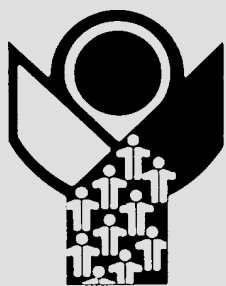


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**Small Group Participant's Booklet**  
**Lent Cycle A**  
**Adapted for the Deaf Community**



# DISCIPLES IN MISSION

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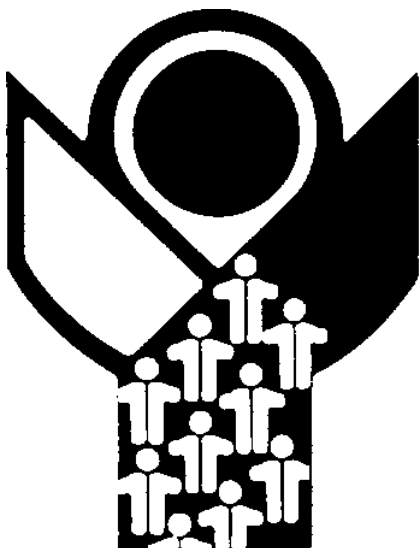
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Adapted for the Deaf Community by  
Archdiocese of Portland in Oregon  
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Catholic Evangelization Association

# WELCOME TO DISCIPLES IN MISSION

WELCOME TO THE DISCIPLES IN MISSION SMALL GROUP EXPERIENCE. GOD HAS WONDERFUL BLESSINGS WAITING FOR YOU DURING THIS LENTEN TIME.

## The Schedule for the Meetings

Each small group meeting lasts 90 minutes and follows this schedule:

- 5 min ..... Welcome and opening prayer.
- 10 min ..... Report on personal and group actions chosen at the last meeting.
- 10 min ..... Read Scripture. Have a short time of private prayer after each reading.
- 45 min ..... Faith sharing, with questions provided.
- 10 min ..... Discuss and decide on individual and group actions for the week.
- 10 min ..... Closing prayer and ritual.

Refreshments and social time after the meeting.  
(Your group will decide whether or not to do this.)

## Getting the Most Out of Your Small Group Experience

As you enter into the holy season of Lent, consider the following suggestions as ways to participate fully in the small group.

### Before the Meeting

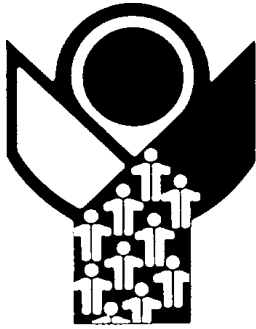
Schedule some personal prayer time to read and reflect on the materials before you go to the meeting. Try this five-step plan and see if it helps you. Or find a plan that works best for you.

**First**, read the theme and the Opening Prayer. Place your mind and heart in God's presence.

**Second**, prayerfully read the Scripture passages for the next Sunday. Focus on the images in the readings. Look for ideas or phrases that touch your heart.

**Third**, strengthened by the word of God, read the explanation and the story of the Disciple in Mission. Let these sections deepen your understanding of God's word and Catholic evangelization. Take time to reflect on the Questions for Faith Sharing.

**Fourth**, read the Ways to Take Action. Listen carefully to what Jesus is calling you to do as his disciple. Consider sharing these thoughts at the meeting.



**“I SENSE THAT THE  
MOMENT HAS COME  
TO COMMIT ALL OF  
THE CHURCH’S EN-  
ERGIES TO A NEW  
EVANGELIZATION.”**

- POPE JOHN PAUL II,  
*MISSION OF THE  
REDEEMER*

**Finally**, read the closing Prayer and Ritual. Get an idea of what your group will experience as you praise and worship God together.

### **During the Meeting**

**Participate fully in the conversation.** Realize that some people, because of their personality, are comfortable saying more; others are comfortable saying less. Be yourself, participate in the way that is right for you, and enjoy the experience.

**Keep the focus on faith sharing.** Think of your group as a community of disciples growing in faith. Faith sharing is not a test of how much each person knows about the topic. Instead, it invites each person to think about the question: “What does this mean to me as I try to follow Jesus today?” Each person will express his or her faith differently, and all will be inspired by the sharing.

### **After the Meeting**

**Pay attention to the Holy Spirit.** Lent is a special time when the Spirit leads us to turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel. The sharing in these group meetings can lead you to conversion, an invitation to new life in Jesus Christ. Your response to the Gospel during Lent will help you celebrate Easter with a renewed mind and heart.

**Take your chosen action seriously.** During each meeting, you are invited to consider both individual and group actions. Listen carefully to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and choose an action that you really want to do, and can do. Also, think of something that will help you and other people. That way you will succeed in doing your action as part of your Lenten commitment to follow the way of Jesus as his disciple.

**Say the *Disciples in Mission* prayer daily.** This prayer provides a way to pray for the needs of your group and for God’s blessings on your Community.



READINGS FOR THE  
FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

**Genesis 2:7-9, 3:1-7**

Then the Lord God took dust from the ground and made a man. The Lord breathed the breath of life into the man's nose, and the man became a living thing. Then the Lord God planted a garden in the East, in a place named Eden. The Lord God put the man he made in that garden. The Lord God made every beautiful tree and every tree that was good for food to grow in the garden. In the middle of the garden, the Lord God put the tree of life and also the tree that gives knowledge about good and evil.

The snake was the most clever of all the wild animals that the Lord God had made. The snake wanted to trick the woman. The snake spoke to the woman and said, "Woman, did God really tell you that you must not eat from any tree in the garden?"

The woman answered the snake, "No! God did not say that! We can eat fruit from the trees in the garden. But there is one tree we must not eat from. God told us, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden. You must not even touch that tree or you will die.'"

But the snake said to the woman, "You will not die. God knows that if you eat the fruit from that tree you will learn about good and evil. And then you will be the same as God!"

The woman saw the tree was beautiful. She saw the fruit was good to eat. And it was exciting that the tree would make her wise. So the woman took fruit from the tree and ate it. Her husband was there with her, so she gave some of the fruit to him and he ate it.

Then both the man and the woman changed. It was like, their eyes opened, and they saw things differently. They saw that they had no clothes on -- they were naked. So they got some fig leaves and sewed them together and wore the fig leaves for clothes.

**Psalm 51**

Lord, we sin. Save us.

**Lord, we sin. Save us.**

God, You are good; save us.

Your compassion is great, forgive me.

Remove my guilt; wash clean my sin.

**Lord, we sin. Save us.**

I know my sins;

I recognize my sin always.

I say to God, "Against You I sin,

I do bad things."

**Lord, we sin. Save us.**

God, make my heart clean.

Give me Your Spirit again;

Don't reject me;

don't remove Your Spirit from me.

**Lord, we sin. Save us.**

God, save us, give us joy.

Help me pay-attention to You;

Lord, open my hands,

for Signing praise to You.

**Lord, we sin. Save us.**

### Matt 4:1-11

The Spirit led Jesus into the desert. Jesus was taken there to be tempted by the devil. Jesus ate nothing for 40 days and nights. After this, he was very hungry. The devil came to Jesus to tempt him. The devil said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these rocks to become bread.”

Jesus answered him, “It is written in the Scriptures, *‘It is not just bread that keeps people alive. People’s lives depend on what God says.’*”

Then the devil led Jesus to the holy city (*Jerusalem*). The devil put Jesus on a very high place on the temple. The devil said, “If you are the Son of God, jump off. Why? Because it is written in the Scriptures *‘God will command his angels for you, and their hands will catch you, so that you will not hit your foot on a rock.’*”

Jesus answered him, “It also says in the Scriptures, *‘You must not test (doubt) the Lord your God.’*”

Then the devil led Jesus to the top of a very high mountain. The devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, and all the great things that are in those kingdoms. The devil said, “If you will bow down and worship me, I will give you all these things.”

Jesus said to the devil, “Go away from me, Satan! It is written in the Scriptures, *‘You must worship the Lord your God. Serve only him!’*”

So the devil left Jesus. And then some angels came to Jesus and helped him.

# 1

## THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

**IN THE READINGS FOR THIS FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT, THE CHURCH GIVES US BOTH BAD NEWS AND GOOD NEWS. THE BAD NEWS COMES FIRST, THE GOOD NEWS IS ALMOST TOO GOOD TO BELIEVE.**

### **Opening Prayer**

Loving God, You made us. You want us to live with you forever. Thank you for loving us so much! Now we begin our Lenten journey. Help us understand you want good things for us. Help us know sin hurts us. Open our hearts to welcome your word and live in your love. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **The Bad News: We Sin**

Some of us know and admit we sin. But some of us deny our sins. We excuse ourselves and blame other people. During Lent, the Church wants us to look at our lives and admit we are not living as we should. This is not to make us feel guilty. It is to help us correct our behaviors and lead us back to a loving relationship with God. To help us think about sin, the Church tells us the story of Adam and Eve in the garden.

### **Did God Really Tell You Not to Eat?**

This story is about each of us. When I was a child, I misunderstood it. I thought it meant God got angry with Adam and Eve for disobeying, and God is still angry. I thought that was why we were all born with original sin, and why we all must suffer. When I became an adult I learned that God is love, and this story asks the question, "If God is all-loving and all-powerful, why do people suffer?" The writer of Genesis shows a world with no suffering -- the garden. God tells the man and woman they can eat from any tree in the garden except one, the tree of knowledge of good and evil. This tree, and God's command, show there is a right and a wrong way to act. God tells us sin is real. We must love people. We must not lie, steal, or kill. God must be most important in our lives.

The snake is a symbol of temptation. We all experience temptation. We all look at what's forbidden, and want it. We take and eat. Eating is a wonderful symbol for sin. When we eat something, we choose to eat it. What we eat becomes part of us. It changes who we are. Sin, also, changes who we are. It changes our knowledge and how we think about things. Adam and Eve were naked before, but after their sin they were ashamed to be naked. This shows that sin makes us uncomfortable with ourselves. We hurt our relationship with ourselves, with others, and with God.

## The Good News: Jesus Conquers Temptation and Sin

In the Gospel story, Jesus was fasting. The devil challenges him: "If you are the Son of God, tell these rocks to become bread" (Matthew 4:3). This is a temptation for Jesus to use his power to serve himself, instead of serving others. Jesus would not do this. We also receive gifts, not to serve our needs, but to build God's kingdom. We are often tempted to use our gifts for ourselves.

Jesus' second temptation was to prove he was the Son of God. He would do this by throwing himself down from the top of the temple, trusting God would save him. This is a temptation to use his gifts to do something that would make him famous. In his ministry, Jesus did not preach about himself. He preached the kingdom of God. This, too, is a temptation we all have -- to use our gifts so people will pay-attention to us. But we should use them to help others come to Christ.

The third temptation was to want political power. The devil offered Jesus all the

kingdoms of the earth if Jesus would worship the devil. Jesus refused. He knew he was called to help people learn about God's kingdom, not to seek power for himself. Sometimes we are tempted to become important. We like to feel that others need us. Sometimes this stops us from really serving people.

This story, like all the stories in the Gospel, was written after the Resurrection. The Gospel's main goal is to teach that Jesus was God's Son. Jesus did prove this -- not by using his gifts in selfish ways, but by dying on a cross and then rising from death. The three temptations represent all temptation: to take care of only our own needs, to become famous and to seek power.

When we hear the story of Jesus' strength against temptations, we look at these same temptations in our lives. The bad news is that we are not always strong; sometimes we sin. The Good News is that Jesus -- through his suffering, death, and resurrection -- saved us from our sins. As we begin Lent, we admit our sins and say we are sorry. We believe God already forgives us in his love.

### DISCIPLE IN MISSION: ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

Eight hundred years ago, St. Francis walked the streets of Assisi barefoot, singing, begging, and preaching the Gospel. His love of God -- shown in his poverty and his joy -- caused thousands of people to join his religious group, the Franciscans.

Francis Bernardone had a wild life as a young man. But God was calling him. One day, on his way to fight in a war,

Francis heard God's voice. He returned home and began to pray more, to give to the poor, and care for lepers.

Later, he was praying at the chapel of San Damiano when he heard, "Francis, repair my Church." Francis obeyed and started to rebuild churches - until he realized God was calling him to renew the one Church, through his poverty and service to others.

Francis and his "little brothers" (Friars) went from town to town, preaching the Gospel. They had no extra clothes, and begged for their food. Stories show Francis' love for his brothers, for people in need, and for all creation. He received the wounds of Christ in his body in September 1224. In October, at the age of forty-four, Francis died the same way he lived, in poverty and in love with God.

### Questions for Faith Sharing

1. How do you feel when you remember you are made like God?
2. Do you believe forgiveness is a free gift from God, or do you think it is something you have to earn?
3. When do you feel closest to Christ in your life?
4. Do you believe you are called to help people experience God's love? How can you do this?

### Ways to Take Action

1. Think about the choices you made last week. Which choices deepened your relationship with God and other people? Are you happy with the choices you made? Lent is a time for change. Ask God for the grace you need to make good choices.
2. This week, think of someone living today who brings God's love to people in need. Share this example with a friend or family member.
3. What situation in your neighborhood, city or church blocks people from enjoying the love and peace God wants us to have? What could you do to make a difference? Do it!

### Closing Prayer and Ritual



*Gather around a table. Light two candles, and place them near a crucifix.*

*First reader:* "God loved the world so much he gave his only Son, so everyone who believes in him will not die but will have eternal life."  
(John 3:16)

*Second reader:* Eating the forbidden fruit from a tree in the Garden brought sin and suffering into our world. When Christ died on the tree of the cross, he brought salvation and love.

*Take a few minutes to reflect in silence. Think about what blocks you from having God's love and peace. Then, remembering your sin and God's loving forgiveness, take the crucifix, touch or kiss it, and say:*

**I adore you, O Christ, and I praise you. With your holy cross you saved the world.**

*Pray for each person as they honor the cross.*

*When everyone is finished, Sign the Our Father together.*

Closing Prayer together:

**Lord, be in my thoughts**  
(+ your forehead), **and in my heart**  
(+ your heart), **and in my hands**  
(+ your hands), **Amen.**



READINGS FOR THE  
SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

**Genesis 12:1-4**

The Lord said to Abram, "Leave your country and your people. Leave your father's family and go to the country I will show you. I will build a great nation from you. I will bless you and make your name famous. People will use your name to bless other people. I will bless people who bless you, and I will curse people who curse you. I will use you to bless all the people on earth."

So Abram left Haran just like the Lord said. And Lot went with him. Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran.

**Psalms 33**

Lord, save us, we trust You.

**Lord, save us, we trust You.**

God's story is true.

All his actions we trust

God loves justice.

Earth is full of God's kindness.

**Lord, save us, we trust You.**

God sees people who honor God;

People hope in God's kindness.

God frees us from death,  
and saves us from hunger.

**Lord, save us, we trust You.**

We wait for God,

our strength and protection.

Your kindness, God, touches us,

We hope in you.

**Lord, save us, we trust You.**

**2 Timothy 1:8-10**

Don't be ashamed to tell people about our Lord Jesus. And don't be ashamed of me. I am in prison for the Lord. But suffer with me for the Good News. God gives us the strength to do that. God saved us and made us his holy people. That happened not because of anything we did ourselves. No! God saved us and made us his people because that was what he wanted and because of his grace (*kindness*). That grace was given to us through Christ Jesus before time began.

That grace was not shown to us until now. It was shown to us when our Savior Christ Jesus came. Jesus destroyed death and showed us the way to have life. Yes! Through the Good News Jesus showed us the way to have life that cannot be destroyed.

**Matt. 17:1-9**

Jesus took Peter, James, and John the brother of James and went up on a high mountain. They were all alone there. While these followers watched him, Jesus was changed. His face became bright like the sun. And his clothes became white as light. Then two men were there, talking with Jesus. The men were Moses and Elijah.

Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you want, I will put three tents here -- one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

While Peter was talking, a bright cloud came over them. A voice came from the cloud. The voice said, "This (Jesus) is my Son and I love him. I am very pleased with him. Obey him!"

The followers with Jesus heard this voice. They were very afraid, so they fell to the ground. But Jesus came to the followers and touched them. Jesus said, “Stand up. Don’t be afraid.” The followers looked up, and they saw Jesus was now alone.

Jesus and the followers were walking down the mountain. Jesus commanded the followers, “Don’t tell any person about the things you saw on the mountain. Wait until the Son of Man has been raised from death. Then you can tell people about what you saw.”

# 2 THE SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

**ABRAHAM AND THE DISCIPLES WERE CALLED TO BE HOLY. TODAY WE ARE CALLED TO BE HOLY. TO RESPOND TO THIS CALL, WE MUST TRUST GOD AND FOLLOW GOD'S SON, JESUS CHRIST.**

## **Opening Prayer**

Holy God, we gather here in your presence, remembering your love and mercy. You call us to be your holy people, bringing your love to others. We thank you for choosing us, and we ask for grace to live holy lives. We ask for trust. Help us follow where you lead us. Amen

## **Called to a Holy Life**

In the Second Letter to Timothy we read, “[God] saved us and called us to a holy life” (2 Timothy 1:9). Will responding to the call to holiness be easy? The stories of Abraham and the disciples tell us *no*. There are difficult challenges for anyone who tries to live God’s call.

## **Abraham’s Response to God’s Call**

God told Abraham to leave his land, his family, and his father’s house, and go to a new land. What a frightening experience! To leave what we know, without knowing the future, and trust God to be with us on our journey is frightening. Some of our parents or other relatives experienced this. They left the country where they were born and came to the United States, a new land for them. But holiness involved trusting God. Like Abraham, each of us is called to let God lead us, and to become the person God wants us to become.

God also promises to bless Abraham and take care of him. God is beginning a relationship of covenant love with Abraham. Covenant love means both people accept responsibilities: Abraham promises to obey God, and God promises to love and protect Abraham and his descendants forever.

Today we are the descendants of Abraham, our father in faith. God promised to bless and protect Abraham, and now God promises to bless and protect us. We have a deeper understanding of this covenant because of Jesus Christ. Because of Jesus we know our call to holiness leads to eternal life.

## **The Disciples' Response to God's Call**

The disciples Peter, James, and John responded to God's call, but like us they had trouble understanding the full meaning of the Good News. Only after the Resurrection did the disciples realize Jesus is God's Son. The story of the Transfiguration is written after the Resurrection. The person telling the story knows that Jesus is God, but the people in the story -- Peter, James, and John -- do not know this. We can see from the way they act that they do not understand what is happening. Peter wants to build three tents, one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. But Jesus does not give Peter permission to do this. Like Abraham, Peter will be challenged to leave the land of his family and go on a spiritual journey. God's voice says: "This is my beloved Son. Pay-attention to him" (Matthew 17:5). The disciples are terribly frightened. But Jesus says, "Do not be afraid" (Matthew 17:9). He stays with his disciples, even after his crucifixion, so they should never fear. Jesus is always with them, and with us.

After the Transfiguration, Jesus tells the three disciples, "Don't tell any person about the things you saw on the mountain. Wait until the Son of Man has been raised from death. Then you can tell people about what you saw" (Matthew 17:9). *Son of Man* is a title for the messiah (savior). Peter, James and John expected a messiah, but not one who would suffer and die. That was a terrible shock for them. They did not expect Jesus to rise from the dead, so his death on the cross destroyed all their hopes that he was the messiah. Jesus does not want the disciples to try to explain to

other people what they do not understand. After he rises from the dead, they will understand who he is, and then they can tell everyone. But until then, Jesus tells them to be quiet.

## **We Trust You**

As we respond to our call to holiness, we will face the same challenges Abraham and the disciples experienced. We will have to let go of some things -- comfortable places and ideas -- that block us from becoming the people God is calling us to be. We will fear the unknown, and the feeling that we are not in control. Can we really trust God to guide us and protect us? We also experience events we can't understand, especially things that cause suffering. When we suffer, or when we see other people suffer, we will be tempted to lose hope like the disciples did.

This Sunday's psalm reminds us: "God sees people who honor God; people who hope in God's kindness" (Psalm 33:18). God is God and we are God's children, totally dependent on God. We know God loves us. God has a relationship of covenant love with us. God saved us and calls us to holiness and eternal life. That is why we hope in God: "Lord, save us. We trust you" (Psalm 33:22).

**DISCIPLE IN MISSION: ST. MARTIN DE PORRES**

Martin de Porres was born in Lima, Peru in 1579. His father was Spanish and his mother was a freed Black woman. The family was poor, but Martin often upset his mother by coming home from the store with an empty basket because he gave away the money or the food.

Martin became a barber, which in those days meant he also learned medicine. Sick and wounded people came to him for help, and soon he became

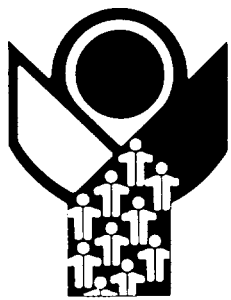
known as a holy man and healer.

He joined the Dominicans as a lay helper. He became their barber, and took care of their infirmary. He did the most humble jobs with joy.

For nine years, Martin cared for the sick and spent his nights in prayer. Then he took vows and became a brother. His holiness influenced everyone. Every night Martin fed the poor, and also

taught them the Gospel. He built an orphanage and school, a soup kitchen, and a hospital where black and white, rich and poor, were treated equally.

Martin de Porres inspires people of all races and countries, because of his holiness and his service to the poor, the sick, and to orphans. He became a saint in 1962, and is the patron saint of social justice.



**DISCIPLES  
IN MISSION**

## Questions for Faith Sharing

1. Do you believe you are called to holiness? What do you think “holiness” means?
2. What questions or concerns would you have if God asked you to leave your home and begin a new life?
3. Did you move here from another nation or state? Did you come because you wanted to come, or were you forced to come? Share your feelings about this. How did God help you?
4. Do your parents or family influence the way you think about God, and your ideas of what God expects from you?
5. Have your ideas about God’s plan for you changed during your life? Explain.

## Ways to Take Action

1. Every evening, look at the choices you made that day. Where are they leading you? Ask God to help you respond to Jesus and follow God’s call.
2. God is present in *every* situation. Read Psalm 33. Choose a verse to pray during the week. See if it helps you recognize God’s presence!
3. Think of one fear that blocks you from trusting God more. Let Jesus tell you again and again, “Do not be afraid.” End your prayer by offering your fear to God.
4. Are there any families in your neighborhood or church community who have recently arrived from another country or a place far away? How can your group support them? Can you offer food, welcome, or friendship?

## Closing Prayer and Ritual



*Gather around a table with a Bible and a bowl of water on it.*

*First reader:* “Your kindness, God, touches us. We hope in you.” (Psalm 33:22)

**All: Your kindness, God, touches us. We hope in you.**

*Second reader:* A reading from the Letter to the Ephesians. “Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens. He chose us in Christ before the world began, to be holy.” (Ephesians 1:3-5)

*Reader 3:* God gives us new birth through the waters of baptism, and welcomes us into God’s holy people. Now, with this water, let us ask God for a special blessing for each other.

*Decide on a blessing you want from God. Starting with the leader everyone takes a turn saying the blessing he or she wants. Then, the person next to the one speaking touches the water and makes the Sign of the cross on the person’s forehead, saying:*

**Be blessed in the name of Jesus. Live a holy life.**

*After everyone has been blessed, the leader prays and Signs:* Lord, you made us holy. We trust you. Now we pray and Sign the words Jesus taught us.

**All: Our Father ...**



READINGS FOR THE  
THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

**Exodus 17:3-7**

The people were very thirsty for water. So they continued complaining to Moses. The people said, “Why did you bring us out of Egypt? Did you bring us out here so that we, our children, and our cattle will all die without water?”

So Moses cried to the Lord, “What can I do with these people? They are ready to kill me.”

The Lord said to Moses, “Go before the people of Israel. Take some of the elders (*leaders*) of the people with you. Carry your walking stick with you. This is the stick that you used when you hit the Nile River. I will stand before you on a rock at Horeb (*Mount Sinai*). Hit that rock with the walking stick and water will come out of it. Then the people can drink.”

Moses did these things and the elders (*leaders*) of Israel saw it. Moses named that place Meribah and Massah because this was the place that the people of Israel turned against him and tested the Lord. The people wanted to know if the Lord was with them or not.

**Psalm 95**

When the Lord calls, open your heart.

**When the Lord calls, open your heart.**

Come, praise the Lord joyfully.

Praise God who saves us.

We thank You and praise You with joy.

**When the Lord calls, open your heart.**

Come let us worship,  
Kneel before God who made us.  
You are our God,  
We are Your people, You care-for us.

**When the Lord calls, open your heart.**

Today accept God’s good news.  
Don’t close your hearts, like long-ago.  
Your ancestors saw My good actions,  
But still they tempted Me.

**When the Lord calls, open your heart.**

**John 4:5-42**  
**(Short form)**

In Samaria Jesus came to the town called Sychar. This town is near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there. Jesus was tired from his long trip. So Jesus sat down beside the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to that well to get some water. Jesus said to her, “Please give me a drink of water.” (This happened while Jesus’ followers went to town to buy some food.)

The Samaritan woman answered, “I am surprised that you ask me for a drink! You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman!” (Jews are not friends with Samaritans.)

Jesus answered, “You don’t know about the gift God gives. And you don’t know who I am that asked you for a drink. If you knew these things, you would have asked me and I would have given you living water.”

The woman said, “Sir, where will you get that living water? The well is very deep, and you have nothing to get water with. Are you greater than Jacob our father (*ancestor*)? Jacob is the one that gave us this well. He drank from it himself. Also, his sons and all his animals drank water from this well.”

Jesus answered, “Every person that drinks this water will be thirsty again. But the person that drinks the water I give will never be thirsty again. That water I give will become like a spring of water flowing inside that person. That water will bring that person life forever.”

The woman said to Jesus, “Sir, give me this water. Then I will never be thirsty again. And I will not have to come back here to get more water.”

The woman said, “Sir, I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped on this mountain. But you Jews say that Jerusalem is the place where people must worship.”

Jesus said, “Believe me, woman! The time is coming when you will not have to be in Jerusalem or on that mountain to worship the Father (God). You Samaritans worship something that you don’t understand. We Jews understand what we worship. Salvation comes from the Jews. The time is coming when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. That time is now here. And those are the kind of people the Father wants to be his worshippers. God is spirit. So the people that worship God must worship in spirit and truth.”

The woman said, “I know that the Messiah is coming.” (Messiah is the One called Christ.) “When the Messiah comes, he will explain everything to us.”

Then Jesus said, “That person is talking to you now. I am the Messiah.”

Many of the Samaritan people in that town believed in Jesus. They believed because of what the woman had told them about Jesus. She had told them, “He (Jesus) told me everything I have ever done.” The Samaritans went to Jesus. They begged Jesus to stay

with them. So Jesus stayed there two days. Many more people believed because of the things Jesus said.

The people said to the woman, “First we believed in Jesus because of what you told us. But now we believe because we heard him ourselves. We know now that he really is the one that will save the world.”

# 3 THE THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

**ON THE THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT, THE CHURCH ASKS US TO OPEN OUR EYES AND SEE: GOD'S LOVE IS GIVEN TO US; CHRIST IS WITH US; WE SHARE GOD'S LOVE SO OTHER PEOPLE WILL KNOW CHRIST, TOO.**

## **Opening Prayer**

Lord, we come together today to share your saving word. We ask for grace to see how you speak to us. We know you invite us to trust your care. Guide our thoughts, Lord. Guide our sharing. Help us know how we can bring people to Christ and to your love. Amen.

## **Is the Lord With Us or Not?**

When I was young, I envied Old Testament people like Moses. They knew exactly what God wanted them to do, because God appeared and told them. In this Sunday's reading from Exodus, Moses is having trouble because the people are complaining they are thirsty. Moses asks the Lord what to do, and the Lord tells him. How nice! Later I learned these Old Testament stories were passed on to the people by generations of storytellers explaining the powerful deeds God did for their ancestors, and would also do for them.

During their time in the desert, the Israelites learned God was truly with them and cared for them. God gave them water, quail, and manna. They would not have survived without them. The point of the story is that God proved we can trust him. God promised to protect Abraham and his descendants forever. Moses and his people also received that promise. With God's care they escaped the Egyptians. Now, God's care continues. God is present in the desert, too, responding to the people's needs. The Israelites learned God was with them -- not because he talked to Moses, but because, through Moses, God took care of their needs.

## **Jesus is Thirsty, Also**

Jesus was like Moses in many ways. Both of them were chosen by God to lead God's people. They both experienced complaints and rejection from the people they were leading. Both Moses and Jesus show God's love and care, but people often did not accept their message. They could not imagine God was as loving and present as these leaders said.

In this Sunday's Gospel, we see Jesus acting in a way that shocked people. He talks with a Samaritan woman he meets at a well. There are two reasons why Jesus' behavior is shocking. This woman was rejected by her own people. The women of the town should come to the well

together, in the morning. But this woman is coming late and alone. Why? Maybe because she was married five times and is now living with a man who is not her husband, this woman was rejected by the other women of the town. Her behavior shows the actions of a person hungry for love. Now Jesus wants this woman to know God's love.

A second reason Jesus' behavior is shocking is because the woman is a Samaritan. Samaritans were considered unclean by the Jews. The Law would forbid Jesus to have any contact with a Samaritan. But Jesus thought it was more important to reach out to people who did not know God's love. For him, love was more important than the law. He always reached out to the poor, the weak, the sinners. By example, Jesus teaches his disciples to bring God's love to every person.

### **Come and See**

At the end of the story, the Samaritan woman is a great evangelizer. She does not pretend to be an expert. She tells people about her own experience with Jesus. Her words lead them to "come and see". They immediately go to see for themselves. When they experience the presence of Jesus, they invite him to stay with them. Jesus accepts their invitation. They listen to him, and they become believers.

This is exactly the way people come to Christ today. They usually hear about Christ first from another person who shares a personal experience. Often they are spiritually hungry, so they are willing to accept an invitation to come and see. When people invite Christ to spend some time with them, they begin to accept his word in the Bible. Soon they will know from their own experience that Jesus Christ really is the savior of the world.

### **DISCIPLE IN MISSION: KATHARINE DREXEL**

On October 1, 2000, Katharine Drexel of Philadelphia became a saint. She was the daughter of a millionaire, who used her wealth to spread the faith. She worked with Native Americans and African Americans, while she lived the vow of poverty.

Katharine was born in 1858. Her parents gave her and her sister an excellent education and many opportunities -- and the example of their great faith. Kate grew up wanting to do God's will, and to help people in need.

After her parents died, she started a community dedicated to missionary work among Native Americans and African Americans. In 1891 she made her vows as the first Sister of the Blessed Sacrament. Three years later, Mother Katharine's sisters went to their first mission, a school in Santa Fe, New Mexico. With money her parents left her, she started fifty other missions for Native Americans, and forty for freed African Americans. Her greatest work was establish-

ing Xavier University in New Orleans, the first university for African Americans in the United States.

At age seventy-eight, heart attacks forced her to retire. She enjoyed the quiet life of prayer she always wanted, and prayed for her missions until she died in 1955 at age ninety-six.

Katharine Drexel's work as apostle to minority people was not easy. Yet she continued in faith as a true disciple in mission.

### Questions for Faith Sharing

1. Does it seem God was more present to people in Old Testament times than today? Why or why not?
2. How does God speak to us? Can you think of a time you felt God “told you what to do”? Explain.
3. Do you think Christ is present now? In what ways do you experience Christ’s presence?
4. Are there groups whom people reject today? Who are they? Do you think, as Christians, we have any special responsibility to accept them? Explain.
5. With your words or actions, have you ever invited someone to meet Christ? Explain. What kinds of invitations are comfortable for you? What kinds are uncomfortable? Why?

### Ways to Take Action

1. This week, tell someone about one way *you* experience God’s love and care.
2. Imagine Jesus speaking to *you*. Let him tell you, “The water I give will become like a spring of water flowing inside that person. That water will bring that person life forever” (John 4:14). Talk with Jesus about his promise.
3. Jesus reached out to people who did not know God’s love. When you meet others this week, ask yourself, “What act of kindness can I do?” Do it!
4. Can your small group do something to help unite different cultural groups? Give examples.
5. Choose a verse from Psalm 95. Pray it often during the week.

### Closing Prayer and Ritual



*Gather around a bowl of water.*

*First reader:* Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman and offered her the gift of living water. We received this living water when we were baptized. God’s love was poured on each of us. Let us thank God for this gift when we take this water and bless ourselves.

*Each person makes the sign of the cross on themselves with the water as they pray.*

**Lord, help me appreciate your gift.**

*After all bless themselves, one person reaches into the water, takes some in his or her hands, and pours it back into the bowl. Then look around at the group and say:*

**Jesus said, “Give me a drink.”**

*Leader:* Jesus thirsts for everyone to come to God. Every time we lead another person closer to God, it is like giving Christ a drink. Let us ask God to bless the people who brought us to Jesus.

*Remember how someone in your life brought you closer to the Lord. Each member then tells how that person showed them God’s love. Then they ask God to bless that person. After each prayer, all pray together.*

**Your love is wonderful, Lord God!**

*End by Signing the Our Father together.*

**All: Our Father . . .**



READINGS FOR THE  
FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

**1 Samuel 16: 1,6-7, 10-13**

The Lord said to Samuel, “How long will you feel sorry for Saul? You are feeling sorry for him, even after I told you that I refuse to let Saul be the king of Israel! Fill your horn with oil and go to Bethlehem. I am sending you to a man named Jesse. Jesse lives in Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be the new king.”

When Jesse and his sons arrived, Samuel saw Eliab. Samuel thought, “Surely this is the man that the Lord has chosen!”

But the Lord said to Samuel, “Eliab is tall and handsome. But don’t think about things like that. God does not look at the things people see. People look only at the outside of a person, but the Lord looks at his heart. Eliab is not the right man.”

Jesse showed seven of his sons to Samuel. But Samuel said to Jesse, “The Lord has not chosen any of these men.”

Then Samuel asked Jesse, “Are these all the sons you have?”

Jesse answered, “No, I have another son my youngest, but he is out taking care of the sheep.”

Samuel said, “Send for him. Bring him here. We will not sit down to eat until he arrives.”

Jesse sent someone to get his youngest son. This son was a good-looking, red-faced young man. He was very handsome.

The Lord said to Samuel, “Get up and anoint him. He is the one.”

Samuel took the horn with the oil in it, and poured the special oil on Jesse’s youngest son in front of his brothers. The Lord’s Spirit came on David with great power from that day on. Then Samuel went back home to Ramah.

**Psalm 23**

Lord, You are my shepherd, I have everything I need.

**Lord, You are my shepherd, I have everything I need.**

Lord, You are my shepherd, I want nothing. You let me rest in green fields.

You lead me near water, and give me new strength.

**Lord, You are my shepherd, I have everything I need.**

You guide me on right paths.

When I go through dark valleys

I’m not afraid, because You are with me.

You protect me with Your shepherd’s staff.

**Lord, You are my shepherd, I have everything I need.**

You prepare a feast for me; my enemies can see.

You bless me with oil, my cup is full.

**Lord, You are my shepherd, I have everything I need.**

Your goodness and love are with me all my life, I know.

Your house will become my home forever.

**Lord, You are my shepherd, I have everything I need.**

**John 9:1-41**  
**(Short form)**

While Jesus was walking, he saw a blind man. This man had been blind since the time he was born.

Jesus spit on the dirt and made some mud with it. Jesus put the mud on the man's eyes. Jesus told the man, "Go and wash in the pool Siloam." (Siloam means "Sent.") So the man went to the pool. He washed and came back. Now he was able to see.

Some people had seen this man begging before. These people and the man's neighbors said, "Look! Is this the same man that always sits and begs?"

Some people said, "Yes! He is the one." But other people said, "No, he is not the same man. He only looks like him."

So the man himself said, "I am the man that was blind before."

Then the people brought the man to the Pharisees. This was the man that had been blind. Jesus had made mud and healed the man's eyes. The day Jesus did this was a Sabbath day. So now the Pharisees asked the man, "How did you get your sight?"

The man answered, "He put mud on my eyes. I washed, and now I can see."

Some of the Pharisees said, "This man (*Jesus*) does not obey the law about the Sabbath day. So he is not from God."

Other men said, "But a person that is a sinner cannot do miracles like these." These Jews could not agree with each other.

The Jewish leaders asked the man again, "This man (*Jesus*) healed you, and you can see. What do you say about him?"

The man answered, "He is a prophet."

The Jewish leaders answered, "You were born full of sin! Are you trying to

teach us?" And the Jewish leaders forced the man to leave.

Jesus heard that the Jewish leaders had forced the man to leave. Jesus found the man and said to him, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

The man asked, "Who is the Son of Man, sir? Tell me, so I can believe in him!"

Jesus said to him, "You have already seen him. The Son of Man is the one talking with you now."

The man answered, "Yes, I believe, Lord!" Then the man bowed and worshipped Jesus.

# 4 THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

**CHRIST IS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD. HOW DO WE RESPOND TO THAT LIGHT? IN THE READINGS FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT, THE CHURCH TELLS HOW SOME PEOPLE RESPOND TO IT. WE CAN ASK OURSELVES, “WHAT ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS MAKE US BLIND TO CHRIST’S LIGHT?”**

## **Opening Prayer**

Lord of light and love, you want to remove darkness of sin from our hearts and bring us new life. We come with minds open, with enthusiasm for your truth and love. Be with us now. Help us see things as you see them. Help us be willing to change. Then we can bring your light and love to all people. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

## **Judging by What We See**

In the first story, God tells Samuel to go to the house of Jesse in Bethlehem, because God chose one of Jesse’s sons to become king. Samuel does what God wants, but God warns him that the way Samuel sees and the way God sees are not the same: “God does not look at the things people see. People look only at the outside of a person, but the Lord looks at his heart” (1 Samuel 16:7).

These words were written in 1000 B.C., but they are also true for us today. Our culture teaches us to judge by what we see. Maybe we have ideas about God, and about other people, that block us from seeing God’s presence. For example, maybe we expect to see God’s face in our teachers, priests, doctors, parents, and children. This is right because God is truly present in these people. But are we also open to see God’s face in people who are homeless or sick? Do we see God’s face in people who are in prison or who come here from other countries? Sometimes our cultural values only let us see God in people we know and accept, and block us from seeing God in people who are often rejected.

When this happens, we are like Samuel and Jesse. We try to do what God wants, but we are slow to understand. Our limited ideas keep us from really “seeing”. Jesse never thought to bring David to Samuel. David was so young, and he was needed to care-for things at home. Are there people in our lives who we don’t see as God’s chosen ones?

## **Obeying Our Laws, Not God's**

The Pharisees in Sunday's Gospel do not see "the light of the world" (John 9:5) because they cling to their own religious beliefs. The Pharisees thought they were faithful Jews because they carefully obeyed all the laws. Some of the laws were truly God's laws, but some of them were only laws made by people.

For example, one of the Ten Commandments says keep the Sabbath day holy. The Pharisees taught that no one should heal on the Sabbath, because they thought healing was work. So they blamed Jesus when he healed on the Sabbath. They thought, "This man (*Jesus*) does not obey the law about the Sabbath day. So he is not from God" (John 9:16). They could not separate God's law from their religious customs. They could not imagine something good could come from a person who did not obey all their laws.

Sometimes we build walls between ourselves and other good people -- people of different races, cultures, etc. -- because they do not agree with all our traditions, all our ways of doing things. These disagreements among believers, especially among Christians, hurt evangelization. When Christians fight with each other, we cannot be good examples for Christ, the light of the world.

## **Being Closed to New Truth**

When the Pharisees experience something that challenges their religious beliefs, they reject it, instead of looking for new truth. "Religious" people have made this mistake for hundreds of years. In fact, many times people who are right are persecuted by others. The Pharisees of Jesus' time persecuted Jesus.

New information and new truth sometimes challenge our ideas. When this happens, do we respond by calling people sinners? Or do we accept the light of Christ, even if it forces us to question our own beliefs?

## **Being Proud and Judging Others**

Some people think they already know the whole truth. They are not willing to learn truth from others, especially truth that challenges their own beliefs. These people do not grow in holiness (loving relationship with God and other people). Instead, they become proud; they judge other people. The Pharisees did this with the man born blind. The man himself slowly comes to know Jesus. First he knows only his own experience and Jesus' name. But then he believes Jesus is a prophet from God. The Pharisees became angry that this person was arguing with them. "The Jewish leaders answered, 'You were born full of sin! Are you trying to teach us?' And the Jewish leaders forced the man to leave" (John 9:34). The Pharisees do not win the argument. They just use physical force. Their pride does not allow them to see the light of the world.

## **Seeing the Light**

The blind man's experience of Jesus healing him changed his old ideas about himself and Jesus. Now he was willing to become open to new understanding.

The Gospel writer John is challenging his people, and us, to see the risen Christ here with us. We are challenged to pray about happenings in our lives, and find their meaning in the light of Christ, who is the light of the world.

## DISCIPLE IN MISSION: BLESSED JUAN DIEGO

Juan Diego was born near Mexico City in 1477. He was an Aztec Indian, whose Indian name, *Cuauhlatohuac*, means “the eagle who speaks.” Eight million Aztecs became Catholic because Juan Diego spoke the good news when Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared to him.

Juan Diego was walking to Mass on December 9, 1531. On Tepeyac Hill, he saw a beautiful Indian woman in Aztec dress. Speaking in his native language, she said she was Mary, the Mother of God. She wanted a shrine built there so she could show her motherly love, especially to the Indian people.

Mary asked Juan Diego to tell the bishop her wish. He went, twice, but the bishop did not believe him. The third time, the bishop asked for a sign that the lady was the Mother of God.

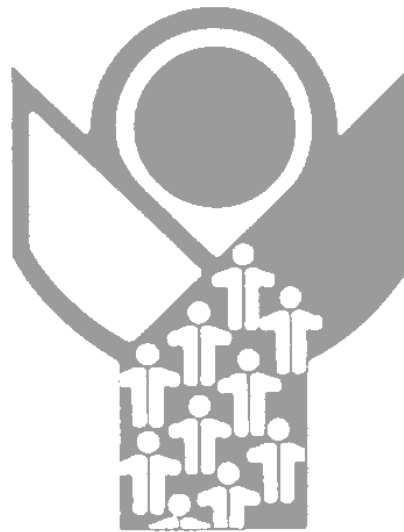
Two days later, Mary appeared to Juan Diego and told him to go to the top of Tepeyac Hill. He went and found gorgeous roses -- growing in mid-winter! He gathered them in his cloak (coat).

When Juan Diego opened his cloak for the bishop, lovely roses fell to the floor. The bishop knelt. On the cloak was a life-size picture

of Mary. This cloak is still kept today at the church of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City.

Juan Diego lived for seventeen more years. The Indians knew about his life of prayer and penance. Priests told people: “May God make you holy like Juan Diego.”

Pope John Paul II gave Juan Diego the title “blessed” in 1990. The pope talked about Juan Diego’s simple faith, love, poverty, and humility. The Pope encouraged lay people to evangelize under the protection of Mary, Star of Evangelization.





*Gather around a table with a Bible and a large candle on it. Small candles are nearby. One person lights the large candle.*

*Leader: Christ is light for the world!*

*All:*

*Each member of the group comes to the candle and lights a small candle from it, while saying,*

*When everyone is holding a lit candle, the leader says:*

Jesus tells us, "I am light for the world. The person who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have light for life." (John 8:12). Let us ask God for grace to live as children of light.

*The leader then invites everyone, individually, to think of an unjust situation in our world today. After a short time, the leader begins:*

Lord, let your light and truth guide us when we see ...

*Maybe some people want to share the situation they thought about. After each one, all pray:*

*Sign the Our Father together.*

*After the Our Father, blow out the candles. The leader ends by Signing:*

We received the light of God's love at baptism. It still burns brightly in us. May it shine in our minds and hearts as we touch people with our lives this week.

*All:*

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**READINGS FOR THE  
FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT**

**Romans 8:8-11**

Those people that are ruled by their sinful selves cannot please God.

But you are not ruled by your sinful selves. You are ruled by the Spirit, if that Spirit of God really lives in you. But if any person does not have the Spirit of Christ, then that person does not belong to Christ. Your body will always be dead because of sin. But if Christ is in you, then the Spirit gives you life, because Christ made you right with God.

God raised Jesus from death. And if God's Spirit is living in you, then he will also give life to your bodies that die. God is the One who raised Christ from death. And he will give life to your bodies through his Spirit that lives in you.

**Psalm 130**

Lord, give us mercy and salvation.

**Lord, give us mercy and salvation.**

Lord I have many troubles;  
I call for your help.  
Pay-attention to my need.

**Lord, give us mercy and salvation.**

If You write-down all our sins,  
It's impossible for us to avoid punishment.  
But You, Lord, forgive Your people.  
We honor You.

**Lord, give us mercy and salvation.**

I trust the Lord, I believe his teaching.  
I wait-for the Lord everyday.

**Lord, give us mercy and salvation.**

The Lord is full of kindness.  
God will save us.  
God forgives all our sin.

**Lord, give us mercy and salvation.**

**John 11:1-45**

**Short Form**

There was a man named Lazarus who was sick.

Mary and Martha sent a person to tell Jesus, "Lord, your dear friend Lazarus is sick."

When Jesus heard this he said, "The end of this sickness will not be death. But this sickness is for the glory of God. This has happened to bring glory to the Son of God." (Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.) When Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was for two more days. Then Jesus said to his followers, "We should go back to Judea ... Our friend Lazarus is now sleeping. But I am going there to wake him."

The followers answered, "But Lord, if he can sleep, he will be well."

Jesus meant that Lazarus was dead. But Jesus' followers thought that Jesus meant Lazarus was really sleeping.

Jesus arrived in Bethany. Jesus found that Lazarus had already been dead and in the tomb for four days.

Martha heard that Jesus was coming. She went out to greet Jesus. But Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you anything you ask."

Jesus said, "Your brother will rise and be alive again."

Martha answered, I know that he will

rise to live again when people are resurrected (*raised from death*) on the last day.”

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection. I am life. The person that believes in me will have life again after he dies. And the person that lives and believes in me will never really die. Martha, do you believe this?”

Martha answered, “Yes, Lord. I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God. You are the one that was coming to the world.”

Mary went to the place where Jesus was. When she saw Jesus, she bowed at his feet. Mary said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

Jesus saw that Mary was crying. Jesus saw the Jews that came with her. They were crying too. Jesus felt very upset. He was deeply troubled. Jesus asked, “Where did you put him (*Lazarus*)?” They replied, “Lord, come and see.”

Jesus cried.

And the Jews said, “Look! Jesus loved Lazarus very much!”

But some of the Jews said, “Jesus healed the eyes of the blind man. Why didn’t Jesus help Lazarus and stop him from dying?”

Again Jesus felt very upset.

Jesus came to the tomb where Lazarus was. The tomb was a cave with a large stone covering the entrance. Jesus said, “Move the stone away.”

Martha said, “But Lord, it has been four days since Lazarus died. There will be a bad smell.”

Then Jesus said to Martha, “Remember what I told you? I said that if you believed, then you would see the glory of God.”

So they moved the stone away from the entrance. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you heard me. I know that you always hear me. But I said these things

because of the people here around me. I want them to believe that you sent me.”

After Jesus said this he called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man (*Lazarus*) came out. His hands and feet were wrapped with pieces of cloth. He had a handkerchief covering his face.

Jesus said to the people, “Untie him. Take the cloth off of him and let him go free.”

There were many Jews that came to visit Mary. They saw what Jesus did. And many of these Jews believed in Jesus.

# 5 THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

IN TODAY'S GOSPEL, BOTH MARTHA AND MARY SAY TO JESUS, "LORD, IF YOU HAD BEEN HERE, MY BROTHER WOULD NOT HAVE DIED." DO WE SAY, "IF YOU HAD BEEN HERE, LORD," INSTEAD OF SEEING THE RISEN CHRIST WITH US EVERY DAY?

## **Opening Prayer**

Lord, God of life and love, we praise you for your faithful love. Thank you for the ways you bring new life. Please bless our meeting here. Send your Spirit to give us life. Guide our thoughts and words. Let our sharing open our eyes to your presence in our lives. We pray through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

## **Lazarus is Dead**

John's Gospel was written at the end of the first century. People expected Jesus's second coming long before this. They were slowly realizing that God's ways were different from their ways. John is helping his people understand the risen Christ is already present. They do not have to wait for the future to find him.

To help people realize the risen Christ is with them, John tells the story of the raising of Lazarus. Jesus truly loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. So, when Lazarus became sick, his sisters informed Jesus. Instead of rushing to be with them, Jesus "stayed where he was for two more days" (John 11:6). Finally, Jesus tells his disciples that they are going back to Judea. "Our friend Lazarus is now sleeping. But I am going there to wake him" (John 11:11). They think Lazarus is really sleeping, but Jesus means he died. Jesus is speaking with symbol language, but his followers don't understand. This lets the Gospel writer explain the true meaning of Jesus' words. John's story is not only about Jesus' presence to Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. It is also about the risen Christ's presence -- to John's people and to us today.

## Lazarus, Come Out!

Sleep sometimes seems like death; today, we sometimes say a sleeper is “dead to the world.” Physical death also seems to *be* the end. But it is not. Jesus said Lazarus’ sickness would not end in death, but would give God glory. This is the most important message of the Gospel -- the best Good News. Our death is not the end, because Jesus Christ conquered death. This truth is explained in the reading from Paul’s Letter to the Romans: “... if God’s Spirit is living in you, then he will also give life to your bodies that die. God is the One who raised Christ from death. And he will give life to your bodies through his Spirit that lives in you” (Romans 8:11).

This is very hard to believe. Could it be true that death is not the end? Did Jesus really conquer death? Have we already received eternal life? These ideas go against our experience. But the story of the raising of Lazarus gives us an answer to these questions. What Jesus says to Martha, the risen Christ is saying to each of us: “I am the resurrection. I am life. The person that believes in me will have life again after he dies. And the person that lives and believes in me will never really die” (John 11:25-26).

What does Jesus mean by *never die*? He is not talking about physical death. He means spiritual death. But Lazarus did die physically. When Jesus finally arrives at Bethany, Lazarus is in the tomb for four days. When Jesus tells Martha to take away the stone, Martha does not want to do it. Knowing he has the power to give life, Jesus says in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” And Lazarus does come out.

## Untie Him

Jesus tells Martha, Mary, and the people to untie Lazarus and let him go free. Jesus says this to us also. We are the Marthas and Marys of this world; we are loved by Christ. We call for Christ’s help during times of trouble, but we do not always experience Christ’s presence with us. When we suffer, sometimes we turn to God and say, “Where are you? If you were with me, this would not happen.” Especially with the death of someone we love, we may ask this question. We feel this death should not have happened. It is hard to keep faith. But we know Christ rose from the dead. We believe our loved ones are joined to Christ, so they still live.

This is the Good News that Jesus came to tell us. Death is not the end. Our loved ones have not died. We will not die. God wants us to live forever!

People today need to know this message. Many people are not aware of Christ’s presence with us. Like Lazarus, they are bound ... tied-up with fear, addictions, broken relationships, and no hope. The risen Christ asks us to untie each other so we all will know the power of Christ, and truly have life.

## DISCIPLE IN MISSION: SAINT FRANCIS XAVIER, SJ

St. Francis Xavier planted the faith in more countries than anyone except St. Paul. His missionary work took him to India, Ceylon, Japan, and the Malaysian Islands.

Francis Xavier was born in Spain in 1506, and as a young man was proud of his noble family. He studied at the University of Paris, where he was a natural leader. There he became a philosophy teacher. Later, Francis Xavier chose a life of serving the Church. With Ignatius of Loyola, Xavier and five others began the Society of

Jesus (the Jesuits). They made religious vows, and promised to go wherever the pope sent them.

Francis Xavier was sent to India, where he began his life's work as missionary in the Far East. His evangelizing always began with the children. He gathered them by ringing a bell, and told them stories about Jesus. Using songs, he taught them the Creed and the Commandments. He taught the poor, prisoners, and lepers, and lived with them.

Francis Xavier sailed from country to country, bringing the Good News of God's love by his teaching and his loving actions. He baptized thousands, but he had to face pirates and evil rulers, and suffered sickness, discouragement, rejection, and loneliness.

On his way to China, Francis became sick and died. He was forty-six. With St. Therese, St. Francis Xavier is the patron saint of missions.

## Questions for Faith Sharing

1. Can you think of a time when you said to God, “If you were here, this would not happen”? Looking back, do you still feel the same way? Explain.
2. Jesus says, “The person who lives and believes in me will never really die” (John 11:26). What do these words mean to you? Are they true?
3. Jesus tells Martha and Mary to untie Lazarus and let him go free. Jesus tells us the same thing. Do you know someone who needs to become free? What can you do to help that person? How do you need to become free? Who can help you?

## Ways to Take Action

1. Each morning ask for grace to see God in everything you experience that day.
2. When you see someone this week struggling with a difficult life situation, pray they will know the power of Christ. Can you do anything to help this person become free?
3. Have you experienced the death of someone close to you? How does the Gospel message help you respond to this with faith? Can you explain this faith to someone else?

## Closing Prayer and Ritual



*Gather around a table that has a cross and a dish of seeds on it.*

*Leader:* God raised Christ from the dead, and will bring us new life through his Spirit. But we often do not experience God’s presence giving us life. We feel tied-up by our fears or our difficulties, the same way the dead Lazarus was tied-up. We need to trust that God’s love for us will bring us true life. Let us pray to Jesus now. *(Pause.)*

Think of one thing that keeps you tied up, blocked from the joy Jesus came to give, and blocked from reaching out to share that joy with other people. *(Pause.)*

*Leader:* God wants to free you from what keeps you blocked. When you are ready to say “yes” to God’s freedom, go to the prayer table, take a seed, and put it near the cross.

This seed seems dead, but we know there is new life inside. When you offer the seed to Christ it means you offer what seems dead in you. But, still you are open to the ways God wants to give you new life.

*When everyone is finished, the leader says:*

To show our freedom and new life, let us pray together the words Jesus taught us.

**All: Our Father ...**



## READINGS FOR PASSION SUNDAY

### Psalm 22

My God, my God, why have you  
abandoned\* me?

**My God, my God, why have you  
abandoned me?**

Many people see me.  
They mock me and say,  
“He depended on the Lord;  
let God deliver him.  
Let God save him if He really loves him.”

**My God, my God, why have you  
abandoned me?**

Truly, many evil people come to hurt me.  
They crucify my hands and feet.  
I can count all my bones.

**My God, my God, why have you  
abandoned me?**

They take my clothes, gamble for my  
coat.  
But you, Lord, stay with me; God, my help.

**My God, my God, why have you  
abandoned me?**

I proclaim Your name for my friends,  
With all people I praise you.  
“You who love the Lord, praise Him.  
All children of God, give Him glory!”

**My God, my God, why have you  
abandoned me?**

\* Abandoned = being left alone; ignored

### Matthew 27:11-54

#### Governor Pilate Questions Jesus

Jesus stood before Pilate the governor. Pilate asked him questions. He said, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

Jesus answered, “Yes, I am.”

When the leading priests and the older Jewish leaders accused Jesus, he said nothing.

So Pilate said to Jesus, “You hear these people accusing you of all these things. Why don’t you answer?”

But Jesus said nothing to answer Pilate. Pilate was very surprised at this.

#### Pilate Tries but Fails to Free Jesus

Every year at the Passover time the governor would free one person from the prison. This was always a person that the people wanted to be made free. At that time there was a man in prison who was known to be very bad. His name was Barabbas. All the people gathered at Pilate’s house. Pilate asked the people, I will free one man for you. Which man do you want me to free: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the Christ?” Pilate knew that the people gave Jesus to him because the people were jealous.

Pilate said these things while he was sitting in the place for judging. While he was sitting there, his wife sent a message to him. The message said, “Don’t do anything with that man (Jesus). He is not guilty. And today I had a dream about him, and it troubled me very much.”

But the leading priests and older Jewish leaders told the people to ask for Barabbas to be made free and for Jesus to be killed.

Pilate said, “I have Barabbas and Jesus. Which do you want me to make free for you?”

The people answered, “Barabbas!”

Pilate asked, “So what should I do with Jesus, the one called the Christ?”

All the people answered, “Kill him on a cross!”

Pilate asked, “Why do you want me to kill him? What wrong has he done?”

But all the people shouted louder, “Kill him on a cross!”

Pilate saw that he could do nothing to make the people change. And he saw that the people were becoming upset. So Pilate took some water and washed his hands so that all the people could see. Then Pilate said, “I am not guilty of this man’s death. You are the ones that are doing it!”

All the people answered, “We will be responsible for his death. We accept for ourselves and for our children any punishment for his death.”

Then Pilate freed Barabbas. Pilate told some soldiers to beat Jesus with whips. Then Pilate gave Jesus to the soldiers to be killed on a cross.

### **Pilate’s Soldiers Make Fun of Jesus**

Then Pilate’s soldiers brought Jesus into the governor’s palace. All the soldiers gathered around Jesus. The soldiers took off Jesus’ clothes and put a red robe on him.

Then the soldiers used thorny branches to make a crown. They put this crown of thorns on Jesus’ head, and they put a stick in his right hand. Then the soldiers bowed before Jesus and teased him. They said, “Hello, king of the Jews!” The soldiers spit on Jesus. Then they took his stick and hit him on the head many times. After they finished teasing Jesus, the soldiers took off the robe and put his own clothes on him again. Then they led Jesus away to be killed on a cross.

### **Jesus Is Killed on a Cross**

The soldiers were going out of the city with Jesus. The soldiers forced another man there to carry the cross for Jesus. This man’s name was Simon from Cyrene. They came to the place called Golgotha. (Golgotha means “The Place of the Skull.”) At Golgotha, the soldiers gave Jesus wine to drink. This wine was mixed with gall. Jesus tasted the wine but refused to drink it. The soldiers nailed Jesus to a cross. Then the soldiers gambled with dice to decide who would get Jesus’ clothes. The soldiers sat there and continued watching Jesus. The soldiers put a sign above Jesus’ head with the charge against him written on it. The sign said: “THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS.”

Two robbers were nailed to crosses beside Jesus. One robber was put beside Jesus on the right and the other was put on the left.

People walked by and said bad things to Jesus. People shook their heads and said, “You said you could destroy the temple and build it again in three days. So save yourself! Come down from that cross, if you are really the Son of God!”

The leading priests, the teachers of the law, and the older Jewish leaders were also there. These men teased Jesus the same as the other people. They said, “He saved other people. But he can’t save himself! People say he is the king of Israel (*the* Jews). If he is the king, then he should come down now from the cross. Then we will believe in him. He trusted God. So let God save him now, if God really wants him. He himself said, ‘I am the Son of God.’ ” And in the same way, the robbers that were being killed on crosses beside Jesus also said bad things to him.

## Jesus Dies

At noon the whole country became dark. This darkness continued for three hours. At about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, "*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*" This means, "My God, my God, why have you left me alone?"

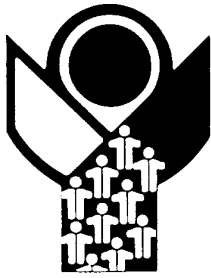
Some of the people standing there heard this. The people said, "He is calling Elijah."

Quickly one of the people ran and got a sponge. That person filled the sponge with vinegar and tied the sponge to a stick. Then he used the stick to give the sponge to Jesus to drink from it. But the other people said, "Don't bother him (*Jesus*). We want to see if Elijah will come to save him."

Again Jesus cried with a loud voice. Then he died.

When Jesus died, the curtain in the temple was torn into two pieces. The tear started at the top and tore all the way to the bottom. Also, the earth shook and rocks were broken. All the graves opened, and many of God's people that had died were raised from death. Those people came out of the graves. After Jesus was raised from death, those people went into the holy city (*Jerusalem*), and many people saw them.

The army officer and the soldiers guarding Jesus saw this earthquake and everything that happened. They were very afraid and said, "He really was the Son of God!"



# PASSION (PALM) SUNDAY

“CRUCIFY HIM!” THESE ARE THE WORDS WE MUST SAY TODAY WHEN WE READ MATTHEW’S STORY OF JESUS’ SUFFERING AND DEATH. NO ONE SUPPORTED JESUS WHEN THIS TERRIBLE THING WAS HAPPENING TO HIM. BUT JESUS’ CROSS LEADS TO HIS RESURRECTION AND TO SALVATION FOR ALL PEOPLE.

## **Opening Prayer**

God, you are truly full of love. We come here to pray about your saving love. Be with us now. Help us understand how the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus changed all human life. Help us know your saving power works in us today. Help us be your messengers bringing this Good News to others. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

## **The Words of the Prophets**

It is important to understand that Matthew wrote his Gospel for Jewish people. He is not trying to explain exactly what happened during the crucifixion. Instead, he is answering the question, “How does Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection influence in my life?” Because the people asking are Jewish, Matthew answers by talking about their own religious history in a way they will understand.

If I was a Jew who did not know Jesus during his life on earth, and Jesus’ disciples were telling me about him after the Resurrection, I would ask: “If Jesus is really the Savior, then why was he rejected by the leaders of his own religion and left alone by people who knew him best?” Every Gospel says this. Could something so terrible happen to a good person?

Matthew’s story of Jesus’ life answers these questions. He wants the Jewish people to know that even though Jesus was misunderstood and left alone, he was still the One promised by God and the prophets.

A prophet was a person who spoke for God. A prophet saw how everything was connected with covenant love -- God’s continuing love for God’s people. When the people were in trouble, the prophets reminded them God would send someone to save them. God did this in the past, and God always keeps promises.

## Matthew's Teaching

Matthew wants to teach the Jewish people that all their hopes and all God's promises came true with Jesus. God sent his beloved Son, who suffered, died, and rose from the dead, to save all people and show God's love to everyone. No one recognized who Jesus was while he was on earth. They knew he was a great teacher and a healer. Only after the Resurrection could they fully understand Jesus' words and actions. Only after the Resurrection they realized who Jesus is.

So Matthew tells the story of Jesus, which people already knew, to teach them what they did *not* understand. True, Jesus was sent to death by his own people. He was left alone by his disciples, and hated by the crowd. But Jesus is still God's Son; he was doing the will of his Father. The fact that Jesus was willing to suffer and be rejected proves his love, and the Father's love for all people. Matthew proves this is true by showing how God's message was there long ago in the words of the prophets.

## My God, My God, Why Have You Abandoned Me?

Matthew's story of the Passion emphasizes Jesus' being left alone and suffering. Psalm 22 does this, too. Psalm 22 is a cry of sorrow. It begins with the person explaining his suffering, but ends by proclaiming God's saving power. "You, Lord, stay with me; God, my help" (Psalm 22:19).

## Jesus Christ is Lord!

The cross was a death of shame for Jewish people. It was hard to believe a good person would have to suffer such a terrible death. Would God allow this to happen? It would be much easier to shout "Crucify him!" than to accept and believe the truth. God loves us so much that God became one of us, accepted persecution and death, and then rose from the dead. Matthew wants his Jewish people, and us, to understand Jesus Christ is Lord. Through Jesus' suffering and resurrection, we receive everlasting life.

## DISCIPLE IN MISSION: ST. THERESE OF THE CHILD JESUS

St. Therese was a Carmelite nun who never left her convent. Then why is she patron of the missions? During the twenty-four years of her life, she touched millions of people with a “little way” to live the Gospel.

Therese was born in France in 1873, the youngest of five girls. When she was four, her mother died, and she was raised by her sisters and her father.

Therese was a loving child, who wanted to live fully for God. At fifteen, she joined

three of her sisters in the convent.

Therese showed her love for God by doing ordinary things -- like housework and sewing -- very well. She was kind to grouchy sisters. She suffered without complaining. She made many sacrifices and prayed much, even when her faith was tested.

She accepted two missionary priests as “brothers,” writing, “Because I could not be an active missionary, I wanted to be one through love and sacrifice.”

St. Therese taught a way of love. She said people who are not able to climb the steps to heaven can take the elevator, by doing all for love. Her simple spiritual life is explained in her autobiography, *The Story of a Soul*.

During her long suffering from tuberculosis, Therese was joyful and wanted to meet Jesus face to face. When she died, many people knew she was holy. Her book became a best-seller, showing how to live the Gospel in the small things of daily life.

## Questions for Faith Sharing

1. How do you feel when you Sign the words, “Crucify him!” Do you think it is a good or bad experience for us to be the crowd who said Jesus must die? Explain.
2. Why do you think the disciples left Jesus alone? Do we also leave Jesus? How?
3. For the Jews, Jesus’ death on a cross made it difficult to believe God was with him. Do you sometimes look at sufferings of other people and think, “This couldn’t happen to a good person”? Why?
4. This is the time of year when we celebrate the best Good News. If you had to explain this Good News to someone who never heard it, what would you say? Do you believe this Good News? Does your life show this Good News to others? Explain.

## Ways to Take Action

1. When you experience a difficult situation this week, unite yourself to Jesus. Offer it to God and say, “We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you, because with your holy cross you save the world!”
2. Go to church on Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. Invite someone else to go with you. During each service, ask for grace to know Jesus better.
3. Think about how you feel when you see people who are suffering. Imagine Jesus looking at them from the cross. Do you see them the same as Jesus does?

## Closing Prayer and Ritual



*Gather in a circle around a table that has a crucifix on it.*

*Leader: We want to be faithful followers of Jesus. But in our hearts we know we are like those people who were there when Jesus was arrested and crucified. Like them, we are not always faithful. Like them, we run away when things become hard. Like them, we sometimes fail to trust God’s faithful love will lead us safely through evil.*

*Let us pray to God now. We will pass around the cross. When you receive it, look at it for a short time. Ask God to help you overcome a sin that prevents you from being a faithful follower of Jesus. Then, give the cross to the person standing next to you.*

*When everyone is finished, the leader picks up the cross, holds it quietly, and then prays silently for a moment. Then the leader holds the cross higher, and everyone Signs together:*

**We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you, because with your holy cross you saved the world.**

*The leader touches or kisses the cross, and gives it to the next person, Signing:*

**See Jesus, savior for the world.**

*Continue until everyone does this.*

*The prayer ends with everyone Signing together:*

**All: Our Father ...**