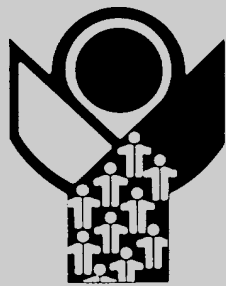

Small Group Participant's Booklet
Lent Cycle C
Adapted for the Deaf Community



DISCIPLES IN MISSION

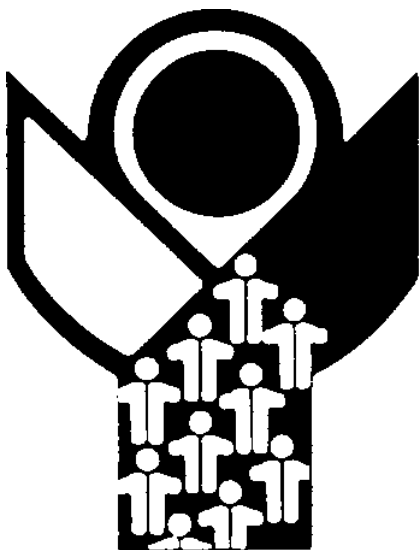
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Adapted for the Deaf Community by
Archdiocese of Portland in Oregon
in Partnership with the Paulist National
Catholic Evangelization Association

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

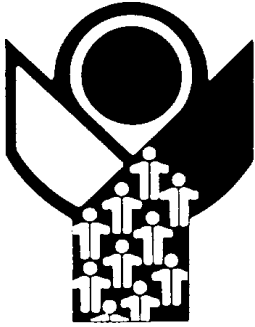
Schedule some personal prayer time to read and reflect on the materials before you go to the meeting. Try this five-step plan and see if it helps you. Or find a plan that works best for you.

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 ENER-
GIES 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

Psalm 91

Lord, during trouble, stay with me.
Lord, during trouble, stay with me.

You who live near God,
People in the presence of God,
Say to the Lord, “ You, my protection,
my strength, I trust You.”

Lord, during trouble, stay with me.

Bad things will not happen to you.
No suffering in your home.
The Lord tells the angels to protect you
always.

Lord, during trouble, stay with me.

God says, because you cling to Me,
I will save you.
You accept the power of My name.
When you call, I answer:
I will relieve your troubles.
I, the Lord, will save you with glory.

Lord, during trouble, stay with me.

Romans 10:8-13

This is what the Scripture says: “God’s teaching is near you, it is in your hands and in your heart.” That teaching is the teaching of faith that we tell people. If you proclaim, “Jesus is Lord,” and if you believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from death, then you will be saved. Yes, we believe with our hearts, and so we are made right with God. And we say that we believe, and so we are saved. Yes, the Scripture says, “Any person who believes in Christ will not be ashamed.” That Scripture says “Any person” because there is no difference between Jew and non-Jew. The same Lord is the Lord of all people. The Lord gives many

blessings to all people that trust in him. Yes, the Scripture says, “Every person that trusts in the Lord will be saved.”

Luke 4:1-13

Jesus returned from the Jordan River. He was full of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit led Jesus into the desert. There the devil tempted Jesus for 40 days. Jesus ate nothing during that time. When those days were finished, Jesus was very hungry.

The devil said to Jesus, “If you are the Son of God, tell this rock to become bread.” Jesus answered, “It is written in the Scripture: ‘It is not just bread that keeps people alive.’”

Then the devil took Jesus and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. The devil said to Jesus, “I will give you all these kingdoms and all the power and glory that is in them. It has all been given to me. I can give it to any person I want. I will give it all to you, if you will only worship me.” Jesus answered, “It is written in the Scriptures: ‘You must worship the Lord your God. Serve only him!’”

Then the devil led Jesus to Jerusalem. The devil put Jesus on a very high place of the temple. He said to Jesus, “If you are the Son of God, jump off! It is written in the Scriptures: ‘God will command his angels to take care of you.’ It is also written: ‘Their hands will catch you so that you will not hit your foot on a rock.’” Jesus answered, “But it also says in the Scriptures: ‘You must not test (doubt) the Lord your God.’” The devil finished tempting Jesus in every way and went away to wait until a better time.

1 THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

THE READINGS FOR THIS FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT REMIND US THAT WE SHOULD NOT BE AFRAID. WHY? OUR GOD IS A GOD WHO SAVES US FROM SLAVERY, SIN, AND TEMPTATION. BECAUSE GOD SAVED US, WE CLING TO HIM IN LOVE AND JOY.

Opening Prayer

Loving God, You show mercy to all people who call to you. We ask you: be with us now. Help us experience your deep love for us. Fill us with your Holy Spirit. We come to you in love and joy as we follow Jesus during this time of Lent. May our time together help us become more aware of your desire to be our strength and guide while we face the temptations of daily life. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

“Because You Cling to Me”

In today’s psalm we read, “Because you cling to me, I will save you.” To “cling” means to hold-on-tight. Whenever I read the words cling to me, I remember one of the most frightening moments of my life. Our family was on a trip. We stopped at a restaurant and gas station on the freeway. When I came out of the restroom with our children, I realized one of them, a three-year old son, was not with us. My husband and I searched frantically, afraid he had been kidnapped. After about five minutes we found him - lost and even more frightened than we were. I picked him up, and learned forever what the phrase “cling to me” means. We clung to each other. Our son was safe, saved. We clung to each other, not in fear - that was past now - but in love and joy. Our son clung to me when we found him, like we cling to God, who saves us. Our readings today encourage us to cling to our saving God through prayer and fasting.

Proclaim “Jesus is Lord”

Paul also, in his Letter to the Romans, teaches us to cling to God. This letter is unusual because Paul is writing to people he has not yet met, but he hopes to meet them. To

prepare, he writes them the Good News: “Everyone who calls the name of the Lord will be saved.” This is a hard truth to believe. Does Paul really mean everyone? He does, and he emphasizes this by saying both Jew and Greek are saved. “Here there is no difference between Jew and Greek; all have the same Lord, rich in mercy to all people who call to him.”

Paul is encouraging the Romans to have faith in this good news, to cling to it and give it a home, both in their words and in their hearts. “For if you proclaim that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from death, you will be saved.” The Romans are called to remember and share the actions of God that gave them salvation. Why? When we talk about them we keep the faith alive and pass it on. Each generation learns about God’s saving acts throughout history and becomes more able to see and talk about them in their own lives. The Good News is remembered and experienced in every generation.

Led by the Spirit into the Desert

Jesus clung to God and to God’s word to help him overcome the difficulties he met as he lived his call from God. Luke begins the story of Jesus’ temptation: “Jesus returned from the Jordan River. He was full of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit led Jesus into the desert. There the devil tempted Jesus for 40 days.” This seems strange to many people. Why would the Holy Spirit lead Jesus into the desert to be tempted? Luke wanted to teach us that the Spirit supported Jesus during the temptation. The power of the Spirit, and Jesus’ faith in God, gave him strength to

overcome all temptations, and to follow his call as God’s son and God’s servant.

Luke begins the story by saying Jesus returned from the Jordan. This reminds us of his baptism, when a voice from heaven says, “You are my beloved son; with you I am very pleased” (Luke 3:22). The voice is naming Jesus’ call from God: God’s son and God’s servant. The temptations in today’s Gospel are temptations not to be son and servant: to serve self (change stone to bread), to do one’s own will, not God’s (jump from a tower), and to seek worldly power (by worshipping the devil).

Notice Jesus prepares for his ministry with prayer and fasting - the same things we do during Lent to help us resist the temptations of life. Luke does not mean Jesus had overcome temptation forever. Instead, he says, “The devil finished tempting Jesus in every way and went away to wait until a better time.” That opportunity comes at the time of Jesus’ suffering and death. The devil will use Judas and try again to stop Jesus from doing his Father’s will. But Jesus does not fail because he clings to the Father. He remembers and lives God’s Word. He prays and he fasts. Because he is full of the Holy Spirit, he is always faithful.

During Lent, we are called to cling to God through prayer and fasting. We do not cling with fear, hoping to be saved. Instead, we cling with love and joy, knowing we are already saved. Filled with the Holy Spirit we, like Jesus, will find wisdom and strength to live God’s call faithfully.

DISCIPLE IN MISSION: ST. ELIZABETH ANN SETON

Elizabeth Ann was born in 1774. She set-up the first Catholic parish school, the first Catholic hospital in the United States and the Sisters of Charity, the first American religious society. She became the first American-born saint.

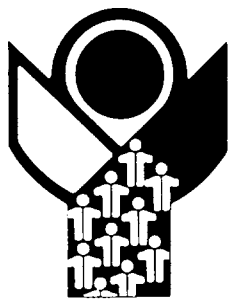
Elizabeth was from a leading Episcopalian family in New York. She and her husband William Seton, a wealthy shipping merchant, had five children.

Eventually William became bankrupt. Then, after traveling to Italy with Elizabeth and their daughter Anna, he died of tuberculosis.

Elizabeth and Anna stayed in Italy for six months with Williams' friends, the Filicchis. These strong Catholics shared their house, money, and faith with the twenty-nine-year-old widow. Elizabeth became interested in the Blessed Sacrament and Mary. When she returned home, she became a Catholic.

Most of Elizabeth's family and friends were angry with her decision and rejected her. When Elizabeth tried to teach school, people were afraid to send their children to her, a Catholic.

Finally, a priest invited Elizabeth to the Catholic city of Baltimore to open a school. Archbishop John Carroll encouraged Elizabeth to begin a religious community. Her Sisters of Charity wore the widow's cap and dress that she wore. Soon Mother Seton was invited to open a school in Emmitsburg. She and her Sisters faced many difficult times. But by 1818, they had fifty-seven students living at their school. Mother Seton taught her Sisters to know and love God. She became a saint in 1975.



DISCIPLES IN MISSION

Questions for Faith Sharing

1. Have you ever “saved” someone from harm? Did someone save you? How did you feel? Do you think the word *saved* describes what Jesus has done for us? Explain.
2. Share about a time when you felt you were “clinging to God.” What was happening in your life? How did God help or comfort you?
3. Do you wonder why Jesus spent time with prayer and fasting? Do you pray and fast? Do you think we should do these things during Lent only, or should we do them all year?
4. Do you believe God has a plan for you that you should seek and follow? Explain.

Ways to Take Action

1. Tell someone about a time when you experienced God’s saving power.
2. Whenever you feel tempted this week, call on the Lord for help, saying the name *Jesus*.
3. Decide specific ways you will pray and fast during this Lent. What actions or attitudes will you “fast from” (avoid), to help you become a better Christian?

Closing Prayer and Ritual



Gather around a table with a strong rope on it.

First reader: God pays attention when we call to him during trouble. God saves us and leads us to freedom and new life.

Second reader: This rope is a symbol, representing God. A person can hold-on-tight to a rope, and be pulled away from danger. We also can cling to God, because God is always near to save us.

Take a few minutes to reflect in silence on the ways the Lord saved you when you cried out for help. Then, accept the rope when it is handed to you. Sign, “My God, I trust you. You saved me when ...” (Share with the group one example of God’s saving power in your life.)

After each person’s sharing, say together:

Be with us, Lord, when we have trouble.

Second reader: We have temptations every day. Like Jesus, we need to cling to God and God’s word. God promises to answer us when we call for help.

In your heart tell God about one temptation you need help to resist. Then Sign the Our Father together.



READINGS FOR THE
SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18

God led Abram outside. God said, "Look at the sky. See the many stars. There are so many you can't count them. In the future, your family will be like that."

Abram believed God. And God decided Abram's faith was the same as living right and doing a good work. God said to Abram, I am the Lord who led you from Ur of Babylonia. I did this so I could give you this land—you will own this land."

But Abram said, "Lord, my Master, how can I be sure that I will get this land?"

God said to Abram, "We will make an agreement. Bring me a three-year-old cow, a three-year-old goat, and a three-year-old ram. Also, bring me a dove and a young pigeon."

Abram brought all these things to God. Abram killed these animals and cut each of them into two pieces. Then Abram laid each half across from the other half. Abram did not cut the birds into two pieces. Later, large birds flew down to eat the animals. But Abram chased them away.

Later in the day, the sun was going down. Abram became very sleepy and fell asleep. While he was asleep a very terrible darkness came.

After the sun went down, it became very dark. The dead animals still lay on the ground, each animal cut in two pieces. At that time, a column of smoke and fire passed between the halves of the dead animals.

So on that day, the Lord made a promise and an agreement with Abram. The Lord said, I will give this land to your descendants. I will give them the land between the River of Egypt and the great river Euphrates.

Psalm 27

Lord, You are my light, my salvation.
Lord, You are my light, my salvation.

You, Lord, are my light and salvation.
Who do I fear?
The Lord is strength for my life;
Who do I fear?

Lord, You are my light, my salvation.

Lord, when I call, You pay-attention.
Look at me with care and concern;
answer me.
You touch my heart; I look at You.

Lord, You are my light, my salvation.

Your presence, Lord, I want.
Don't hide from me.
Don't become angry with me.
You are my helper.

Lord, You are my light, my salvation.

I will see the Lord's presence here
in the land of God's people.
The Lord gives hope, be strong.
Hope in the Lord.

Lord, You are my light, my salvation.

Luke 9:28-36

Jesus took Peter, James, and John and went up on a mountain to pray. While Jesus was praying, his face began to change. His clothes became shining white.

Then two men were talking with Jesus. The men were Moses and Elijah. Moses and Elijah were shining bright too. They were talking with Jesus about his death that would happen in Jerusalem. Peter and the others were asleep. But they woke up and saw the glory of Jesus. They also saw the two men that were standing with Jesus. When Moses and Elijah were leaving, Peter said, “Master, it is good that we are here. We will put three tents here—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” (Peter did not know what he was saying.)

While Peter was saying these things, a cloud came all around them. Peter, James, and John became afraid when the cloud covered them. A voice came from the cloud. The voice said, “This is My Son. He is the One I have chosen. Obey him.”

When the voice finished, only Jesus was there. Peter, James, and John said nothing. At that time they told no person about what they had seen.

2 THE SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

DO YOU BELIEVE THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS CHRIST? IN THE READINGS FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT, WE SEE A VARIETY OF PEOPLE RECEIVING GOOD NEWS. FROM THEIR REACTIONS WE ALSO SEE IT IS OFTEN DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND AND BELIEVE THE TRUST JESUS TEACHES US.

Opening Prayer

Faithful God, you love us so much! We gather here with faith and trust. We want to live with love and trust. We want to proclaim you are our light and our salvation, and we fear nothing. Bless us now while we share about your love and your promises. Help us believe you will do all things Jesus taught us. Amen

The Lord Makes a Covenant with Abraham

The whole Bible, Old Testament and New, is about God's love and desire to be known and loved by his people. In fact, the word testament means covenant. A covenant is an important promise and agreement made with love. The Bible shows how God made a covenant with his people so they could live in love and trust. It shows God kept the promises of that covenant more than anyone can imagine. The beginning of the story of this covenant is our reading from Genesis. God makes an agreement that can't be broken. He promises Abraham many descendants, protection, and land for him and his future family. Abraham trusts God fully.

The ceremony described in this reading is an action of covenant making. In Abraham's time, when people made an important agreement, they sealed the agreement in some visual way. Normally, animals would be cut in half and both people involved would walk between the cut halves. This action showed that the partners would rather be cut in half like the animals than break the agreement. Here we see God truly involves himself in an agreement with a human person. The column of smoke and fire, symbols of God's presence, pass between the cut halves. God wants us to know he loves us and we can trust him to keep his promises. Abraham believed.

Don't Hide from Me

Continuing strong in faith is not easy. The psalm writer makes this clear. Our psalm begins with words of strong faith: "You, Lord, are my light and my salvation; who do I fear?" But the psalm writer is not always sure God is paying attention. He cried out, "Your presence, O Lord, I want. Don't hide from me." But he is able to keep his faith even in difficult times. "I will see the Lord's presence here in the land of God's people. The Lord gives hope, be strong." For the psalm writer, faith was sometimes a struggle.

"This is My Son; Pay Attention"

In the Gospel, we read about Jesus' transfiguration, when his body changed to show his glory. Jesus is with Peter, James, and John, and he is praying. The apostles fall asleep. When they wake-up, Peter sees Jesus transformed (changed), talking to Moses and Elijah. The Gospel of Luke tells us they are talking about the fact Jesus was going to suffer, die, and then rise from death. The cross is still a mystery to Peter and the other disciples. Their idea of covenant love made them expect a savior who would conquer the Romans, not a savior who would die on a cross. This is why they leave Jesus during his time of great need. The cross was something they couldn't understand or accept.

When Peter sees Jesus transfigured, he does not understand what is happening. He suggests building three tents: for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. Then, like at

Jesus' baptism, a voice from heaven calls Jesus Son. "This is my Son, my Chosen One. Pay-attention to him." Then Jesus is alone; Moses and Elijah are gone. Peter's desire that all three stay ("Let us make three tents") is not God's will. Only Jesus stays there. Luke is teaching us that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the Law (Moses) and the prophets (Elijah). Moses and Elijah will not stay, only Jesus. Jesus' disciples must pay-attention to him.

We know Peter loves and believes in Jesus. But now Peter does not understand what Jesus is teaching. The disciples witness something completely beyond their understanding. They see Jesus transformed, but they have no idea what this vision means. They cannot respond with real understanding until after Jesus rises from death and appears to them.

Then the apostles start to understand the cross was not a failure for Jesus. Instead, it was the way Jesus did the will of his Father. The cross was Jesus' victory: his victory over death. Through the cross he could teach God's love and God's gift of eternal life.

Because Jesus was willing to come and show us God's love, we can now understand the covenant promises made to Abraham in a new way. When the psalm writer said he believed he would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living, he was talking about his belief that he would see the Israelites peacefully farming in the Promised Land. When we

say the words today, we see a deeper meaning. We believe we will see God's saving power beyond life on earth. The land of the living for us, is not a place on earth but a spiritual reality, a truth we believe because Jesus rose from death and

promised us eternal life in the kingdom of God. People involved in covenant love know that God will keep his promises. Abraham believed. The psalm writer believed. The apostles learned to believe. Do we?

**DISCIPLE IN MISSION: ST. FRANCIS DE SALES ---
PATRON SAINT OF THE DEAF**

St. Francis de Sales became a saint in 1665. In 1854 Pope Pius IX made him the Patron Saint of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. His feast day is January 24. Who was he?

Francis, the oldest of thirteen children, was born to a noble family. His parents sent him to the University of Padua to study law so he would replace his father as a senator.

After receiving his doctorate degree in law, Francis persuaded his father to let him be ordained a priest. He had learned his theology well. When the pope called him to Rome to be examined in front of a committee, St. Francis answered all thirty-five questions easily.

In his rather short life from 1567 to 1622, St. Francis

worked with enthusiasm. As bishop of Geneva at the age of thirty-five, he directed people in religious life, heard confessions, and organized the teaching of the faith. He and St. Jane de Chantal started the Sisters of the Visitation.

Why is he the patron saint of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing? Because of his interest in a Deaf man named Martin. Martin had been born Deaf and like all Deaf persons in those days, had received no education. There were no schools for the Deaf. This man made a living by doing small jobs and Bishop Francis gave him permanent work in the bishop's house. Martin had never received religious instructions, so Francis, with

great patience, began to teach him through natural sign language. Martin received his first communion and was confirmed. His instructions continued and Martin became known as the very holy Deaf man who worked for Bishop Francis.

Until his death, St. Francis lived simply and gave generously of his time and energy. Deaf and Hard of Hearing people are blessed in having St. Francis de Sales as their patron. Because they are often misunderstood, they must live with gentleness and meekness. These were the two favorite virtues of St. Francis. Pray to him for strength to have these qualities in your own life.

Questions for Faith Sharing

1. We are called to witness to the Good News. What is the Good News?
2. Do you believe God made promises to us? What are the promises? Why do you think God would promise us anything?
3. Have you ever felt that God's face is hidden from you? Explain.
4. Give an example from your experience of how suffering can lead to new life.

Ways to Take Action

1. Make the sign of the cross often this week, using it as a reminder of God's covenant with you.
2. When you feel overwhelmed by difficulties, or when you learn about someone who is hurting, express your strong belief in God's saving love by saying: "Lord, You are my light, my salvation" (Psalm 27:1)
3. Think of your usual reaction when you see someone suffering or dying. Do you think about suffering and death the way Jesus does?
4. Plan how you individually or as a group can comfort someone who is suffering or dying.

Closing Prayer and Ritual



Gather around a table with a crucifix on it. Light a candle and place it near the crucifix.

All: Lord, You are our light and salvation.

First reader: Peter, James, and John saw Jesus' glory. Then the voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, my Chosen One. Pay-attention to him." Jesus told them he was going to suffer, die and rise from death. But they did not understand. They could not see how the cross could be a sign of victory until after Jesus' resurrection.

Second reader: We believe Jesus gives us the gift of salvation through his suffering, death, and resurrection. We believe all people who follow Christ will rise from death and receive glory. The cross is a symbol of God's covenant with us. It is a powerful symbol that we are united to God.

In your heart, thank Jesus for showing us God's love for us. Decide one thing you will do to show your love for God. When you are ready, go to the cross, touch it, and in your heart or with Sign, tell God your promise. Before you leave the cross, pray and Sign: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you, because by your holy cross you saved the world.

Pray silently for each person as he or she prays at the cross. When everyone is finished, pray together the Our Father.



READINGS FOR THE
THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

Exodus 3:1-8, 13-15

Moses' father-in-law was named Jethro. Moses took care of Jethro's sheep. One day, Moses led the sheep to the west side of the desert. Moses went to a mountain called Horeb, the mountain of God. On that mountain, Moses saw the Angel of the Lord in a burning bush. This is how it happened. Moses saw a bush that was burning without being destroyed. So Moses decided to go closer to the bush and see how a bush could continue burning without being destroyed.

The Lord saw Moses was coming to look at the bush. So God called to Moses from the bush. God said, "Moses, Moses!"

And Moses said, "Yes, Lord."

Then the Lord said, "Don't come any closer. Take off your sandals. You are standing on holy ground. I am the God of your ancestors. I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."

Moses covered his face because he was afraid to look at God.

Then the Lord said, "I have seen the troubles my people have suffered in Egypt. And I have heard their cries when the Egyptians hurt them. I know about their pain. Now I will go down and save my people from the Egyptians. I will take them from that land. And I will lead them to a good land where they can be free from troubles. It is a land filled with many good things. Many different people live in that land: the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

Then Moses said to God, "But if I go to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors sent me,' then the people will ask, 'What is his name?' What should I tell them?"

Then God said to Moses, "Tell them, 'I AM WHO I AM.' When you go to the people of Israel, tell them 'I AM' sent me to you."

God also said to Moses, "This is what you should tell the people 'YAHWEH is the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. My name will always be YAHWEH. That is how the people will know me for generations and generations to come.' Tell the people, 'YAHWEH has sent me to you!'"

1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12

Brothers and sisters, I want you to know what happened to our ancestors that followed Moses. They were all under the cloud, and they all walked through the sea. Those people were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food. And they all drank the same spiritual drink. They drank from that spiritual rock that was with them. That rock was Christ. But God was not pleased with most of those people. They were killed in the desert.

And these things that happened are examples for us. These examples should stop us from wanting evil things like those people did.

And don't complain like some of those people did. Those people were

killed by the angel that destroys.

The things that happened to those people are examples. And those things were written to be warnings for us. We live in a time when all those past histories have come to their end. So the person that thinks he is standing strong should be careful that he doesn't fall.

Luke 13:1-9

At that time people told Jesus about what happened to some people from Galilee. Pilate killed those people while they were worshipping. Pilate mixed their blood with the blood of the animals they were sacrificing to God. Jesus answered, "Do you think this happened to those people because they were more sinful than all other people from Galilee? No, they were not! But if all of you don't change your hearts and lives, then you will be destroyed like those people were! What about those 18 people that died when the tower of Siloam fell on them? Do you think those people were more sinful than all the people that live in Jerusalem? They were not! But I tell you if you don't change your hearts and lives, then you will all be destroyed too!"

Jesus told this story: "A man had a fig tree. He planted the tree in his garden. The man came looking for some fruit on the tree, but he found none. The man had a servant that took care of his garden. So the man said to his servant, 'I have been looking for fruit on this tree for three years, but I never find any. Cut it down! Why should it waste the ground?' But the servant answered, 'Master, let the tree have one more year to

make fruit. Let me dig up the dirt around it and put on some plant food. Maybe the tree will make fruit next year. If the tree still does not make fruit, then you can cut it down.'"

3 THE THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

GOD WANTS US TO KNOW HIM AND LOVE HIM. THIS IS WHY GOD MADE A COVENANT WITH US AND PROMISED TO LOVE US ALWAYS. BUT WITH A COVENANT, BOTH PEOPLE MUST KEEP THEIR PROMISES. WHEN WE FAIL TO LOVE GOD AND EACH OTHER, GOD CALLS US TO ASK FOR FORGIVENESS AND CHANGE OUR HEARTS.

Opening Prayer

Holy God, loving and merciful Lord, we gather here today to experience your deep love. You call each of us by name. Bless us now. Fill us with your Holy Spirit. Help us understand the importance of responding to your call. Help us see what is blocking us from deeper relationship with you. Help us remove the suffering caused by sin in our world. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The God of Abraham Appears to Moses

The story of God's covenant love in the Old Testament now moves forward 600 years. Abraham lived about 1850 B.C.; now we see Moses, who lived about 1250 B.C. You remember God promised Abraham descendants, land, and protection. Now the Israelites were not living in the land promised to Abraham, but became slaves in Egypt. Moses, a descendant of Abraham's, ran-away from Egypt where he was raised, because he killed an Egyptian slave-driver. Now, before God sends Moses back to Egypt to lead the people to freedom, he appears to Moses. He identified himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and reveals his name.

God "bent down" to human beings by making a covenant relationship with them through Abraham. Now God "bends down" again telling Moses his name. In the Israelites' culture, to reveal your name was to give another person power over you. God tells Moses, "I am who am... This is what you shall tell the Israelites: I AM sent me to you." In Hebrew, this name has four letters: YHWH. When we add vowels to it, we say Yahweh. YHWH comes from the verb *to be* and can have three meanings: I make all that is; I make everything happen; I am always with you. Moses will understand the truth of each of these meanings during the Exodus.

A Loving God Calls Us to Change Our Hearts

Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, tells us that after the Israelites left Egypt they wandered in the desert. Here God was upset with them and punished them. Does this mean that God no longer loved them?

Why would a loving God punish his chosen people? Paul says God is calling us to repent (ask for forgiveness and change our hearts). God saved the Israelites from the Egyptians and protected them in the desert, but he also had to correct their behavior. When the Israelites turned away from God and worshipped the golden calf, he called them back to be faithful in covenant love. Paul reminds us about our ancestors in faith as an example. We must be faithful to covenant love. When we are unfaithful, we must repent.

Paul tells the Corinthians the time to repent is now, because the end of time is coming. Paul and most of the first Christians thought the world was ending soon. Therefore, repentance was important “NOW!”

Is All Suffering Punishment for Sin?

God always acts with love and corrects us only to help us be faithful in covenant love. Still many people think God punishes; they see all suffering as a punishment for sin. We hear this when a person who is suffering says something like, “Why is God doing this to me? I don’t deserve this!” – as though the only explanation for suffering is punishment.

Suffering is a result of sin, but not all suffering is because of sin.

Sometimes people suffer because of the evil actions of others, or because of accidents or natural disasters. These kinds of suffering should not be seen as signs that the victims are great sinners.

People saw suffering as punishment for sin in Jesus’ time. Jesus tried to correct this misunderstanding. In the Gospel he discusses the suffering of some Galileans who had been persecuted and killed. Jesus says their suffering is not a sign they were terrible sinners. In the same way, eighteen people who were killed by a falling tower suffered, but no one should think they were being punished for sin. Jesus uses these two examples to teach the crowd that tragedies should not be seen as a punishment from God. He also reminds them that sudden death is not unusual. His purpose is to call everyone to repentance, to change their hearts. Lack of repentance ends in disaster – not because God is mean, unforgiving, and punishing but because the result of sin is suffering. No one knows how much time we have on this earth. We do know sin results in suffering. This is why we should repent now.

“REPENT ... NOW!”

To show the importance of the call to repent, Jesus tells the crowd a parable. A parable is a story, told to teach people something about themselves, and call them to conversion. To understand a parable, we need to ask ourselves who Jesus is speaking to, and what he is teach-

ing them. The audience can be compared to someone or something in the story. The lesson Jesus is teaching will come from this comparison.

Jesus tells the story of the fig tree without fruit. A man who owns a fig tree has waited three years for the tree to grow fruit, but nothing grows. He loses patience and wants to cut it down. But the vinedresser, the one who cares for the tree every day, does not want to destroy the tree. He suggests the owner be patient and let him care for the tree one more year to see if it will grow fruit. But the vinedresser realizes if the tree still doesn't grow fruit it will be cut down.

In this parable Jesus is calling the crowd to repentance. They can be compared to the fig tree. The owner of the vineyard wants the tree to grow fruit now. The failure to grow fruit cannot continue or the tree will be destroyed. How long will the tree survive if it doesn't grow fruit? No one really knows. No one knows how much time remains; no one knows how long anyone will be alive. That's why we should realize the importance of the situation and repent now.

Now is the time to turn to God, to know God, to call God's name. When we repent, God's will – that everyone live in covenant love with each other and with him – can happen successfully.

DISCIPLE IN MISSION: POPE JOHN PAUL II

In 1978 at the age of fifty eight, Cardinal Woytyla of Poland became Pope John Paul II.

When Karol Woytyla was a child, his mother and brother both died, leaving only Karol and his father. When he was nineteen, the Nazis took-over Poland. Two years later his father died. Karol decided to become a priest and entered an underground (secret) seminary.

After ordination Karol studied in Rome for two years. He returned to Poland after the war when

it was struggling to remain independent from Communist control. In Krakow Father Woytyla did parish work and became a popular professor at two universities.

In 1958 Woytyla became assistant bishop of Krakow. Later he became arch-bishop and in 1967 a cardinal. He united the people and was a skilled negotiator for church rights. During the Second Vatican Council, Woytyla served on several committees.

Since his election Pope John Paul has often been in

the news. His spirit, enthusiasm and love always attract large crowds. He has traveled to more countries more often than any other pope, giving him the title "Pilgrim Pope." His forgiveness of the man who tried to kill him preached better than any sermon. In 1994 he was Time Magazine's "Man of the Year."

Catholics and many other people admire Pope John Paul II's intelligence, prayerfulness, and dedication in serving the Church and Jesus Christ.

Questions for Faith Sharing

1. The Egyptians were oppressing the Israelite slaves. God paid-attention to the Israelites and helped them. Who is oppressed in our world today? How does God want us to help them?
2. God became humble to help the Israelites. He “bent down” and told Moses his name, and promised to stay with him. What is our attitude when we help people? Do we act proud and make them feel small? Or are we humble to become their friends? Give examples from your experience.
3. Moses challenged Pharaoh to do what God wanted. Should we challenge our political leaders to change some things today? What things in our country must change?
4. Do you think God wants us to think about him as punishing? Why did God become a human person? Who needs to receive this good news?

Ways to Take Action

1. The name “Yahweh” means: I make all that is; I make everything happen; I am always with you. Pray about God’s name this week.
2. Remember a painful or difficult time in your life. If another person caused it, try to forgive that person and ask God to bless them. If it happened because of your own sin - or because of an accident or natural disaster - ask God how you can grow from that experience.
3. Think about good actions you do for people in your life. This is the same-as “good fruit” in our Gospel story. Now decide one action you or your group can do this week to “grow good fruit” from this faith-sharing. What action will show your faith?

Closing Prayer and Ritual



Gather around table with a flowering plant on it.

First reader: The flowering plant on our table makes this room bright. In the same way, the growth of each person makes the world bright. The Gospel reading today reminds us: God wants our lives to “grow good fruit” now. This means show good action. Jesus calls us to change our hearts and remove anything that blocks our good works. Jesus expects us to respond to this important call.

Second reader: Now we ask our God of mercy and compassion to inspire our hearts. We want to change our lives and become better people for Christ.

Leader: You, Lord, are merciful, not angry, and full of kindness.

All: Show us your mercy, Lord.

Leader: You, Lord, are a loving God, always ready to forgive and heal.

All: Lead us to repentance and a life of good actions.

Leader: You, Lord, continue inviting us to a more loving relationship with you.

All: Show us your ways.

Take some quiet time to identify a behavior you need to change. Ask God to help you do it! Then put your left hand on the shoulder of someone near you, Sign or fingerspell that person’s name, and say, Receive and answer God’s call.

Pray the Our Father together.



READINGS FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

If any person is in Christ, then that person is made new. The old things have gone; everything is made new! All this is from God. Through Christ, God made peace between us and himself. And God gave us the work of bringing people into peace with him. I mean that God was in Christ, making peace between the world and himself. In Christ, God did not hold people guilty for their sins. And he gave us this message of peace to tell people. So we have been sent to speak for Christ. It is like God is calling to people through us. We speak for Christ when we beg you to be at peace with God. Christ had no sin. But God made him become sin. God did this for us, so that in Christ we could become right with God.

Luke 15:1-2, 11-32

Many tax collectors and bad people came to listen to Jesus. Then the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to complain, "Look! This man (Jesus) welcomes bad people and even eats with them!"

Then Jesus told them this story: "A man had two sons. The younger son said to his father, 'Give me my part of all the things we own!' So the father divided the wealth with his two sons. Then the younger son gathered up all that he had and left. He traveled far away to another country. There the son wasted his money like a fool. He spent everything that he had. Soon after that, the land became very dry, and there was no rain. There was not enough food to eat anywhere in that

country. The son was hungry and needed money. So he went and got a job with one of the people of that country. The man sent the son into the fields to feed pigs. The son was so hungry that he wanted to eat the food that the pigs were eating. But no person gave him anything. The boy realized that he had been very foolish. He thought, 'All of my father's servants have plenty of food. But I am here, almost dead because I have nothing to eat. I will leave and go to my father. I will say to him: Father, I sinned against God and have done wrong to you. I am not good enough to be called your son. But let me be like one of your servants.' So the son left and went to his father.

"While the son was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. The father felt sorry for his son. So the father ran to him. He hugged and kissed his son. The son said, 'Father, I sinned against God and have done wrong to you. I am not good enough to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Hurry! Bring the best clothes and dress him. Also, put a ring on his finger and good shoes on his feet. Bring our fat calf. We will kill it and have plenty to eat. Then we can have a party! My son was dead, but now he is alive again! He was lost, but now he is found!' So they began to have a party.

"The older son was in the field. He came closer to the house. He heard the sound of music and dancing. So the older son called to one of the servant boys and asked, 'What does all this mean?' The servant said, 'Your brother has come back. Your father killed the fat calf to eat. Your father is happy because your

brother came home safely!’ The older son was angry and would not go in to the party. So his father went out to ask him to come in. The son said to his father, ‘I have served you like a slave for many years! I have always obeyed your commands. But you never killed even a goat for me! You never gave a party for me and my friends. But your other son has wasted all your money on prostitutes. Then he comes home, and you kill the fat calf for him!’ But the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me. All that I have is yours too. We must be happy and have a party; because your brother was dead, but now he is alive. He was lost, but now he is found.’”

4 THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

SIN SEPARATED US FROM GOD. GOD UNITED THE WORLD TO HIMSELF AGAIN THROUGH JESUS CHRIST. THIS “UNITING AGAIN” IS CALLED RECONCILIATION. WE MUST TRULY BELIEVE THAT WE ARE FORGIVEN. WHEN WE REALIZE HOW MUCH GOD LOVES US, WE WILL BRING CHRIST TO EVERYONE WE MEET.

Opening Prayer

God, you love us so much. You sent your Son, Jesus, to our world to free us from sin. With hearts full of thanks we come together today. We share about your saving love and ask for grace to see how we can show our gratitude. We want to help unite people with God. Bless us now, Lord. Inspire us and guide our time for sharing. We want to bring your forgiving love to other people. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

All is New!

In this letter Paul is teaching the Corinthians we have all been saved and everything is new for us. We are now united again with God. We did not earn it; God simply decided not to remember our sins. Paul wants the Corinthians to understand this good news, so they will know how blessed they are, and so they will bring the Good News to others. Paul tells them they must become witnesses for Christ. We must spread God’s love and forgiveness to everyone. We must become ministers of reconciliation.

Jesus: Minister of Reconciliation

Jesus was a minister of reconciliation. Because Jesus came to show God’s love to sinners he spends much time with them. We see him doing this in the Gospel.

The Gospel begins: “Many tax collectors and bad people came to listen to Jesus. Then the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to complain, ‘Look! This man (Jesus) welcomes bad people and even eats with them!’” This sentence seems to divide Jesus’ audience into two groups – sinners and good religious leaders. But we know the Pharisees and scribes are also sinners, like the tax collectors and other people called sinners. The difference between

the two groups is not who is really a sinner and who is not. The tax collectors and sinners know the Pharisees and scribes don't accept them and feel they are better than them. When Jesus tells the story of the prodigal son, he is teaching the Pharisees they are sinners, also, because they fail to love and accept everyone.

Understanding the Parable

To understand the parable, remember what we learned about parables last week. A parable is always calling the audience to conversion. Luke tells us the parable is told for Pharisees and scribes. So the Pharisees and scribes will be compared to someone or something in the story. The lesson Jesus is teaching them will come from this comparison.

The Pharisees and scribes do not realize the story is really about them. They would not feel connected with anyone in the story. It seems to be about a sinner, an ungrateful son, someone very different from themselves. But, when the older brother enters the story, they would identify with him. The older brother has never disobeyed his father. The Pharisees feel like this too. They carefully obey the Law and look down on people who don't. The older brother feels he has earned his father's love through his obedience. This is exactly how the Pharisees feel about themselves and God. They believe they have earned a good relationship with God because they obey the law. The Pharisees would understand the actions of the older brother. They would agree the father should not welcome back

this child who disobeyed him and wasted his money. Why should the father have a celebration for a sinner?

The father is trying to teach the older brother the same thing Jesus is trying to teach the Pharisees and scribes. Love is not earned. The father loves both sons. His love is given freely. The father never stopped loving the younger son, and is overjoyed when he returns. But the father does not stop loving the older son because of his unloving behavior. The father goes out to each son. But he also wants the sons to love each other. He wants the older son to join in the celebration because his brother, who was lost, is now found.

In the same way, Jesus goes out to people who are "sinners" and to the Pharisees. The Pharisees' pride and judging attitude stops them from realizing they are sinners too, because they do not love their brothers. They don't think they need forgiveness, they are not grateful, and they are not ready to reach out to others.

This story shows the importance of realizing we are among the sinners God loves and forgives. When we understand that we are forgiven and loved, our hearts will be full of thanks and joy. Realizing we've been brought back to God, we will never feel better than someone else who also needs forgiveness. Like Jesus, and like the father in the story, we will want to go out to others and invite them to our celebration, the Eucharist. We will become witnesses of Christ's love and reconciliation.

DISCIPLE IN MISSION: ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA

During her short life of thirty-three years, St. Catherine was filled with love for God.

She was born in 1347, the youngest of twenty-five children. As a girl, Catherine wanted to join the Third Order Dominicans. They lived in their own homes and did works of charity. Catherine made vows at age sixteen. Her parents gave her a private room where she prayed, did penance, and fasted, keeping silence and going out only for Mass.

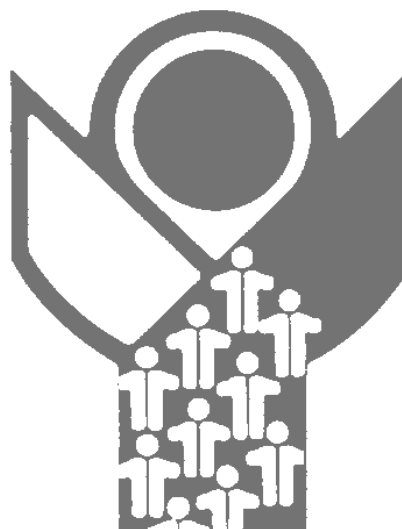
God gave Catherine special favors. Jesus and the saints spoke to her. Once Jesus

replaced her heart with his, and she also experienced the wounds of Jesus on her body.

Three years later Jesus sent Catherine into the world to love him in other people. She worked in hospitals and served the poor. People gathered around her, wanting to follow her ways of prayer and service.

Catherine's followers called her Mama and were known as the Caterinati. She dictated more than four hundred letters. She also wrote about her experiences of God, which were published.

Catherine was God's messenger to popes and kings. This small, sickly woman settled arguments and worked for changes in the church. For seventy-five years the popes lived in France, which caused confusion in the Church. Because of Catherine's strong words, Pope Gregory XI returned to Rome. She advised him and the next pope, Urban VI. During a time of much trouble in the church, Catherine offered herself to God as a victim for church unity. For three months she suffered and then died, praying, "Father, into your hands I give my spirit."



Questions for Faith Sharing

1. When you “act right” – that is, when you go to Mass, treat others with great respect, help the poor, etc. – do you feel that you are earning something? Why or why not?
2. Jesus was constantly going out to others. Have you ever reached out to people who do not know Christ? Have you ever invited anyone to meet your church community? Do you think this would be a good thing to do? How can you do it?
3. The older brother, who did not show love, was gently corrected by his father. We learn about God’s love in families. What did you learn from your family members? What are you trying to teach your family now? How are you doing this?

Ways to Take Action

1. Decide which person in this parable is most like you. Talk with God about how Jesus is calling you to change with this story.
2. Remember a time when you made a foolish decision. How did God, like the father in Jesus’ parable, respond to your decision and to you?
3. Think of someone who made choices that upset or disappointed you. Think of one step you will take to reach out to this person.
4. How can you or your group show love and acceptance to someone who feels separated from the Church?

Closing Prayer and Ritual



Gather around a table with a crucifix on it.

First reader: With our baptism we are together in Christ. Jesus united us again with God. This reading from the First Letter of John explains:

Second reader: If we say, “We have no sin,” we are liars; the truth is not in us. But if we admit our sins, we can trust Christ will forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrong. If we say, “We never sinned,” Jesus’ word is not in us (1 John 1:8-10).

First reader: But if anyone sins we have Jesus Christ our Savior. He was sacrificed for our sins; not for our sins only, but for sins of the whole world (1 John 2:1-2).

Look at the crucifix and remember a time when you needed forgiveness. When you are ready, go to the table, pick up the crucifix, kiss it, and Sign, Glorify the Lord with me!

After each person does this, all Sign together:

We praise God’s name!

Second reader: Teach us, Lord Jesus, to become worthy of the name Christian. Fill our hearts with your love for all people. Help us offer them the same forgiving love you show to us.

First reader: Pray and Sign together: Our Father...



READINGS FOR THE
FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

Philippians 3:8-14

Now I think that all things are worth nothing compared with the greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Because of Christ, I lost all those things I thought were important. And now I know that all those things are worthless trash. This allows me to have Christ. It allows me to be in Christ. In Christ I am right with God, and this being right does not come from my following the law. It comes from God through faith. God uses my faith in Christ to make me right with him. All I want is to know Christ and the power of his rising from death. I want to share in Christ's sufferings and become like him in his death. If I have those things, then I have hope that I myself will be raised from death.

I don't mean that I am already exactly like God wants me to be. I have not yet reached that goal. But I continue trying to reach that goal and to make it mine. Christ wants me to do that. That is the reason Christ made me his. Brothers and sisters, I know that I have not yet reached that goal. But there is one thing I always do: I forget the things that are past. I try as hard as I can to reach the goal that is before me. I keep trying to reach the goal and get the prize. That prize is mine because God called me through Christ to the life above.

John 8:1-11

Early in the morning Jesus went back to the temple area. All the people came to Jesus. Jesus sat and taught the people. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought a woman there. The woman had been caught doing the sin of adultery. These Jews forced the woman to stand before the people. They said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught having sex with a man that is not her husband. The law of Moses commands that we kill with rocks every woman that does this. What do you say we should do?" The Jews were using this question to trick Jesus. They wanted to catch Jesus saying something wrong. Then they could have a charge against him. But Jesus knelt down and started writing on the ground with his finger. The Jewish leaders continued to ask Jesus their question. So Jesus stood up and said, "Is there any person here that has never sinned? That person without sin can throw the first rock at this woman." Then Jesus knelt down again and wrote on the ground.

The people that heard Jesus began to leave one by one. The older men left first, and then the others. Jesus was left there alone with the woman. She was standing before him. Jesus looked up again and asked her, "Woman, all of those people are gone. None of them judged you guilty?" The woman answered, "None of them judged me, sir."

Then Jesus said, "So I also don't judge you. You can go now, but don't sin again."

5

THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

JESUS OFFERS US FORGIVENESS FOR OUR SINS. HE DOES NOT REQUIRE WE COME TO HIM WITHOUT ANY SIN. EVERY ONE OF THE PEOPLE IN OUR READINGS WAS A SINNER. JESUS ONLY ASKS US TO TURN AWAY FROM SIN AND KEEP OUR EYES ON HIM.

Opening Prayer

God of mercy, your love gathers us here today. We experience your saving power. Even though we turn away from you and sin, we feel your forgiveness. Many people still do not know your love. Many people still have not received your gospel message. May our sharing about your saving love give us ideas and words to open people's hearts, so they will know your call to be free from sin and grow in love. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

“The Wonderful Knowledge of My Lord Jesus Christ”

In Paul's writing, it's clear he knows he is a sinner. But he also knows he has been called by Christ. Paul did not earn his relationship with Christ. It was a free gift, given by God. We know from the Acts of the Apostles that Paul persecuted the early Christians and even participated in the death of the first martyr, Stephen (see Acts 8:1). But Christ did not hold Paul's sins against him. Instead Christ called him to a relationship of love. Paul answered the call, and soon loved Christ more than everything else. Paul put all his hope in Christ: “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection. I need to share his sufferings and death...” Paul knew living and dying with Christ means rising with Christ. His past sins were not a burden now. He kept his eyes on Jesus, “forgetting the past.”

This is the freedom Jesus offers us: freedom from our past sins, from desire for wealth, from feeling we must earn God's love, from fear of death. Like Paul, all we must do is keep our eyes on Jesus. When we experience Christ's love and the freedom that comes with it, we will become witnesses of that love to other people. Paul witnesses to the Philippians, not because he is bragging but because he is full of joy. The Good News that he knows

from experience must be shared. The most precious gift we can give to another person is to share our knowledge of Christ and faith in Christ.

Love, Not Law

If the Good News is really so good, why do some people resist it? We see an example of this in Sunday's Gospel. Jesus is teaching the people. The scribes and Pharisees bring him a woman who was caught in the act of adultery. The Law of Moses would allow her to be stoned (see Deuteronomy 22:23-24). But under Roman law, the Jews were not allowed to punish anyone by death. The scribes and Pharisees want to trap Jesus by forcing him to say something that would be against their Law or Roman rule.

Pride Blocks Love

If we look at the scribes and Pharisees, we see why some people might resist the good news Jesus brings. One reason might be pride. The scribes and Pharisees think they are better than the woman they caught in adultery. They do not understand themselves as sinners. Instead they see themselves as good because they obey the Law. However, Jesus thinks the most important Law is love: love of God and love of neighbor. By their actions against the woman, the scribes and Pharisees are showing they do not love. By trying to trap Jesus, they are failing to love him. Still they have no understanding of their own sin.

Control Blocks Love

Another reason why a person might resist the Good News is a desire to be in charge,

even in charge of God. The scribes and the Pharisees are religious leaders. They believe they understand the Law, because they teach it. They also believe because they obey the Law, they earn a strong relationship with God. They are now deciding what is right and wrong, instead of letting God decide.

So when Jesus invites everyone to a loving relationship with God, he is threatening the scribes and Pharisees. They think he is letting everybody in. He is threatening the Pharisees' ego. He is forcing them to recognize their faults and he is calling them to conversion, to change their hearts.

As the story continues we see Jesus forcing the scribes and Pharisees to face their own sinfulness. Instead of stepping into their trap by speaking against the Mosaic or Roman law, Jesus says, "Any one of you who is without sin can throw the first stone at her." We do not know what Jesus wrote in the sand. Some suggest he wrote the Pharisees' sins. Some think he wrote, "Where is the man you caught with her?" No one throws a stone, but they do not change their hearts. Instead, they walk away.

Jesus turns to the woman and says the words he wants all of us sinners to know: "I do not say you are guilty." He came to save, not judge or punish. Do we believe it? Do we even realize we need forgiveness? Are we willing to accept it? If we can accept Christ's good news, our lives will become a witness to God's saving love.

DISCIPLE IN MISSION: REVEREND ALVIN A. ILLIG, CSP

Fr. Alvin Illig was a Paulist priest who had the enthusiasm of St. Paul in spreading the Gospel. Paul sailed, preached, and wrote letters, but Fr. Illig flew, produced television shows, and published books.

Alvin was born to a German couple who settled in Los Angeles. After studying at the Paulist House of Studies in Washington, D.C., he was ordained in New York City in 1953 and assigned to Paulist Press there.

During his twenty years in publishing, Fr. Illig began an organization that supplies

Catholic literature to churches and school.

In 1973 Fr. Illig went to Mississippi to develop programs to evangelize the unchurched and inactive Catholics. In 1977 the Paulist Fathers asked him to form a national office for evangelization; he became its director. That same year, he became the first director of the bishops' Committee on Evangelization.

For his evangelizing work, Fr. Illig was presented the Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice medal of Pope John Paul II in 1983.

Fr. Illig began Share the Word magazine and Share the Word television program – at one time the largest Catholic Bible study program. He started Another Look, a program to reach inactive Catholics. He began national lay evangelization celebrations that expanded into teleconferences. He said, “I take the electronic word to proclaim the divine Word.”

By the time Fr. Illig died from cancer in 1991, he had inspired many Catholics in the United States to join the work of evangelization.

Questions for Faith Sharing

1. Do you believe Jesus offers forgiveness to everyone? Why or why not? How do you feel about this?
2. Have you ever felt God doesn't or couldn't love you? Explain. If you brought this feeling to Jesus, what do you imagine he would say? Why?
3. Have you ever fallen in love? Did this experience change your priorities? Have you fallen in love with God? Do you want to? How might this change your priorities?
4. Is your behavior at work and home a strong witness to your belief in Jesus' love for others? Explain.
5. Why do you think we all resist a call to conversion? What might we do to overcome our resistance?

Ways to Take Action

1. Remember one of your worst sins, and its effect on yourself and others. Then imagine yourself standing before Jesus. Let Jesus tell you that he doesn't say you're guilty – but you must avoid this sin in the future. Spend time talking with Jesus about how you feel.
2. With prayer, examine any resistance you have to forgiving other people. Ask Jesus to help you understand God's love for sinners.
3. This week do an act of kindness for someone who hurt you or someone you love.

Closing Prayer and Ritual



Gather around a table that has some small stones and a picture of Jesus.

First reader: Paul persecuted the first Christians. But he tells us in his Letter to the Philippians that when he knew Jesus, the only thing important to him was running toward the prize God offered: life in heaven with Christ Jesus.

Second reader: Paul's sins from the past were now not a burden for him. Paul knew God forgave him. He accepted that forgiveness and, forgetting his past, he focused on growing in God's love.

First reader: All of us are sinners. All of us need God's forgiveness. All of us are called to proclaim: the great things God does for us, God wants to do for everyone.

Second reader: Remembering our sins – and God's forgiving love – let us ask for grace to bring hope to people involved with sin.

Take a few minutes to pray quietly. Select an attitude or action that will help you bring hope to others. When you are ready, go to the table, pick up a small stone, and say,

Lord, you do wonderful things for me.
Help me bring hope to people.

Keep your stone as a reminder of God's forgiving love.

End with the Our Father and a sign of peace.



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?

Philippians 2:6-11

Christ himself was like God in everything. Christ was equal with God. But Christ did not think that being equal with God was something that he must keep.

He gave up his place with God, and agreed to be like a servant. He was born to be a man and became like a servant.

When he was living as a man, he humbled himself by being fully obedient to God. He obeyed even when that caused him to die. And he died on a cross.

Christ obeyed God, so God raised Christ to the most important place. God made the name of Christ greater than every other name.

God wants every person to bow for the name of Jesus. Every person in heaven, on the earth, and under the earth will bow.

Every person will confess (say), “Jesus Christ is Lord.” When they say this, it will bring glory to God the Father.

Luke 23:1-49

Governor Pilate Questions Jesus

The whole group stood up and led Jesus to Pilate. They began to accuse Jesus. They told Pilate, “We caught this man trying to change the thinking of our people. He says we should not pay taxes to Caesar. He calls himself the Christ, a king.”

Pilate asked Jesus, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

Jesus answered, “Yes, that is right.” Pilate said to the leading priests and the people, “I find nothing wrong with this man.”

They said again and again, “But Jesus is making trouble with the people! He

teaches all around Judea, He began in Galilee, and now he is here!”

Pilate Sends Jesus to Herod

Pilate heard this and asked if Jesus was from Galilee. Pilate learned that Jesus was under Herod’s authority. Herod was in Jerusalem at that time, so Pilate sent Jesus to him. When Herod saw Jesus, he was very happy. Herod had heard all about Jesus, and he had wanted to meet Jesus for a long time. Herod wanted to see a miracle. So he hoped that Jesus would do a miracle. Herod asked Jesus many questions, but Jesus said nothing. The leading priests and teachers of the law were standing there. They were shouting things against Jesus. Then Herod and his soldiers laughed at Jesus. They made fun of Jesus by dressing him in clothes like kings wear. Then Herod sent Jesus back to Pilate. In the past, Pilate and Herod had always been enemies. But on that day Herod and Pilate became friends.

Jesus Must Die

Pilate called all the people together with the leading priests and the Jewish leaders. Pilate said to them, “You brought this man (Jesus) to me. You said that he was trying to change the people. But I judged him before you all. I found no wrong that he had done. Jesus is not guilty of the things you say. Also, Herod found nothing wrong with him; Herod sent Jesus back to us. Look, Jesus has done nothing wrong. He should not be killed. So, after I punish him a little, I will let him go free.”

But all the people shouted, “Kill him! Let Barabbas go free!” (Barabbas was a man that was in jail because he started a riot in the city. He had also killed some people.)

Pilate wanted to let Jesus go free. So again Pilate told them that he would let Jesus go. But they shouted again, “Kill him! Kill him on a cross!”

A third time Pilate said to the people, “Why? What wrong has he done? He is not guilty. I can find no reason to kill him. So I will let him go free after I punish him a little.”

But the people continued to shout. They demanded that Jesus be killed on the cross. Their shouting became so loud that Pilate decided to give them what they wanted. The people wanted Barabbas to go free. Barabbas was in jail for starting a riot and for killing people. Pilate let Barabbas go free. And Pilate gave Jesus to the people to be killed. This is what the people wanted.

Jesus Is Killed on a Cross

The soldiers led Jesus away to be killed. At that same time, there was a man coming into the city from the fields. His name was Simon. Simon was from the city of Cyrene. The soldiers forced Simon to carry Jesus’ cross and walk behind Jesus.

Many, many people followed Jesus. Some of the women were sad and crying. They felt sorry for Jesus. But Jesus turned and said to the women, “Women of Jerusalem, don’t cry for me. Cry for yourselves and for your children too! The time is coming when people will say, ‘Happy are the women that cannot have babies! Happy are the women that have no children to care for.’ Then the people will say to the mountain, ‘Fall on us!’ The people will say to the hills, ‘Cover us!’ If people act like this now when life is good, what will happen when bad times come?”

There were also two criminals led out with Jesus to be killed. Jesus and the two criminals were led to a place called "The Skull." There the soldiers nailed Jesus to his cross. They also nailed the criminals to their crosses. They put one criminal beside Jesus on the right, and they put the other criminal beside Jesus on the left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive these people that are killing me. They don't know what they are doing."

The soldiers gambled with dice to decide who would get Jesus' clothes. The people stood there watching Jesus. The Jewish leaders laughed at Jesus. They said, "If he is God's Chosen One, the Christ, then let him save himself. He saved other people, didn't he?"

Even the soldiers laughed at Jesus and teased him. They came to Jesus and offered him some wine. The soldiers said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself!" (At the top of the cross these words were written: "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.")

One of the criminals began to shout very bad things at Jesus: "Aren't you the Christ? Then save yourself; and save us too!"

But the other criminal stopped him. He said, "You should fear God! All of us will die soon! You and I are guilty; we should be killed because we did wrong. But this man (Jesus) has done nothing wrong!" Then this criminal said to Jesus, "Jesus, remember me when you begin ruling as king!"

Then Jesus said to him, "Listen! What I say is true: Today you will be with me in Paradise!"

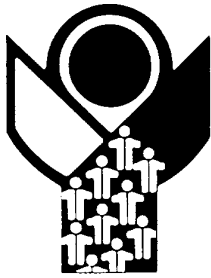
Jesus Dies

It was about noon, but the whole area became dark until three o'clock in the

afternoon. There was no sun! The curtain in the temple was torn into two pieces. Jesus shouted, "Father, I give you my spirit." After Jesus said this, he died.

The army officer there saw what happened. He praised God, saying, "I know this man was a good man!"

Many people had come out of the city to see this thing. When the people saw it, they felt very sorry and left. The people who were close friends of Jesus were there. Also, there were some women that had followed Jesus from Galilee. They all stood far away from the cross and watched these things.



PASSION (PALM) SUNDAY

A WOMAN ONCE TOLD ME, “YOU KNOW, SUFFERING CAUSES SELFISHNESS. I CAN’T THINK ABOUT ANYONE BUT MYSELF.” MANY OF US EXPERIENCE THIS FEELING DURING SUFFERING. BUT, IN LUKE’S STORY OF JESUS’ PASSION, WE SEE SUFFERING AND DEATH DO NOT STOP JESUS FROM THINKING ABOUT OTHER PEOPLE.

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, we are beginning the holiest week of the year. We remember the suffering you accepted to bring us new life, and we proclaim you as our savior and king. We want to face the suffering in our life the same way you faced yours. Be with us now; help us learn how to reach out to other people with words of encouragement and forgiveness, bringing them new life. Jesus, we ask this in your name. Amen.

“My God, My God, Why Do You Abandon Me?”

Each Gospel tells the story of Jesus’ passion and death in a different way. Some people ignore these differences. They want the Gospel writers to agree. But the Gospel writers are not trying to answer the question, “Tell me exactly what happened.” Instead, they answer the question, “Tell me why what happened is important for my life.” When we remember this, we will pay attention to the differences.

The Church shows us one big difference – about what Jesus says on the cross – by using parts of Psalm 22 as the psalm this Sunday, with Luke’s story of the Passion. In Mark’s and Matthew’s Gospels the first line of this psalm, “My God, my God, why do you abandon me?” is what Jesus says as he dies. This psalm is a sad crying-out to God. A person who is suffering describes his feeling of abandonment but also his faith in God’s saving power. He proclaims God’s name to other people even during his suffering. The first Christians understood the words of the psalm truly happened in Jesus’ life, so they included them in the stories of the Passion.

But Luke shows Jesus saying something completely different. Luke shows Jesus not crying out in abandonment and suffering. Instead he speaks words of forgiveness and encouragement. We should notice this difference and ask, “Why does Luke tell the story this way? What is Luke teaching his audience, and us?”

The people Luke wrote for were Gentiles (not Jewish). Luke wants them to know Jesus invites everyone to a relationship of covenant love with God. Jesus is always reaching out to others, even during his passion and death: praising them, warning, inviting them, and forgiving them.

Jesus Praises the Apostles

Luke shows the apostles failing Jesus when he needed them most. He pictures them arguing about who is the greatest, and then falling asleep after Jesus asked them to pray. Still, in Luke’s story, Jesus praises the apostles. He says, “You supported me during my trials. Now I give you a kingdom the same way my Father gave me a kingdom...” Jesus does not say this because the apostles have just done something wonderful. They have just proved they don’t understand the kind of servant leadership that Jesus shows. Jesus praises them because he wants to give them the security of knowing he will forgive them. He will always love them, and he reminds them when they most need to know this.

Jesus Encourages Peter

Because Peter will deny Jesus three times,

Jesus gives Peter special words of love and encouragement. Jesus says, “I have prayed that your own faith will not fail. When you return, you must strengthen your brothers.” Even before Peter’s terrible failure, Jesus tries to comfort him so he will not despair. Later, when Peter denies he knows Jesus, Jesus turns and looks at Peter, who “went out and began to weep.” What do you think Peter saw in Jesus’ eyes? Was it accusation? Hurt? Anger? The way Luke tells the story, we know what Peter saw in Jesus’ eyes was love. Even in this painful moment of denial, Jesus offers only love.

Jesus Forgives His Persecutors

Jesus reaches out not only to the apostles. He forgives everyone: the soldiers who mock, the people who crucify him. Even after he is nailed to the cross, Jesus talks about forgiveness. “Father, forgive them, they don’t know what they do.” One of the criminals being crucified at the same time defends Jesus, but Jesus does not join in defending himself. Instead, he encourages this suffering man, “Today you will be with me in Paradise.” In every situation Jesus is a person serving others. Luke emphasizes Jesus’ forgiveness, not his suffering, because that is the part of the Good News his audience needs to hear. No matter who we are or what we’ve done, we are all invited into God’s covenant love.

Our Attitude Must Be the Same as Christ’s

Paul’s Letter to the Philippians shows Jesus as our model. Jesus did not cling to his equality with God. He became a

human being, accepting death on a cross, so we could know God's love for us. We are baptized into Christ's body, the Church. We are called to act like Jesus. Our attitude must be the same as Christ's. We are called to praise, encourage, comfort, and forgive in Christ's name, so all people can know the Father's love.

DISCIPLE IN MISSION: ST. JOHN BOSCO

St. John Bosco, or Don (Father) Bosco, reached out to the neglected street boys in nineteenth century Italy and brought them the love of Christ.

John's own father died when John was only two. Even though the family was poor, his mother made sure he and his two brothers were happy. John did farm-work during the day and read in the evenings.

A natural leader, John taught other boys religion and encouraged them to go to Mass. At school he began the Happy Club. Each member was told to live the faith, enjoy life and be cheerful. After becoming a priest John

worked with boys in the town of Turin. He gathered as many as seven hundred wild street boys on Sunday for a day in the country. This day included Mass, breakfast, games, a picnic, a religion lesson, and prayers.

Later Don Bosco had a house where his boys lived with him. The boys received a religious education and learned to play musical instruments and do drama. Don Bosco's way of love, instead of punishment, was successful. After six years there were one hundred and fifty happy boys at the house.

In 1859 John began a religious community named the Salesians, after St. Francis de Sales. Some of his boys joined this community. In 1875 the Salesians went as missionaries to Argentina. Today this community cares for boys all over the world. With St. Mary Mazzarello, Don Bosco began the Daughters of Our Lady, Help of Christians, a group of sisters who work with girls.

John Bosco's work developed very successfully. When he died in 1888 at the age of seventy-three, about forty thousand people came to his wake. He became a saint in 1934.

Questions for Faith Sharing

1. Do you agree that our words and actions influence other people? When you think about your faith life, who has the strongest influence for you? Why? How?
2. Imagine you visit two friends on the same evening. One is a young woman who recently had her first baby, and the other is a person who is dying. You want them both to know how Christ's good news affects them. Would you say the same thing to each person? How does this connect with the Gospels?
3. Imagine Jesus not only looked at Peter after his denial, but spoke to him also. What do you think Jesus would say? What do you think we should say to people who deny Jesus?
4. Do you know a person who needs a word of encouragement? Who? What can you tell them?

Ways to Take Action

1. Look at a crucifix and think of one way you sin. Imagine Jesus says: "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Thank Jesus for his forgiving love.
2. Ask God to bless someone who has disappointed you. Ask for the grace to see that person with love, the same way Jesus looked at Peter after his denial.
3. Think of a person or group of people who are suffering in your community. Plan how your group can offer them service.

Closing Prayer and Ritual



Gather around a table that has a crucifix on it. Nails lie around the crucifix.

Leader: Jesus reached out to everyone, even while he was dying, giving words of encouragement and forgiveness. Like Peter, we need to know Christ forgives us for the ways we've failed to recognize him as Lord. Then, strengthened by his forgiveness, we need to do what Jesus told Peter to do: go out and strengthen others. Let us now admit our failure, ask Christ for help, and accept his forgiving love.

Each person quietly thinks about a situation where he or she sinned. After a few minutes of prayer, each member of the group goes to the table, picks up one of the nails, and Signs:

Lord, help me forgive other people, the same as you forgive me.

Then the group Signs this prayer together:

Thank you, Lord Jesus Christ, for all the blessings you give me. Thank you for all the pain and insults you suffered for me. Merciful Friend, Brother, and Savior, I want to know you more clearly, love you more dearly, and follow you more nearly day by day.

End by praying the Our Father together. Take the nail home to remind you how much God loves you and wants you to bring his love to other people.