Faith Sharing Booklet for Small Groups
Cycle B Sunday Readings &
Cycle A Scrutiny Readings
Lent 2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

Welcome to **Disciples on the Journey Lent 2021**!

We all find ourselves in a new world, so to speak, a world suffering from a pandemic, an economic, and a health crisis, and for some a faith crisis. However, we know and believe that Jesus, the Incarnate Word of God, came to earth as one of us to put skin on God and to show us how to live as his disciple.

Lent is an important liturgical season in the Church where we as the people of God make a long 40-day retreat in order to deepen our love relationship with God and to prepare our minds and hearts to celebrate the stupendous wonderful event of Jesus’ Resurrection!

**Disciples on the Journey** for the last 18 years has served to help countless Catholics on their Lenten journey by offering a resource that facilitates reflection, prayer, and faith sharing using the Lenten Sunday readings. It is designed to be used in small groups; however, it can be helpful for individual use also.

Because of all the uncertainties around the COVID19 pandemic, we decided to make our 2021 book available as a download at our website [www.discipleson the journey.org](http://www.discipleson the journey.org). The format is different, but the book has the same quality of reflections and material as before. We hope by the time Lent comes, people will be able to meet in small groups to share faith with one another physically or virtually. It is with great pleasure that we Sisters of the Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament make available once again **Disciples on the Journey** a Lenten lectionary faith-sharing resource in both English and Spanish. It is our hope and prayer that you will find **Disciples on the Journey Lent 2021** helpful on your Lenten journey.

Sincerely in the Incarnate Word,

Sister M. Kathleen Goike, IWB

General Superior of the Sisters of the Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament
Welcome To

Disciples on the Journey
A LENTEN FAITH SHARING RESOURCE FOR ADULTS

PARTICIPANTS and LEADERS
It is suggested that 90 minutes (1.5 hrs.) of time be allotted for each gathering. It is also recommended that groups have no more than 10 participants to allow adequate time for sharing.

Disciples on the Journey is NOT a Bible study, but rather is designed for faith sharing. For this reason, we ask that the commentary and Saint of the Week sections not be read at the session but at home before meeting. These two sections are enrichment and learning for participants that will prepare them for the discussion questions.

5 min. Welcome and Opening Prayer (by leader or group)

10 min. Report on personal and group actions for Living as Disciples of previous week. Week One use this time to have each person share why they have chosen to participate in Lenten faith sharing.

10 min. Read aloud all the Scriptures for the coming Sunday. Group members volunteer to read the Scriptures from their Bible.

45 min. Discuss Faith-Sharing Questions. Remember to speak from your experience. This is faith sharing.

10 min. Read Living as Disciples.

10 min. Closing Prayer and Ritual

*** See inside back cover for Tips and Suggestions for using Disciples on the Journey.

For the Teen and Family sections of Disciples on the Journey, and for the Evaluation form go to www.disciplesonthjourney.org.

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Tips and Suggestions for Using

Disciples on the Journey

GROUP LEADER: The environment should be conducive to faith sharing. Each week set up a prayer table with the necessary items for the closing rituals. Arrange seating to allow for everyone to see and hear. Adequate lighting is essential.

In order to keep with the allotted time, it may be helpful to assign a timekeeper. Ask for volunteers to read aloud each of the Scripture readings.

Make sure that no one dominates the sharing time. Try to encourage sharing by everyone, but do not insist that they share. It is not necessary to use all questions during faith sharing; what is important is that faith sharing occurs.

OPTIONAL: You may ask participants to take turns each week to bring refreshments.

GROUP PARTICIPANTS: Before your weekly faith-sharing session, prepare by reading the Scriptures, Commentary, Faith-Sharing Questions, Living as Disciples, Closing Prayer Ritual, and Saint of the Week.

GENERAL INFORMATION:

The aim of each section of Disciples on the Journey is to help participants to reflect on the Sunday readings and to live the Gospel in their daily lives.

1. Become familiar with all parts of Disciples on the Journey (DJ).
2. Prepare for faith sharing each week by reading the Scriptures and all sections of DJ. It is essential to reflect on the faith-sharing questions before each gathering.
3. Bring your Bible and DJ booklet to each session.
4. Get to know each person in your group.
5. Be open to the Spirit, and be willing to allow this time to enrich your faith and trust in God.
OPENING PRAYER
Jesus, Incarnate, we come ever ready to repent, to be renewed, and to live our Baptismal call wherever it may lead us. We implore you to strengthen us on our Lenten journey, forever mindful of your covenant agreement that promises love and mercy. We ask this in your name. Amen.

COMMENTARY ON THE WORD OF GOD
The readings for the First Sunday of Lent speak of a covenant agreement, of a Baptismal commitment, of a vulnerability, and of a need for God. We are reminded that as Noah, John the Baptist, and Jesus were strengthened by their relationship with God, so too are we. Our Baptism calls us to continue Jesus’ ministry of proclaiming the Kingdom of God.

A PROMISE KEPT
The first reading from Genesis tells the outcome of Noah’s flood experience and the establishment of a covenant – a relationship with God. God tells Noah and his family that the covenant is “between me and you and all living creatures” (Genesis 9:12). The all-knowing, loving, personal, and creator God of the universe establishes a relationship with human beings in this one act of mercy and love. God’s love for Noah is reflected in this biblical covenant with a rainbow, a sign and symbol of God’s presence. The rainbow, to this day, speaks of a promise, of an ever-presence with us, and of abundant blessings. Our challenge is to recall, to recognize, and to receive this gift – a covenant of love and life, mercy and compassion, hope and peace. It is in this binding agreement that we will find strength and courage to meet our daily challenges fully aware that the Holy One walks with us.

OUR NEED OF GOD
Knowing our need for salvation that comes only from the Holy One, Psalm 25 calls us to wait and trust in the Lord for God is eager to teach and guide us. Our task is to engage in the grace given and be transformed. God’s desire for us is simply that we choose life! (Quantum Grace, Judy Cannato).

A BAPTISMAL REMINDER
In this Sunday’s second reading, St. Peter reminds us of our Baptismal call to live in hope, recalling that we have been saved through the sufferings of Christ. As Noah’s family was saved through water, so Christians are saved through the waters of Baptism (cf. 1 Peter 3:19-22). Greek scholar A. T. Robertson and author Karl Jacobson remind us that “we are baptized in Christ’s name, delivered from the power of sin through his suffering, and so saved”, stirring in us the importance of patient endurance. John W. Martens, in his writings on this passage, encourages us to grasp fearlessly our baptismal mission.
AN ENCOUNTER
In the prologue of Mark’s Gospel, we encounter John the Baptist, witness Jesus’ baptism, and enter the desert with Jesus. The ending of today’s Gospel passage has Jesus proclaiming the Kingdom of God as he begins his public ministry.

John the Baptist, forerunner and announcer of his cousin Jesus, encounters him at his baptism in the Jordan River. This baptism inaugurates Jesus’ public ministry and unveils his identity. A dove, symbol of the Spirit, descends on Jesus and a voice from heaven reveals, “you are my Son, the Beloved; my favor rests on you” (Mark 1:11). Through this life-giving baptism with the Holy Spirit, Jesus is being anointed for his ministry (The Catholic Bible (Personal Study Edition) NAB).

However, before beginning his ministry “…the Spirit drove him out into the desert” (1:12) where Jesus remained for forty days. This is reminiscent of the Hebrews of old, entering this period of testing by Satan. In contrast to his forefathers, Jesus overcomes the trial and remains faithful to his Father. He prefers the Word of God to bread, trust to a striking miracle, and the service of God to all hope of earthly domination (Dictionary of Biblical Theology – Xavier Leon-Dufour, p 123).

Judy Cannato, in her reflections of the desert experience of Jesus, tells us that temptations “…expose our hearts. In Jesus’ own desert experience his heart is rent, his longing exposed, and this opening of his heart seems to prepare him for the mission that is to be his life and his death – the fulfillment of the covenant established with Noah.”

Anselm Hutstader in his writings on the desert temptations states “…that Lent also calls us to the desert, a place we rarely visit. It is a place where the Lord will pass; a place where we are exposed to him. There is no hiding, just barren reality. No masks!” Our exposure, our vulnerability is laid before God, in order that we may be healed, receive mercy, and experience the power of grace to be renewed. Is this not what Lent calls us to embrace?

It is in these encounters with John the Baptist, God the Father, and Satan, that Jesus is strengthened for his public ministry. His mission is clear: to preach God’s reign faithfully, even if it would lead to his death. Jesus’ mission challenges us to “repent and believe in the Gospel” (1:15c). Lent reminds us ever so poignantly of this theme of turning from (repentance) to turning toward (belief). Noah experienced God’s promise of new life as he exited the Ark. Lent gives us the opportunity to also experience this promise so that we can accept and live our Baptismal Covenant more deeply. This Lent will I allow myself to be led by the Spirit to be cleansed and renewed?

Sister Kathleen Goike, IWBS
Incarnate Word Convent, Victoria, TX
SAINT OF THE WEEK  
Sister Dulce Lopes Pontes  
1914-1992 *Canonized in 2019

Sister Dulce Lopes Pontes was born Maria Rita de Souza Pontes into an upper middle-class family in Brazil in 1914. Her mother died when she was small, so she went to live with her aunts. One of them took her to see the poor area of the city which inspired her to help the poor and homeless in her neighborhood. As a child, she had a strong devotion to St. Theresa of the Child Jesus and wanted to join the convent; however, her father was not happy with the idea and wanted her to become a teacher. Finally, when she had graduated from high school at the age of 18, her father allowed her to enter the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God. She ministered to the poor and the destitute and housed them in abandoned buildings from which they were repeatedly evicted. She appealed to her Mother Superior who gave her the use of the convent henhouse on the condition that she take care of the chickens. She ended up feeding the chickens to her poor patients. She spent her life taking care of the poor through health care and education. She was noted for her care of the underprivileged and was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by the President of Brazil. Known as the “Mother Theresa of Brazil,” she died at the age of 77 on March 13, 1992 and was canonized on October 13, 2019.

Memory Verse
“Repent and believe in the Gospel.”
Mark 1:15

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS
Discuss the following questions.

1. In contemplating God’s covenant agreement/relationship with me, what image comes to mind to describe this relationship? Explain.

2. How attentive am I to God’s voice that calls me to be faithful to my commitments? What deters me from hearing God’s voice and not living my commitment?

3. The Letter of St. Peter gives practical advice in how to live our Baptismal call. What advice would I give to anyone desiring Baptism that would challenge me and them to live out our call?

4. In today’s Gospel, we encounter Jesus in the desert being tempted. Upon reflecting on my experience with the Pandemic, what temptations did I experience? How did this experience draw me closer to God?

5. What do I plan to do these 40 days of Lent in order to open my heart and be renewed and transform to be more like Jesus?

LIVING AS DISCIPLES
Select one or more of the following actions, or one of your own choosing, to do this week. Be prepared to share with your group how this experience affected your faith journey.

1. Pray for the Elect who will participate in the Rite of Election at the Cathedral or other designated church. Attend the Rite if possible.

2. Discern your Lenten practices and choose one to focus on this first week of Lent.
3. With your baptismal certificate or some other remembrance of your Baptism, spend some time in a prayer of reflection, rededication, and commitment of this important event in your life when you became a son or daughter of God and a member of the Church. Display these objects where you will be reminded throughout the week of the importance of this sacrament in your life.

4. Draw or find a picture that depicts the image of your relationship with God and spend some time reflecting and praying with this image. You may want to put this on your home altar during Lent or use as a bookmark.

5. Pray and reflect on the Memory Verse.

CLOSING PRAYER AND RITUAL

Gather around a table with a crucifix, a Bible, a bowl of water, and a candle for each participant.

Reader: The readings call us to a change, a renewal – a kind of rebirth. We gather having reflected on our call to enter the desert of Lent in order to encounter Jesus, opening our hearts and exposing ourselves without masks. It is in this stance that we are able to overcome our temptations professing our belief in God.

Leader: Do you renounce Satan? All: I do.

Leader: And all his works? All: I do.

Leader: And all his empty show? All: I do.

Leader: Do you believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth? All: I do.

Leader: Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered death and was buried, rose again from the dead and is seated at the right hand of the Father? All: I do.

Leader: Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting? All: I do.

All: This is our faith! Let us go forth as we sign ourselves with holy water to live and proclaim our belief in God.
OPENING PRAYER
God of every generation, send forth your Holy Spirit to guide us on our Lenten journey. As you took aside your disciples and revealed your glory to them, so too take us aside and teach us of your merciful love in every moment of life. We praise you and place our trust completely in your most Holy Name. Amen.

SUSPENSE AND SURPRISE
The Book of Genesis is filled with suspense and surprises as God unfolds his plan for his chosen people. At every moment where it seems the promise may be lost God intervenes for the good of Abraham and his descendants. The history of the children of Abraham is not a collection of random events, it is a collection of stories which have a lesson for our current generation. The willingness of Abraham to trust God completely and the promise of the Lord to bless all the nations of the earth through the children of Abraham are stories that continue to teach in the present age.

ANSWERED PRAYERS
In Psalm 116 the Psalmist rejoices in a healing received from God, and offers prayers in front of the people acknowledging God’s goodness. It sounds like the situation was pretty severe, as in earlier verses the writer admitted that the “snares of death encompassed me,” and he “suffered distress and anguish.” The Psalm today is a prayer of acknowledgement that God heard the prayer from the heart and responded.

MEANING
The closing words of the Gospel on this Second Sunday of Lent recall one of the most memorable conversations among the disciples. After witnessing the glorious Transfiguration of Jesus, the disciples Peter, James, and John questioned among themselves “what rising from the dead meant.” (Mk. 9:10) This discussion may point to the most significant question each of us asks: “What does it mean for me that Jesus died and rose from the dead?”

St. Paul, writing to the Christian community in Rome, shared about his own answer to this most crucial question. From his personal experience of transformation, he confidently proclaimed that the Risen Lord conquered every power of sin and death. There is nothing for the Christian to fear. At the same time that he joyfully professed this victory, he joyfully acknowledged that in this present age the Christian will suffer greatly. For St. Paul did not experience the crucifixion of the Lord as a one-time event of the past, he knew that the saving power of the Cross continued to heal. As one Scripture scholar wrote, “I am still hanging with Christ on that cross.” (James D.G. Dunn, The Theology of Paul the Apostle, Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI, 1998, p. 485)
It seems strange that we could be joyful in suffering. The joy must come in the acknowledgement that our prayers for healing are heard and there is resurrection on the other side of the Cross. The new life of Christianity is not a running away from the human condition, it is a fully entering into every aspect of humanity with the confidence of the crucified and glorified Lord.

TAKEN BY THE HAND
The Gospel of Mark records another time when Jesus took with him Peter, James and John. In Mark 14:33 Jesus takes them to the Garden of Gethsemane to be with him as he was “distressed”, “agitated” and “deeply grieved.” It seems that the Greek word used for “taking” them – *paralambano* - can have a sense like a teacher taking students to a special place where they can learn a powerful lesson. Experience teaches. The hour in the Garden of Gethsemane also revealed the glory of God, not in the dazzlingly white clothes of the Transfiguration but in the blood-drenched sweat of the Agony. The disciples must have had intense conversations after both events and these two scenes help to give meaning to suffering, death and resurrection.

They teach us about freedom. There may have been a tendency after the Transfiguration for the disciples to think that Jesus would bring about the freedom of Israel through an awesome act of power and the physical destruction of enemies. Jesus brought about the freedom of humanity through an awesome act of love and sacrifice for the healing, forgiveness and reconciliation of enemies. Jesus freely accepted his suffering and death, and from the painful cries on the cross he spoke words of love and forgiveness. The disciples witnessed this freedom to love when they overheard him crying in the Garden: “Not what I want but what you want.” (Mk. 14:36)

They teach us about self-offering. The free offering of self-will, with confidence in the glory of the Resurrection, is at the heart of our Christian faith. This offering can open the way to healing and wholeness for the human person. The “Big Book” of Alcoholics Anonymous writes about an abandonment of self-will to God with a beautiful prayer: “God, I offer myself to Thee – to build with me and do with me as Thou wilt. Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Thy will. Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Thy power, Thy love, and Thy way of life. May I do Thy will always!” (p. 63).

They teach us about presence. In both instances Jesus took the initiative and spent time with the disciples. He invited them to spend some time with him. The personal relationship among them was the foundation for the learning and the later reflection of the disciples on the events that happened. It’s almost like they didn’t understand the significance of the events as they occurred, but later on when they were talking about it among themselves and with their friends, they gained a greater understanding. And they must have remembered their conversations after witnessing the Transfiguration. Eventually they learned from experience - this is what rising from the dead means – that every moment of suffering and sacrifice can be transformed by a human will that surrender to the will of the Father.

The Most Reverend Brendan J. Cahill  
Bishop of the Diocese of Victoria in Texas
SAINT OF THE WEEK
Marguerite Bays
1815-1879 *Canonized in 2019

Marguerite Bays was born in Switzerland in 1815, the second of seven children in a family of farmers. At the age of fifteen she was apprenticed to a seamstress where she learned a skill that she used all her life. She was a devout young woman who spent her spare time working in her parish, encouraging others in prayer, teaching catechism, visiting the sick, and taking care of the poor. When she was old enough, she joined the Secular Franciscan Order. When people asked her why she didn’t enter a religious order, she told them that her way of serving God was to daily serve the family at home as a lay person.

Marguerite took care of her extended family without complaining in spite of numerous difficulties, including her own very painful intestinal cancer. She was healed when Pope Pius IX proclaimed the dogma of the Immaculate Conception on December 8, 1854. She continued her intense prayer life and developed the stigmata, the crucifixion wounds of Jesus on her hands, feet, and chest which she tried to keep secret. However, the truth came out; she suffered excruciating pain on Fridays and during Holy Week until her death on June 27, 1879. She was canonized by Pope Francis on October 13, 2019.

Memory Verse
“I will offer a sacrifice of praise and call on the name of the Lord.”
Psalm 116: 17

FAITH SHARING QUESTIONS
Discuss the following questions.

1. When have I experienced a “Transfiguration moment”, where the glory of God and hope of the resurrection was apparent? What are some of the key parts of that memory that can help me when I pass through the times of suffering and pain?

2. How does my faith in Jesus help me with the suffering I endure? How does it help me to relate and empathize with others who are suffering?

3. Jesus took the initiative and took the disciples aside to teach them. How do I respond to Jesus’ initiative and spend time with him?

4. Who else do I spend time with to reflect on God’s action in my life? How do I make sure there is enough time to spend with my “disciple friends”?

5. What do these words mean to me: “I am still hanging with Christ on that Cross”? 
LIVING AS DISCIPLES
Select one or more of the following actions, or one of your own choosing, to do this week. Be prepared to share with your group how this experience affected your faith journey.

1. As you reflect on your day each evening, ask yourself, “Where did I encounter Jesus today?”
3. Visit or call someone who is grieving the loss of a loved one or who is suffering from physical, emotional, or other challenges.
4. Practice the corporal work of mercy, “feed the hungry” by volunteering at a soup kitchen or food bank.
5. Pray the memory verse each day.

CLOSING PRAYER AND RITUAL
Gather around a table with a Bible, a crucifix, a candle and a bowl of water. Provide clay and wax paper for each person.

Opening Prayer (All): God of heaven and earth, thank you for giving us life. Each day you give us the opportunity to come closer to you through our struggles and our joys. These experiences can be transformative if we allow your grace to change us in the person you have created us to be from all eternity.

Leader: We will take some time to go inward to silence ourselves to pray ad reflect on the person that God desires us to be. When you are ready, take a piece of clay and mold it into that image.

Play soft music while each person works with the clay. When all are finished, they can take turns explaining their image.

Closing Prayer: Lord, help us to become the persons you want us to be so that we may be witnesses to your transforming power and grace. Amen.
Share a sign of peace with one another. Clay images are to be taken home as a reminder of God’s transforming love.
OPENING PRAYER
God of love and wisdom, gather us to your heart today. As the days of Lent pass by, we pray for the grace to see more clearly how Jesus allowed his heart to be broken so that we could better understand your love. Take away any blindness from our hearts which keeps us from loving you.

COMMENTARY ON THE WORD OF GOD
In today’s Scriptures God seems to be having a rough time. First, he demands that the Israelites acknowledge no God but the God they have come to know as Y H W H, I AM. In Psalm 19 he requires worship. In 1 Corinthians both Jews and Gentiles misunderstand the message of the Cross. And in the Gospel Jesus has to get really stern about how they are worshipping God. Jesus was passionate about his Father and his Father’s house.

I AM YOUR GOD
In today’s reading from Exodus, God admits that he is jealous. Michael Joncas captures God’s meaning well in song, “I have loved you with an everlasting love. I have called you and you are mine.” God demands that the newly freed slave people of Israel love him exclusively. “I am your God. There is no other,” he reiterates in case they misunderstand. God’s jealousy is not about envy of other gods. His jealousy is about relationship. He longs for a relationship with us and will not be denied. In many psalms including Psalm 19 we can glean that worshipping the Lord is sacred. God will always be worshipped.

LOOKING FOR GOD IN ALL THE WRONG PLACES
And yet the rescued Israelites and we ourselves often look for God in all the wrong places. In today’s passage from 1 Corinthians, Paul explains the wisdom of God concerning Jesus. To the Jews, Jesus crucified was a stumbling block and to the Gentiles foolishness. We, born into God’s wisdom of the Cross, may take God’s wisdom for granted. Our vision too can be blurred, without focus, missing the mark.

SOUND AND FURY IN THE TEMPLE
After the resurrection his disciples remembered Jesus saying, “Zeal for your house will consume me” (John 2:17). However, as Jesus was overthrowing tables of vendors and money changers and taking a whip to the oxen and sheep and shouting at those with doves in their cages “get out of here” it must have been a tale of sound and fury unleashed on all without exception. *Spend some moments taking in the scene, including the fury of Jesus.* Are you perhaps wondering “what’s the big deal?” Don’t we sell raffle tickets, cakes, tacos in our churches on Sunday? Maybe because the Israelite market in the temple was a lot louder and distracting and even dirty? And yet, that wasn’t the point. The point was … “my Father’s house” was a marketplace for some. It was not directed toward temple worship and covenantal relationship with God, but more toward personal benefit to merchants and money changers. The

READINGS
Exodus 20:1-17
Psalm 19:8-11
1 Corinthians 1:22-25
John 2: 13-25

Third Sunday Of Lent
Cycle B
worshippers were following temple law by bringing sacrifices to God. Yet, Hosea 6:6 must have come to the mind of Jesus as he was cleansing the Temple: “I desire mercy, not sacrifice and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.”

The words of Victor Hugo seem appropriate here: “More powerful than any army is an idea whose time has come.” Jesus’ time had come. “Destroy this temple and I will rebuild it in three days” (John 2:19b). The full meaning of these words would become clear only after the Resurrection.

A wisdom saying tells us that when we are ready to learn, the guide will appear. For us Jesus is that guide. He urged the apostles to “learn from me” (Matt. 11:29). Our observance of Lent echoes that call of Jesus to us in the Lenten Scripture readings.

We are directed:

1. To develop a personal relationship, a deep friendship with Jesus, our guide.
2. To set aside times of silence where our hearts become receptive to the quiet whispers of the Eternal Mystery.
3. To practice reflective living using an examen of our daily lives.
4. To stay focused on Jesus and respond to his every move within us.
5. To nourish what humanizes us, starve what dehumanizes us: choosing what is life-giving and starving what is life-diminishing.
6. To discern our choices from the true center of ourselves, choosing what leads us to become more fully human each day. St. Irenaeus made this observation: “The Glory of God is a human being fully alive.” God’s example of such a person is his Son, Jesus Christ. Like Christ may we become living signs of God’s love and fidelity.

Sister Odilia Korenek, IWBS
San Antonio, TX

SAINT OF THE WEEK
Saint Giuseppina Vannini
1859-1911 *Canonized in 2019

Sister Giuseppina Vannini was born in 1859, the second of three children of Angelo Vannini and Annunzia Papi in Italy. Both parents died soon afterward and the three orphans were separated. Our future saint had been baptized “Giuditta Adelaide Agata” and spent her formative years in an orphanage under the guidance of the Vincentian Sisters. In 1883 she tried to join the Vincentians but had to leave due to poor health. Some years later she tried to reenter but she was not admitted.

In 1891 Father Luigi Tezza, a Camillian priest, invited her to join him in establishing a women’s Congregation dedicated to serving the sick and the dying. Together they founded the Daughters of Saint Camillus. She made her profession in private because Pope Leo XIII decided not to allow the opening of new congregations. Father Tezza was sent to Peru so she was alone in the Congregation which was eventually approved as a diocesan group and later received papal approval under Pope Pius XI. Sister Giuseppina died on February 23, 1911 and was canonized by Pope Francis on October 13, 2019.
Memory Verse
“The law of the Lord is perfect reviving the soul; the decrees of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple.”
Psalm 19:8

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS
Discuss the following questions.

1. How does your relationship with God influence and guide your everyday living?

2. Jesus was crucified for what he stood for (the dignity of all people: prostitutes, Samaritans, tax-collectors, the poor, foreigners...) How do I understand Jesus’ death?

3. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (the Divine Indwelling) live in us. What in the temple of my heart needs cleansing to grow in my relationship with Jesus?

4. How do I nourish what humanizes me (makes me kinder and more compassionate)? How did I feel when I saw people during the pandemic caring for others?

5. How do I starve what dehumanizes me (makes me cruel, hateful, and judgmental)? What were my feelings when I was made aware of how people were dehumanized during the pandemic?

LIVING AS DISCIPLES
Select one or more of the following actions, or one of your own choosing, to do this week.
Be prepared to share with your group how this experience affected your faith journey.

1. Explain to someone who doesn’t understand why we honor Jesus hanging on a cross in our Churches.

2. Do the examen of consciousness prayer each evening to heighten your awareness of how you are living a fully Christian life.

3. Have a mutual, respectful conversation with someone who shares ideas different from your own about God.

4. Pray for the elect in your parish who are participating in the first Scrutiny.

5. Invite someone to attend Mass, Reconciliation, Stations of the Cross with you.

CLOSING PRAYER AND RITUAL

Gather around a table with a Bible, a crucifix, a candle and a bowl of blessed water.

Leader: May the Church and all its people ever grow to be the living temple of God’s love and mercy.........(Pause) All: Lord have mercy.

May the people of all nations heed the commandments of God written on their hearts and help bring all people to peace and reconciliation....(Pause) All: Lord have mercy.

May those who twist laws for their own gain come to conversion and repentance during this Lent .......(Pause) All: Lord Have Mercy
May all of us be consumed with zeal for God and express it by faithful prayer, fasting, and charity. (Pause) All: Lord have Mercy

Leader holds a bowl with water. Makes the sign of the cross and prays:
Cleanse us, Lord from our selfishness Lord, hear our Prayer

If possible, each person in turn takes the bowl of holy water, makes the Sign of the Cross and prays what is written or says a prayer from the heart.

Cleanse us from prejudice. Lord, hear our prayer.
Cleanse us from ingratitude. Lord, hear our prayer
Cleanse us from unforgiveness. Lord, hear our Prayer
Cleanse us from exclusion of those who are different from us. Lord, hear our Prayer
Cleanse us from lack of compassion. Lord, hear our Prayer
Continue as needed.

Leader: Loving and kind God, you offer us a covenant of new life in which we are your temple. Hear these our prayers and help us to persevere in our Lenten penance. We ask this through Christ our loving Lord. Amen.
OPENING PRAYER
Let us pause for a moment to recall that we are always in the presence of God. Father, as we journey closer to the time when we recall the passion and death of your Son, Jesus, help us to become increasingly aware of your love for us. We ask for the grace to respond fully to Jesus’ call to servanthood and to his cross which brought all humanity to himself. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

COMMENTARY ON THE WORD OF GOD
The readings for this Sunday contain the theme of God’s gift of freedom. The first reading tells of the return of the Jewish people from their captivity in Babylon—a physical freedom. The second reading describes the beauty of that freedom, and the Gospel tells of the source of that freedom: God’s love for us. This Sunday we celebrate that ALL IS GIFT in Christ Jesus.

GOD CALLS EVEN PAGANS
The Jews were exiled to Babylon in 597 BCE and this Exile was formally ended in 538 BCE. Cyrus the Great, king of Persia, believed Yahweh had called him to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem and, in the process, he allowed the Jews to return to their homeland. His royal decree that announced, “Let him go up” brings both the book of Second Chronicles and the Babylonian Exile to a close. Thus, both mark the beginning of a new era. Yet, when the Jews returned to their homeland, they would discover its restoration would not be an easy one. Building materials were hard to find, the people were unorganized, and they also needed to learn to live with the descendants of those who had not gone into exile. This was due to the distrust between the two groups. Cyrus appointed Zerubbabel as “governor” in 538 BCE to oversee the reconstruction. Matthew and Luke included his name in their genealogies of Jesus. The reformer Ezra would come forward to also help rebuild the community according to the Torah or Law. Thanks to his gift of freedom to the Jews, Cyrus II (the Great) was even referred to as “messiah” or anointed one in Isaiah 45:1ff. He was the only non-Jewish figure to be called so. Thus, he prefigured Jesus, the Messiah, who would, some 500 years later, bring true freedom. It is especially appropriate that this reading is used for the Fourth Sunday of Lent which liturgically points to the end of Lent and the beginning of Holy Week and the Easter season.

SORROW AND HOPE IN EXILE
Psalm 137 expresses the Jewish people’s overwhelming grief in losing their homeland and the Temple, the center of their faith, which had been destroyed. To understand the psalmist’s profound depth of feeling, one would have to imagine, if possible, the destruction of something central to our own faith as well as our loss of being a nation. This psalm is a song of a people who no longer have a religious and national identity. In a way, the psalm echoes those
spirituals sung by African-American slaves that helped them to endure their own profound losses of religious and tribal identity.

**God’s Passionate Loving Kindness**
When read slowly and carefully, this reading from Ephesians can expand one’s understanding of God’s gift of freedom. The phrase “rich in mercy” comes from the Hebrew *rav hesed*, that is, “greatness of loving kindness.” One of my graduate theology professors translated *hesed* as “passionate loving kindness.” *Hesed* was the love that was centered in the covenant Yahweh had established with his people—a relationship, a bond that could never be broken.

As Jesus was “raised up” on the cross, he then will raise us up to join him in heaven. God will also continue to bless us with grace and kindness that is immeasurable. All of this is simply God’s gift. The reading closes with the reminder that we are no less than God’s art, his “handiwork.”

**THE CROSS - JESUS’ GLORIFICATION**
John places seven signs (miracles) throughout his Gospel to show who Jesus is. In this reading, John prefigures the final and greatest one that these signs point to (the cross) with an Old Testament image. Like the bronze serpent in the desert, Jesus will be “lifted up” where he freely embraces death on the cross. However, in the serpent passage in Numbers 21:9 the verb used was “mounted” on a pole. John changes the action to “lifted up” which suggests Jesus’ glorification on the cross.

One writer I found made this beautiful observation about the line, “God so loved the world he gave his only Son . . .”: “The magnitude of the love is matched by the magnitude of the gift . . .” Perhaps that line could be called to mind the next time you read a plaque with John 3:16. John then continues with the implied challenge to both his original audience and to us: do you believe? His challenge concludes with two thoughts—fear and freedom. To refuse to believe is to live in darkness, therefore, fear. But to live in the truth of who Jesus is to live in relationship with him which brings light and freedom.

_Sister Lou Ella Hickman, I.W.B.S_.
_Corpus Christi, TX_

**SAINT OF THE WEEK**
_Saint Thresia Chiramel Mankidiyan_  
*1876-1926 *Canonized in 2019*

_Sister Thresia Chiramel Mankidiyan_ was born in India on April 26, 1876, and named after Teresa of Avila. She was the third of five children in a once-rich family that had become poor as the result of paying for the costly dowries of seven aunts. Her mother taught her to pray, to care for the poor, and to read the bible and stories of the saints. When she was twelve years old, her mother died, so she dropped her studies and spent her time in contemplation in the local church. She is said to have had a vision of the Blessed Virgin Mary who asked her to add Mariam to her name. She experienced attacks by the devil and was the subject of exorcisms. She then spent her whole life ministering to the sick and needy after receiving the gifts of prophecy and healing.
Her spiritual director encouraged her to enter religious life. So, she tried the Franciscan Poor Clares and then the Discalced Carmelites but did not feel called to either order. Rather, she felt called to a life of silence and withdrawal. In the midst of her mystical experiences she received the stigmata, which she tried to keep secret. Eventually she founded the Congregation of the Holy Family in India, a congregation that grew rapidly and now serves the poor through educational facilities and orphanages. She was considered the “Apostle of Families” and quietly championed women’s rights and the education of girls. Mother Mariam Thresia died on June 8, 1926 and was canonized on October 13, 2019.

**Memory Verse**

“For by grace you have been saved through faith...it is the gift of God.”

*Ephesians 2: 8*

**FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS**

*Discuss the following questions*

1. How do I experience “hesed”, God’s loving kindness?

2. Many people do not believe or understand the Scripture, “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.” How is my life a witness or testimony of God’s unconditional love in a world so torn by conflict, death, pandemics, war, and injustice?

3. What idea, word, or phrase in these readings will help me to continue my journey to Easter?

4. How does psalm 137 express how I have felt at some point in my life?

5. How does reflecting on God’s choosing Cyrus, a pagan ruler, help me to believe that God can chose me to proclaim God’s love for the world?

**LIVING AS DISCIPLES**

*Select one or more of the following actions, or one of your own choosing, to do this week. Be prepared to share with your group how this experience affected your faith journey.*

1. Attend the Mass where the Elect are participating in the 2nd Scrutiny, or pray for them on their journey Easter.
2. Celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation this week.
3. After reflection on the Memory Verse, write a prayer or poem on this Scripture verse.
4. Visit or send a card/letter to someone who has recently experience a loss.
5. Reflect on your life from childhood to the present and see how your faith has changed and grown as you have gone through the valleys and peaks of life. Record this in your journal.
CLOSING PRAYER & RITUAL
Gather around the prayer table with a Bible, a crucifix, and a lit candle.
Provide paper hearts and pens for each person.

Opening Prayer (All): Good and gracious, thank you for loving us so much that you gave your only Son that we who believe in him may not die but may have eternal life. Amen.

Reader:
“Nothing is more practical than finding God, then falling in Love in a quite absolute, final way. What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything? It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, whom you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in Love, stay in love, and it will decide everything.”

Taken from Fall in Love, attributed to Fr. Pedro Arrupe, SJ (1907–1991)

Play soft music while each person writes on a paper heart a message to God responding to God’s great love. This may be shared aloud.

Leader: (Intercessions) Response (R/): They will know we are Christians by our love.
- For all those suffering especially from the pandemic, violence, hunger, and racism, we pray to the Lord. R/
- For leaders that they may lead with God’s love and mercy, let us pray to the Lord. R/
- For all grieving losses in their lives, let us pray to the Lord. R/
- For what else shall we pray? R/

Conclude by singing “They Will Know That We Are Christians By Our Love” Center of My Life, John Foley, I Have Loved You” Michael Joncas, or another appropriate song. Share a sign of peace with one another. Hearts may be taken home as a reminder of God’s great love for us.
OPENING PRAYER
Jesus our Lord, you call us to follow you. Open our hearts and minds to receive the graces and gifts bestowed on us through your Spirit so that we may learn, as you did, to embrace our cross with obedience and fidelity.

COMMENTARY ON THE WORD OF GOD
In the first reading Jeremiah speaks of a new covenant which will not be broken as were the tablets given to Moses. This new covenant will last forever for it will be written upon their hearts and not on stone. God must be experienced in one’s life and that of others and not solely on written instruction and knowledge.

In Hebrews we see Jesus’ role as a priest who sympathized with sinners because of his own experience of human nature. It also speaks to the relationship of Jesus as Son and how he learned obedience through suffering.

In the gospel of John, we see that the Greeks were drawn to Philip who had a Greek name. They approached Philip with confidence and expressed their desire to see Jesus. Philip then went to Andrew and both told Jesus about their request.

We have walked with Jesus during these weeks of Lent and we seek, as the Greeks did, to see Jesus, to encounter him in a more personal manner. Let the words of Jesus echo in your hearts, “Whoever serves me must follow me, says the Lord, and where I am, there also will my servant be.” (John 12:26a)

DISCIPLESHP
How can we be disciples today? Pope Francis says, “Today, as the Church seeks to experience a profound missionary renewal, there is a kind of preaching which falls to each of us as a daily responsibility. It has to do with bringing the Gospel to the people we meet, whether they be our neighbors or complete strangers. This is the informal preaching which takes place in the middle of a conversation, …. Being a disciple means being constantly ready to bring the love of Jesus to others, and this can happen unexpectedly and in any place: on the street, in a city square, during work, on a journey.” (Evangelii Gaudium #127)

In this Sunday’s readings we can see four aspects which are essential for all disciples. They are as follows:
1. **Openness to God:** We must allow God to enter our hearts. That place within us where he can truly abide.

2. **Relationship:** God is a God of relationships who calls us to encounter others in community, be nourished and then called to share our experience with those outside of the community. “The disciple of Christ must not only keep the faith and live on it, but also profess it, confidently bear witness to it, and spread it.” (CCC 1816)

3. **Mercy:** In recognizing our own sinfulness and failings we need to own the Psalmists plead, “create in me a pure heart, O God.” (Psalm 51:12)

4. **Suffering:** This suffering is the type of dying and transformation that occurs within a seed. Becoming Christ-like requires that we learn to embrace the cross with obedience and fidelity as Jesus did.

In the Gospel Jesus says, “… unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit. … And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself.” (Jn 12: 24, 32)

What draws everyone to Jesus? People are not only drawn to Jesus for his miracles and words but also by the enthusiasm and witness of his followers. Have you ever met someone who truly witnessed Christ to you? How have you been a conduit for others to encounter Christ?

We need prayer, persistence, and patience. Bible programs and other programs do not make disciples. Disciples make disciples. No wonder Pope Francis reminds us, “Consult your bible more often than your smartphone.” “If the Scriptures are not to remain a dead letter, Christ, the eternal Word of the living God, must, through the Holy Spirit, "open (our) minds to understand the Scriptures." (CCC 108) Dei Verbum 21 states: “In the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets his children with great love and speaks to them.”

The gift of being called cannot remain idle. We must be that light, that witness in this world of darkness and gloom. It is your responsibility, my responsibility, our responsibility to leave our comfort zones to reach out to others, to those who have lost their vision and hope, and to those who are overwhelmed by isolation, loneliness, in a fast-paced world of fast communication but that have no depth nor profound relationships. The world awaits your participation, your willingness to die in order to give fruit. Every act of dying brings life – dying to pride brings humility, cowardice brings courage, cruelty brings kindness, selfishness brings acts of love.

Pope Francis In GAUDETE ET EXSULTATE: On the Call to Holiness in Today’s World states,

23. … You too need to see the entirety of your life as a mission. Try to do so by listening to God in prayer and recognizing the signs that he gives you. Always ask the Spirit what Jesus expects from you at every moment of your life and in every decision, you must make, so as to discern its place in the mission you have received. Allow the Spirit to forge in you the personal mystery that can reflect Jesus Christ in today’s world.
24. May you come to realize what that word is, the message of Jesus that God wants to speak to the world by your life. Let yourself be transformed. Let yourself be renewed by the Spirit, so that this can happen, lest you fail in your precious mission.

Sister Miriam Perez, MCSH
Perth Amboy, New Jersey

SAINT OF THE WEEK
Saint John Henry Newman
1801-1890 *Canonized in 2019

John Henry Newman was born in England on February 21, 1801 and baptized in the Anglican faith. At the age of 25 he began a personal relationship with God and was ordained an Anglican priest at the age of 27. He taught at Oxford where he was continually searching for the Truth. Among his studies were the writings of the Fathers of the Church which are accepted by many Christian religions. A visit to Rome was a turning point in his quest for the Truth. He was admitted to the Catholic Church in 1845 and began his studies to become a Catholic priest. After two years of studying in Rome, he was ordained. He soon returned to England where he was very involved in many activities such as the foundation of Dublin University, the translation of the Bible into English, the direction of a magazine, and the foundation of an Oratory in Oxford. He was named a Cardinal in 1879 and died at Birmingham Oratory on August 11, 1890. Newman Centers can be found on many college campuses. Cardinal John Henry Newman was canonized by Pope Francis on October 13, 2019.

Memory Verse
“Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit.”
John 12:24

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS
Discuss the following questions.

1. Is there something in my life that I need to let go of (die to self)?

2. When I was able to die to self, what fruit came from this, how was my life changed?

3. The gift of being called cannot remain idle. We must be that light, that witness in this world of darkness and gloom. How am I a witness to God’s love by the way I live my life?

4. Share an experience of someone who truly witnessed Christ to you?

5. How have I been a conduit for others to encounter Christ?

6. Jesus knows everything about me and still chooses to call me. How does that make me feel? What is my response?

LIVING AS DISCIPLES
Select one or more of the following actions, or one of your own choosing, to do this week. Be prepared to share with your group how this experience affected your faith journey.
1. When attending Mass make a conscious effort to greet someone new at the Church and share a few words.
2. Pray for someone in your life who needs your forgiveness and mercy, even if they are no longer with you.
3. Commit yourself to set aside your smartphone or electronics and encounter Jesus in his Word or in prayer for one full day or for half a day?
4. Take a few minutes before the Blessed Sacrament and ask Jesus which aspects of your life need transformation.
5. Pray for the Elect or Candidates in your parish and/or attend the third Scrutiny.

CLOSING PRAYER AND RITUAL

Gather around a table with a Bible, a crucifix, a candle and seeds for each person.

Leader: We take lightly the process of a seed dying, but what does it really have to go through and what factors are necessary for it to die and bear fruit? There are environmental conditions that are crucial, for example: is the soil fertile, how deep is the seed planted, is it getting the correct amount of water, and is the temperature and sun enough? These are all essential. Once these conditions are met, the seed grows a root to access water underground. The seed then sends a shoot that appears above the ground where leaves will grow to harvest energy from the sun.

(Each person receives one seed to hold in the palm of their hand as they listen and personally reflect on the following questions.)

Reader 1: In my own life, what factors do I need for my seed to die and give fruit?

Reader 2: Do I nurture myself with relationships which direct me to God?

Reader 3: Do I seek and desire a deep sacramental life?

Reader 4: How do the people I encounter know that I am truly a follower of Christ?

Reader 5: From where do I harvest my energy?

Two or three people may say a spontaneous prayer.

Leader: Let us present our reflections, thoughts, and desires to our Loving Father who hears even that which we cannot express with the words Jesus taught us: OUR FATHER...

Share a sign of peace.

(Two or three people may say a spontaneous prayer)

Leader: Let us present our reflections, thoughts and desire to our Loving Father who hears even that which we cannot express with the words Jesus taught us: OUR FATHER.

Share a sign of peace.
OPENING PRAYER
Jesus, as we enter into this Holy Week, we are awestruck that you humbled yourself to become one of us. You willingly suffered insults and humiliation despite the fact that you are God. Help us to become humble and to realize who we really are, your beloved children. Because of this we are called to treat all people with dignity, love, and compassion. Amen.

A KING WITH A DIFFERENCE (Mark 11:1-10)
Kings returning from war used to ride on horses in the entourage of their soldiers, prisoners of war, and booty. Riding on horseback portrays, among other things, gallantry, bravado, strength, speed as well as readiness to fight. Thus, riding on horseback does not always point to peace; it could be associated with war, impending suffering, vindictiveness, vengeance, and animosity. Contrariwise, riding on a donkey signifies peace. The donkey symbolizes calmness, peace, gentleness, humility, and conviviality. Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem on a donkey is symbolic. The event defies the commonly known logic of all times. Jesus is a humble King who enters his city in a peaceful manner without soldiers, prisoners of war, or booty. Kingship with a difference; the triumphal entry depicts the type of leadership Jesus had come to demonstrate; a humble servant King.

GOD’S HUMBLE MESSENGER
The first reading for today is the third of four suffering servant songs in the Book of Isaiah (42:1-7; 49:1, 5-6; 50:4-7; 52:13-53:12). Isaiah does not tell us who the suffering servant is, nevertheless, he describes him as a very humble, peaceful, and self-effacing servant sent by God to do his will. People may spit on him, slap him, slander him, and do all sorts of negative and dehumanizing things to him, yet he will neither complain nor fight back. He trusted in God’s unfailing protection and was so resolute on his course that he does not allow anything to distract him. In a calm, humble, unwavering but a firm way, he carries out the will of God. Christians applied this concept of ‘suffering servant’ to Jesus Christ.

THE SELF-EFFACING MESSIAH
A deputy minister in Ghana was stopped by the police for speeding. The minister rolled down his window, demanded for the rationale behind their stopping him, and was told that he was driving faster than the permitted speed limit. He arrogantly retorted, “Do you know who I am?” He refused to be processed for court and eventually caused the interdiction of the poor police officer who was only doing his work. Many leaders, their children, relatives, and friends often flout the laws and go unpunished. They are haughty and despise other people. They think they are ‘untouchable.’ Jesus presents us with a sharp contrast. Divine, though he was, he emptied himself and took upon himself the nature of a slave. Albert Einstein, the physicist said, “Strive not to be a success, but rather to be of value.” Jesus focused not on success but on
being of value. Jesus had an undisputable claim to divinity and all its concomitant attributes and status yet he refused to lay claim to what was his (cf. Philippians 2:6-8). He teaches us a lesson that overturns the logic of the world: that whatever we let go or lose for an honorable purpose shall be regained in God.

UNCONTESTED CONDEMNATION
Stealthily present in the passion narrative of Jesus Christ is the image of the suffering servant of God described by Isaiah. Much of what the Sanhedrin did to Jesus warranted some reaction but he did not allow himself to be provoked.

In the first place, the nocturnal arrest of Jesus with armed soldiers was not necessary because Jesus was not armed nor were his acts and deeds clandestine; he acted in public. Secondly, the Sanhedrin unusually sat at night and tried Jesus. One can justifiably ask: “What was Jesus’ crime?” The Sanhedrin laboriously solicited testimonies from the crowd against Jesus but they could not readily find any. In their bid to get Jesus condemned, many people spoke falsely against him under oath. Eventually, they settled on the following ‘crime’ against Jesus: “We heard him declare, ‘I will destroy this temple made by human hands, and in three days I will construct another not made by human hands’” (Mark 14:58).

The high priest asked Jesus their weightiest question: “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?” (14:61b) Jesus responded affirmatively and then quoted Daniel 7:13. Tearing his garment the high priest accused Jesus of blasphemy, which was punishable by death, and decided that there was no need for any further witness. They subsequently agreed among themselves that Jesus was guilty. Thus, they led him to Pilate with the purpose of forcing Pilate to sentence Jesus to death because only the Romans could pronounce the death sentence. At Pilate’s palace, the Jewish elders instigated the Jewish populace to demand that Pilate condemn Jesus to death. Pilate finally yielded to pressure from the Jews and sentenced Jesus to death, even though he confessed that he found no fault in Jesus. It is noteworthy that Jesus did not protest against the baseless accusation levelled against him. He was scourged, spat on, and crowned with thorns. Isaiah’s description of the suffering servant fit Jesus perfectly.

Father John Kwame Korang
Ghana, Africa

SAINT OF THE WEEK
Saint Francesco Spinelli
1853-1913 *Canonized in 2018

Francesco Spinelli was born in Milan, Italy, on April 14, 1853. As a child he was cured of a serious spinal problem. His mother often took him with her when she visited the poor and sick. He would entertain the children with puppets while his mother ministered to the needy. As he grew older, his mother and a priest uncle supported his vocation to the priesthood; he was ordained in 1875.

After he had a vision in which he saw women adoring Jesus in Eucharistic Adoration, he became the co-founder of the Sacramentine Sisters in Pergano; however, the establishment was not successful. He later founded the Sister Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament in 1897. This order now serves in several countries, including Argentina. It began as a diocesan order and received
full pontifical approval after Father Spinelli’s death. He died in 1913 and was canonized by Pope Francis on October 14, 2018.

**Memory Verse**

“Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped.”

*Philippians 2:6*

**FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS**

*Discuss the following questions.*

1. We are all leaders in some way. Often leaders, even Christian leaders, display arrogance and a show of power which is contrary to Jesus’ example of leadership. In exercising leadership, when have I been an arrogant leader or a humble Christlike leader?

2. When people offend me, accuse me falsely, and/or abuse me, how do I usually react? Am I able to let go or do I want revenge? Share.

3. So many people in our world today are falsely accused like Jesus was. Others are languishing in jail for no fault of theirs. Many still are unjustly treated. Do I make any effort to assist them or do I sit on the fence?

4. A major hallmark of the personality of Jesus is ‘humility’. Humility is truth. How do I practice humility in my life?

5. Albert Einstein said, “Strive not to be a success, but rather to be of value.” Jesus focused not on success but on being of value. Success can be measured by my achievements and goals reached. When it comes to value, I can lose sight of what matters - enjoying my work, loving my job and making precious memories with my team or the people around me. Don’t lose sight of who you are. Live happily. Enjoy every moment. At the end of the day, you’ll realize success is at every corner of every day by making yourself and everyone valued and happy. How do I live my life?

**LIVING AS DISCIPLES**

*Select one or more of the following actions or one of your own choosing to do this week.*

1. Visit or write a shut-in or a person in prison.

2. If you have not done so, receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

3. Participate in the Triduum Services of Holy Week.

4. Make plans to enjoy a meal with your faith sharing group to celebrate Easter.

**CLOSING PRAYER AND RITUAL**

*Gather around a table with a Bible, a crucifix, and a candle.*

**Leader:** Gracious God, you created us out of love and sent us Jesus, your Son, who gave us a perfect example of leadership. It is this example that teaches us its value.

May you touch the hearts of all leaders. We pray to the Lord.

R/ Lord hear our prayer.
Make them understand that they are leaders not for themselves but for others. We pray to the Lord.
R/Lord hear our prayer.

May their leadership bring nations and societies to peaceful co-existence. We pray to the Lord.
R/Lord hear our prayer.

Fill them with the grace to use the authority granted them with respect, humility and care. We pray to the Lord.
R/Lord hear our prayer.

Help them to build societies where people are able to earn a just wage to support their families. We pray to the Lord.
R/Lord hear our prayer.

May they be open to seeing the importance of caring for the earth for future generations. We pray to the Lord.
R/Lord hear our prayer.

Help them to create societies that respect the dignity and worth of all people. We pray to the Lord.
R/Lord hear our prayer.

Concluding Prayer:
All: Lord God, thank you for calling us to journey together these six weeks of Lent. We ask that you help us be your disciples leading people by example. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.
WHY ARE CYCLE A SCRUTINY READINGS IN THIS BOOK WHEN WE ARE IN CYCLE B?

The readings we hear every Sunday are structured on a three-year rotation. In Year A, we hear primarily from Matthew’s Gospel; in Year B, from Mark; and in Year C, from Luke. John’s Gospel is interspersed throughout each year. The Sunday Gospels of Lent are designated as important guides to the spirit of this season. The scrutinies from Cycle A are especially important for those preparing for baptism through the RCIA, as well as all the baptized present at Mass. To get a better understanding, please review the terms below:

WHAT IS RCIA?
The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is a restoration of an ancient process for incorporating unbaptized persons into Jesus Christ (and the Catholic Church) through the Sacraments of Initiation, Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. The process was restored after the Second Vatican Council.

WHO IS THE ELECT?
The Rite of Election closes the Period of the Catechumenate. This rite normally coincides with the first Sunday of Lent. In the presence of the bishop (or his delegate), the catechumens (the unbaptized in the RCIA process) inscribe their names in the Book of the Elect at the cathedral as a pledge of fidelity. Now the catechumens are called “the elect’ or “the illuminandi” (those who will be enlightened). They now begin a Period of Purification and Enlightenment - the final, intense preparation for the reception of the Sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil.

WHAT ARE THE SCRUTINIES?
They are short liturgical rites for the Elect during the season of Lent that invokes the grace and power of the Holy Spirit and calls the Elect out of the darkness of evil and sin and into the light of Christ. The purpose of the Scrutinies is to call upon the intercession of the parish community for the Elect and to help them with the grace of the Holy Spirit to persevere in their Lenten penitence and their ongoing conversion to Christ in preparation for Baptism and the Easter sacraments. The Scrutinies are celebrated on the third, fourth, and fifth Sundays of Lent. The Scriptures used are taken from the Cycle A Lenten readings each year, i.e., **Week 3** - The Samaritan Woman at the Well: John 4:4-42; **Week 4** - The Man Born Blind: John 9:1-40; **Week 5** - The Raising of Lazarus: John 11:1-44.
OPENING PRAYER
+ God of pure and unbounded love, you call us out of the darkness of our sin into a deep, loving relationship with you. Help us to recognize our need for salvation and to drink deeply of your living water, the only thing that can satisfy our deepest thirst. Amen.

COMMENTARY ON THE WORD OF GOD
The scripture readings today highlight the incredible and unconditional love that God has for sinners. Even our grumbling, complaining, lack of trust in God’s presence, and our deepest, darkest sins cannot impede God’s love, if only we open our hearts to receive the grace offered.

IS THE LORD IN OUR MIDST, OR NOT?
In the first reading, the people grumble against Moses in their thirst for water. Apparently, it has only been just over a month since the triumphant escape from Egypt, and thus far in the desert of Sin, God has provided them with water, manna, and quail. They have seen all the wonders God has done to liberate them from their bondage, yet still they grumble and question if God is present in their midst. They are ready to stone Moses, who in turn cries out to God. God provides water when Moses strikes the rock.

OH, THAT TODAY YOU WOULD HEAR GOD’S VOICE
Psalm 95 is a song of joyful praise and acclamation, inviting us to worship in awe God our Creator. The third strophe, with its obvious reference to the passage from Exodus 17, calls us to listen to the voice of God and not harden our hearts as at Meribah (literally, “the place of quarreling or strife”) and Massah, (“the place of the test” or “contention”). These two names, both here and in Exodus 17:7, are given for the place where God provides water from the rock, despite the people’s lack of trust. The message comes through clearly: whether we are praising God in the midst of a joyful gathering, or bowing down in humble worship, or wandering in a desert of temptation and testing, we are to open our hearts to hear the voice of God who is present with us.

HOPE DOES NOT DISAPPOINT
In his letter to the Romans, Paul ponders the mystery of our sin and Christ’s redemptive suffering which brings us back into peace with God when we receive in faith the reconciliation offered to us. The hope of which Paul speaks is not a simple wish for the future, an “I hope so” attitude, but rather the Christian virtue of hope, a firm trust in God’s promised salvation and restoration of our wounded nature. Those who cling to this hope are not disappointed, because in doing so we open our hearts to receive God’s love poured out through the Holy Spirit and manifested most profoundly by the complete self-giving of Christ on the cross. The proof of God’s unconditional love is that we have done nothing to merit this gift – in fact, the only thing we have that does not come from God is our sin – and Jesus takes this very rejection upon himself and offers his life for our redemption. What an awesome grace it is to receive such love!

READINGS:
Exodus 17:3-7
Psalm 95: 1-2, 6-9
Romans 5: 1-2, 5-8
John 4: 5-42
THE PURE AND POWERFUL LOVE OF GOD FOR SINNERS

As is characteristic of the fourth Gospel, the account of the woman at the well is packed with symbols, most of which are meant to point out to us who Jesus is and who we are called to be in relation to him. From the mouth of the woman, we learn that Jesus is greater than Jacob, a prophet, Lord (kyrios in Greek, which is often translated as “sir”), the Messiah, and Savior (this in fact being the only time in any of the four gospels that Jesus is called Savior). Jesus himself, as he accepts the title of Messiah from the woman, goes a step further in using the expression egō eimi (I am), the Greek equivalent of Yahweh, the sacred name of God.

We look to an unlikely person to come to understand who we are and how we are to relate to Jesus. The woman in the story has three strikes against her. She is a woman, which in her time and culture means that she has no rights of her own. She is a Samaritan — at the time, the animosity between Jews and Samaritans was so great that if a Samaritan drank from a well, simply dipping a dipper into water from it, the whole well would be defiled. She is also an outcast, a public sinner. Because of her five husbands and current illicit union, she goes to the well at an hour when she will not meet any of the other women of the village. The disciples have cause to be shocked when they return to find Jesus speaking with her.

The woman meets Jesus at the well at noon. In the Scriptures, the well is a place of encounter, often the first meeting place of a man and a woman who will later be espoused. Though the hour “noon” is usually understood as representing the woman’s alienation, Jeanne Chezard de Matel explains that the sun is the strongest at noon, and thus the most powerful and intimate encounter with Jesus (Light of the World) occurs at midday. It is the midday of pure love. This pure love is also manifest at Jesus’ crucifixion at noon, and just as in this story, there also he expresses his thirst. The very fact that the woman is a sinner is what leads to her intimate encounter with Jesus, to her receiving the gift of God, and to her becoming an evangelist. Jesus, in his pure and self-sacrificing love, does not reject her, as the others do.

Several elements of this story hearken back to the account of the Wedding at Cana. The baptismal and Eucharistic symbolism is apparent in both, yet the most striking symbol is the woman’s stone jar. In the wedding story, the water is held in six stone jars. Any hearer in New Testament times at all familiar with number symbolism would notice that there is something wrong here and surmise: “Six is not a good number; it falls short of perfection (7). There must be another jar somewhere”. Voilà, two chapters later appears a woman, a public sinner and a Samaritan no less, carrying the seventh stone jar! The implication is clear: what makes our Eucharist complete, the only way to make our Christian community complete, is to accept the one whom we ostracize. This is the key to our salvation. Furthermore, sometimes the person we wish to ostracize is our own sinful self. In opening ourselves to God’s presence, allowing the powerful rays of his noontime sun to penetrate our dark places and tell us everything we have done, we experience the incredible, pure love that turns even our sinfulness into an opportunity for grace.

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1 Jeanne Chézard de Matel (1596-1670) is the foundress of the Order of the Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament. In her explanation, she associates this encounter with the noon meeting between the two lovers of the Song of Songs.
SAINT OF THE WEEK

MEMORY VERSE
“Is the Lord in our midst or not?”
(Exodus 17:7)

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS
Discuss the following questions.

1. What effect does grumbling and complaining have on me and on others around me when I hear it or do it? What can I do to change my attitude?

2. When have I been tempted to question God’s presence in my life? What are signs that God is present?

3. When have I experienced God’s pure, unconditional love for me?

4. How can I allow God to turn the difficulties and sinful tendencies of my life into opportunities for grace?

5. The woman’s encounter with Jesus changes her from a social outcast into a bold evangelist. How does my own relationship with Jesus call me to share the Good News with others?

6. When have I ostracized, put down, or judged another as inferior because of race or ethnicity? How did I feel then, and what is my feeling today?

LIVING AS DISCIPLES
Select one or more of the following actions, or one of your own choosing, to do this week. Be prepared to share with your group how this experience affected your faith journey.

1. Limit your use of water for one day in solidarity with those who have no fresh water for drinking or cleansing.
2. Write notes of encouragement to the Elect in your parish who are beginning the Scrutinies this week.
3. When you are tempted to complain about a difficult or unpleasant situation, offer a prayer of gratitude to God for all that is good in your life.
4. If there are people in your life that you have been indifferent to or ostracized, make a special effort to include them.
5. Give to a charity that helps the homeless or marginalized people of your area.
6. Pray the memory verse each day.
CLOSING PRAYER AND RITUAL:

Gather around a table with a Bible, a crucifix, a lighted candle, a pitcher of water, and a large glass bowl.

Begin in silence. One person holds the bowl at arm’s length. Another holds the pitcher about two feet above the bowl and pours the water, so that each person can see, hear, and perhaps feel drops of the water that may splash.

Leader: Many people in our world lack fresh water for basic necessities.
All: Give us true gratitude for the gift of water, and help us to share our resources with others.

Leader: Our souls thirst for your living water.
All: Help us to recognize our true longing for you and to drink deeply of your Spirit.

Leader: Through the waters of Baptism, you cleanse us and bring us into communion with you and your Church.
All: Open our hearts to receive the grace that you offer us.

Sing or play an appropriate hymn, such as “Come to the Water”, “Healing Waters”, “Water of Life”, or “River of Glory”, while all come forward, dip their hand into the water, and bless themselves with the sign of the cross.
OPENING PRAYER
+ God our Creator, you have formed us from the dust of the earth and breathed your Spirit into us, giving us life. Give us new eyes to see with your vision. Lead us out of the darkness of our sin into the light of Christ your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

COMMENTARY ON THE WORD OF GOD
The Scriptures this week invite us to distinguish between light and darkness, between outward appearance and what is truly in the heart, between our own preconceived ideas and God’s truth. We are called, chosen, anointed, and led into a deeper faith. It is up to us to respond.

WE SEE THE APPEARANCE; GOD SEES THE HEART.
At the command of God, Samuel goes to Bethlehem to anoint the next king. Even the prophet does not fully understand God’s will, for God says, “Not as man sees does God see” (1 Samuel 16:7). We see the outward appearance; God sees the heart. David, the youngest and most unlikely, a lowly shepherd boy, is chosen, anointed, and receives the outpouring of the Spirit.

YOU ANOINT MY HEAD WITH OIL
The familiarity of Psalm 23 can lull us into a sort of comfortable listening to our favorite verses; however, a more attentive reading in conjunction with the other Scriptures of today’s liturgy reveals several elements that tie them together. The anointing with oil – being blessed and chosen by God for a special purpose, the peaceful waters that reappear in the Gospel at the pool of Siloam (meaning “sent”), the interplay between light and darkness: those who are chosen can live as children of the light and need not fear the darkness.

CHRIST WILL GIVE YOU LIGHT
Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, exhorts those who have been called out of darkness to live as children of the light, not in the darkness of sin. Everything becomes visible when exposed to the light of Christ, which produces goodness and truth in us.

BLIND MAN
John’s account of the healing of the man blind from birth shows how one who has lived in physical darkness all his life is transformed by encountering Jesus and receiving the light of Christ. The liberal use of strong contrasts throughout the passage urges a choice between opposing stances: light and darkness, belief and unbelief, blindness and sight, acceptance and hostility, physical blindness (not caused by sin) and spiritual blindness (caused by a deliberate
rejection of Christ’s light). The humility of the man born blind, who admits that he is unsure of who Jesus is, is contrasted with the arrogance of the Pharisees, who boldly claim to know all about someone whom they have not truly encountered.

The choice of the blind man to make visible God’s works further illustrates a biblical theme that we saw in the anointing of David in the first reading: God chooses the lowly, the weak and despised in order to make known his power and glory. Jesus, in healing the blind man, reveals himself as the Light of the world, and his simple actions point to baptismal themes. He spits in the dust and makes mud, in a sense to recreate the man (cf. Genesis 2:7). Spittle later becomes a part of the baptismal ritual. Jesus takes the mud and anoints the man (the Greek word epichriein, often translated as “smearing”, also means “anointing”, sharing roots with “chrism” and “christen”). He sends the man to the pool to wash off the mud: it is the waters of baptism that cleanse us of original sin that leads to spiritual blindness.

Once the man is healed, he suffers interrogation, opposition, ridicule, judgment, accusation, and expulsion at the hands of the Pharisees. Even his own parents plead ignorance rather than stand up for him. Yet, the trials that he experiences serve only to develop his faith. In fact, the whole purpose for him receiving his sight is so that he can see the light and come to know Christ. At first, he does not even know who has healed him, describing him as “the man they call Jesus” (John 9:11). Throughout the account, he progressively becomes more aware, calling him a prophet (v. 17), still later (v. 33) arguing that he comes from God, and finally professing his faith in Jesus as the Son of Man and prostrating himself to worship him (v. 38).

In a stunning reversal, the man born blind, who initially saw and knew nothing, truly sees and believes, whereas the Pharisees, who presume to know all, become blind because of their refusal to believe in Jesus. In the end, the choice for or against Jesus, the choice to live in darkness or in light, to rely on the outward appearance or to see with God’s vision into the heart, to accept or reject the anointing and sending and cleansing that Jesus offers, is the free and deliberate choice of each person. Where do I stand?

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SAINT OF THE WEEK
See Week 4 Cycle B p. 18

MEMORY VERSE
“God does not see as a mortal, who sees the appearance. The Lord looks into the heart”
(1 Samuel 16:7).

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS
Discuss the following questions.
1. God chooses ordinary people, often the most unexpected. When have I been aware that God chose me for a special purpose even though I may have felt unworthy or unqualified? What was my response?

2. When have I judged someone and/or been judged based on outward appearances? How can I learn to see as God sees, into the heart?
3. Where in my life have I experience the contrast between light and darkness?

4. How have the trials of my life served to deepen my faith?

5. How do my daily actions illustrate my acceptance or indifference toward Jesus?

**LIVING AS DISCIPLES**

*Select one or more of the following actions, or one of your own choosing, to do this week. Be prepared to share with your group how this experience affected your faith journey.*

1. Read and reflect on the memory verse each day.
2. When you are tempted to judge someone harshly or criticize them, offer a compliment or a prayer of blessing instead. For example, pray “God bless (name). and have mercy on me a sinner”.
3. Give to an association that helps the blind, or reach out to someone in your community who is visually impaired.
4. Pray for the Elect who are undergoing the Second Scrutiny this week.
5. Try to attend daily Mass or at least spend more time in prayer this week.

**CLOSING PRAYER AND RITUAL:**

*Gather around a table with a Bible, a crucifix, and a lighted candle that can be passed around to each person. Darken the room.*

*Leader: “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.” Then the candle is passed around the circle.*

*As each person receives the candle, (s)he says: Lord, let your light shine in me. (S)he prays silently or aloud for a moment. While each person is holding the candle, the rest of the group lifts him/her up in prayer either silently or aloud.*

*After the last person has received the candle,*

*Leader: “You were once in darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of the light.”*

*End by playing or singing an appropriate hymn, such as: “Shine, Jesus, Shine”; “Be Our Light”; “The Light of Christ”; or “Marvelous Light”.*
OPENING PRAYER
O God of life and light, you call us out of darkness and death. Give us the courage to respond to your love and to live according to your Spirit. Amen.

COMMENTARY ON THE WORD OF GOD
The readings for this Fifth Sunday of Lent call us out of spiritual death and bondage into life in Christ’s light. The theme of death and resurrection recalls our baptism, when we die to sin and are raised to new life according to the Spirit that is given to us.

I WILL PUT MY SPIRIT IN YOU THAT YOU MAY LIVE
The passage from Ezekiel, perhaps a foreshadowing of later Jewish belief in the resurrection of the dead, speaks figuratively of God restoring Israel to true worship under the covenant. On hearing and accepting the words of the prophecy, the people will know the Lord, will receive his spirit, and will live. Their spiritual death, which originated in their straying from God, will be ended when God opens their (symbolic) graves and restores them to life.

OUT OF THE DEPTHS
Psalm 130, called the De profundis (from the first two words in the Latin translation), is used in funeral liturgies, even though the “depths” of the first verse does not refer to the underworld of physical death, but rather to the misery of sin that feels like death. The psalmist expresses deep distress, anguish over sin, yet also trust in God’s mercy, kindness, forgiveness, and redemption.

YOU ARE IN THE SPIRIT
In the passage from the Letter to the Romans, Paul draws a contrast between flesh and spirit. Living according to the flesh brings spiritual death, although the body may live, whereas living according to the spirit brings life and hope in the resurrection of the body after physical death. Living according to the spirit means allowing the Spirit of God to dwell in us and guide our actions.

LAZARUS
The account of the Raising of Lazarus is the last of only seven miracles (called signs) recounted in John’s Gospel. These “signs” are recorded by the evangelist to reveal not so much what Jesus does, but who he is, and are often punctuated with I AM statements. As we saw in the cure of the man born blind, the blindness is “so that the works of God may be made visible through him” (John 9:3), and Jesus reveals himself as the “Light of the world” (9:5). In the seventh sign, Jesus states that the sickness of Lazarus is “for the glory of God” (11:4), and reveals himself as the “Resurrection and the Life” (11:25). Indeed, in the beginning of the Lazarus narrative, Jesus recalls the images of light and darkness (cf. 11:9-10), indicating that
having the Light within is equivalent to having Life. This theme is also evident in the Prologue to John’s Gospel: “Through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race” (1:4), there also being linked with the revelation of God’s glory (cf. 1:14).

Throughout the narrative, Jesus’ followers either object to his actions or do not understand him. His disciples try to dissuade him from returning to Judea, reminding him that at his last visit attempts were made on his life (cf.11:8). They also misunderstand his euphemistic use of “sleep” instead of “death” (cf.11:12-13). Martha (11: 21), Mary (11: 32), and other believers (11:37) all question why Jesus did not heal Lazarus. They clearly believe that he could have done it, and demand why he let Lazarus die. Martha, who has just made bold proclamations of faith in the resurrection of the dead and in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God (11: 24, 27), now objects when Jesus asks for the tomb to be opened, saying that there will be a stench (11:39). She has misunderstood his statement about the resurrection, thinking he was referring to the final resurrection on the last day.

Perhaps these objections and misunderstandings are what cause Jesus to be perturbed (11:33, 38). Perhaps it is out of compassion that he is deeply moved within himself when he sees Mary weeping. Perhaps he shudders inside because of the pain and suffering that death brings. Whatever the reason, Jesus is moved to tears when Mary, who has sat at his feet many times listening to him, now throws herself at his feet and weeps. The bystanders presume that he weeps because of his love for Lazarus, which is indicated four times in the story (11: 3, 5, 11, 36). In the first instance Lazarus is not mentioned by name, but only described as the one Jesus loves, leading to an understanding that all those whom Jesus loves (i.e., everyone) can be given a share in the resurrection and the life.

The description of the actual miracle of raising Lazarus is quite brief (as is typical in John). Jesus prays, cries out in a loud voice for Lazarus to come out, and then instructs the bystanders to untie him and let him go. The Greek verb used for crying out (kraugazein) is rare, occurring only seven times in the whole New Testament. In John’s Gospel it is used here (11:43) and four times when the people cry out for Jesus to be crucified (18:40, 19:6, 12, 15). Ironically, the same word that leads to Jesus’ death is used to raise Lazarus back to life.

When Lazarus responds in dramatic fashion, coming out of the tomb all bound up head to toe in burial cloths, he is still described as “the dead man” (11:44). Thus, the final words of the account, Jesus’ command, “Untie him and let him go” (11:44), are what truly bring Lazarus back to life. The one Jesus loves is called to leave behind the bondage of sin and death and allow Jesus’ light and life to revivify him.

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SAINT OF THE WEEK
See Week Five Cycle B p.23

MEMORY VERSE
“I will put my Spirit in you that you may live”
(Ezekiel 37:14).
FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

Discuss the following questions.

1. When in my life have I been in the depths of anguish and distress and cried out to God to help me? What happened?

2. What are some experiences where I felt or realized that I am truly “one whom Jesus loves”?

3. What things, habits, relationships, or compulsions keep me from growing closer to God?

4. In what ways has my prayer, my attitudes, or my relationship with God and others changed since the beginning of Lent? What still needs to be changed in my life in order to be closer to God?

5. In order for Lazarus to be freed, bystanders must remove the stone and untie him. When and how has someone helped me to be free enough to respond to Jesus’ call to new life? How have I helped someone else respond to Jesus’ call?

LIVING AS DISCIPLES

Select one or more of the following actions, or one of your own choosing, to do this week. Be prepared to share with your group how this experience affected your faith journey.

1. If someone misunderstands you or objects to your actions this week, treat them with compassion and mercy instead of an unkind response or retaliation.
2. Reach out this week to someone who seems to be in distress.
3. Go out of your way to visit someone who is grieving the loss of a loved one.
4. Receive the sacrament of reconciliation if you have not already done so recently.
5. Pray and reflect on the memory verse each day.
6. Accept God’s challenge to be “slow to anger and rich in love” (Psalm 145:8). One way to do this is to stop thinking of “my enemies” as enemies.

Closing Prayer and Ritual:

Gather around a prayer table with a Bible, a crucifix, a lighted candle, a clear glass bowl of water, and enough strips of white cloth* for each person. Have available for each person a watercolor marker or highlighter. *Note: the one responsible for preparing the prayer environment may want to experiment to see which cloth and markers will release the color when dipped in water. A paper towel or large coffee filter may be cut into strips if a suitable cloth is not found.

Leader: O God, through the prophet Ezekiel you promised that you would open our graves and have us rise from them, that you would put your spirit within us and give us life. Help us to trust in your promise. Give us the courage to leave behind all that binds us.

All: Amen.

Allow a period of silence while each person takes a strip of cloth and a marker and writes one or two things that hold them in bondage.

The leader calls each person by name, saying: (name), come out!

As the person’s name is called, the group responds: Untie him/her and let him/her go.

The person drops the strip into the water and responds: Amen.

Close by exchanging a sign of peace.