

# A HEART RENEWED



## LENT 2021



CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF BUNBURY

## WELCOME

*"God never tires of forgiving us; we are the ones who tire of seeking his mercy....Time and time again he bears us on his shoulders. No one can strip us of the dignity bestowed upon us by this boundless and unfailing love. With a tenderness which never disappoints, but is always capable of restoring our joy, he makes it possible for us to lift up our heads and to start anew."*

*Pope Francis  
The Joy of the Gospel 3*

Welcome to the Lenten journey for 2021 and to this program from the Diocesan Pastoral Office.

In the Liturgy we pray "Father...each year you give us this joyful season when we prepare to celebrate the Paschal Mystery with mind and heart renewed."

Lent is the time of grace where we allow God to 'renew our hearts'. Hearts can wander and get lost, they can grow cold and hard and shut off from others. Hearts can be wounded and struggle to live in true harmony with others. Hearts can also succumb to temptation and create pain and anguish in this world. Hearts can wander far from their Creator and suffer greatly as a result.

A 'renewed heart' is not simply a personal, inner experience; it is above all a renewed way of living and relating to God and other people. It is a renewed way of seeing that issues in a renewed way of engaging with life. Lent is, after all, a summons to live anew!

This program, "A Heart Renewed", is offered to support us in the renewal of our lives this Lent. It offers prayers, reflections and exercises to nourish us on our Lenten journey. It will focus particularly on the struggles we face, the wounds we bear and the 'ashes' we find in our lives sometimes; and it will lead us to 'new life' as we allow God to reach and renew our hearts in His love.

Special thanks are given to Dr Michael Jackson who has continued to support and contribute to this work with his ideas, scholarship and spiritual vision.

I wish you a fruitful Lenten journey to Easter. May this program provide nourishment on the journey to a renewed heart.

God bless you!

Fr Tony Chiera

*An Ash Wednesday Prayer*  
*Henri Nouwen*

*How often have I lived through these weeks without paying much attention to penance, fasting, and prayer?*

*How often have I missed the spiritual fruits of the season without even being aware of it? But how can I ever really celebrate Easter without observing Lent?*

*How can I rejoice fully in your Resurrection when I have avoided participating in your death?*

*Yes, Lord, I have to die—with you, through you, and in you—and thus become ready to recognise you when you appear to me in your Resurrection.*

*There is so much in me that needs to die: false attachments, greed and anger, impatience and stinginess.... I see clearly now how little I have died with you, really gone your way and been faithful to it.*

*O Lord, make this Lenten season different from the other ones.*

*Let me find you again.*

*Amen.*





## FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

### *GATHERING PRAYER*

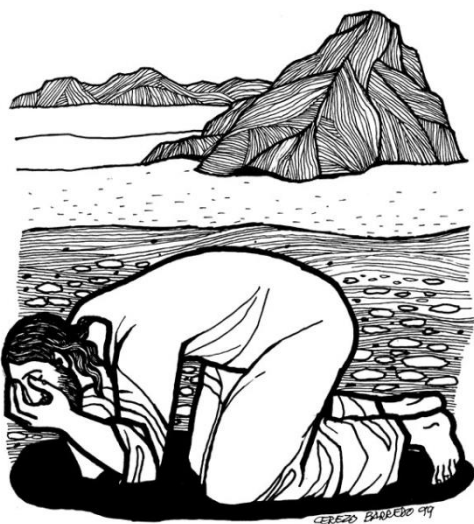
Lord our God,  
you formed your people from the clay of the earth  
and breathed into them the spirit of life,  
but they turned from your face and sinned.  
In this time of repentance we call out for your mercy.

Bring us back to you  
and to the life your Son won for us  
by his death on the cross,  
for he lives and reigns for ever and ever.

Amen

### *PROCLAIMING AND HEARING THE GOSPEL*

*A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Mark (1:12-15)*



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

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

The Gospel of the Lord

***Pause for a few moments of prayerful reflection and allow the Words of the Gospel to speak to you. As I hear this Gospel, which words or phrases stay with me?  
Share these words and phrases with others in your group without discussion. Simply repeat and echo the sacred words and let them fill your mind.***

## ***REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL***

The story of Jesus being tempted in the desert comes immediately after his baptism. Jesus begins his public ministry with his confrontation with evil and darkness. The rest of his life and ministry will continue this great battle and struggle: casting out demons, healing, struggling for the truth against corrupt leaders and even dealing with the blindness of his own disciples. Throughout his ministry Jesus proclaims the good news that the time of God's loving and healing reign is near. God's truth and love is stronger than distortion and injustice. Jesus calls people to open their hearts and believe the Good News of God's renewing love now "close at hand".

## ***QUESTIONS FOR GROUP SHARING AND DISCUSSION***

- ❖ Like Jesus, we too must struggle in our Christian life. What struggles and temptations are we facing in our lives as Christians and in our parishes at this time?
- ❖ Angels cared for Jesus in the desert. What gives you strength and hope as you face the challenges of being a Christian?
- ❖ Share your Lenten hopes for yourself and your parish with the group. What do you think are helpful Lenten practices today?

## ***LENTEN REFLECTION*** ***The Insecurity of Being Human***

The moment of our birth holds within it an incredible and frightening truth about ourselves. We are born gasping and wailing for that first breath of life; born utterly dependent on others. The truth about us is that we are never sufficient and secure in ourselves alone. As we grow older and become more aware of ourselves we begin to sense the disturbing questions that never leave: Who am I? Why am I here? Where do I belong? Where is life taking me? We, as human beings, carry within ourselves a radical insecurity from the very beginning.

Sometimes we experience this insecurity as a strange sadness that comes upon us and we don't know why; at other times it comes as nostalgia and a longing for something 'more', that we cannot even put into words. But one thing is certain – we cannot bear this state of uncertainty and insecurity for very long. We go searching for something that will give us security, and help relieve the uncertainty we feel; reaching out for some way to settle this painful ache and longing in our hearts.

Sometimes human beings try to find their security, and 'ground' themselves, by turning outwards into the world and finding some 'external solution' to their insecurity and anxiety. We look, for instance, for what we can accumulate and achieve that will prove our value and calm our insecurities. At other times people turn inwards and try to find happiness and peace focussed solely on themselves. Experience shows us that these are vain attempts at finding security.

Every day we see the results of misguided ways of trying to deal with the insecurity and longing ache within our hearts. We see people tragically attached to 'things', desperately trying to anaesthetise their pain, and willing to do almost anything to fill the void in their hearts – even if it damages others or themselves.

During Lent we are called to see this hunger and longing in ourselves for what it truly is. The human heart is a longing and a desire for God. God who eternally desires us, fashions us with a desire for Himself stamped on our very being. The restlessness and insecurity we experience deep within ourselves is the stirring of our deepest desire for God. We are in this world as flesh and blood longing for God. But Lent takes us further than this. We are also called in Lent to recognise how our hunger for God can become lost, confused and even distorted. We can avoid facing the questions and hungers of our hearts and immerse ourselves in a superficial and unreflective life. We can also settle for damaging and destructive 'solutions' to our inner ache and insecurity; trying to find our fulfilment apart from God and at any expense to ourselves or others.

The words of God through the Prophet Joel on Ash Wednesday cry out to us in Lent: "Come back to me with all your heart".

### ***DISCUSSION QUESTIONS***

- 1. What "idols" do you see people constructing in our world today?***
- 2. When do we tend to sense the longing for God within us most?***

### ***SENDING PRAYER***

Dear Lord,  
Bring us back to you.  
Sometimes our hearts turn in every direction except towards you.  
Help us to turn our hearts toward you, to gaze upon you in trust  
and to seek your kingdom.  
Soften our hardened hearts so that we might love others  
as a way to glorify and worship you.  
We pray for a renewal of our lives. Our desire is clear.  
We want the self-sacrificing love of Christ -  
which brings us mercy and healing - to be reproduced in our lives.  
In our journey, we seek to savour the meaning of Jesus' self-less love,  
so that we might reflect that love to others.  
We desire nothing less than God's re-creating us -  
breathing new life into us.  
Grant us this with the ever-present guidance of your spirit.  
Amen

### ***LENT IN ACTION THIS WEEK***

#### **Spiritual Reading**

St Benedict, the founder of the Benedictines, saw reading as a prayerful activity. He required each of his monks to read a book during Lent. Anyone can practice spiritual reading in Lent. Select books that deal with Sacred Scripture, biographies of saintly people, books on prayer or sacraments, or ones that deal with developing a deeper spiritual life. Reading has the ability to deepen one's prayer life.

**Set aside specific time for spiritual reading this Lent!**



## SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

### GATHERING PRAYER

Father of light,  
in you is found no shadow of change  
but only the fullness of life and limitless truth.  
Open our hearts to the voice of your Word  
and free us from the original darkness that shadows our vision.  
Restore our sight that we may look upon your Son  
who calls us to repentance and a change of heart.  
For he lives and reigns with you for ever and ever.  
Amen

### PROCLAIMING AND HEARING THE GOSPEL

*A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark (9:2-10)*



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

As they came down the mountain he warned them to tell no one what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

They observed the warning faithfully, though among themselves they discussed what 'rising from the dead' could mean.

The Gospel of the Lord.

***Pause for a few moments of prayerful reflection and allow the Words of the Gospel to speak to you. As I hear this Gospel, which words or phrases stay with me?  
Share these words and phrases with others in your group without discussion. Simply repeat and echo the sacred words and let them fill your mind.***

## ***REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL***

Last Sunday, we began Lent 'down' in the desert. This week we are taken 'up' to the mountain top, the place of revelation from God. Jesus is revealed to the disciples with a glimpse of his glory, as the 'beloved Son'. The story of the transfiguration in the gospel of Mark follows Jesus' first warning of his suffering and death. The disciples found this talk of suffering and death impossible to accept. Now, on the mountain top, the voice from heaven tells them 'listen to him'. The disciples are slowly being prepared for the scandal of the cross, and the new life and glory that comes through it. Resurrection and glory can only be understood in the mystery of suffering and dying.

## ***QUESTIONS FOR GROUP SHARING AND DISCUSSION***

- ❖ God constantly 'reveals' himself to us. Where have you seen 'glimpses' of God's glory lately? E.g. in creation, other people, liturgy etc. How have these moments affected you and your Christian life, especially during the Pandemic?
- ❖ Like the disciples we struggle with the Cross too. What strengthens us to embrace our crosses?
- ❖ How can our parish sustain us more in the 'ups and downs', the 'deserts' and 'transfigurations' of our Christian life?

## ***LENTEN REFLECTION*** ***The Doubt That Holds Us***

The radical insecurity we feel as human beings leaves us with a lingering self-doubt. We wonder if we really are of any actual worth, whether we are truly lovable or of any real value. Sometimes we feel that we are just an outer show with little inner substance.

This inner self-doubt is compounded by many of life's experiences. We are hurt, ignored and rejected by others and as a result doubt ourselves and our value even more. We may find it difficult to find employment and so wonder about our value in this world. There are so many ways that we can come to feel diminished and of little value as a person.

As Christians we may find this self-doubt magnified by our "seeming inability to believe in and to accept God's unconditional love and forgiveness of us, and so to make that love and forgiveness the bedrock of our identity and personal security". (Dr M. Jackson) We know in 'our heads' that the power of God's unconditional love, given to us in the Holy Spirit, can free us from fear and self-doubt. We know this Spirit gives us the power to live for others in Christ-like love. Yet we hesitate and hold back. We find it so difficult to fully accept that we are loved and forgiven.

As we reflect on the story of our lives we can see that from our earliest years we started to form opinions of ourselves based on others' expectations, approval or disapproval. We soon discovered that if we did what was expected we were a 'good boy' or a 'good girl'. If we did not we were a 'bad girl' or a 'bad boy'. We began to take to heart the idea that there is something 'wrong' and even 'unlovable' about ourselves. Later in our adult lives we experienced a sense of guilt or shame after some events that further entrenched the idea that we were unlovable.



This self-doubt, with its guilt, shame and sense of ‘unlovableness’, blinds us to the image of God and Christ that we each uniquely are in this world. We need God’s help to come to see our inner beauty, and live freely in a Christ-like way.

St John of the Cross tells us that “when God looks at us his eyes imprint his grace in us and so we are enabled to love what God sees in us. In his love for me, I am led to love myself, to see the beauty of myself in God’s beauty.” (*The Spiritual Canticle* 32, 33)  
God looks at us and his love makes us beautiful.

Christ came with the warmth of God’s mercy and persuaded people out of their self-constructed cages of self-doubt and fear. Only when we know God truly wants us can we begin to grow and flourish. Only when we realise our worst sins are not bigger than God can we live in the freedom of God’s children.

Lent is a time of grace and mercy; when hearts can be set free as they courageously allow God to look gently and mercifully upon their doubt, guilt and shame.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**1. Why do you think it is difficult for some people to accept God’s love and forgiveness?**

**2. What helps you to believe in God’s love for you?**

### **SENDING PRAYER**

Loving God,  
there is so much darkness in my life and I hide from you.  
Take my hand and lead me out of the shadows of my fear.  
Help me to change my heart.  
Bring me to your truth  
and help me to respond to your generous love.  
Let me recognize the fullness of your love which will fill my life.  
Free me from the darkness in my heart.  
Your commandment of love is so simple and so challenging.  
Help me to let go of my pride, to be humble in my penance.  
I want only to live the way you ask me to love,  
to love the way you ask me to live.  
Amen

### **LENT IN ACTION THIS WEEK**

#### **Daily Prayer**

Lent is a time to pray as an individual, as a family and as a faith community. Set aside time daily for your own personal prayer time. Pray as a family at meals. Bless one another as you leave your home in the morning and before you go to bed at night. One of the simplest and most natural gestures is to trace a cross on a loved one’s forehead. It speaks volumes to a young child when a parent gives him or her this sign of love and prayer.

*“A day without prayer is like a sky without the sun, a garden without flowers.”*

*Pope Saint John XXIII*

**Set aside a specific time for prayer this Lent.**



## THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

### GATHERING PRAYER

God of all compassion, Father of all goodness,  
to heal the wounds our sins and selfishness bring upon us  
you bid us turn to fasting, prayer, and sharing with our brothers and sisters.  
We acknowledge our sinfulness, our guilt is ever before us:  
when our weakness causes discouragement,  
let your compassion fill us with hope  
and lead us through a Lent of repentance to the beauty of Easter joy.  
Grant this through Christ our Lord,  
Amen.

### PROCLAIMING AND HEARING THE GOSPEL

*A reading from the holy Gospel according to John (2:13-25)*

Just before the Jewish Passover Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and in the Temple he found people selling cattle and sheep and pigeons, and the money changers sitting at their counters there. Making a whip out of some cord, he drove them all out of the Temple, cattle and



sheep as well, scattered the money changer's coins, knocked their tables over and said to the pigeon-sellers, 'Take all this out of here and stop turning my Father's house into a market.' Then his disciples remembered the words of scripture: Zeal for your house will devour me.

The Jews intervened and said, 'What sign can you show us to justify what you have done?' Jesus answered, 'Destroy this sanctuary, and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews replied 'It has taken forty-six years to build this sanctuary: are you going to raise it up in three days?' But he was speaking of the sanctuary that was his body, and when Jesus rose from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and the words he had said.

During his stay in Jerusalem for the Passover many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he gave, but Jesus knew them all and did not trust

himself to them; he never needed evidence about any man; he could tell what a man had in him.

The Gospel of the Lord.

***Pause for a few moments of prayerful reflection and allow the Words of the Gospel to speak to you. As I hear this Gospel, which words or phrases stay with me?  
Share these words and phrases with others in your group without discussion. Simply repeat and echo the sacred words and let them fill your mind.***

## ***REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL***

This week we begin reading from John's Gospel, where one of the first things Jesus does as he begins his ministry is to drive the money changers out of the Temple. Anyone coming to the Temple to offer sacrifice needed animals. These were sacrificed every day and taxes were paid to support the work of the Temple. Money changers were needed as coins with the Emperor's image were forbidden in the Temple. Jesus reaches the Temple and drives out the animals, and overturns the table. He not only confronts the commercial activity going on in the Temple, but rejects the whole system of sacrifices and external offerings. His whole life and work are summed up in the words; "zeal for your house will consume me." Everything Jesus says and does is based on the loving relationship he has with the Father. Throughout John's Gospel, Jesus will invite others into the relationship he shares with his Father. The Temple in Jerusalem is being replaced by the Temple of Jesus' body. Jesus the crucified – glorified Lord is the "way" to the Father. Faith and trust in Jesus lead us to share the very life of God.

## ***QUESTIONS FOR GROUP SHARING AND DISCUSSION***

- ❖ The Risen Jesus is the 'living temple' of God among us. Where do you see signs of his presence around you and in your own life?
- ❖ Everything Jesus does in his ministry is based on the loving relationship he has with his Father. What are the priorities in your life and Parish? What needs changing?
- ❖ Have you ever felt hurt or upset with the "Church"? What can you do in a constructive way to help improve things?

## ***LENTEN REFLECTION*** ***Our Wayward Hearts***

Jesus came to reveal to us that God is at the heart of life, lovingly "creating" the world moment by moment, and "coaxing" a free response of love from His children. The world is founded on "an abyss of unconditional love" and human beings are called to trust, hope and live from this love.

At the centre of the human heart is a profound hunger for God's love and life. But Jesus reveals to us how the hunger for security and fulfilment in God can become distorted into a hunger for prestige, for power, for prosperity. Rather than respond to God, we can set our hearts on fear rather than love, control rather than acceptance, oppression rather than freedom. In a world where people seek security in prestige, power and prosperity we find rivalry and discrimination, violence and revenge, greed and injustice. Prestige, power and possessions become 'idols' of the human heart, damaging human beings because they leave no room for God or others. It is God alone who creates and sustains all life; God alone who fulfils human longing. We are called to live out of this radical conviction, and to reject all the 'idols' we fashion in search of our security.

Lent provides us with a time of honest reflection, and the grace of a "change of heart" as we identify and renounce the "gods" we fashion and "give our hearts to" in this world.

The hunger for possessions and riches is often severely challenged by Jesus. If we seek security and fulfilment in what we possess and over accumulate, where is our faith and trust in God who is the source of all we are and have? If we accumulate possessions, what happens to the poor who have an equal right to these earthly goods? Wealth and possessions can blind us to the needs of others as we spend time protecting and generating more and more possessions and seeming "security". Jesus

calls us to radical generosity; he does not sanction destitution and hunger but rather calls us to be gracious as our Father is, rejecting all that brings suffering and poverty.

Jesus also challenges the hunger in us for prestige; the desire to be looked up to and 'important' in this world at the expense of others. Status and honour do not fulfil our profound hunger for security and fulfilment in God. Jesus summons us to the "littleness" of a child, receptive and dependent on God, constantly sustained by the Father, and then living reverently and humbly for others.

Finally, Jesus calls his disciples to renounce the destructive hunger for power. It is the drive for power over others that breeds conflict, jealousy, hatred, violence and revenge. Jesus is adamant that authority means service and nothing else; and warns us that the energy we put into maintaining power must be released for the service of others. This means confronting our "egotistic self", and with God's grace moving beyond this false security to a life centred on God's love, and filled with mercy and forgiveness towards others.

Lent unmask our 'idols', shatters our false securities and calls us back to God.

### ***DISCUSSION QUESTIONS***

- 1. Where do you see people's lives consumed with the thirst for possessions, prestige and power today?***
- 2. What helps us to put God first and keep things in perspective?***

### ***SENDING PRAYER***

God of Love,  
through this Lenten journey, purify my desire to serve you.  
Free me from any temptations to judge others, to place myself above others.  
Please let me surrender even my impatience with others, that with your love and your grace,  
I might be less and less absorbed with myself,  
and more and more full of the desire to follow you, in laying down my life  
according to your example.  
So many times I turn away from you and always you welcome me back.  
Your mercy and love gives me confidence  
Thank you for the invitation to share, fast and pray  
so that you can form a new heart within me.  
Your powerful compassion for my weaknesses leads me to ask for mercy  
and await with great hope the Easter joy you share with us.  
Amen

### ***LENT IN ACTION THIS WEEK***

#### **Treasure**

How do you share your treasures, both the things you own and the money you earn? Could you live for less if it meant it would feed the hungry of your community? What donations to Project Compassion could you make this Lent? Could you forgive someone a monetary debt they owe you?

**Share your treasures with someone this Lent!**



## FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

### GATHERING PRAYER

God our Father,  
your Word, Jesus Christ, spoke peace to a sinful world  
and brought humankind the gift of reconciliation  
by the suffering and death he endured.  
Teach us, the people who bear his name,  
to follow the example he gave us:  
may our faith, hope, and charity  
turn hatred to love, conflict to peace, death to eternal life.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord,  
Amen.

### PROCLAIMING AND HEARING THE GOSPEL

*A reading from the holy Gospel according to John (3:14-21)*

Jesus said to Nicodemus:

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



The Gospel of the Lord.

***Pause for a few moments of prayerful reflection and allow the Words of the Gospel to speak to you. As I hear this Gospel, which words or phrases stay with me?***

***Share these words and phrases with others in your group without discussion. Simply repeat and echo the sacred words and let them fill your mind.***

## ***REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL***

A gracious and loving God created this world, and loves it so much that he sends his only Son, not to judge or condemn the world, but to give it life.

God's love is most powerfully revealed in the "lifting up" of Jesus. On the one hand this "lifting up" refers to Jesus being crucified on the cross. God loves the world so much that he "gave his only Son". On the other hand this "lifting up" refers to the 'exaltation' and glory of Jesus. The cross becomes a 'throne' and Jesus reigns in love as King of the Jews and Saviour of the world.

Just as the Hebrews who had been bitten by poisonous snakes found healing by looking upon the bronze serpent (First Reading), so all who look with faith upon the crucified one will find fullness of divine life and healing in him. We are called to "believe" in Jesus, living in his light and truth.

## ***QUESTIONS FOR GROUP SHARING AND DISCUSSION***

- ❖ "God so loved the world..." Share some ways you have recently seen and experienced this love of God present and active in our lives.
- ❖ The 'serpent' (First Reading) and the 'cross' (Gospel) both bring death, but also new **LIFE**. Have you had experience of new life and hope coming out of suffering, struggle and death? Share this experience with others.
- ❖ Share what you 'see' when you meditate on the Cross of Jesus

## ***LENTEN REFLECTION*** ***Lent's Way of Renewing Our Hearts***

During Lent we are summoned by the Church to embrace the ancient practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving with true determination. For it is by fidelity to these practices that our hearts can be transformed and renewed during this season of grace.

### **PRAYER**

In prayer we come before God with attentiveness, openness and humility. Certainly, during Lent we express our sorrow and repentance to God, but even moreso we pray that God "may bring the image of his Son to perfection within us" (Lenten Preface 1). We pray in order to allow God to touch our wayward hearts and renew us by his love.

"By devoting more time to prayer, we enable our hearts to root out our secret lies and forms of self-deception, and then to find the consolation God offers. He is our Father and he wants us to live life well" (Pope Francis)

### **FASTING**

The ancient practice of fasting helps us to "wake up" and realise our dependence on God and his loving care. It empties us so we can be more open and receptive to the Living God; and at the same time it makes us more aware of the needs of others.

"Fasting weakens our tendency to violence; it disarms us and becomes an important opportunity for growth. On the one hand it allows us to experience what the destitute and starving have to endure.

On the other hand it expresses our spiritual hunger and thirst for life in God. Fasting wakes us up. It makes us more attentive to God and our neighbour. It revives our desire to obey God who alone is capable of satisfying our hunger” (Pope Francis)

### **ALMSGIVING**

Giving to those in need, and sharing what we possess ourselves increases our awareness of the poverty of others and enables us “to love the poor” in a real and practical way. This giving assists us to become more detached from things and focussed on God.

“Almsgiving sets us free from greed and helps us regard our neighbours as our brother and sister. What I possess is never mine alone... (and in the) daily encounters with those who beg our assistance, we...see such requests as coming from God himself. When we give alms, we share in God’s providential care for each of his children. If through me God helps someone today, will he not tomorrow provide for my needs? For no-one is more generous than God” (Pope Francis).

We pause to reassess our Lenten journey in the light of these traditional practices.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- 1. What Lenten practice is helping you to re-centre your life on God and his love?***
- 2. What Lenten practice do you find the most difficult and challenging? Encourage and support each other in your Lenten practices.***

### **SENDING PRAYER**

Creator God,  
You offer me new life through your Son  
and through the gift of your sacraments.  
While I see new life all around me,  
I don't always recognize the new life you offer me.  
Help me to grow this Lent in an awareness of the gifts you place in my life  
and in a greater appreciation for your care.  
Give me the courage to ask for help.  
I know that the tiny sacrifices I make this Lent  
can never serve as a real penance in my life.  
But help me to make my whole life  
one of following your Son.  
Thank you for the love you pour out on me so lavishly.  
Help me to follow more closely  
in the path you have set for me,  
the path of your Son.  
Amen

### **LENT IN ACTION THIS WEEK**

#### **Time**

In our fast-paced world, time is the alms that is hardest to give. It might be a parent or a grandparent giving that form of alms to a child generously and regularly, or a person visiting the sick, lonely or housebound, or a person taking time to assist St Vincent de Paul with one of their many forms of service. It could mean listening to someone after Mass, or down the street. To give freely and generously of our time is a positive practice of Lenten almsgiving.

**Give generously of your time this Lent!**



## FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

### GATHERING PRAYER

Father in heaven,  
the love of your Son led him to accept the suffering of the cross  
that his brothers and sisters might glory in new life.  
Change our selfishness into self-giving.  
Help us to embrace the world you have given us,  
that we may transform the darkness of its pain  
into the life and joy of Easter.  
Grant this through Christ our Lord,  
Amen.

### PROCLAIMING AND HEARING THE GOSPEL

*A reading from the holy Gospel according to John (12:20-33)*

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

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



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

Now sentence is being passed on this world;  
now the prince of this world is to be overthrown.



And when I am lifted up from the earth,  
I shall draw all men to myself.'

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

The Gospel of the Lord.

***Pause for a few moments of prayerful reflection and allow the Words of the Gospel to speak to you. As I hear this Gospel, which words or phrases stay with me?  
Share these words and phrases with others in your group without discussion. Simply repeat and echo the sacred words and let them fill your mind.***

## ***REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL***

This Gospel reading is a reflection by Jesus himself on his own death and its meaning for the world. In his life and ministry Jesus is completely committed to his Father's mission. No matter what happens Jesus remains true to his disciples, to sinners and to the outcast. He brings the light and compassion of God into people's lives, and does so to the bitter end of the Cross. He is so faithful that he is prepared to die for his own.

Jesus sees himself as a grain of wheat that falls to the ground and dies, producing a great harvest. On the cross, 'lifted up', Jesus reveals God's infinite love that heals, reconciles and unites the world in God.

Christians are also called to join Jesus in self-sacrificing love. We too are to become as the 'grain of wheat' for the life of others.

## ***QUESTIONS FOR GROUP SHARING AND DISCUSSION***

- ❖ Reflect on your family, school or Parish community. Share some stories of people who 'give their life' so that others are enriched and blessed.
- ❖ How does our society deal with death and dying? Share how your faith in Jesus helps you to approach death and dying.
- ❖ "Now the prince of this world is to be overthrown". What are some of the structures, attitudes and practices in our communities that need to be confronted and cast out?

## ***LENTEN REFLECTION Catching the Easter Fire – Again!***

The journey of Lent is a journey of change, growth and transformation. It is 40 days of heartfelt preparation for the "celebration of the Paschal Mystery with mind and heart renewed". (Lenten Preface 1) We strive to acknowledge and renounce in our lives what is contrary to the Gospel of Christ, and renew our commitment as "missionary disciples".

Lent takes us all to the "paschal Mystery"; to the death and resurrection of Christ. It takes us to the celebration of God's overflowing love and mercy at work in the dying and rising of Christ. Jesus suffers and dies with a loving and obedient heart, at the hands of evil and darkness in this world. He

breathes forgiveness over the world as his last breath on the Cross. The Father receives his “faithful Son” and his loving self-sacrifice and raises him to newness of life. Jesus the Risen One, filled with the Spirit, breathes new hope and life into a broken world, as he shares his Spirit with all creation.

We gather at Easter to celebrate this death and resurrection of Christ, and to be filled with Christ’s Spirit anew. We gather at Easter to immerse new Christians into the waters of Baptism, and the life of the crucified and risen Lord. We also gather at Easter to be renewed in our own Baptismal commitment and mission.

Lent prepares us to embrace the way of Christ with fresh zeal and commitment as “missionary disciples”. As we renew our Baptismal vows at the Easter vigil, we enter again the path of loving God and neighbour with all our heart. Everything we have done throughout our observance of Lent leads to this moment of encounter with the Risen Christ. It is not simply that we celebrate the resurrection of Christ himself; it is also that we celebrate his risen life and Spirit in us leading us to a life of self-sacrificing love, mercy and service. Lent takes us to the Easter fire of the Holy Spirit, ready to surrender anew to Christ and his way in this world.

The great paradox is that we who began Lent in ashes, facing and renouncing our idols, turning anew to Christ and his Gospel become a light in this world for others once again! Lent leads to Easter. Easter leads us back into the complexities and struggles of life with a hope and a love larger than darkness and death.

Our Christian life is a series of new beginnings. Lent prepares us for another such beginning this Easter. With a week and a half of Lent to go, we still have time to respond to Lent’s call. Even if we have struggled and drifted away from our Lenten resolve and practice, there is still time. Pray. Fast. Give alms.

“Come back to me with all your heart”.

### ***DISCUSSION QUESTIONS***

- 1. What does Easter mean to you? How does Lent help you celebrate Easter more fruitfully?***
- 2. What do you hope will be strengthened in your Christian life as you celebrate Easter this year?***

### ***SENDING PRAYER***

Most forgiving Lord,  
again and again you welcome me back into your loving arms.  
Grant me freedom from the heavy burdens of sin  
that weigh me down and keep me so far from you.  
All I want is to be faithful to you in my life,  
but so often I fail.  
Guide my heart back to you.  
Help me to think beyond my own wants  
and to desire only to do your will.  
Be with me in both mind and heart  
as I renew my life in your spirit.  
Amen

## ***LENT IN ACTION THIS WEEK***

### **Talent**

Everyone has been blessed by God with talents. We can practice giving our talents by cooking a meal for an ill person or an elderly shut-in. We can use the talents of our hands by helping to fix up someone's home or doing some spring cleaning for them. We can drive people to medical appointments or shop for the elderly and infirm. We can contribute to one of the ministries in our Parish that really needs more assistance. Lent is a time to both acknowledge the talents we have and to make greater use of them.

**Use one of your talents for others in a practical way this Lent!**

## ***A PRAYER FOR HOLY WEEK***

Loving God,  
I am just beginning to realize how much you love me.  
Your son Jesus was humble and obedient.  
He fulfilled your will for him by becoming human and suffering with us.  
I ask you for the desire to become more humble,  
so that my own life might also bear witness to you.  
I want to use the small sufferings I have in this world to give you glory.

Please Lord, guide my mind with your truth.  
Strengthen my life by the example of Jesus.  
Help me to be with Jesus in this week  
as he demonstrates again his total love for me.  
He died so that I would no longer be separated from you.  
Help me to feel how close you are and to live in union with you.

Amen



## TIPS FOR LEADERS

*The role of the leader is to help the Lenten group run smoothly. Two hours is a good length of time to allow for each week's gathering, and suggested times to be spent on each part of the program are set out below. Please do not feel as though you must stick to these times though, as each group will operate differently. As the leader, you may like to suggest that the group members invite someone along who is not a regular mass-goer. This is a good way to help people come back to the practice of their Catholic faith.*

### **1. GATHERING TOGETHER:**

After welcoming everyone, ask them to make themselves comfortable, and pray the GATHERING PRAYER for the week together.  
(Suggested time: 10 minutes)

### **2. PROCLAIMING AND HEARING THE GOSPEL:**

One member of the group reads the Gospel reading out loud, either from this text, or from a bible. After reading, pause for silent reflection.  
(Suggested time: 15 minutes)

### **3. REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL:**

The REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL section can be read by each person silently or out loud by a volunteer.

### **4. QUESTIONS FOR GROUP SHARING AND DISCUSSION**

Reflect on each of these questions, and allow any group members who wish to share to do so. It is important that enough time is allowed to ensure that all group members have time to share their thoughts.  
(Suggested time: 30 minutes)

### **5. LENTEN REFLECTION**

This section should be read aloud by a member of the group. Group members are then encouraged to spend some time discussing the questions at the end, making sure that all those who wish to contribute are given the opportunity.  
(Suggested time: 30 minutes)

### **6. CONCLUDE WITH THE SENDING PRAYER:**

Pray the sending prayer out loud as a group.  
(Suggested time: 5 minutes)

Encourage group members to read, and try to implement the LENT IN ACTION suggestions during the week between meetings.