praise for ever and ever. *Our Father...Hail Mary...Glory be...*



Station 9: Jesus falls the third time

Falling to the ground for the third time on the way of the Cross, he cries out loudly to us once more the mystery of himself. Let us listen to his voice! This Condemned Man, crushed to the ground beneath the weight of the Cross, now very near the place of punishment, tells us: “I am the way, and the truth and the life.” (Jn 14:6)

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, through your humiliation beneath the Cross you revealed to the world the price of its redemption. Grant to the men and women of the third millennium the light of faith, so that, as they recognize in you the Suffering Servant of God and man, they may have the courage to follow the same path which, by way of the Cross and self-emptying, leads to life without end. To you, O Jesus, our support when we are weak, be honour and glory for ever. *Our Father...Hail Mary...Glory be...*



Station 10: Jesus is stripped and offered gall and vinegar to drink

“When he tasted it, he would not drink it” (Mt 27:34). He did not want a sedative, which would have dulled his consciousness during the agony. He wanted to be fully aware as he suffered on the Cross, accomplishing the mission he had received from the Father.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, who, with supreme dedication, accepted death on the Cross for our salvation, grant to us and to all the world's people a share in your sacrifice on the Cross, so that what we are and what we do may always be a free and conscious sharing in your work of salvation. To you, O Jesus, Priest and Victim, be honour and glory for ever. *Our Father...Hail Mary...Glory be...*

Station 11: Jesus is nailed to the Cross

From the Cross, Christ draws us by the power of love, divine Love, which did not recoil from the total gift of self; infinite Love, which on the tree of the Cross raised up from the earth the weight of Christ's body, to counterbalance the weight of the first sin; boundless Love, which has utterly filled every absence of love and allowed humanity to find refuge once more in the arms of the merciful Father.

Prayer: O Christ lifted high, O Love crucified, fill our hearts with your love, that we may see in your Cross the sign of our redemption and, drawn by your wounds, we may live and die with you, who live and reign with the Father and the Spirit, now and for ever. *Our Father...Hail Mary...Glory be...*



Station 12: Jesus dies on the Cross

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Lk 23:34). At the height of his Passion, Christ does not forget man, especially those who are directly responsible for his suffering. Jesus knows that more than anything else man needs love; he needs the mercy which at this moment is being poured out on the world.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, in the moment of your agony you were not indifferent to humanity's fate, and with your last breath you entrusted to the Father's mercy the men and women of every age, with all their weaknesses and sins. Fill us and the generations yet to come with your Spirit of love, so that our indifference will not render vain in us the fruits of your death. To you, crucified Jesus, the wisdom and the power of God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. *Our Father...Hail Mary...Glory be...*



Station 13: Jesus is taken down from the Cross and given to his Mother

In the arms of his Mother they have placed the lifeless body of the Son. The Gospels say nothing of what she felt at that moment. It is as though by their silence the Evangelists wished to respect her sorrow, her feelings and her memories. Or that they simply felt incapable of expressing them.

Prayer: Implore for us the grace of faith, hope and charity, so that we, like you, may stand without flinching beneath the Cross until our last breath. To your Son, Jesus, our Saviour, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, all honour and glory for ever and ever. *Our Father...Hail Mary...Glory be...*



Station 14: Jesus is laid in the tomb

The lifeless body of Christ has been laid in the tomb. But the stone of the tomb is not the final seal on his work. The last word belongs not to falsehood, hatred and violence. The last word will be spoken by Love, which is stronger than death.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, you were drawn by the Father from the darkness of death to the light of a new life in glory. Grant that the sign of the empty tomb may speak to us and to future generations and become a wellspring of living faith, generous love, and unshakeable hope. To you, O Jesus, whose presence, hidden and victorious, fills the history of the world, be honour and glory for ever and ever. *Our Father...Hail Mary...Glory be...*



AN AID TO YOUR EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

BY ARCHBISHOP ANTHONY FISHER OP

I am the Lord your God: you shall not put other gods before me.

Positive value: Reverence for God.

- What are my priorities in life? Do I put God first and love Him with all my heart or do I put something or someone before God?
- Do I pray daily?
- Do I receive the teachings of Christ and His Church with an open heart and profess them openly? Or have I resisted less convenient teachings or denied them so as to get along?
- Do I receive Holy Communion often (at least annually in Eastertide), and prepare well for this? Or have I gone to Communion thoughtlessly, ungratefully or without first confessing grave sins?
- Do I go to Confession whenever I have committed a serious sin and am I honest when I go to Confession?
- Have I engaged in any occult, satanic or superstitious practices?
- Have I avoided activities that I know can be occasions of sin for me?

You shall not take God's name in vain.

Positive value: Respect for the things of God.

- Do I give due honour to God, His holy name, sacred ministers and sacred things?
- Have I used the name of the Lord (God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit...) disrespectfully, or the names of Mary or the saints?
- Have I deliberately harboured hatred or resentment towards God?
- Have I cursed or wished evil on another person?
- Have I lied under oath or violated a vow?

Keep the Lord's Day holy.

Positive value: Worship of God.

- Do I make worship of God a priority in my life?
- Is Sunday my day of rest, prayer and dedication to my family, avoiding unnecessary work and shopping?
- Have I missed Mass on Sunday without a serious reason? Or on a Holy Day of Obligation (in Australia: 25 December and 15 August)?
- Do I try to be there for all of Mass and try to be engaged with God, his Word and the sacred actions while I am there?
- Do I fast and do penance at the proper times (Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, other Fridays)? Do I fast for an hour before receiving Holy Communion?

Honour your father and mother.

Positive value: Reverence for family.

- Do I love, honour and respect my parents, other older people, and those in authority?
- Have I shown appropriate care for my spouse, children, siblings, other family?
- Have I neglected the aged, sick or lonely?
- Have I tried to ensure that my children receive the sacraments, are given good religious instruction and practice their faith?

You shall not kill.

Positive value: Reverence for life.

- Do I uphold the dignity of every person?
- Do I love others appropriately and forgive those who hurt me? Or do I harbour hatred, grudges or prejudices?
- Have I deliberately harmed someone, physically, emotionally, or in reputation?
- Do I care for my own physical, emotional, and spiritual health?
- Have I abused alcohol or drugs or driven 'under the influence'? Do I act recklessly?
- Have I had an abortion or helped someone else to have one?

VI You shall not commit adultery.

Positive value: Reverence for sex and the body.

- Do I reverence my own body and have I been faithful to my state in life (married, vowed, single)?
- Am I a flirt? Have I engaged in immodest or sexually inappropriate behaviour?
- Do I honour my own marriage / family and support others in their family life?
- Have I committed sexual acts outside of marriage?
- Have I used bad language or told impure jokes?
- Have I used or encouraged others to use contraception or sterilisation?
- Have I viewed pornographic magazines, film or websites?

VII You shall not steal.

Positive value: Reverence for earthly goods.

- Do I honour the goods of the earth and of other people and try to contribute to the improvement of this world?
- Do I share with those in need, giving generously to charities and contributing to the material needs of the Church?
- Have I stolen, pirated or damaged other people's property?
- Have I cheated someone or failed to make just restitution?
- Do I gamble excessively or spend wastefully?
- Do I act justly with respect to my employer, employees and in my tax affairs?

VIII You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

Positive value: Reverence for truth.

- Do I always seek to know and speak and live by the truth? Or have I lied, exaggerated or sworn falsely?
- Do I gossip or reveal confidences without good reason?
- Have I damaged someone's good name or failed to defend those unjustly criticised?
- Have I plagiarised or been academically dishonest?

IX You shall not covet your neighbour's wife or people.

Positive value: Reverence for persons.

- Do I reverence other people's bodies and state in life?
- Do I guard my senses, imagination and memory? Or have I wilfully lusted after another person or entertained impure thoughts?
- Am I envious of the abilities, talents, beauty, friendships or success of others?
- Do I ridicule, humiliate or manipulate others?
- Do I encourage others to live good lives? Or have I encouraged them to engage in a sin or wrongly assisted them in doing so?

X You shall not covet your neighbour's goods.

Positive value: Reverence for higher things.

- Do I put the higher things first in my life or am I materialistic and part of the consumer culture?
- Am I excessively attached to material goods or envious of what others have?
- Do I show respect for the earth? Or do I unnecessarily damage the ecology?
- Have I desired or planned to steal, destroy or damage the property of another?
- Do I trust God to provide or fail to be grateful when He does?

"Merciful
and gracious
is the Lord,
slow to anger,
abounding in
mercy."
(Ps 103:8)



A Prayer for Renewal



lessed are you, Father,
who, in your infinite love
sent us your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ,
that we may have life, and have it in abundance.

By the power of the Holy Spirit,
renew our Eucharistic communities.

May they be places of encounter
with the living Christ,
centres of evangelisation and outreach
to our community in love and mercy.

Grant us the gifts of faith, hope and love
to be faithful disciples of Jesus and
radiant witnesses to the people of Sydney.

Our Lady, Help of Christians. *Pray for us!*

Our Lady of Guadalupe, Star of the New Evangelisation. *Pray for us!*

St Mary of the Cross MacKillop. *Pray for us!*



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