

A Weekly Resource for Faith Sharing, Prayer, and Service

"there is a season for every purpose under heaven"

-Ecclesiastes 3

Seasons of Faith



Winter - Lent
February 26, 2017 through
April 13-15, 2017



Winter - Lent

On December 21, the sun's high point is in its daily path at the southernmost point for the year. The solstice also officially marks the beginning of winter. Winter is the season of holidays and celebration, but also when many of us take time for quiet reflection on the year ending before we begin the new year. Setting aside time for reflection enables us to make sense of what it was but also to look toward to what it might be. In a way it is an early preparation for the Lenten Season in early spring. A time when all of us experience the difference between long dark evenings of winter and then the increased hours of daylight as we move into the fullness of spring. Just as the earth begins its process of renewal, Lent invites us to renew, revitalize and deepen our adherence to Christ through prayer and penance, including the sacrament of reconciliation. Every part of our Lenten observance: prayer, fasting and almsgiving ought to help us be renewed. God who lead us through the Lenten journey will help us reach a happy conclusion at Easter time.

Welcome to Seasons of Faith

May your kindness Lord be upon us;
we have put our hope in you". Ps 33:22

The above words of the psalmist ought to give us a moment to pause as we enter the Season of Lent. Year after year we are given the opportunity during this time of the year to ask ourselves: how am I going to observe Lent? This is a question and conversation among Catholics all around you. Many people might even make use of social media to let us know how they are planning to live their Lent this year, such as giving up meat, sweets, watching television and shopping, and the list goes on and on. Still others have decided to devote more time to cultivating the classic Lenten disciplines of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. The one thing certain about these choices is that as Church we observe, remember and celebrate the events that uphold Jesus Christ as our Savior. As believers, we put aside the differences that often plague our communities and come together centered in and on Christ. Lent is not about us. Lent is about Jesus Christ. Lent is about taking time to examine ourselves and be realistically aware of how utterly dependent upon God we really are whether we accept it or not. Thus, whatever we choose to do, deny the self or give of one self in this season of Lent, we agree that the only purpose of everything we decide to do is to draw us closer to God through Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. This is what is good to remember in every part of our Lenten observance and practices. Prayer, fasting and almsgiving ought to help us renew our baptismal covenant, putting our trust in God's promises to bring our Lenten journey to a happy conclusion at Easter.

To inspire you in your Lenten journey, in this issue of Seasons of Faith we created a special reflection section title "*Committed to New Life*". The section is based on words from Pope Francis to help you reflect in the Four Core Values of the San Bernardi-

no Diocese: Hospitality, Faith Sharing, Collaboration and Reconciliation. This year, Bishop Barnes has invited every parish in each vicariate to focus on these Core Values as a way of continuing to live in the spirit of the Mercy of God.

The Four Diocesan Core Values represent a legacy of the Diocesan Vision from Bishop Gerald Barnes. I invite every person and every community through this year to honor Bishop Barnes' Vision as we prepare to celebrate his 25th Anniversary as Bishop in our Diocese. These Core Values are the way he invites us to live the gospel message in a concrete manner. Each of these values expresses ways in which we are a Church of disciples who are committed to protecting life, engaging in the civic life of the community, and as laity developing our leadership skills, promoting vocations to the priesthood and religious life, generously offering our services in our communities, celebrating the richness of our diversity, serving and supporting the ministries in our diocese. We are blessed indeed in the Diocese of San Bernardino!

Lent is a time of penance, a time to atone for our sins and seek our salvation. The Lenten call from Joel is to return to the Lord. Lent is a season which invites Catholics and other Christians to kneel before the Cross, meditate and enter into a period of profound conversion and change. It is an opportunity to turn away from our past life toward a life with Christ, and embrace the call to holiness.

Let us make this Lenten Season a time to celebrate our unity as Church, as Diocese, and as Believers, with hearts filled with gratitude for our Shepherd Bishop. Let us repeat with the psalmist, "*May your kindness Lord be upon us; we have put our hope in you*". Ps 33:22

Peace and blessings,
Paulina Espinosa
Director



Developing relationships and building community require that people really listen to one another. Listening helps both the speaker and the hearer to grow as persons. Good listening within a group increases the trust, openness and understanding that make for authentic community. People who truly listen to one another are drawn together in a special bond.

From
**Sowing Seeds:
Essentials for Small
Community Leaders**
Renew International

Faith Sharing Guidelines

When you share, please remember ...

- Constant attention to **respect, honesty, and openness** for each person will assist the community's growth.
- Each person **shares on the level** where he or she feels **comfortable**.
- **Silence** is a vital part of the total process.
- Participants are given **time to reflect** before any sharing begins. A period of comfortable silence might occur between individual sharing.
- Persons are encouraged to **wait to share a second time** until others who wish to contribute have done so.
- The **entire community is responsible** for participating and faith sharing.
- **Confidentiality** is essential, allowing each person to share honestly.
- **Action** flowing out of the meetings **is essential for the growth** of individuals and the community.

*-from The Office of Evangelization and Adult Faith Formation Resource Manual,
Diocese of San Bernardino*



Facilitator Guidelines*

A good small community leader is warm, open, friendly and sensitive. The leader attempts to create a climate of understanding and acceptance while avoiding inclinations to control. The leader is not the “expert,” but rather a community member who facilitates the small community, freely acknowledges personal limitations and welcomes new information, ideas and insights.

From
**Sowing Seeds:
 Essentials for Small
 Community Leaders**
 Renew International

1. Invite the group to gather (keep groups between 7-10 persons). Contact everyone personally and make sure they know the time and location of the gathering. *Keep everyone individually and the community, in prayer.*
2. The faith sharing process is designed to last around 100 minutes outside of closing hospitality. For a new group add 15 minutes to the first gathering for introduction/ice breaker and to review the faith sharing guidelines on page 3 .
3. The gathering can be led by a single facilitator or the facilitation can rotate among group members.
4. The *facilitator* or a separate *convener/host* for the group should make sure...

- there are enough chairs for everyone, set up in such a manner so that participants can see each other.
- there are copies of each weekly handout for each participant.
- there is a *ritual center* set up for all to see: a green cloth for Ordinary time. There is always a bible and any other symbol(s) the closing ritual suggests.
- there is hospitality appropriate to the group to be enjoyed after the faith sharing.

5. The facilitator of the session generally can use the following process:

(for a new group the first night only):

10 Min. — Introduction/Icebreaker

Name, Ministries, Mass Attended,

Then answer the following opening question: How do you deal with change?

5 Mins.—Review of Faith Sharing Guidelines

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20 Mins.— Have everyone briefly check in, How have they been since the last gathering?

How did you do *walking* last week’s talk?.

5 mins.— To begin the prayer, light the candle, play the song, have a few moments of silence then recite the Opening Prayer together.

15 Mins.— Have someone either **read the First or Second Reading from the Bible.**

After some quiet time, share on the question or something from the reading**

15 Mins.— Have someone **read the Gospel from the Bible.** After some quiet time, share on the question or something in the readings

15 Mins.— **Read the Reflection,** invite sharing on the question or on any thoughts, reactions or reflections on any of the readings.

20 Mins.— Review the *Walking the Talk* and *Committed to New Life* sections. Discuss: What might we do as a group or as individuals this coming week in response to the readings? (optional: these sections may be part of the gathering if time permits. They can be used for personal or family reflection during the week)

10 Mins.— Finish process with the *Strength for the Journey* Ritual

Hospitality time

* You’ll find Guidelines for using Seasons of Faith in family settings or other intergenerational settings in the appendix.

**Remember that not all questions have to be responded to by everyone!



Opening Prayer for Lent

Light a candle, observe a *minute of silence* then recite together:

**Loving and Merciful God,
You give us these Holy
Days of Lent for our
conversion, in order to
prepare for your
Resurrection.**

**Help us to recognize your
call each day so that we
may one day rise to new
life.**

**Keep us close to you and
each other as we share
faith, serve those in need
and worship you in Spirit
and in Truth.
-AMEN**

Seasons of Faith

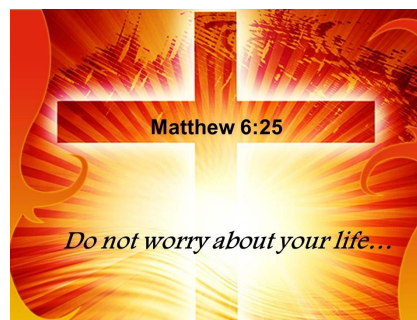
February 26, 2017 ❖ 8th Sunday in Ordinary Time 📖 Isaiah 49:14-15, 1 Corinthians 4:1-5, Matthew 6:24-34

Written by Ana Garcia, Office of Evangelization and Adult Faith Formation

Although I don't like to admit it, I would have to say that I have always been a worrywart, especially this last year when I took the big step towards adulthood and decided to live by myself in my very own apartment. It was a big transition for me and I felt like my entire life was changing. In the first months of my move I began to worry more and more, thinking, "Will I still be able to do everything I did before, now that I have to pay rent and bills each month? What if I don't buy the best refrigerator or couches? Will I be safe all by myself? What if I can't do this?" All of these things would cloud my mind constantly and I felt as though I had made the wrong decision. I would often go to my sister to vent about all of these things that I constantly worried about and that caused me not to sleep at night and she would always tell me the same thing, "Put it in God's hands and everything will be ok." It took me a few months to realize that that was exactly what I needed to do. Easier said than done, right?

Many times we waste so much time and effort worrying about things that don't matter in this life, material things that may give us instant gratification but will never fulfill our hearts the way God does. In this Sunday's Gospel we hear Jesus tell us that we must "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" and then all our needs will be fulfilled. He assures us that our Master, if we trust and believe, will always provide what we need.

If we take all the strength and effort we waste worrying about the things of this world and put them towards helping our neighbor, fighting for justice and praying for those in need, then we would truly be seeking His kingdom here on earth. Doing this will help us serve the proper Master, the One that with His love and care can give us calm during the storms of our lives. We must go to Him in all those times of worry and recognize that He is always there, alive and present in us and in all those we meet. Indeed, we must place everything in His hands and be assured that everything will be ok, even in times we worry they won't be. Let us constantly put into practice our trust in Him so that we may not worry and instead seek happiness in the Lord, today and always.



Questions for Sharing

1. **For Isaiah:** Isaiah tells us that God will never forget us. How do you remember that God is always with you? In what ways do you recognize His presence in your life?
2. **For Corinthians:** "The one who judges me is the Lord." If Jesus were here today, what would he tell you about yourself? What would he want you to work on in your life?
3. **For Matthew:** The Lord tells us, "do not worry about your life." What is something that you worry about constantly? What can you do to worry less and trust that God will provide what we need?
4. **For the Reflection:** What is something that you are currently doing to "seek the kingdom of God" here on earth? How does it fulfill you?

Walking the Talk

Letting Go and Letting God

In this Sunday's Gospel we hear Jesus tell us, "Do not worry about your life," something that is difficult for many of us to do. With these words, what Jesus is really asking of us is to have complete trust in the Lord. He confirms that all living things are important in God's eyes and for that very reason He will always give us what we need. Many of us waste so much time and effort worrying about so many things, and in most cases, they are things that we cannot change. So let us place all our trust in the hands of God, knowing that He will provide. Let go of your worry and let God take over so that you may strive to seek God's Kingdom in all you do. This week:

- On a blank page make two columns. On the first column write down the top 5 things that bring worry to your life. (Leave some space between each item). Each day, spend some time really letting go of these worries. Use the second column to write prayers, thoughts and ideas of what you can do to stop worrying about these things so much. Put these steps into action during the week so you can practice to let go and let God.

Committed to New Life

The Church is Our Home!

Editor's Note: This section of "Committed to New Life" will feature words from Pope Francis that emphasize the importance of our four diocesan values of Hospitality, Faith Sharing, Collaboration, and Reconciliation. Our commitment to live these values more intentionally can help bring new life to ourselves, our families and communities.

"Wherever we go, even to the smallest parish in the most remote corner of this earth, there is the one Church. We are at home, we are in the family, we are among brothers and sisters. And this is a great gift of God! It is like being in a family: some of its members may be far away, scattered across the world, but the deep bonds that unite all the members of a family stay solid however great the distance." (General Audience, 9/25/13)

- When attending mass this Sunday, take a moment to think of all those around the world that might also be experiencing the liturgy at the exact same time as you. Say a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the solidarity that exists in our church. This unity promotes that true reconciliation can be possible between all people.



Strength for the Journey

Seasonal Rituals To Celebrate Faith and Life

Editor's note: In response to Bishop Barnes' request to live out our Diocesan mission more intentionally in our lives, the closing rituals will help us pray together for the things that help us live the gospel message as a community of believers.

Protecting Life Together

(For the prayer center, include a cross, bible and a candle. You may also include some greenery or a green table cloth to observe Ordinary Time. Ask each participant to bring their favorite photograph of themselves, at any age.)



Leader: We begin in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **AMEN**

Leader: We gather this day as a community to pray for the protection of ALL life, from conception to natural death. The Lord blesses us at every age and is our companion in moments of joy, our support in moments of tribulation and our guide in moments of doubt.

All: Lord, we ask that you continue to guide us in all stages of life. May you always give us the courage to stand up for the protection of all life, especially the lives of those who are voiceless.

(Invite each participant to share their photograph with the group. Ask them to share how old they are in the photo. What was happening in their lives at the time the photograph was taken and why is it special to them? After they share, ask them to place the photograph at the prayer center as they pray:

"Lord, I thank you for this moment in my life. Help me to recognize your presence every day."

All: Lord, thank you for all the precious moments you give us in life. May we always cherish them and strive to protect life from all that threatens to hurt it. We ask you this through Christ our Lord, Amen.



Opening Prayer for Lent

Light a candle, observe a *minute of silence* then recite together:

**Loving and Merciful God,
You give us these Holy
Days of Lent for our
conversion, in order to
prepare for your
Resurrection.**

**Help us to recognize your
call each day so that we
may one day rise to new
life.**

**Keep us close to you and
each other as we share
faith, serve those in need
and worship you in Spirit
and in Truth.**

Seasons of Faith

March 1, 2017 ❖ Ash Wednesday 📖 Joel 2:12-18, 2 Corinthians 5:20, 6:2, Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

Written By John Duffy, St. Paul the Apostle Parish, City of Chino Hills

All hands on deck! That's what the prophet Joel seems to be shouting to the people. Many years ago in my first professional job I worked for a distribution company. I sat in a very comfortable office in the company headquarters right next to the executive suite. At one point we successfully obtained a huge new chain store account but the company did not have enough warehouse workers to service the new account. The company urgently needed help and was asking all who could spare the time, even those like me working in an office, to spend a week or two in the warehouse stocking inventory and filling orders. I responded to the call since it was clearly all hands on deck.

In the first reading Joel is rallying all the people to fast and pray to ward off disaster. Even those who are normally exempt from fasting or working, like the elderly, the young, and newlyweds, are being urged to sacrifice. Similarly, during these 40 days of Lent the Church is calling all Catholics to repentance and to prepare our hearts for Easter, the high point of our liturgical year. As Chapter 6 of Matthew states, we are

asked to give alms, pray, and fast.

What if I don't have any money to give? What if I cannot fast? What if I have no extra time to give? Fr. Tom Mullen (RIP), one of our parish priests, used to say "Maybe you can't do everything, but you can do SOMETHING." Instead of thinking about what I can't do, I ought to focus on what I can do. I recall when my dad had his first heart attack in his mid-forties how we as a family held vigil at the hospital praying fervently that God would spare his life. Or I think about the time when a friend of ours in the diaconate formation program developed cancer and how my wife and I dedicated holy hours in the adoration chapel praying that the cancer would go into remission and he would go on to be ordained. In both cases our prayers were answered.

Over the years, I've had some ho-hum Lenten seasons – not very transformative. What if I had prayed, fasted, and given material assistance with the same kind of fervor that I show when a loved one is seriously ill? What can I do differently this Lent to make it a truly transformative experience?



Questions for Sharing

1. **For Joel:** The Lord asks us to, "return to Him with all our whole heart." What has been something that you have done "whole heartedly" for the Lord? What was the outcome of what you did?
2. **For Corinthians:** "We are ambassadors for Christ." In what ways do you represent Christ in your family, place of work and in society?
3. **For Matthew:** Share a time that you prayed, gave alms, or fasted that was spiritually transformative for you? How did it change you?
4. **For the reflection:** During this Lent, how do you plan to give alms, fast and pray in a more simple way? What is one thing that you can change about the way you currently practice your faith?

Walking the Talk

Seeking a Positive Transformation

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells us "Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father." With these words, Jesus reminds us that as we enter into this conversion time we call Lent we must always strive to practice righteous acts such as prayer, fasting and almsgiving and to do them in a way that leads us closer to God. Not to seek public attention or adoration but to be truly transformed by their beauty. This week:

- Search for a new way of prayer. Perhaps try to do something that you have never done such as quiet meditation, journal writing or praying a decade of the rosary every morning. Do this as one of your Lenten practices and make sure to do it at a time you are by yourself. At the end of Lent, you can reflect on how this new prayer helped you be transformed.
- Instead of giving something up this Lent, focus on *doing* something positive for the 40 days. Read a spiritual book, go for a walk or try being more positive every day. Let this time be a positive transformation in your life.

Committed to New Life

Grow, Flourish and Bear Fruit

"Remember that the love of God accompanies you in this work. You are God's eyes, mouth, hands and heart in this world. I urge you to help transform your communities into places of welcome where all God's children have the opportunity not simply to survive, but to grow, flourish and bear fruit." (Address to Members of the European Confederation and of the World Union of Jesuit Alumni and Alumnae, Sept. 9th, 2016)

- Go to your local Home Depot, Lowes or even 99 Cents store to purchase a small plant or flower. Contemplating the small plant/flower take some time each day this week reflecting on how you have grown in faith this past year. What fruits have flourished because of this growth? In what other ways do you want to grow in your relationship with God? Write in a journal to help you reflect. Take good care of the small plant during the year and see it grow alongside your own personal growth.
- Practice hospitality and giving welcome by introducing yourself to a new person this week. Perhaps at Mass or at your workplace. Let them know that you are glad they are there and that you are glad to have met them.

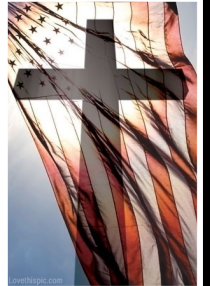


Strength for the Journey

Seasonal Rituals To Celebrate Faith and Life

A Faithful Nation

(For the prayer center, include a cross, a bible and a candle. You may also include a purple tablecloth, some rocks or a dry branch to observe the Lenten Time. If you can, also include a small flag of the United States. This can also be just an image.)



Leader: Lord, through your example, you have shown that we must always be kind to one another, to welcome the stranger, to love others despite our differences. Today, as we continue to embrace the changes in our nation, we ask you to guide us as we strive to practice faithful citizenship.

All: Lord, you are our eternal leader. Today we ask you to open our minds and hearts so that we may remain faithful to You and your teachings. Help us pray for our new president and his administration. May their good decisions always seek justice, peace and unity in our nation.

Let us now join our voices in prayer for our nation:

Reader 1: God our Father, giver of life, we entrust the United States of America to Your loving care. You are the rock on which this nation was founded.

Reader 2: You alone are the true source of our cherished rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Reclaim this land for Your glory and dwell among Your people.

Reader 3: Send Your Spirit to touch the hearts of our nation's leaders. Open their minds to the great worth of human life and the responsibilities that accompany human freedom.

All: Remind Your people that true happiness is rooted in seeking and doing Your will. Through the intercession of Mary Immaculate, Patroness of our land, grant us the courage to reject all that leads us to sin. We ask this through Christ Our Lord. Amen

Taken from <http://www.catholic.org/prayers>



Opening Prayer for Lent

Light a candle, observe a *minute of silence* then recite together:

**Loving and Merciful God,
You give us these Holy
Days of Lent for our
conversion, in order to
prepare for your
Resurrection.**

**Help us to recognize your
call each day so that we
may one day rise to new
life.**

**Keep us close to you and
each other as we share
faith, serve those in need
and worship you in Spirit
and in Truth.
-AMEN**

Seasons of Faith

March 5, 2017 ❖ First Sunday in Lent 📖 Genesis 2:7-9, 3:1-7, Romans 5:12-19, Matthew 4:1-11

By Ted Harder, Chaplain at California State Prison

Eduardo was a kid when he left for prison. His commitment offense guaranteed six years of incarceration. The add-on enhancements, however, sent him into a correctional system to serve 20 years. Isolated and alone, it is customary for kids to follow the temptation of belonging, of being safe, giving up, or fighting for survival. How do you find enough nourishment to offset the void of protein, vitamins and minerals? How do you face decades of gut-wrenching monotonous prison living when life is just starting out? Why not use one's youthful ferocity, claiming one's gladiatorial power on the yard and beyond?

Eduardo tells me of an encounter in the desert. As he sat on a sheriff's department bus waiting to be processed and shipped off to California's secreted wasteland – "Corrections", he whispered to the God he did not yet know "keep me safe". And the God he did not see, spoke. Eduardo went to the desert, not of own will but with God on his side. He fasted. For three days he ate nothing. When he was done fasting he had become a man, and God fed him. He read scriptures, re-

membering God's promise to him - peace will be with those who trust. Eduardo discovered peace of mind and heart amidst the desert wild, never doubting, not testing, simply trusting in the God he could not see. This young whippersnapper had entered prison a force to be reckoned with. The childhood dream of becoming a marine had been undercut by the violent deaths that rule the ghetto. He would have made a fierce warrior: disciplined, loyal, fearless. On the prison yard his savagery would have made him king had he chosen to use it. He did not. Neither did he give in to the constant lure of hopelessness. The bleakness that swallows up so many young lives and spits out dying addicts never stood a chance of gaining power over young Ed. Not once, over the years, has this little-known champ given up, given in or doubted. His forty days and nights in the desert has lasted fourteen years so far. His unwavering faith, that he is called to be at peace, has made him a man whose peace is contagious; a modern day apostle whose acts speak loudest, whose words leave the devil running for cover. I could not do my job without the message of this Gospel reading.



Questions for Sharing

1. **For Genesis:** What have you "opened your eyes" to recently? How has this new revelation changed the way you live your life?
2. **For Romans:** Paul tells us that Jesus' self-giving obedience gives us "acquittal and life." What positive outcomes have you seen in your life for believing in Christ? How has it made your life better?
3. **For Matthew:** What are some of the temptations of your everyday life? What do you do to turn away from them? How is God present in this?
4. **For the Reflection:** Who in your life gives you a sense of peace? Share a time when someone helped you fight off a temptation.

Walking the Talk

Overcoming Our Deserts

In this Sunday's Gospel we see how Jesus overcomes temptation and is not fooled by the trickery of the Devil. The Spirit had led him into the desert to encounter hardships and temptations but he remained strong against them. In a similar way, we are also led into the desert during this Lenten Season to learn how to remain strong against our own temptations and weaknesses. Let us look onto God and His word for guidance and strength. This week:

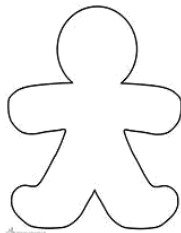
- Make a list of the "deserts" in your life, the challenges and temptations that you encounter everyday. Recognizing them and confronting them may help you overcome them this Lent.
- Write down your favorite scripture reading on a small card. Carry it with you everywhere you go and make time to read it throughout the day. Let God's words give you strength against temptation.

Committed to New Life

Opening Faith in Community

"It is impossible to believe on our own. Faith is not simply an individual decision which takes place in the depths of the believer's heart, nor a completely private relationship between the "I" of the believer and the divine "Thou", between an autonomous subject and God. By its very nature, faith is open to the "We" of the Church; it always takes place within her communion." (Lumen Fidei, 6/29/13, no. 39)

- Using scissors cut out five figures of people. (like the one pictured below) Each paper cut-out will represent a person in your life that you share your faith with on a regular basis, those who have taught you about faith, prayed with you or celebrated the sacraments alongside you and your family. On each cut-out figure, write a prayer in their honor, thanking them for being part of your community and for being there for you to share your faith with them. Make sure that you give them the cut-out as a token of gratitude for their support.



Strength for the Journey

Seasonal Rituals To Celebrate Faith and Life

Called to Lead

(For the prayer center, include a cross, a bible and a candle. You may also include a purple tablecloth, some rocks or a dry branch to observe the Lenten Time.)



Leader: We gather here today as a faithful community committed to ministering those seeking a closer relationship with Christ. Through our sharing we are growing in faith with God and one another.

All: Lord, we ask for your guidance as we continue to embrace our call as leaders in your church.

Each one of us is called, in some way, to share Your love and wisdom with others. May we welcome and answer the call as lay leaders so we may do our part to build Your kingdom here on earth.

(Invite participants to read the following, one person per letter. All will response the bold together.)

Leader: Lord, as we strive to be leaders in your church, guide us always to:

- L -** Be **Loyal** to Your word and your teachings, so that with our actions we can show others the joy of our faith.
- E -** Show **Empathy** to all those that need to be listened to. May we give compassion and mercy so that they may find hope.
- A -** Be **Available** to give my time, talent and treasures in my ministry so that those that need it the most can benefit from it.
- D -** **Delight** in the work that I am doing and remember that it is all done for the Glory of God.
- E -** Be **Energized** and guided by the Spirit to try new ways to evangelize, especially to those that do not practice their faith.
- R -** **Respond** with kindness to all that you encounter in your ministry. Even the challenges that we face can be blessings.

We conclude saying together, "Our Father..."



Opening Prayer for Lent

Light a candle, observe a *minute of silence* then recite together:

**Loving and Merciful God,
You give us these Holy
Days of Lent for our
conversion, in order to
prepare for your
Resurrection.**

**Help us to recognize your
call each day so that we
may one day rise to new
life.**

**Keep us close to you and
each other as we share
faith, serve those in need
and worship you in Spirit
and in Truth.
-AMEN**

Seasons of Faith

March 12, 2017 ❖ Second Sunday of Lent 📖 Genesis 12:1-4, 2 Timothy 1:8-10. Matthew 17:1-9

Written by Anna Vasquez, Our Lady of the Assumption, San Bernardino

Every Lent, we Catholics are invited into a season of conversion; 40 days and nights of prayer, fasting and penance in which I've "given up" bad habits and naively hoped for a great vision that would bring me to my knees much like Jesus' faithful disciples in Matthew 17:1-9. I've come to realize that conversions with thunderous clouds that speak are few and far between. For most of us, conversion is a much slower process that may unfold across months, years or even a lifetime. My own conversion has been a slow evolution through many roles I've lived--- student, activist, lover of words, "extranjera", maestra, "honey bear" (my husband's nickname for me), budding academic, and advocate. Each of these formative roles came laden with ideas that defined my words and actions, taking me on many adventures that challenged and often pushed me to my limits. And, when I take a truly honest look at all these "roles", I've come to realize that "Christian" had never truly been at the center of these identities until my husband's recent journey through RCIA; and I, the "cradle Catholic", began learning with him, the neophyte.

It has been quite a challenge to unwind/ untangle and understand previous notions of who I thought I should be and truly "let go". To literally throw away trash bags of research papers and give away heaping boxes of books to have the space to sit and listen to the quiet voice of God's

love instead of building a fortress of research to defend myself. You see it's not so easy for this Chicana who has been struggling her whole life to learn how to surrender and truly accept the invitation to walk with Christ and "Go forth... to a land that I will show you" (Genesis 12:1). What should I pack? Will I need to learn a new language? Who will help me? All the anxiety that comes with previous notions of journeys is dismissed when I choose to sit, listen and not be afraid. You see, I don't have to earn God's love. Nor do you! His love and grace is a constant gift that is ready and waiting for you right now as you read these words (2 Timothy 2:9). You just have to accept it.

This beautiful surrendering love is the most present in the newest "role" I've accepted, that of Mother. While challenging in EVERY aspect, being Mom has been the most fecund and healing process combining/aligning so many of my previous roles. Amen! With the lens of conversion, I've come to realize that I create, advocate, teach, travel and learn on a daily basis as Mom. God's perfect love and grace is gifted in my children's innocent eyes full of love.

My prayer for you and me is this:

May God give me the courage to let go, unwind and let go. And, accept Him and all his glory, grace and love. I am not "my things" (books, papers, credits, degree). I am a child of God ready to live the life He has designed for me. Amen.



Questions for Sharing

- For Genesis:** We hear the Lord's promises to Abram before he obediently does as He asked. In what ways have you listened and followed God recently? What has He led you to do?
- For Timothy:** Paul says "bear your share of hardship for the Gospel". What hardships have you encountered because of your faith and belief? Who or what helped you during this time?
- For Matthew:** The Lord says, "Rise and do not be afraid." Share a time that you overcame fear and doubt. Who or what helped you not be afraid?
- For the Reflection:** Which role in your life helps you encounter God in a special way? How does this happen?

Walking the Talk

Be Not Afraid and Listen

This week's Sunday Gospel describes to us the transfiguration of Jesus. We hear about the glorious experience that Peter, James and John had and we can only imagine how they felt seeing Jesus' face shine in front of them. We hear God say these important words, "This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased—listen to him!" And Jesus tells his disciples "Get up, Don't be afraid." This week:

- Spend some time in quiet reflection listening to what God has to tell you. Many times we spend most of our time praying to God with many words, asking Him for what we most need and we don't stop to listen. He may be guiding us to see His shining face somewhere unexpected, so let us listen and not be afraid.

Committed to New Life

Give Welcome and Be Encouraged

"May the Church be a place of God's mercy and hope, where all feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live according to the good life of the Gospel. To make others feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged, the Church must be with doors wide open so that all may enter and we must go out through these doors and proclaim the Gospel." (General Audience, 6/12/13)

- Think of someone you know that needs encouragement or some words of wisdom to help them accomplish something they are working on. Throughout the week, send them emails, texts, or visit them to share that you are thinking of them. If it's possible, you can even use post-it notes to discretely place these words, phrases and prayers of support and encouragement in places where they will find them, such as on their desk, car windshield or bedroom door. These little surprises will help them be successful in their endeavors.



Strength for the Journey

Seasonal Rituals To Celebrate Faith and Life

Fostering Growth in Our Church

(For the prayer center, include a cross, a bible and a candle. You may also include a purple tablecloth, some rocks or a dry branch to observe the Lenten Time. Make small cards with the following scripture reference written on them. Place the cards in a basket on the prayer center)



Abraham: Gen. 12:1-4a

Amos: Am 7:14-15

Requirements: Lk 9:57-62

Few Chosen: Mt 22:1-14

Moses: Ex 3:10-12; 4:1, 10-12

Isaiah: Is 6:8

The Cross: Mt 16:24-28

Leader: We gather today to continue to pray for a much needed growth in our church: to the priesthood, religious life, lay ministry, or matrimony and family life. We are all called to holiness, called to a vocation that can lead us closer to God.

All: Lord, that with your help we may discover our vocation in life. We ask that you give us the courage to answer that call, so that Your church may grow, not only in numbers, but also in faith.

(Ask each participant to approach the prayer center and take a small card from the basket. Ask them to pray with this scripture during the week. These scriptures may help them as they discern their vocation in life.)

Reader 1: Lord, there are so many things in life that we do not understand, so many questions about the future that we ask. What is Your plan for us? What is the work You want us to do?

Reader 2: All we really know is that You love us. Show us the road You want us to walk— to fulfillment, to happiness, to holiness.

All: Whatever vocation you may be leading us to, give us the strength to say "yes" and the grace to begin to prepare ourselves for the challenge of a life spent in Your service and in the care of Your people. We ask this in Jesus' Name. Amen.



Opening Prayer for Lent

Light a candle, observe a *minute of silence* then recite together:

**Loving and Merciful God,
You give us these Holy
Days of Lent for our
conversion, in order to
prepare for your
Resurrection.**

**Help us to recognize your
call each day so that we
may one day rise to new
life.**

**Keep us close to you and
each other as we share
faith, serve those in need
and worship you in Spirit
and in Truth.**

-AMEN

Seasons of Faith

March 19, 2017 ❖ Third Sunday in Lent 📖 Exodus 17:3-7, Romans 5:1-2, 5-8, John 4: 5-42

Written by Donald T. Jones, Our Lady of the Assumption, San Bernardino

Our lives are like the journey of the Israelites in the first reading, traveling to a desired destination through an uncharted land full of both opportunities and miseries. During the opportune times all is well; we coast along seemingly without a care or worry, expecting each successive moment to be as comforting as the last. We barely give a thought about how those moments came to be, taking for granted the blessings bestowed upon us. But it is the challenging times, those that take us out of our comfortable existence and place us in a situation where we question why things are happening, that reveal our resolve in our basic beliefs. Do such times remind us of how we have been blessed or do they evoke a self-righteous, entitlement attitude? Do we accept the hard times, recognizing that our God will carry us through or do we question, maybe even abandon, our faith, wondering if our God has forgotten us?

How do we face life's hardships? When we have health

challenges, when we have economic troubles, when our close relationships are strained, or when other tragedies occur, is our first reaction one of frustration or is it one of faith? Do we question if "God is in our midst" or do we draw on the 'living water' He provided through Christ? Do we lose hope or do we have faith?

As Catholic Christians we learn to draw on the 'living water' of our faith to give us hope, to give us strength through the power of the Holy Spirit, especially in the low points of our lives. The Israelites needed physical drink to satisfy their bodies, as well as spiritual drink to remind them of their faith and reboot their hope. Ahh, water! How good it tastes when we are thirsty, when we are in need of refreshment! How reinvigorated we become when we

are satisfied by it! May we be spiritually reinvigorated during this Lenten season by the hope that Christ brings us through his death and resurrection. May our faith be ever strengthened by how we respond to the challenges we face.



Questions for Sharing

1. **For Exodus:** The Israelites questioned, "Is the Lord in our midst or not?" Where in your life do you feel God's presence the most at this moment? What do you do to recognize He is there?
2. **For Romans:** Paul tells us that "hope does not disappoint because of the love of God". What is something that you hope will happen this year in your parish community, your home or with your personal faith?
3. **For John:** The Samaritan woman surrendered herself to change. What are some things that seem to hold you back from change? How can you overcome those obstacles?
4. **For the Reflection:** Share a time you were thirsty for a "spiritual drink". What did you do to find your way to the "Living Water"?

Walking the Talk

Seeking and Receiving the Living Water

This Sunday's Gospel describes Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman. Jesus tells the woman that he gives "Living Water" and whoever drinks of this water "will never thirst again." When we find ourselves thirsting for meaning in life, we must drink up what Jesus has for us so that we can truly get to know who He is and be fulfilled by His teachings. Jesus is indeed the well of "living water" that we must drink to find truth and life in our faith life. This week:

- Every time you see water or drink it, stop and say a prayer for all those that "thirst" and long to know God. Pray that they open up their hearts to Jesus and to all that he teaches so their lives may be transformed.
- March 22 is World Water Day. Spend some time this day in prayer for all those that do not have access to clean drinkable water. May the necessary changes be made in our world so no one is deprived of having water.

Committed to New Life

Encountering One Another in Faith

"While theologians carry on the dialogue in the doctrinal field, keep looking persistently for opportunities to encounter one another, to know each other better, to pray together and offer help to each other and to all those who are in need. Thus, free from prejudice and trusting only in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, proclaiming peace and reconciliation, you will be the true protagonists of a new season of this journey which, with God's help, will lead to full communion." (Homily for Canonization 10/13/16)

- This week, make the effort to reach out to someone that you know has drifted away from church. It may be a family member or a friend. Begin the conversation by sharing with them a positive experience that you have recently had with your parish community. Hearing something positive might rekindle their interest in returning to their own parish.
- Dedicate some extra time to pray for the reconciliation between families that have been torn apart by differences and misunderstandings. May they find the courage to begin mending their brokenness.



Strength for the Journey

Seasonal Rituals To Celebrate Faith and Life

A Community of Service

(For the prayer center, include a cross, a bible and a candle. You may also include a purple tablecloth, some rocks or a dry branch to observe the Lenten Time. Have a blank 3x5 card for each person. Also have pens/pencils available)



Leader: We gather this day to honor and pray all those that give of their time and talent for the service of others. We live in a society that is in need of so much. May we all open our hearts to respond to those needs as best we can.

All: Lord, may we strive to have servant hearts and follow your example of service and giving. That with our actions we demonstrate your ever-lasting love and care.

(Distribute the blank cards, one per participant, and ask them to reflect and write one way they can provide service for another person during the week. It can be something as simple as helping a friend with a daily task or as extensive as organizing a carpool for those that cannot drive themselves to Mass. Be creative! Give them the option to share with the group if they would like to. Encourage them to follow through with their commitment.)

Leader:

For those that go hungry everyday.

For those that don't have anywhere to call home.

For those that are persecuted, prejudged and misunderstood.

All:

May they be fed by the fruit of God's love.

May they know they hold a place in the heart of Jesus.

May they see that the Lord is a Merciful God and He is always listening. Amen



Opening Prayer for Lent

Light a candle, observe a *minute of silence* then recite together:

**Loving and Merciful God,
You give us these Holy
Days of Lent for our
conversion, in order to
prepare for your
Resurrection.**

**Help us to recognize your
call each day so that we
may one day rise to new
life.**

**Keep us close to you and
each other as we share
faith, serve those in need
and worship you in Spirit
and in Truth.
-AMEN**

Seasons of Faith

March 25, 2017 ❖ The Annunciation of the Lord 📖 Isaiah 7:10-14, 8-10, Hebrews 10:4-10, Luke 1:26-38

Written by Terril Bauer, Our Lady of the Assumption, San Bernardino

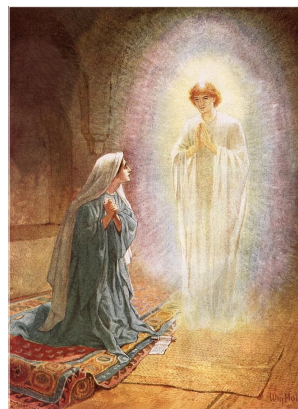
In the midst of the soul searching, praying, and reordering of priorities that are part of Lent for me, reflecting upon the Annunciation and the Incarnation give me a boost of energy and encouragement.

My first encounter with the Annunciation of the Lord was in my Children's Bible with the big, colorful illustrations. I was quite taken with the angelic looking Mary and I marveled at how lucky she was to be the mother of Jesus. Years later as I read this passage I tried to put myself in Mary's place. Wasn't she scared? Didn't she wonder what everyone would think of her, pregnant with no husband? Didn't she have doubts? Could she actually embrace the idea of giving birth to and raising the Son of God?! What incredible faith she demonstrated to be so accepting and obedient!

When Gabriel made his announcement to Mary he was telling her of the Incarnation. Yes, her life would become more complicated and there would be pain as well as joy for her, but she must have been encouraged. After all,

the Incarnation is the ultimate expression of God's willingness to be with us. Mary had the grace to accept the will of God because her faith was so strong. Can I be a little more successful today at living the words of the Morning Prayer? Can I offer up all my prayers, works, joys, and sufferings to God as Mary did? Will today be a day when I live in the present and try to work with God, or will I be preoccupied with resentments, frustrations, and selfishness?

I remember a phrase from a literature class I once took. We were told that when reading fiction we must have a 'willing suspension of disbelief.' In other words, we have to accept the author's premises and assumptions and willingly surrender to the reality he creates. This reminds me of Mary's reaction to Gabriel's announcement. Whatever skepticism she might have been tempted to feel was suspended. The whole idea of Incarnation demanded it of her as it does of us. Despite the fears and struggles we face in our lives we are called to a continuing conversion, to a renewing and a deepening of our trust in God. May we respond as Mary did. May we have the grace to live and believe that God is with us. Emmanuel!



Questions for Sharing

1. **For Isaiah:** What are some signs that the Lord has given you recently to let you know that He is with you?
2. **For Hebrews:** Through the offering of the Body of Jesus, we are consecrated. What does this offering mean to you in your life? In what ways do you give thanks for this sacrifice?
3. **For Luke:** Mary tells the Lord, "May it be done to me according to your Word." Share a time you allowed the Lord's will to lead you to new places, when you said "yes" to something unexpected. What was the outcome?
4. **For the reflection:** What thoughts or feelings come to mind when you think of Mary in the Annunciation? In what ways does her "yes" inspire you?

Walking the Talk

Trusting and saying "Yes" to the Lord

In today's Gospel when we hear how Mary gave her full and knowing consent to the angel of the Lord, she gives us the paradigm of how a human person embraces divine will. She deposited all of her trust in God, willingly and without any reservation, even though she might have or might not have been fully aware of the difficulties and consequences of her Yes! C. S. Lewis writes in *The Screwtape Letters*, "God does not want slaves to do His bidding under His command, but sons and daughters who willingly and joyfully join in His work". This week:

- Spend some time doing an activity you find difficult to perform. For example, visit a person in the hospital, make amends to someone you have a conflict with. Share with someone if you willingly or grudgingly performed this activity or refused to accept it all.

Committed to New Life

Welcoming Others in their Story

"For us hospitality is core to everything we do in our accompaniment, service and advocacy. It is about how we welcome the human person. From this encounter we understand how best to serve them. Listening, developing relationships, charity and mercy are at the heart of hospitality". Pope Francis

- This week reach out to people in your neighborhood or parish community or in your family whom you know are going through difficult times. Offer them compassion in real tangible ways. Invite them to share a cup of coffee with you and provide for them the space to share some of their frustration.
- In this Lenten Season, be more intentional in giving your donations to the rice bowl to help feed the hungry and assist the efforts of Catholic Relief Services (CRS) to respond to the needs of people in the diocese and around the world.



Strength for the Journey

Seasonal Rituals To Celebrate Faith and Life

Embracing Our Diversity

(For the prayer center, include a cross, a bible and a candle. You may also include a purple tablecloth, some rocks or a dry branch to observe the Lenten Time. Ask each person to bring an image or item that identifies with their culture. Have them place the item on the prayer center)



Leader: We gather today to recognize that we are all made special in God's image and resemblance. We all possess unique qualities and talents that make our church rich in diversity. May we always embrace and recognize our differences as blessings not obstacles.

All: Lord, help us to work towards unity in our diversity so that Your church will walk together towards You in harmony. Encourage us to learn from one another and guide us to grow together in faith.

(Ask each participant to approach the prayer center and one by one, share a bit about their image or item that they brought. They can share why this item is special to them and what about their culture it represents. After each person has shared, conclude with the following unity prayer.)

Eternal Father,
we praise you for sending your Son
to be one of us and to save us.
Look upon your people with mercy,
for we are divided in so many ways,
and give us the Spirit of Jesus to make us one in love.

We ask this gift, loving Father,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Taken from <http://www.catholic.org/prayers>



Opening Prayer for Lent

Light a candle, observe a *minute of silence* then recite together:

**Loving and Merciful God,
You give us these Holy
Days of Lent for our
conversion, in order to
prepare for your
Resurrection.**

**Help us to recognize your
call each day so that we
may one day rise to new
life.**

**Keep us close to you and
each other as we share
faith, serve those in need
and worship you in Spirit
and in Truth.
-AMEN**

Seasons of Faith

March 26, 2017 ❖ Fourth Sunday in Lent 📖 1 Samuel 16:1, 6-7, 10-13, Ephesians 5:8-14, John 9:1-41

Written by Abraham Joven, Office of Advocacy and Justice for Immigrants, Diocese of San Bernardino

There's no easy way to say it: I can be an arrogant, stubborn human and dying to self is perhaps my constant struggle. Worse, I can drift into condemnation and effectively place my opinion as truth and beyond reproach. And yet, as my wife can attest, I'm also capable of doing things like locking myself out of the house. I am far from an authority on anything, despite all of my interior attempts at buying into that delusion. And those instances, much like the readings for this week, are reflections of my humanity, reminding me of my need to surrender to the Divine and allow It to guide me.

The anxiety shown by the various characters in the readings jumps out at me: the aides to Samuel as he turns people away and the people who encounter the healed blind man. All of them are wondering how this

can be. All are wondering at the impossible. The past few months have filled me with similar anxiety as I sense a shift in my perception of the world's understanding of love and inclusion. I have felt the chill of fear, the crowding of my brain with worry, and the clouding of my eyes as I perceived hope might be lost. I was left wondering at how love might overcome the insurmountable.

But as this reading reminds, I do not see as God sees. And, more importantly, I forgot that love will overcome because Love has overcome – that my personhood is bound entirely in Him who never fails. Hope, then, is not lost because our shepherd is The Good Shepherd, the Creator of the universe. And, slowly, I can feel the scales fall off of my own eyes as I enter back into the peace of knowing I am, as it states in Ps. 139, fearfully and wonderfully made by a Maker that loves and cares for me.



Questions for Sharing

1. **For Samuel:** God chooses David and he is re-created from shepherd to king. What do you feel God has chosen for you in your life? Why do you feel this to be true?
2. **For Ephesians:** Paul encourages us to "live as children of light" so that we may produce every kind of goodness, righteousness and truth. Share a time you helped produce any of these three in your parish, home or place of work. What feelings arose with this experience?
3. **For John:** What is something that you were blind to and Jesus helped you see with faith? How has this helped you in your relationship with Christ?
4. **For the reflection:** Share a time you felt that all hope was lost. What helped you see hope again and how did it help you in your experience?

Walking the Talk

Our Blindness of Today

Today's marvelous Gospel story is about seeing the face of Jesus, allowing the scales of blindness to fall from our eyes, experiencing his healing powers, and acknowledging Jesus for who He really is: the Lord and Savior who has come into the world. However, "Many of us are reluctant today to even acknowledge the source of our salvation, the bringer of our hope, the cause of our joy. We are afraid to name him for fear of what others will say. Perhaps our reluctance is because we aren't convinced that Jesus is the one, that He's it?" (Fr. Thomas Rosica, CSB) This week:

- Write a reflection expressing how the words of Fr. Rosica make you feel. Share it with your group or family; then together discuss how the blindness that causes us to doubt that Jesus is our Lord and Savior can be cured.

Committed to New Life

Encountering Christ in the Domestic Church

"...It is important that within families, parents encourage shared expressions of faith which can help children gradually mature in their faith. Young people particularly going through a complex period in their lives are to feel the constant closeness and support of their families and the Church in their journey of faith". *Lumen Fide*, The Light of Faith

- This week focus on your family, in person or in a written card let each of your children know that you notice and appreciate their good works.
- Plan a family movie evening with your small group or family. Chose a movie for the whole family such as "Frozen" or "Miracles from Heaven" After the movie take time to identify what lessons, values children and adults can identify and how they may help the relationships in the family.



Strength for the Journey

Seasonal Rituals To Celebrate Faith and Life

The Blessing of Ministries



(For the prayer center, include a cross, a bible and a candle. You may also include a purple tablecloth, some rocks or a dry branch to observe the Lenten Time.)

Leader: We gather this day in gratitude for all the different ministries that exist in our church today. So many of us give of our time and talents to various ministries to show our love and gratitude to God. May our efforts always show our commitment to helping the Lord's church flourish.

All: Lord, as we give thanks to you for all You do for us and our ministries, we ask that you continue to guide us in our efforts to minister to all those we encounter. May we continue to use our gifts and talents for the good of the church and never stop wanting to serve those that seek your love.

Leader:

All:

For those that minister through words...

may their lips continue to preach the Good News to all nations.

For those that minister through actions...

may they continue to be God's hands and feet on their path of faith.

For those that minister through music...

may their voices be joined together to radiate God's endless love.

For those that minister thru listening...

May the Lord allow their ears to listen not only to words, but the feelings and needs of His people. Amen



Opening Prayer for Lent

Light a candle, observe a
minute of silence then
recite together:

**Loving and Merciful God,
You give us these Holy
Days of Lent for our
conversion, in order to
prepare for your
Resurrection.**

**Help us to recognize your
call each day so that we
may one day rise to new
life.**

**Keep us close to you and
each other as we share
faith, serve those in need
and worship you in Spirit
and in Truth.
-AMEN**

Seasons of Faith

April 2, 2017 ❖ Fifth Sunday in Lent 📖 Ezekiel 37:12-14, Romans 8:8-11, John 11:1-45

Written by Paul Dion, St. Christopher, Moreno Valley

"I know that you always hear me; but because of the crowd here I have said this, that they may believe that you sent me."

These words of Jesus, spoken before the tomb of Lazarus bring us to the reality of the Communion of Saints. The spirit of our prayer in community is a powerful one. The elevation of our heart and soul to God projects an aura of God's presence into our environment. It is a moment of reconciliation between the one praying and those joining in prayer.

The moment is an experience of mission. It is a moment of deep faith in the presence of God in all His people. This is not a moment of personal admiration but a moment of recognition of the presence of the Divine Spirit in us all. *"But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin,*

the spirit is alive because of righteousness." (Rom 8; 10) We are called to live the mission received from Christ to baptize all people. Our lives are not superficial imitations of the words and actions of Christ. As St. Paul reminds us, our lives are the life of Christ. As today's quote from Romans tells us, *"If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through his Spirit that dwells in you."* (Rom. 8; 11)

This our call; this is our mission.



Questions for Sharing

1. **For Ezekiel:** The Lord gives us His Spirit so that we may live. Share a time you felt the Spirit alive and burning in your heart. What did it lead you to do?
2. **For Romans:** Paul tells us that if Christ dwells in us, our spirit will always be alive. What in your life makes you feel most alive? Why?
3. **For John:** Jesus tells us that "whoever believes in him will never die." Share a specific time you showed that you believed in Jesus Christ through your words or actions. In what ways did this situation give you life?
4. **For the reflection:** At this moment, in what ways does your life resemble Jesus' life? What is one change you can show He dwells in you?

Walking the Talk

"Lord, if you had been here..."

Today's Gospel shows that sometimes adversity brings people closer to God. Jesus uses Lazarus' illness and death to demonstrate the power of God through him, not for his own sake but for the sake of his disciples, for our sake! Jesus uses the adversity of the natural consequence of Lazarus' illness and death to bring us, not only closer to him, but also to allow us to trust that He is with us when despair might rule the day. This week:

- Recall a memory when you were able to overcome despair or fear. What or who helped you go through this difficult time. Dedicate some time giving thanks to God for all that helped you during this time in your life.
- Reflect and share in your group or family about a dream you thought was impossible and it came true. What role, if any, did God have in the fulfillment of your dream? Take some time to encourage someone else to follow their dreams.

Committed to New Life

Stepping Outside Ourselves

"Please do not withdraw into yourselves! This is a danger: we shut ourselves up in the parish, with our friends, within the movement, with the like-minded... but do you know what happens? When the Church becomes closed, she becomes an ailing Church, she falls ill! That is a danger. . . .A Church closed in on herself is the same, a sick Church". (Pope Francis, 5/18/13)

- Write a note to a ministry group in your parish thanking them for the way their service impacts your faith. Ask them if you could assist them in a project. Tell them about your own ministry in your small faith community/faith sharing group and invite them to one of your meetings.
- If you have children in a religious education program, or even if you do not, offer to assist the catechists in one of their weekly classes or a special task they might be planning for the class.



Strength for the Journey

Seasonal Rituals To Celebrate Faith and Life

Rooted in Giving

(For the prayer center, include a cross, a bible and a candle. You may also include a purple tablecloth, some rocks or a dry branch to observe the Lenten Time. Have a half-sheet blank piece of paper for each participant. Also have a pencil or pen for each person.)



Leader: We gather this day to recognize that we must always give our best in as many ways as we can. Jesus, says "give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back." (Luke 6:38)

All: Lord, help us to remember that all we have is to be shared, especially with those that are most in need. With your example, you show us to share our treasures with others. Empty our minds and hearts from greed so that we can give whole-heartily in your Name.

Reader 1: In times of chaos and doubt..... Give peace.

All: For the measure we give, will be the measure we receive.

Reader 2: In times of hatred and loneliness Give love.

All: For the measure we give, will be the measure we receive.

Reader 3: In times of hurt and confusion Give mercy.

All: For the measure we give, will be the measure we receive.

Reader 4: In times of loss and sadness Give hope.

All: For the measure we give, will be the measure we receive.

All: Lord, help us refocus our eyes to see that all that we have is given to us to do Your work. We give you thanks for trusting us with all these blessings and may we always strive to give without asking for anything in return. We ask you this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.



Opening Prayer for Lent

Light a candle, observe a *minute of silence* then recite together:

**Loving and Merciful God,
You give us these Holy
Days of Lent for our
conversion, in order to
prepare for your
Resurrection.**

**Help us to recognize your
call each day so that we
may one day rise to new
life.**

**Keep us close to you and
each other as we share
faith, serve those in need
and worship you in Spirit
and in Truth.**

-AMEN

Seasons of Faith

April 9, 2017 ❖ Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion 📖 Isaiah 50:4-7, Philippians 2:6-11, Matthew 26:14-27:66

Written By Tessie Duffy, St. Paul the Apostle Parish, City of Chino Hills

"My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" When I was a freshman in high school, my eldest sister and I went by bus on a shopping trip to Manila from Cavite, a small town in the Philippines. After an exciting day of shopping in the big city, my sister got on a Jeepney, a popular form of public transport in the Philippines. She thought that I was with her on the Jeepney and came all the way home without me. I did not know what happened to her and could not understand why she left me alone. I felt so abandoned, especially after I had to find my way home on my own getting rides from strangers. My eyes well up with tears when I think about how abandoned our Lord must have felt during his Passion. His disciples could not stay awake for even an hour during his agony in the garden. One of his disciples, Judas, betrayed him, and Peter, the disciple he called "rock," denied him. Jesus had to carry his heavy cross alone until Simon was pressed into service to help him because he was so weak. He had to endure the jeers and taunts of the crowd who viewed him as an outcast. Finally, he suffered crucifixion, the most humiliating and

painful form of execution devised by the Romans. Jesus knew what it was to be totally abandoned. In 2008 I felt terrible when we were forced to close our business and I could not honor a gift certificate that a customer had purchased. I was shocked, though, when she got so upset that she spat in my face. The humiliation that I felt in that incident and having to declare bankruptcy gave me a little glimpse into the humiliation that Christ must have felt. It was a turning point for me, however, as I understand now that God was pruning me for new spiritual growth. Through it all, I felt that God was by my side. He never abandoned me in my time of trouble. How could we think that the God who humbled himself to take on flesh and knows what it is like to be abandoned, would ever abandon us? When I was lost in Manila, I felt so abandoned, but really the Lord was with me the whole time and in hindsight I am confident he was helping me to get home safely. No matter what trials I go through, I know that God will always be with me, just like Simon, helping me to bear my cross.



Questions for Sharing

1. **For Isaiah:** Isaiah tells us, "The Lord is my help, therefore I am not disgraced." Share a time when you received help from someone when you most needed it. How did you encounter Christ through them in this experience?
 2. **For Philippians:** In what ways do you "confess" that Jesus Christ is Lord to others? Share a specific response you have received when doing this.
 3. **For Matthew:** What images remain in your mind and heart when listening to the Passion Story? In the midst of all that Jesus endures, what signs of hope and love do you recognize?
- For the reflection:** During what moment of trial have you felt that God was closest to you? In what ways did you acknowledge His presence?

Walking the Talk

His Suffering Sets us Free

This Sunday we follow Jesus into His Passion. At this point, perhaps we feel like we have had enough suffering of our own. The darkness that descends around us becomes overwhelming and we cannot wait until the day we no longer suffer. These moments of darkness are when we need Jesus the most, and yet, when we look around, we see him nowhere. In the Gospel, Jesus has died in the midst of the darkness. The suffering has descended all around Him and He voices the abandonment of the soul from the cross. And now at last it is over, isn't it? This week:

- Reflect on ways you find strength through Christ's passion to bear any hardship. Take some time to write the words "The Lord God is my help and strength" on a small card. Carry this card with you. During the week when you experience moments of doubt, anger, confusion or sadness, take out this card and repeat the words a few times in silence. This will bring you peace and calmness and it might help you see more clearly how you need to respond to the situation. Do this as many times as needed.

Committed to New Life

Endless Desire to Show Mercy

"Mercy overcomes every wall, every barrier, and leads you to always seek the face of the man, of the person. And it is mercy which changes the heart and the life, which can regenerate a person and allow him or her to integrate into society in a new way. (9/10/14) ...therefore we can move forward, boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads, and welcome the outcast". (Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium, 24). (12/12/14)

- Every day this week focus on how you can be open to other people's points of view or perspectives. Engage in conversation and practice listening before you speak.
- If you enter into a heated discussion and find yourself getting angry or upset, call a "time out". Take a walk, listen to music do whatever it takes to calm down.



Strength for the Journey

Seasonal Rituals To Celebrate Faith and Life

Welcoming with Honor

(For the prayer center include a crucifix draped with a light weight purple cloth, a bible and a candle. Prepare ahead small pieces of purple cloth for each participant. You may cut the strips of cloth from a larger piece of fabric and distribute one per participant. Also have an unlit tea light for each participant. Place them on the prayer center.)



Palm Sunday marks the beginning of Holy Week. On Palm Sunday some parishes cover or veil the crucifix with purple cloth. The veiling symbolizes the fact that Christ's Divinity was hidden at the time of His Passion and death.

All: God our Father, we gather today as we prepare to welcome Your Son as he enters the holy city of Jerusalem. We wave palms in praise and honor.

(Invite participants to come forward with their piece of purple cloth to cover or veil the cross on the prayer center and to take a tea light and light it with the larger candle. Ask them to stand in a circle as they read the prayer below.

Reader 1: As we begin this Holy week and give Him welcome, may we bless Him as our king and give Him praise and glory, for He has shown us His everlasting love.

Reader 2: Grant us the strength to follow Him from death to the resurrection, from darkness to fullness of light.

All: It is the cross that is at the heart of our faith. The cross that leads us to the resurrection and to Jesus, who is the fullness of life. We ask this in His name. Amen.



Opening Prayer for Lent

Light a candle, observe a *minute of silence* then recite together:

**Loving and Merciful God,
You give us these Holy
Days of Lent for our
conversion, in order to
prepare for your
Resurrection.**

**Help us to recognize your
call each day so that we
may one day rise to new
life.**

**Keep us close to you and
each other as we share
faith, serve those in need
and worship you in Spirit
and in Truth.**

-AMEN

Seasons of Faith

April 13-15, 2017 ❖ Easter Triduum 📖 Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14, Hebrews 4:14-16, 5:7-9, Matthew 28:1-10

By Clare Colella, Our Lady of the Assumption, San Bernardino

As we celebrate the seasons of faith in our lives and in the life of the Church, we come to our greatest feast – the sacred time of the Triduum and Easter -- the “high holy days” of the Church’s year of grace. The Paschal Mystery of dying and rising takes place in our own lives as well. When I have “kept” Lent well, these precious days of Triduum make a significant difference in my life.

Central to both the liturgical celebrations and the prayers of this season are powerful symbols which enrich our faith life these days: water, light, oil, bread and wine. In the years that I have been involved with initiation ministries, I have come to listen to and remember better the prayers of the Easter Vigil. I want to focus for now on the centrality of water in the Vigil as we prepare for the baptism of the Elect, and as we renew our own baptismal promises. In the proclamation from Exodus we have heard of how the waters of the sea saved the escaping people of Israel from the pursuing Egyptians. God’s power in action!!

In the prayers of blessing of the new baptismal water, we hear the recounting of the myriad of ways in which God has

been with, protected, cared for and saved the Chosen People, from creation to crucifixion. Many years ago now, those prayers were said over the waters with which our daughter Marie would be baptized that evening. What a perfect celebration! To know that grace and redemption have been offered to her, to each of us, brings me to tears at times. Because of her, I am more than ever aware of how intimately God’s love and salvation are present in my life today. I often take water for granted, but in the Easter Vigil prayers and rites I see once again how God uses the simple things of daily life to let us know how passionate God is about each of us. As we witness the baptism of our Elect, I am in awe of God’s continuing mercy and goodness.

Each time, during the Easter liturgies, that the sprinkling rite is used, each time we go to the font of new life and bless ourselves with this holy water, we can be renewed and reminded of God’s great, tender and continuing love. The Paschal Mystery touches our lives each day; may we, each time we use water, recall with joy God’s great gift of redemption.



Questions for Sharing

1. **For Exodus (Holy Thursday):** What has been the most difficult for you during these last 40 days? ¿What do you believe God wants you to do now?
2. **For Hebrews (Good Friday):** We hear that Christ “offered prayers and supplications to the one that was able to save him.” Share a time you offered “prayers and supplications” to God during a difficult time. How did this bring you peace?
3. **For Matthew (Easter Vigil):** The angel tells the women, “Do not be afraid!”. Share a time you felt fear because of the unknown. Who or what helped you find hope again?
4. **For the reflection:** How has water been a sign of God’s presence in your life? What symbols of the Easter Triduum speak to you the most? Why?

Walking the Talk

The Opened Tomb

In today's Gospel we hear: "After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to view the tomb". Upon their arrival their lives were changed. How about us? Can we celebrate Easter and not be moved? Can we still have the world as it was yesterday? We want to come to church on Easter, sing some soul-stirring hymns, eat lunch with our family and friends, hunt for eggs with our children, and still have our world un-rocked by the resurrection. Why? Because we are amazingly well adjusted to the same old world. This week:

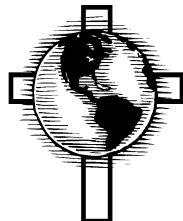
- Make a list of personal improvements and renovations you might need to do to make this Easter a truly transforming and changing experience. Place the list on a visual place to remind you that you are a work in process.

Committed to New Life

Healing Wounds

"Freedom of religion and freedom of expression, It is my hope that interreligious and ecumenical cooperation will demonstrate that men and women do not have to forsake their identity, whether ethnic or religious, in order to live in harmony with their brothers and sisters". (Pope Francis, 1/13/15)

- Create a group of close friends from your parish who might be open to discuss a way to reach out to Christians from other denominations and establish an ecumenical task force to work towards the improvement of your neighborhood .
- Talk to a friend about your aha! moments after reflecting on the above words from Pope Francis.



Strength for the Journey

Seasonal Rituals To Celebrate Faith and Life

The Three Days

(For the prayer center, include a cross, a bible and three candles. You may also include a purple tablecloth, some rocks or a dry branch to observe the Lenten Time.)



Leader: We gather this day to recognize and honor The Triduum, which is the culmination of our Christian belief. It begins with Holy Thursday and ends with the celebration of the Easter Vigil. It is during this special three days that we celebrate the Paschal Mysteries of the suffering, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

All: Lord, open our hearts and minds so that we may truly be present during these final days of Lent. May all that we lived, experienced and encountered during this season stay with us and continue to change our lives for the better.

Leader: Let us now join our voices in prayer to prepare to enter these three days with Christ.

Reader 1: Holy Thursday, Lord Jesus, at the Last Supper, you said: "Do this in remembrance of me."

All: Help us to realize that the Mass is the greatest gift of God to us and our greatest gift to God.

Reader 2: Good Friday, Jesus, it is the sight of you affixed to the Cross and suffering insults, which impels me to love you.

All: Help us to remain in your love and never forget the sacrifice you gave for us.

Reader 3: Holy Saturday/Easter Vigil, Son of the living God, you have allowed us though baptism to be buried with you;

All: Grant that we may also rise with you in baptism and walk in the newness of life. Amen

Taken and adapted from <http://www.stagnescathedral.org/Prayers/Triduum.html>



Principles for Family Faith Sharing

- **Keep it simple.** Rather than plan a full evening, pick one item: a reading, question, or activity to do at different times during the week.
- **Keep it everyday.** Link a faith sharing conversation to daily life. Have a casual faith conversation as part of a shared meal, on a drive, or while doing a seasonal activity.
- **Be open.** To the action of the Holy Spirit in your family. Point out signs of grace when you see them such as siblings getting along, when possessions are shared with others, or when someone says "I'm sorry." Encourage everyone in the family to do the same.
- **Be flexible.** Allow things to happen naturally (Keep it everyday.) Don't force anyone to talk, or punish them if they don't!
- **Be respectful** of everyone's spiritual experiences, especially children. Never laugh at or make fun of anyone's sharing.

Appendix

Family Use Guidelines



In preparing to use the resource,

- Please review the Family Faith Sharing principles in the column on the left hand side of this page. Each week the **Households of Faith** column may include a creative activity. Be sure to review the handout ahead of time to prepare and gather materials to do this activity.
- Remember, Family Faith Sharing is more about having spiritual conversations and growing spiritually as a family, than about "teaching."



For families with Adolescents,

- Let the teen read the reading for the family.
- Ask the teen to prepare their own opening prayer instead of the one given on the handout.

For families with young children,

- Read and/or Tell the Gospel stories only from a simpler translation such as the "Good News Bible" or from a children's Bible with pictures. The reading is listed on the front of the weekly handout.
- Recite opening prayers in a "repeat after me" form. Parent or other adult says a part of the prayer, and it is repeated by everyone.

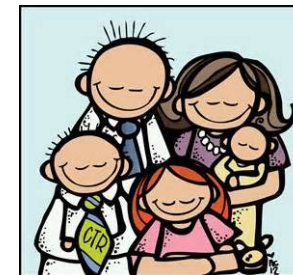


For families with older children,

- Read no more than one reading at a time. Readings are listed on the front of the weekly handout.
- Let a child read and/or recite opening prayers. Take turns each week. Ask everyone to make one petition - someone or something the family should pray for. Put everyone's name in a bowl and draw one out each week to pray for them.

General Process for Family Night Faith Sharing

1. Invite everyone in the family to gather around a table. Designate an evening, or time of day to make this a priority. Inform everyone of the time, explain to little ones the special occasion 'faith sharing'. What is it? Time together as a family talking about GOD and Jesus!
2. Prepare the space! Clear the table or area chosen.
3. The faith sharing process in this resource is designed to last around 90 minutes. With a family this can be considerably cut back, depending on ages and attentiveness.
4. Plan a special snack. Take turns within the family.
5. Choose a facilitator or 'shepherd' for the time together:
 - This person would say the beginning prayer, settle everyone, and thank everyone for making this a priority time and for being here!
 - This person also keeps everyone involved, staying on task and listening!





Our Writers

Terril Bauer: Terril attends Our Lady of the Assumption Parish in San Bernardino. She is married with one son and three grandchildren. She has worked as a children's librarian and an elementary teacher. She is currently a caregiver for her mother. She is on the RCIA team, the Parish Renewal Retreat team and is a reader. She is a participant in the Catholic Bible Institute.

Clare Colella: Clare has been involved in Adult Initiation ministry for over three decades which has helped shape her spirituality, aware of the journey of faith and growth. For eight years Clare has prepared a weekly column for the parish bulletin that is a reflection on the readings and connects them to the life of those who are intentional about their spiritual growth. As a Master Catechist, she enjoys helping others grow in skills and effectiveness as catechists. She and her husband are active at Our Lady of the Assumption parish. Among their special joys are traveling and enjoying their son and his family – especially their grandson!

Paul Dion: Paul was born a long time ago to a Franco-American couple. It was in Holyoke, Massachusetts in an area where French was the predominant second language. He was educated in Catholic schools and during the entire time of his education he was taught and formed in the spirituality of the Missionaries of Our Lady of La Salette. All his education, from kindergarten through Masters Degree in Theology was bi-lingual. All his life he has lived in bilingual, multi-cultural environments. At this moment him and his wife live and minister mostly at St. Christopher parish in Moreno Valley, of course side by side with the La Salette Missionaries. They have dedicated their lives to the formation of adults through writing, teaching through presentations, retreats and hosting pilgrimages to holy places, primarily the Holy Land. He manages and maintains a few blogs, one of them dedicated to the spirituality of the La Salette Missionaries.

John Duffy: John is 55 years old, serves an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, and co-leads the Ministry to the Sick and Homebound with his wife Tessie in their parish, St. Paul the Apostle, in Chino Hills. He also serves on the parish liturgy and evangelization committees. John is a graduate of CMFP and CBI and is currently in the aspirancy year of the Diaconate Formation Program.

Tessie Duffy: Tessie is passionate about sharing her faith and enjoys serving others. She is an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion and co-leads the Ministry to the Sick and Homebound with her husband, John. She serves on the parish Liturgy Committee and Evangelization Committee at St Paul the Apostle, Chino Hills, the Financial Advisory Board with the Diocese of San Bernardino, is a CMFP graduate with specialization in Pastoral Care Formation from Loyola Marymount University (LMU), completed LMU's Catholic Bible Institute and Advanced Liturgy Formation programs. She and her husband are currently aspirants for the Diaconate Formation Program.



Our Writers

Ana Garcia: Ana is currently the consultant for the Office of Evangelization and Adult Faith Formation. She has been an employee for the Diocese of San Bernardino for 14 years. She holds an Associate's degree in Liberal Arts from Chaffey Community College. In 2012, she received the St. Bernardine Diocesan Award for her mission work in Guatemala. In 2015 she received a Certification in Hispanic Theological and Pastoral Studies from the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, CA

Ted Harder: Ted Harder is the Regional Coordinator for *Get On The Bus* & Chaplain at a California State Prison and has been there since 2008. He has worked with the incarcerated for 20 plus years. Born and raised in Denmark, Ted arrived in the States in 1990 to volunteer with the Missionaries of Charity Brothers.

Donald T. Jones: Don and his wife, Teri, have been a members of Our Lady of the Assumption parish in San Bernardino since 1983. Both of their children, Jackie and Matthew, began their schooling at OLA, attended Aquinas high school, graduated from college with bachelor degrees, and have moved out of state to pursue their individual careers. Don is retired after 34 years of service with the San Bernardino Sheriff's Department, working as a forensic scientist in the crime lab. He is active in the OLA community, serving in the Renewal Retreat and Mass Coordinator ministries among others. He is also a member of the Del Rosa Knights of Columbus, council 4488.

Abraham Joven: AJ Joven is a Catholic writer and immigrant rights advocate. Born in the Philippines and raised in LA, he currently lives in Riverside and works as the Director of Advocacy and Justice for Immigrants on behalf of the Diocese of San Bernardino. He also loves Liverpool Football Club, Hamilton, social justice, and his amazing wife.

Anna Vasquez-Banerjee: Anna is a member of Our Lady of the Assumption parish. In addition to being mommy to three young children, she is a part-time support teacher at a local charter school.



**“Lent is a time of grace, a time to
convert and live out our baptism fully.”**

~ Pope Francis