

RENEWED FOR MISSION



LENT 2020

CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF BUNBURY



TIPS FOR LEADERS

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

1. GATHERING TOGETHER:

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

2. PROCLAIMING AND HEARING THE GOSPEL:

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

3. REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL:

The REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL section can be read by each person silently or out loud by a volunteer. After reading this section, allow some quiet time for each person to reflect on the question for **personal prayer and reflection**. The responses to these questions are **not for sharing**; rather they are intended for individual reflection.
(Suggested time: 15 minutes)

4. QUESTIONS FOR GROUP SHARING AND DISCUSSION

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

5. RENEWED FOR MISSION WITH POPE FRANCIS

This section should be read aloud by a member of the group. Group members are then encouraged to spend some time discussing the question at the end of this excerpt from *The Joy of the Gospel*.
(Suggested time: 30 minutes)

6. CONCLUDE WITH THE SENDING PRAYER:

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

Encourage group members to read, and try to implement the LENT IN ACTION suggestions during the week between meetings, and to pray the PRAYER MANTRA FOR THE WEEK.

INTRODUCTION

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,
Welcome to Lent 2020!

We are embarking on a journey from the ashes of Lent to the fires of Pentecost; a holy time of renewal and transformation that centres on the dying and rising of Jesus and our own sharing in that mystery.

Sometimes in our thinking about our faith we can be tempted to keep things separated in “little boxes”. So Lent is Lent and Pentecost is Pentecost and somewhere in the middle is Easter. We then fail to see that we are in fact celebrating one inter-connected and seamless mystery: Lent-Easter-Pentecost.

Lent prepares us to renew our Baptismal commitment at Easter, and this commitment becomes our mission in the world strengthened by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It is so easy after 40 days of fasting and penance to say “I made it!!” and forget this is but a preparation for something much bigger than my Lenten achievements. Lent is vitally important for it begins the journey to new life and dedication at Easter, and blossoms into a Spirit – filled mission at Pentecost – a mission of love, justice and compassion in a broken world.

Our Lenten Program is entitled “Renewed for Mission” precisely to maintain this holistic focus in our prayer and Lenten journey. There is a focus on the Sunday Gospels of Year A (traditionally used by the Church to help those preparing for Baptism at Easter). These Gospels call us to a deeper response to our Baptismal commitment to Christ and his mission. In addition there is a focus on our mission as Christians today as presented by Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation “The Joy of the Gospel” (*Evangelii Gaudium*). This document is a summation by the Pope of the Synod of Bishops held in Rome during October 2012, on “The New Evangelisation for the Transmission of the Christian Faith”.

With prayerful best wishes for a fruitful Lent, joyful Easter and inspiring Pentecost!

Fr Tony Chiera
Pastoral Office
Diocese of Bunbury

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

GATHERING PRAYER

Loving Father of Jesus and our own Father,
lead us during this Lent
through the desert we face each day.
We come with humility and openness
to recognise and name our temptations
as Jesus did in the desert.
Send your Holy Spirit to help us in this task
and with the challenge we face
of walking the path of truth, love and justice.

These things we ask through Christ our Lord.
Amen

PROCLAIMING AND HEARING THE GOSPEL

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew (4:1-11)



Jesus was led by the Spirit out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, after which he was very hungry, and the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to turn into loaves." But he replied, "Scripture says:

Man does not live on bread alone
but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."

The devil then took him to the holy city and made him stand on the parapet of the Temple. "If you are the Son of God" he said "throw yourself down; for scripture says:

He will put you in his angel's charge,

and they will support you on their hands
in case you hurt your foot against a stone."

Jesus said to him, "Scripture also says:

You must not put the Lord your God to the test."

Next, taking him to a very high mountain, the devil showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. "I will give you all these" he said, "if you fall at my feet and worship me." Then Jesus replied, "Be off, Satan! For scripture says:

You must worship the Lord your God,
and serve him alone."

Then the devil left him, and angels appeared and looked after him.

The Gospel of the Lord

Pause for a few moments of prayerful reflection and allow the Words of the Gospel to speak to you. You may like to read aloud to the group a word or phrase that "speaks" to you. Not for discussion at this stage, but to assist each other to hear the Gospel more deeply.

REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL

It is a struggle to get to God. Or to put it another way, it is a struggle to grow into the “best in ourselves”, and to become fully the sons and daughters of God that we were created to be. It’s a struggle because our weaknesses and limitations open us up to very “testing” times each and every day. It’s also a struggle because we live in a broken and fractured world, where darkness constantly intrudes into the light of God in our hearts. Even as we set out each day to walk the way of a Christian, we each meet our own “demons” along the way; those inner voices and outer experiences that threaten to distract and betray us. It is as simple and deceptive as gossip says Pope Francis; or as complicated and challenging as where we invest our money. Temptation and struggle are never far from us!

But neither were temptation and struggle far from Jesus. “For the high priest we have is not incapable of feeling our weaknesses with us, but has been put to the test in exactly the same way as ourselves, apart from sin” (Heb. 4:15).

At his Baptism Jesus had a profound experience of intimacy and blessing from his Father. “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Mt 3:17) says the Father at the River Jordan. Jesus is filled and anointed with the Holy Spirit, and “knows” in the depths of his heart that he is “beloved Son”.

But no sooner was the Baptism over, and the same Spirit “leads” Jesus into the desert to be tested! It seems God’s children must struggle and grow into authentic lives, lived for God and others. Jesus fasts for 40 days, as a means of gaining clarity, focus and strength, in order to deal with the “testing” and struggle to come. And come it does as he is confronted by Satan and his seductive offers!

“Come on, hungry Son of God, make bread from these stones” says Satan. What’s the test? Will this Father of yours really provide for you? Why not use your own power? Jesus declares with the totality of his heart, “The Father is the source of life, even here in the desert. I will trust and wait for him to feed me and guide me”.

Satan tries again. “Come on Son of God, jump off the Temple. This God you say you trust will catch you”. What’s the test? You can manipulate God into action. You can test how reliable he really is. Once again Jesus declares that he will always allow God to be God in his life; that he will rely utterly on God’s providence and care.

Finally Satan says “Okay Son of God, you can have all the splendour, prestige and wealth of this world; just bow to me”. The test is will you sell out, make compromises and give your loyalty to an idol. Jesus declares that there will be no compromises or idols in his life. He will live with complete loyalty to God and humanity, whatever it costs.

When we look at Jesus we see humanity at its finest; totally responsive to God in a life of sacrificial love.

Jesus draws us into the same loving response through the strength of his Spirit living in us.

This Lent we go into our own 40 days in the desert, to meet our own “demons”, and to find in Christ the strength to grow more truly; in trust and loyalty to God and loving service to others.

For personal prayer and reflection:

What is God calling me to face in my life this Lent?
What Lenten practice am I committed to following this year?

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP SHARING AND DISCUSSION

- ❖ What are some of the temptations and struggles we are facing in the world, and the Church, today?
- ❖ What would support you and your family/parish on this Lenten journey of renewal?
- ❖ Share a Scripture verse or story that strengthens and sustains you in these challenges.

RENEWED FOR MISSION WITH POPE FRANCIS

Jesus was tempted in three different ways to give up or distort his mission:

- The desire to survive and to consume
- The need to be loved and to be special
- The making of power and wealth into false gods

His relationship with his Father helped him to resist these temptations.

Here are some of the ways in which Pope Francis says Christians are tempted to give up or distort our mission to spread the Good News.

Pessimism and Defeatism:

One of the more serious temptations which stifles boldness and zeal is a defeatism which turns us into querulous and disillusioned pessimists, “sourpusses”. Nobody can go off to battle unless he is fully convinced of victory beforehand. If we start without confidence, we have already lost half the battle and we bury our talents. [85]

The evil spirit of defeatism is brother to the temptation to separate, before its time, the wheat from the weeds; it is the fruit of an anxious and self-centred lack of trust. [85]

Warring among Ourselves:

How many wars take place within the people of God and in our different communities! In our neighbourhoods and in the workplace, how many wars are caused by envy and jealousy, even among Christians! Spiritual worldliness leads some Christians to war with other Christians who stand in the way of their quest for power, prestige, pleasure and economic security. Some are even no longer content to live as part of the greater Church community but stoke a spirit of exclusivity, creating an ‘inner circle’. Instead of belonging to the whole Church in all its rich variety, they belong to this or that group which thinks itself different or special. [98]

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

****How positive are we about our mission to spread the Good News?***

****Pope Francis is not discouraged but says, 'Challenges exist to be overcome! Let us be realists, but without losing our joy, our boldness and our hope-filled commitment. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of missionary vigour! [109] What helps you to be positive in the face of difficulties?***

****Do any groups in our community appear to be exclusive? How can we make clear that God has no favourites?***

SENDING PRAYER

Loving God,
fill us with hope in the call you give us
to be bearers of Good News.
Free us from the temptation not to believe
in your power at work within us
and amongst us.
Free us from trusting in our ways
more than your ways.
Free us from the need to be liked
and admired.
Fill us with such a desire
to proclaim the Good News
that we allow nothing to get in the way
of the invitation we have been given
to be co-workers with Christ.
Amen

LENT IN ACTION THIS WEEK

****Actively participate in Project Compassion***

****Incorporate moments of silence for prayer into your daily routine.
E.g. in the car before driving home, or to the shops.***

PRAYER MANTRA FOR THE WEEK

Lord, keep my heart close to you.

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

GATHERING PRAYER

Loving Father,
we have put our hope in Jesus Christ
who was transfigured before the apostles.
We believe that we, too, will share in that same glory.
Help us prepare for that time by our actions in this life.
Open our eyes to the seed within us waiting to grow and blossom
into the good works that Jesus calls us to do.
Help us to use this time of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving
to come to a greater understanding
and a determination to follow the call we have been given
both as individuals and as a community.
This we ask in Jesus' name and in the power of the Holy Spirit.
Amen

PROCLAIMING AND HEARING THE GOSPEL



A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew (17:1-9)

Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain where they could be alone. There in their presence he was transfigured; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became as white as the light. Suddenly Moses and Elijah appeared to them; they were talking with him. Then Peter spoke to Jesus. "Lord," he said "it is wonderful for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." He was still speaking when suddenly a bright cloud covered them with shadow, and from the cloud there came a voice which said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; he enjoys my favour. Listen to him." When they heard this, the disciples fell on their faces, overcome with fear. But Jesus came up and touched them. "Stand up," he said "do not be afraid." And when they raised their eyes they saw no-one but only Jesus. As they came down from the mountain Jesus gave them this order. "Tell no-one about the vision until the Son of Man has risen from the dead."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Pause for a few moments of prayerful reflection and allow the Words of the Gospel to speak to you. You may like to read aloud to the group a word or phrase that "speaks" to you. Not for discussion at this stage, but to assist each other to hear the Gospel more deeply.

REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL

We live in an amazing time in history. The global media explosion means that we are constantly exposed to the thoughts, voices and opinions of many people. From Facebook to television to the Web, we are continually hearing voices from all over the world.

Daily we are told how to live, what really matters, how to be happy and who counts in this world. The challenge and the struggle for us is how to discern those voices and messages that truly lead us to fulfilment, light and authenticity. Who is truly worth listening to in all this noise?

In the Gospel for this second Sunday of Lent the answer is heard clearly from the mountain top: “Listen to Him”.

In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke the story of the transfiguration is always linked to Peter’s great confession of faith, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Mt 16:16); and Jesus’ prediction of the suffering, death and resurrection that awaits him in Jerusalem. (Mt 16:21) Peter and the disciples resist such a shocking thought, “this must not happen to you” (Mt 16:22). So “six days later” Jesus takes Peter, James and John up a high mountain.

Mountains, in Scripture, are the places of encounter with God; and the setting for God to reveal Himself to his people. As Moses on Mt Sinai entered into the mysterious presence of God and received the gift of the Law, so Jesus and the disciples are drawn into God’s presence and receive a new gift from God.

As Jesus is enveloped in heavenly light, he shines with the glory of God. The disciples, for an instant, behold this glory and hear God’s voice declaring Jesus as “the beloved Son” in whom God the Father is “well pleased”. The Father is well pleased because his Son is faithful, and the choices he is making in life are in accord with God’s ways. Then, with Moses and Elijah present to confirm that Jesus is the long awaited One from God, the Father says “listen to Him”.

The disciples are given the gift of beholding for a moment, the glory that is to come in the future as Jesus passes through suffering and death into resurrection. Strengthened by this gift, they are called not to resist this journey of Jesus to Jerusalem; rather to join him on this journey, listen to him and share in the same transforming experience.

As we make our way through Lent, towards the celebration of Jesus’ death and resurrection at Easter, we are called to “listen” to the voice of Jesus as we have never done so before. As we listen to Jesus and his call in our lives, our hearts are “purified” from the confusion of so many contradictory voices in our world.

It is important that we do not miss what is at stake here. Jesus is the “beloved Son” who becomes the “suffering servant” and totally gives himself for others. This is the only way to true life and glory. Jesus is the “man for others” even to the cross. Very soon in the Gospel of Matthew, the face that shone with glory on the mountain will be overshadowed by the darkness and terror of Calvary. There, the only thing that will shine is a love prepared to give everything. This is the only path to glory.

Jesus lived his faithful journey of love for God and others in this real world of ours with all its challenges and suffering. We are called to walk the challenging path of life in this world with the same love, until we share in His eternal life and glory. In Lent we strive to let go of our false securities, moving beyond where we feel safe and in control, and risking the call of faith and love. Here we “listen” to Jesus who calls us out toward our neighbour, our enemy and the suffering ones at our door. Here in Lent, we climb up the mountain by deeper prayer, fasting and almsgiving and are transformed more and more into the image of Christ.

The kindness of God is such, that as we strive and struggle along this path of “costly love” with Jesus, every now and then we are given a glimpse of glory to encourage us along. Whether it be the smile on a child’s face, or the setting sun after a hard day at work; or whether it be a moment of inner peace during prayer or the encouraging words of a friend or sponsor...God touches our fearful hearts and urges us on.

For personal prayer and reflection:

As you strive to listen more deeply to God this Lent, what is He saying to you?
What is your response to God?

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP SHARING AND DISCUSSION

- ❖ “Mountain-top” moments with God strengthen us for the demands of life and faith. Share some experiences of God’s closeness and presence that keep you going through life’s challenges. E.g. a retreat, a liturgy, a friend...
- ❖ Many people are confused and discouraged today. What do you think will help people find hope and a positive spirit? What helps you?
- ❖ How can we, and our Parish, help others come to know Jesus Christ more?

RENEWED FOR MISSION WITH POPE FRANCIS

Peter, James and John had an encounter with Jesus as they had never seen him before and it filled them with joy and wonder.

Pope Francis insists that we can experience the wonder of a personal encounter with Jesus, and it will transform our lives, filling us with a joy we cannot help but share.

The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew. [1] I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since “no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord”. [3]

An evangeliser must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral! Let us recover and deepen our enthusiasm, that “delightful and comforting joy of evangelising, even when it is in tears that we must sow...And may the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the good news not from evangelisers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervour, who have first received the joy of Christ”. [10] (quoting Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 1975)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- *Can I recall a time when I experienced a personal encounter with Jesus?***
- *What opportunities are there already in your community for learning to pray and for growing in prayer? What else could be offered?***
- *When have I seen the joy of the Gospel on someone's face? What helps me to overcome feelings of dejection or discouragement?***

SENDING PRAYER

God of glory,
may our eyes be opened to glimpse your glory all around us
in the goodness that fills our world.
May we see it in the gift of the creation in which we live,
in the brothers and sisters who walk with us,
and in those who with whom
we have an encounter each day.
May we look for goodness all around us,
and share goodness with those who are
looking for reasons for living and hoping.
Amen.

LENT IN ACTION THIS WEEK

**Support someone who is sick, or who you know is struggling in some way at this time.
Show your support for them either by visiting, phoning, writing or praying for them.**

PRAYER MANTRA FOR THE WEEK

Lord, teach me to listen to you and do your loving will.

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

GATHERING PRAYER

God, our wise and loving Father,
In your wisdom you gave us the example of your Son
who once again shows us the way to live the life you desire.
We ask you now for insight to see
what his example in today's Gospel means for us in our own lives.
We ask you for the courage to do what Jesus did
and to reach out to someone with patience, without judgement,
and with the sensitivity needed to heal the wounds and sinfulness
of our time and our society.
We make this prayer through Jesus your Son and in the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

PROCLAIMING AND HEARING THE GOSPEL

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John (4:5-42)



Jesus came to the Samaritan town called Sychar, near the land that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well is there and Jesus, tired by the journey, sat straight down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." His disciples had gone into the town to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, "What? You are a Jew and you ask me, a Samaritan, for a drink?" – Jews in fact, do not associate with Samaritans.

Jesus replied:

"If you only knew what God is offering

and who it is that is saying to you:

Give me a drink,

you would have been the one to ask,

and he would have given you living water."

"You have no bucket, sir," she answered "and the well is deep: how could you get this living water? Are you a greater man than our father Jacob who gave us this well and drank from it himself with his sons and his cattle?" Jesus replied:

"Whoever drinks this water

will get thirsty again;

but anyone who drinks the water that I shall give will never be thirsty again:

the water that I shall give

will turn into a spring inside him, welling up to eternal life."

"Sir," said the woman "give me some of that water, so that I may never get thirsty and never have to come here again to draw water."

"Go and call your husband" said Jesus to her "and come back here." The woman answered, "I have no husband." He said to her, "You are right to say, 'I have no husband'; for although you have had five, the one you have now is not your husband. You spoke the truth there."

"I see you are a prophet, sir" said the woman. "Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, while you say that Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship." Jesus said:

“Believe me, woman, the hour is coming
when you will worship the Father
neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.
You worship what you do not know;
we worship what we do know;
for salvation comes from the Jews.
But the hour will come – in fact it is here already –
when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth:
that is the kind of worshipper
the Father wants.
God is spirit,
and those who worship
must worship in spirit and truth.”

The woman said to him, “I know that the Messiah – that is, Christ, - is coming; and when he comes he will tell us everything.” “I who am speaking to you,” said Jesus “I am he.”
At this point his disciples returned, and were surprised to find him speaking to a woman, though none of them asked, “What do you want from her?” or, “Why are you talking to her?” The woman put down her water jar and hurried back to the town to tell the people, “Come and see a man who has told me everything I ever did; I wonder if he is the Christ?” This brought people out of the town and they started walking towards him.
Meanwhile, the disciples were urging him, “Rabbi, do have something to eat.” but he said, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” So the disciples asked one another, “Has someone been bringing him food?” But Jesus said:

“My food
is to do the will of the one who sent me,
and to complete his work.
Have you not got a saying:
Four months and then the harvest?
Well, I tell you:
Look around you, look at the fields;
already they are white, ready for harvest!
Already the reaper is being paid his wages,
already he is bringing in the grain for eternal life,
and thus sower and reaper rejoice together.
For here the proverb holds good:
one sows, another reaps;
I sent you to reap
a harvest you had not worked for.
Others worked for it;
and you have come into the rewards of their trouble.”

Many Samaritans of that town had believed in him on the strength of the woman’s testimony when she said, “He told me all I have ever done,” so, when the Samaritans came up to him, they begged him to stay with them. He stayed for two days, and when he spoke to them many more came to believe; and they said to the woman, “Now we no longer believe because of what you told us; we have heard him ourselves and we know that he really is the saviour of the world.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

Pause for a few moments of prayerful reflection and allow the Words of the Gospel to speak to you. You may like to read aloud to the group a word or phrase that “speaks” to you. Not for discussion at this stage, but to assist each other to hear the Gospel more deeply.

REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL

Pause for a moment and ask yourself ... when was the last time you had a drink of water? Maybe you are one of an ever-growing number of people with a water bottle at your side, and just had a sip. Or maybe you keep a jug of water with lemon slices on your kitchen table or desk during the day. Perhaps you had a glass of water to take the medication you need.

Water is life. We come from the waters of our mother's womb, we are baptised in the water of Holy Mother Church and each day we drink precious water simply to stay alive!

But of course, water is life, because as human beings we are thirsty to the very core. We are thirsty for the physical refreshment and life-giving properties of water; and we are "thirsty" for life and renewal in so many different ways.

When Jesus meets the nameless Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, both of them are thirsty. Clearly they both need water to drink; but there is more to this well-side meeting.

A close reading of the story reveals how deeply Jesus "thirsts" for this woman's faith. It is a long and probing conversation between the two of them, and Jesus strives to reveal the gift from God he is offering her. He longs for her to know the gift of "living water" he can bring her; and longs even more for her faith, and acceptance of the gift.

On the other hand, this woman is considered by some as the "outcast of outcasts"! She is a public sinner, a woman in a patriarchal world, and to top it off she is a Samaritan. Jews and Samaritans were bitter enemies. The Jews regarded Samaritans as having lost the purity of their faith by inter-marrying with foreigners and including elements of other religions in the practice of their faith. They are considered ritually unclean and outcasts from the Jewish faith.

The Samaritan woman is "thirsty" for acceptance, inclusion and dignity. Jesus is "thirsty" for her faith in him.

Jesus notices her, speaks to her, drinks from her bucket and thereby makes himself "ritually unclean". She knows acutely the pain of rejection, and as the compassionate conversation unfolds, she slowly opens her heart to the person of Jesus and moves from calling him "sir", a "prophet", the "messiah", to finally, with her village, calling Jesus "saviour of the world". She has come to personal faith in Jesus; a faith that fills her with His life and Spirit and gives a new meaning to her life. This news is too good to keep to herself, and she becomes an evangelist to her own people. They in turn, also come to faith in Christ.

As St Augustine famously said, "Our hearts were made for you O Lord, and they will not rest until they rest in you". We are indeed thirsty to the core of our being; thirsty for life, meaning and God. On the other hand God is "thirsty" for us; longing to draw us into deeper union with Himself.

Jesus is among us, offering us "living water" as we journey through Lent to Easter joy. He is drawing us to Himself in order to fill our hearts with the spring of his Holy Spirit. Can we risk more this Lent? Can we drink in his Spirit as never before? Can we surrender more completely to Christ this Lent?

For personal prayer and reflection:

**What are you "hungry and thirsty" for in your life?
What difference does knowing and loving Christ make to your life?**

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP SHARING AND DISCUSSION

- ❖ The Samaritan woman slowly comes to faith in Jesus. Share what has helped your faith to grow over the years.
- ❖ Why do people reject and dismiss other people and groups etc.? How can we change this behaviour? What if those who are “different” from us have much to teach us?
- ❖ Jesus gives “living water” through the Sacraments. What would enrich the celebration of the Eucharist and other sacraments in your parish?

RENEWED FOR MISSION WITH POPE FRANCIS

The Gospel sheds light for us on the reflections of Pope Francis on how our parish communities are called to be places of welcome and inclusion so that people can experience the joy of the gospel in their lives and respond appropriately.

The thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds...and you have to start from the ground up. [*America* magazine – September 2013]

The Church is called to be the house of the Father, with doors always wide open. One concrete sign of such openness is that our church doors should always be open, so that if someone, moved by the Spirit, comes there looking for God, he or she will not find a closed door. There are other doors that should not be closed either. Everyone can share in some way in the life of the Church; everyone can be part of the community, nor should the doors of the sacraments be closed for simply any reason. This is especially true of the sacrament which is itself “the door”: baptism. The Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak. These convictions have pastoral consequences that we are called to consider with prudence and boldness. Frequently, we act as arbiters of grace rather than its facilitators. But the Church is not a tollhouse; it is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems. [47]

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

****What are the obvious wounds of those around us, what are the hidden wounds? How can we help to heal those wounds?***

****Pope Francis’ reflections on the doors of the Church and the sacraments being open challenges us to reflect on our pastoral practice: how can we live out what the Pope is suggesting? What are the “pastoral consequences”? Can we leave the door of our church open?***

****In what ways are we already living out the vision of Pope Francis to be an open door community?***

SENDING PRAYER

Mary, Virgin of listening and contemplation,
Mother of love,
Bride of the eternal wedding feast,
pray for the Church, whose pure icon you are,
that she may never be closed in on herself
or lose her passion for establishing God's kingdom.
Star of the new evangelisation,
help us to bear radiant witness to communion,
service, ardent and generous faith, justice and love of the poor,
that the joy of the Gospel may reach to the ends of the earth.
Mother of the living Gospel, pray for us.
Amen

LENT IN ACTION THIS WEEK

Be attentive to the gift of water each day.
Give thanks for the water you drink, wash with etc.
Conserve as much water as you can.

PRAYER MANTRA FOR THE WEEK

Come, Holy Spirit, fill and renew my heart.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

GATHERING PRAYER

Father of mercy and kindness,
your loving Son, Jesus, responded with his heart
to an individual outside of the mainstream.
He led the blind man into the community,
giving to both him and the community
new eyes, new vision, new hope.
We praise and thank you for this marvellous lesson
and ask your help as we try to follow in Jesus' footsteps.
Help us to discover our own blindness
and to rejoice in the new vision we receive
when we act to overcome that blindness.
We ask this through Christ our Lord
and in the Holy Spirit.
Amen

PROCLAIMING AND HEARING THE GOSPEL

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John (9:1-41)



As Jesus went along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, for him to have been born blind?" "Neither he nor his parents sinned," Jesus answered "he was born blind so that the works of God might be displayed in him.

As long as the day lasts
I must carry out the work of the one who sent me;
the night will soon be here when no one can work.
As long as I am in the world
I am the light of the world."

Having said this, he spat on the ground, made a paste with the spittle, put this over the eyes of the blind man and said to him, "Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam" (a name that means 'sent').

So the blind man went off and washed himself, and came away with his sight restored.

His neighbours and people who earlier had seen him begging said, "Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?" Some said, "Yes, it is the same one." Others said, "No, he only looks like him." The man himself said, "I am the man." So they said to him, "Then how do your eyes come to be open?" "The man called Jesus" he answered "made a paste, daubed my eyes with it and said to me 'Go and wash at Siloam'; so I went, and when I washed I could see." They asked, "Where is he?" "I don't know" he answered.

They brought the man who had been blind to the Pharisees. It had been a Sabbath day when Jesus made the paste and opened the man's eyes, so when the Pharisees asked him how he had come to see, he said, "He put a paste on my eyes, and I washed, and I can see." Then some of the Pharisees said, "This man cannot be from God: he does not keep the Sabbath."

Others said, "How could a sinner produce signs like this?" And there was disagreement among them. So they spoke to the blind man again, "What have you to say about him yourself, now that he has opened your eyes?" "He is a prophet" replied the man. However, the Jews would not believe that the man had been blind and had gained his sight, without first sending for his parents and asking them, "Is this man really your son who you say was born blind? If so how is it that he is now able to see?" His parents answered, "We know he is our son and we know he was born blind, but we don't know how it is that he can see now, or who opened his eyes. He is old enough: let him speak for himself." His parents spoke like this out of fear of the Jews, who had already agreed to expel from the synagogue anyone who should acknowledge Jesus as the Christ. This was why his parents said, "He is old enough; ask him."

So the Jews again sent for the man and said to him, "Give glory to God! For our part, we know that this man is a sinner." The man answered, "I don't know if he is a sinner; I only know that I was blind and now I can see." They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" He replied, "I have told you once and you wouldn't listen. Why do you want to hear it all again? Do you want to become his disciples too?" At this they hurled abuse at him: "You can be his disciple," they said "we are disciples of Moses: we know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this man, we don't know where he comes from." The man replied, "Now, here is an astonishing thing! He has opened my eyes and you don't know where he comes from! We know that God doesn't listen to sinners, but God does listen to men who are devout and do his will. Ever since the world began it is unheard of for anyone to open the eyes of a man who was born blind; if this man were not from God, he couldn't do a thing." "Are you trying to teach us," they replied "and you a sinner through and through, since you were born!" And they drove him away.

Jesus heard they had driven him away, and when he found him he said to him, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" "Sir," the man replied "tell me who he is so that I may believe in him." Jesus said, "You are looking at him; he is speaking to you." The man said. "Lord, I believe", and worshipped him.

Jesus said:

"It is for judgement
that I have come into this world,
so that those without sight may see
and those with sight turn blind."

Hearing this, some Pharisees who were present said to him, "We are not blind, surely?" Jesus replied:

"Blind? If you were, you would not be guilty,
but since you say, 'We see',
your guilt remains."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Pause for a few moments of prayerful reflection and allow the Words of the Gospel to speak to you. You may like to read aloud to the group a word or phrase that "speaks" to you. Not for discussion at this stage, but to assist each other to hear the Gospel more deeply.

REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL

We are taken this week into that mysterious world of human change and growth, and how at times we resist its call. It is obvious that change and growth are built into our nature. We cannot keep thinking about reality the way we did as children or adolescents. Life and experience constantly call us to ponder, reflect and change the way we see things; responding in the way we actually live. This is not always an easy path to tread and at times it is costly as we “let go” of what we have believed and held securely to, and “reach out” to new perspectives and priorities. So we sometimes find ourselves resisting the invitation to grow, and pushing aside what life and experience keep offering us at a deeper level. At other times we engage the call to grow and find that new dimensions of life, and ourselves, open up before us!

The beautiful and dramatic account of the healing of the blind man in today’s Gospel, confronts us with the way God leads us to growth and faith even in the midst of human fear and resistance.

Jesus is the Light of the world. He has come to open human hearts to the reality of his Loving Father. He has come to shatter the darkness we get lost in, and to reveal the God who loves the world and shares eternal life with us. He has come to lead humanity on a journey of faith, surrendering in love to the mystery of the Living God.

Typically of St John’s symbolic ways of expressing the story of Jesus, he firstly presents Jesus as healing the life-long blindness of a man. A truly wonderful miracle, whereby a man who has never seen anything before but darkness has the whole world of life and colour opened up before him. But at a deeper level, the story is really about a man slowly coming to see who Jesus really is and entrusting his life to him by becoming a disciple. It is the story of a man growing from unbelief to whole-hearted commitment to Jesus.

Once the healing has taken place the real action in the story begins. Controversies, questions and resistance abound and they centre on the person of Jesus. The Pharisees reject Jesus and his miracle because he made some mud on the Sabbath day, a day when kneading anything was forbidden. They preferred their legal system to the incredible healing light and message of Jesus. The Jews eventually refuse to believe the miracle even occurred, and interrogate the parents of the healed man, finally rejecting the man himself. In their eyes Jesus is a “sinner” and he can offer nothing from God.

But all the while, as this interrogation and fearful resistance is at play, the healed man is slowly coming to a clearer and clearer view of Jesus. He moves from seeing Jesus as a man, to then seeing him as a prophet. Finally he acknowledges Jesus as the Son of Man sent to make God known in this world; and ends up bowing before Jesus the ‘Lord’, worshipping him. What a journey from unbelief to trust, faith and worship. Also a stark reminder that searing questions and God’s grace can work together to bring us to new insight and faith!

The once blind man opens his heart and accepts the gift of Jesus, growing into faith. The Jewish leaders close their hearts, reject the gift Jesus is offering and are left in their darkness. They refuse to be open, to change and to “see”, even as they come face to face with Jesus the Light of the World.

Baptism was called “enlightenment” in the early Church. In the waters of Baptism we are joined to Christ, who fills us with his light that we may “see” the glory of God in this world and the world to come. But it takes a life-time to live out our Baptism. We are constantly called to “die” to our old ways of seeing and living and more truly embrace the way of Jesus. We are constantly called to believe what Jesus says to us about God and to be willing to change our ideas, perspectives and life-style as he leads us. It can be unsettling to have to change; unsettling to accept the fact that we can be wrong and that we don’t know everything. But it is this humble openness to Jesus and his truth, that “sets us free” to grow into the fullness of our humanity in Christ.

For personal prayer and reflection:

When have you been “blind” to God’s love and presence in your life?
How comfortable are you in truly bringing your “blindness” to Christ so He can heal you?

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP SHARING AND DISCUSSION

- ❖ Where can you see “blindness” in your community, society and Church? What is it that “blinds” people? What helps people “see”?
- ❖ Faith is a way of seeing. How is “daily life” different if we look at it through the eyes of faith?
- ❖ Share about someone on your faith journey, who by their life, holiness and words has helped you “see” more of God and grow in faith.

RENEWED FOR MISSION WITH POPE FRANCIS

Here are some passages from Pope Francis that challenge us to think about how seriously we are taking the call to share our faith with others.

In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf Mt 28:19). All the baptised, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelisation, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelisation to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. The new evangelisation calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptised. Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelisation; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God’s saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are “disciples” and “missionaries”, but rather that we are always “missionary disciples”. If we are not convinced, let us look at those first disciples, who, immediately after encountering the gaze of Jesus, went forth to proclaim him joyfully: “We have found the Messiah!” (Jn 1:41). ...So what are we waiting for? [120]

Today, as the Church seeks to experience a profound missionary renewal, there is a kind of preaching which falls to each of us as a daily responsibility. It has to do with bringing the Gospel to the people we meet, whether they be our neighbours or complete strangers. This is the informal preaching which takes place in the middle of a conversation, something along the lines of what a missionary does when visiting a home. Being a disciple means being constantly ready to bring the love of Jesus to others, and this can happen unexpectedly and in any place: on the street, in a city square, during work, on a journey. [127]

In this preaching, which is always respectful and gentle, the first step is personal dialogue, when the other person speaks and shares his or her joys, hopes and concerns for loved ones, or so many other heartfelt needs. Only afterward is it possible to bring up God's word. [128]

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

****What would you like to see offered in your parish that might help you share the Gospel with others?***

****How are we sharing the Gospel already through our parish and in our daily lives?***

SENDING PRAYER

Father,
you have blessed us in so many ways,
above all in the mercy and compassion you have shown us
in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, your Son.
Keep us grateful every day for your great and gentle love.
We don't always know how to bring people closer to you
and we would rather that it was someone else's job.
But we do know that you have poured your Holy Spirit into our hearts
and you are at work among us.
Take away the fear and embarrassment
that sometimes stops us from speaking about you to others.
Make us sharers of Gospel joy to those who most need to learn of you.
Amen

LENT IN ACTION THIS WEEK

Pray for strangers: people in line at the supermarket, ambulance passengers, people in the news etc.

We will "see" them as sons and daughters of God!

PRAYER MANTRA FOR THE WEEK

Open my eyes Lord!

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

GATHERING PRAYER

Good and gracious Father,
when your Son Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead,
he showed that we will be given new life.
We walk every day in the light and hope of resurrection.
Help us to live each day in gratitude for the gift of our very being.
Move our hearts and minds to share the gifts of life and hope.
Help us to seek freedom from all the bonds that still hold us.
Help us to reach out to those outside our community's acceptance.
We pray this through Christ our Lord
and in the unity of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

PROCLAIMING AND HEARING THE GOSPEL

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John (11:1-45)



There was a man named Lazarus who lived in the village of Bethany with the two sisters, Mary and Martha, and he was ill. It was the same Mary, the sister of the sick man Lazarus, who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair. The sisters sent this message to Jesus, "Lord, the man you love is ill." On receiving the message, Jesus said, "This sickness will end not in death but in God's glory, and through it the Son of God will be glorified."

Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, yet when he heard that Lazarus was ill he stayed where he was for two more days before saying to the disciples, "Let us go to Judaea." The disciples said, "Rabbi, it is not long since the Jews wanted to

stone you; are you going back again?" Jesus replied:

"Are there not twelve hours in the day?

A man can walk in the daytime without stumbling

because he has the light of this world to see by;

but if he walks at night he stumbles,

because there is no light to guide him."

He said that and then added, "Our friend Lazarus is resting, I am going to wake him." The disciples said to him "Lord, if he is able to rest he is sure to get better." The phrase Jesus used referred to the death of Lazarus, but they thought that by 'rest' he meant 'sleep', so Jesus put it plainly, "Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there because now you will believe. But let us go to him." Then Thomas – known as the Twin – said to the other disciples, "Let us go too, and die with him."

On arriving, Jesus found that Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days already. Bethany is only about two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to sympathise with them over their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus had come she went to meet him. Mary remained sitting in the house. Martha said to Jesus, "If you had been

here, my brother would not have died, but I know that, even now, whatever you ask of God, he will grant you.” “Your brother” said Jesus to her “will rise again.” Martha said, “I know he will rise again at the resurrection on the last day.” Jesus said:

“I am the resurrection and the life.

If anyone believes in me, even though he dies he will live,
and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.

Do you believe this?”

“Yes Lord.” she said “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who was to come into this world.”

When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in a low voice, “The Master is here and wants to see you.” Hearing this, Mary got up quickly and went to him. Jesus had not yet come into the village; he was still at the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who were in the house sympathising with Mary saw her get up so quickly and go out, they followed her, thinking that she was going to the tomb to weep there.

Mary went to Jesus, and as soon as she saw him she threw herself at his feet, saying, “Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” At the sight of her tears, and those of the Jews who followed her, Jesus said in great distress, with a sigh that came straight from the heart, “Where have you put him?” They said, “Lord, come and see.” Jesus wept; and the Jews said “See how much he loved him!” But there were some who remarked, “He opened the eyes of the blind man, could he not have prevented this man’s death?” Still sighing, Jesus reached the tomb: it was a cave with a stone to close the opening. Jesus said, “Take the stone away.” Martha said to him “Lord by now he will smell; this is the fourth day.” Jesus replied “Have I not told you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?” So they took away the stone. Then Jesus lifted up his eyes and said:

“Father, I thank you for hearing my prayer.

I know indeed that you always hear me.

but I speak for the sake of all these who stand round me,
so that they may believe it was you who sent me.”

When he had said this, he cried in a loud voice, “Lazarus, here! Come out!” The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with bands of stuff and a cloth round his face. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, let him go free.”

Many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary and had seen what he did believed in him.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Pause for a few moments of prayerful reflection and allow the Words of the Gospel to speak to you. You may like to read aloud to the group a word or phrase that “speaks” to you. Not for discussion at this stage, but to assist each other to hear the Gospel more deeply.

REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL

Many years ago a young man walked along a busy city street wearing a most intriguing t-shirt. At least I thought so. He had printed on the front of his shirt, in large black letters: “FEAR IS A THIEF”. What a moment of truth that young man was offering everyone who walked past him that day! For indeed fear does rob and deprive human beings of so much every day.

It is fear that keeps some people indoors rather than walking into the world of society and other people; fear that prevents others from travelling lest they encounter violence; fear that stops people from trying new things or learning new skills, lest they fail along the way. Fear is a thief that steals our peace and thwarts our growth as we hold back from the invitations that life and grace send us.

But, ultimately, what are we really afraid of? Losing control? Losing our very selves? Taking risks? Or is the bottom line that we are in terror of death and dying?

The Gospel this Sunday has Jesus walk directly into the place of all our worst fears. And lest we think he entered these dark and deadly places in some “angelic” form, we note the Gospel has Jesus “sighing deeply” and in “tears”. By the end of the story, the Jewish leaders have made their final decision to kill Jesus. (Jn 11:53)

Several days after hearing of Lazarus’ illness, Jesus informs the disciples that they are all returning to Judaea. This represents a life-threatening risk for Jesus. It was in Judaea that the Jews had already attempted to stone Jesus to death. Jesus embraces this deadly risk for the sake of Lazarus and his family, placing his own life “on the line”.

Jesus then encounters the full force of human grief and loss as he meets Martha and Mary. Death is so final for us human beings. Illness threatens us from the moment we are born, and finally the grave buries all hope! We are left to weep, as Jesus himself does. Yet he does not hold back from immersing himself completely in our pain and loss; does not keep his distance from our dying.

Finally, Jesus comes face to face with the tomb that holds Lazarus. One wonders if in his own heart Jesus “senses” that his own tomb is not far away now; and as he summons death to release Lazarus, is he finally preparing to “embrace” death, do battle with darkness and give his life for the world?

Jesus walks into the risks and terrors of our life, and into the darkness of our death. He does so as the Son of the Father, who so loves the world that He gives his only Son for the life of the world. Jesus walks into the darkness and death of our world bearing the love, light and life of God. He walks with absolute trust in his Father, sent among us as “the resurrection and life” of God. He gives his life for us on the cross, and raises us beyond our fears into a new and “eternal” life that begins here and now in this world.

The only thing that Jesus asks of us is that we “believe” in him; that we trust him, surrender to him and have faith in him. So important is this “believing” that St John mentions it eight times in the story of Lazarus. To believe in Jesus is to accept him as the Father’s gift to us; the source of life and love. To believe in Jesus is to love him, and then experience Jesus dwelling within us through his Spirit. To believe in Jesus is to live in a mutual relationship of love with him, and allow that love to reach out to everyone.

When we believe in Jesus, living by faith in him every day, there is a loving bond established that not even death can overcome. As the Spirit of Jesus fills our hearts, fear is cast out and a fountain of life rises from the depths of our being. This “life” expresses itself as profound love for others in this world; and as the gift of “eternal life” even as we breathe our last. To know and love Christ is to breathe a new life, greater than death itself.

For personal prayer and reflection:

Are there any “graves” that need opening in my life? E.g. shame, fear, guilt, resentment...

Can I bring these to God and allow Him to heal me?

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP SHARING AND DISCUSSION

- ❖ The Risen Lord fills the universe. Share experiences of where you have “sensed” the presence and strength of Christ in difficult situations. E.g. illness and death. How did His strength come to you?
- ❖ The Parish is the body of Christ. How does your Parish bring “new life” and hope to people today?
- ❖ Who in your community is “trapped” and “bound” and in need of healing? What can Christians do?

RENEWED FOR MISSION WITH POPE FRANCIS

Pope Francis has described ways that people can be robbed of life and the Church’s sense of mission can die. He has named some features of our world which diminish life, things we must oppose to uphold life.

A crisis in relationships:

In the case of the family, the weakening of these bonds is particularly serious because the family is the fundamental cell of society, where we learn to live with others despite our differences and to belong to one another; it is also the place where parents pass on the faith to their children. [66] The individualism of our postmodern and globalised era favours a lifestyle which weakens the development and stability of personal relationships and distorts family bonds. Pastoral activity needs to bring out more clearly the fact that our relationship with the Father demands and encourages a communion which heals, promotes and reinforces interpersonal bonds. [67]

A new idolatry of money:

One cause of this situation is found in our relationship with money, since we calmly accept its dominion over ourselves and our societies. The current financial crisis can make us overlook the fact that it originated in a profound human crisis; the denial of the primacy of the human person! We have created new idols...man is reduced to one of his needs alone: consumption. [55] While the earnings of a minority are growing exponentially, so too is the gap separating the majority from the prosperity enjoyed by those happy few. [56] Money must serve, not rule! [58] Today’s economic mechanisms promote inordinate consumption, yet it is evident that unbridled consumerism combined with inequality proves doubly damaging to the social fabric. [60]

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- *What sort of pastoral activity in my parish is strengthening family and community life?***
- *What are the main burdens that are weighing people down in our community? What can we do?***

SENDING PRAYER

God of life,
At times we experience death, not only within ourselves,
but in the world around us.
Give us courage to be vessels for life to flow within us and through us.
Give us strength to stand as witnesses for life and fill us with compassion for those
who struggle to find life in the midst of death.
May we always be mindful of the invitation to unbind and let go free
those who have experienced the darkness of poverty,
pain and heartache,
that they may find the joy of the Gospel.
Amen.

LENT IN ACTION THIS WEEK

**Show support for someone who is grieving.
Visit, phone or write a letter.
Pray for them.**

PRAYER MANTRA FOR THE WEEK

Lord, fill me with your life.

A PRAYER FOR HOLY WEEK

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

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

Amen

