

*Springtime of the Soul*  
*Lent 2024*



# LENT 2024

## INTRODUCTION

### Lent Calls Us to Walk with Jesus

Lent, especially this year, begins in the dead of winter and moves toward the thaw and emergence of all things beautiful in time for Easter. Saint Francis of Assisi in his Canticle of the Sun praises God for the beauty of all creation. We, too, can echo his song, giving praise for sunlight, moon and stars, water, fire, and all the gifts of Mother Earth who feeds us. Francis describes these elements as precious and beautiful, useful, and pure, cheerful, and powerful. We witness the emergence of all this beauty as we walk through the weeks of Lent 2024.

Lent also calls us to walk with Jesus through these weeks so that we might learn from him about love. Love that is steadfast in the midst of temptation. Love that is glorious and bright as at the Transfiguration. Love that is strong enough to take a dramatic stand for the truth, as Jesus does when he cleanses the temple. Love that is wise enough to recognize the evils of the world and choose goodness. Unselfish love that draws us to the cross and at the same time deepens the covenant inscribed on our hearts. (Jer 31:34)

*A clean heart, create for me, God;  
a steadfast spirit renew within me. (Ps 51:12)*

*Marianne Race, CSJ  
Brookfield, IL*

*Cover Photo  
Joellen Sbrissa, CSJ*

## WEDNESDAY - FEBRUARY 14

### ASH WEDNESDAY

#### SCRIPTURE

Joel 2: 12-18

Ps. 51: 3-6, 12-14, 17

2 Cor. 5: 20 – 6:2

Mt. 6: 1-6, 16-18

#### REFLECTION

*“Yet even now says Yahweh, return to me with all your heart ...  
rend your heart and not your clothing.”*

*Joel 2: 12-13*

This text from the prophet, Joel, is something to ponder as you walk around today, ash marked on your forehead. This pondering is an inner action, not a showoff to others about what many may not understand about a dirty forehead. So, I am inviting you to ponder this: everyone will return to ash: through choosing cremation, a casket in a cemetery, green burial, or donating to science. This returning is about me, my choice as to how my body will ready itself for the glorious promise of life everlasting. This is primarily MY choice. Perhaps the invitation this Ash Wednesday, this Lent 2024, is to think about: what about those who are introduced to the Ash stage of life, not by their personal choice, but by the choices of others: Sandy Hook school children, concert goers in Las Vegas, residents of Gaza, Ukraine, Israeli settlements, U.S streets, and on and on and on. Perhaps the ashes of this Lent, personal and communal, but mostly in our common earth family, invite us to do more than walk with ash marked foreheads. Just, perhaps, we are invited to rend open our hearts, that is, to act to end war (will I join a protest?), act against guns of mass destruction (will I join a protest?)...

#### PRAYER

*For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you alone, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.*

*Psalms 51: 3-4, 7*

#### PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Whatever this Ash Wednesday invites me to be, it is to be more than a walking bulletin board saying, “I went to church.”

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

*Carol Crepeau, CSJ  
Burr Ridge, IL*

## **THURSDAY - FEBRUARY 15**

### **SCRIPTURE**

Dt. 30:15-20

Ps 1:1-2, 3, 4 and 6

Mt 4:17

Lk 9:22-25

### **REFLECTION**

*“Repent, says the Lord; the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*

*Mt 4:17*

What does repent really mean? It means to change our minds, which in turn causes us to change our behaviors. We need to ask ourselves where we need to change our minds and our behaviors. Are we open to new ideas and ways of thinking? Are we stuck in our ways and believe that the way we are living is fine and in no need of change? Are we living as Jesus wants us to live or living according to what the world expects from us? We may need to be more empathetic to others' needs, help those who are less fortunate, use less of the earth's resources, speak up for those who have no voice, etc. Do we rant and rave about what's wrong with the world but do little to change it? We need to use Jesus' example of ministry and follow in his footsteps. What changes can we make today to have a little heaven on Earth?

### **PRAYER**

Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the  
renewal of your mind,  
that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and  
pleasing and perfect.

Romans 12:2

### **PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

What is Jesus asking of me this day? I will try to change one of my  
behaviors today  
that will be pleasing to God and others.

*Nancy Leonard, CSJ Associate  
La Grange, IL*

## FRIDAY - FEBRUARY 16

### SCRIPTURE

Is 58:1-9a

Ps 51:3-6, 18-19

Mt 9:14-15

### REFLECTION

*“This...is the fasting that I desire: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; setting free the oppressed, breaking every yoke; sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless; clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own. Then your light shall break forth like the dawn...the glory of the HOLY ONE shall be with you. Then you shall call, and the HOLY ONE will answer...will say: “Here I am!” [Is.58:6-9]*

When I was a child we were taught that we fasted during Lent, as a penance, by giving up things along with any bad habits. We gave up TV, candy & desserts, going to movies, almost anything that gave us pleasure. I'm sure this reading showed up in the Lent lectionary, but I don't remember any preaching or homilies that urged us to, rather than to give up, move out of our comfort zones and take these actions. Years later, reading these words, I was stunned at the difference between what I had been taught about fasting and what Isaiah proclaims as the *fasting that God desires*. Even today I'm tempted to commit to the easier 'fasting from' (usually things that could benefit my physical or mental wellbeing) rather than fasting by taking one or more of these actions desired by God. So I have to ask myself, as we move into another season of Lent and engage in fasting, which of these actions am I willing to consider? Which of these will move me to step out of my current comfort zone and commit to responding to God's desire for a more just, whole, and holy world?

### PRAYER

You have made known what you desire for our fasting, not just during Lent, but throughout our lives. Grant me the courage and strength to make your desire my own and respond whole-heartedly to where you are inviting me today.

### PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Commit to some action during this Lent that moves you out of your comfort zone in responding to God's call and desire for our world.

## **SATURDAY - FEBRUARY 17**

### **SCRIPTURE**

Is 58: 9b-14

Ps 86: 1-6

Lk 5: 27-32

### **REFLECTION**

*“Then you shall delight in the Lord...”*

*Is 58:9b-14*

“If” is a small yet powerful word, but can be big in importance. It is usually accompanied with conditional statements: “if you do this...then this...will happen.” Implied is “if you do not” something else will happen. A choice is offered that challenges one to be or to act differently. Isaiah offers conditional statements to the Israelites in today’s reading and challenges them to begin a journey toward God in changing how they act toward their neighbor and in how they worship. The two challenges are connected. If they do what is demanded there will be light in their darkness; their strength will be renewed; nourishment given them. This Lent we are challenged to examine our relationships – societal and personal- and ask: “Are they life-giving or oppressive?” We are challenged to not have our prayer and worship become mere routine, but rather to make space within ourselves to have our senses awakened and our daily living impacted.

### **PRAYER**

Lord, we pray, give us courage. We pray, give us conviction.  
We pray, Lord, that You would give us hearts that grieve when we  
look at the idols without and the idols within.  
May we honor and delight in Your holy day – setting aside our own  
ways, interests, and affairs.

### **PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

Today, pray that you recognize and respond to an unexpected  
challenge God may set out before you.

*Ginny Yeager, CSJ  
Charleston, WV*

## FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT - FEBRUARY 18

### SCRIPTURE

Gn 9:8-15

Ps 25:4-9

1Pt 3: 18-22

Mk 1:12-15

### REFLECTION

*"I set my bow in the clouds to serve as a sign of the covenant between me and the earth."*

*Gn 9: 13*

As we begin this journey of Lent, with the contrasting images of rainbows after quite a flood, and Jesus called to the desert, I am praying with God's Covenant of love and trust and new life in my heart and for the whole earth. We are in covenant with so many people, including our Pope Francis in "Laudato Si" and "Laudato Deum." How can we live this covenant even more fully this year, as we journey with Jesus through the Mystery of his death and resurrection, and ours? More fully! Seeing with more attentive eyes comes to mind, listening with more compassion, acting with more vision of the whole world/earth/universe. I cannot act alone all the time, even when rainbows appear as a sign of grace, or beautiful sunrises and sunsets bring me to gratitude after a storm. I need the covenanted community (like Noah and family, John the Baptist and Jesus, and followers, congregation, and other circles) to live with me in the deserts and in the fullness of life each day. Realizing the covenant of trust and love, gratitude, and generosity is an essential part of this Lenten journey, as we weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who have joy! Transformation is happening!

### PRAYER

All-Abiding, Sustainer of Life, call me, through your covenant of love, to journey through deserts, floods, and suffering with others, knowing your rainbows do appear to comfort and sustain.

Give me eyes to see!

### PERSONAL CHALLENGE

During this Lent I will share with a friend or spiritual companion how I am living our Covenant of Love more fully. (I will notice rainbows, too!)

*Janet Franklin, CSJ  
New Roads, LA*

## **MONDAY - FEBRUARY 19**

### **SCRIPTURE**

Lv 19:1-2, 11-18

Ps 19:8-10, 15

Mt 25:31-46

### **REFLECTION**

*“You shall not go about spreading slander among your kin;  
nor shall you stand by idly when your neighbor’s life is at stake.”*

*Lv 19:16*

Today’s scripture calls us to be people of action. The readings from both Leviticus and Matthew make it clear that it is not enough to simply avoid actions that hurt others; we are called to proactively take steps to care for our neighbors and all creation. While many of us choose something to fast from each Lent, perhaps this year we are also called to choose an action of care for the dear neighbor that we can add to our lives this season. Whether it is caring for those near us who are experiencing hunger, imprisonment, or loneliness, or it is taking action to support the neighbor in other parts of the world experiencing war, hatred, or poverty, we are called to not “stand by idly” while others suffer. We each have our own unique contribution to make to caring for the world around us. May we all use this season to deepen our understanding and commitment to that call.

### **PRAYER**

Lord, give us the wisdom and strength to hear your call  
and be people of action this Lent.

### **PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

What is one thing I can do each day to care for the dear neighbor?

*Anna Mayer Diaz, CSJ Associate  
Champaign, IL*



## **TUESDAY - FEBRUARY 20**

### **SCRIPTURE**

Isaiah 55:10-11

Ps 34:4-5, 6-7, 16-17, 18-19

Matthew 6:7-15

### **REFLECTION**

*“This is how you are to pray: Our Father who art in heaven...”*

*Mt 9*

In today’s Gospel we hear Jesus teaching his disciples to pray: “Our Father who art in heaven...” Jesus relates to God as Father, his Abba. This reveals his relationship to his God. I believe the names we use for God reveal something about our relationship to God also. As children, we are taught that God is our Father. As Christians, we learn about God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In my young life, I prayed to God the Father. As I learned about Jesus, He became the focus of my prayer. In my adult years, the Holy Spirit became a familiar prayer companion. But we have so many more names for God besides Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Like the nicknames we use for friends, our names for God reveal something about our relationship with God each time we pray. Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer, Holy One, Beloved, Compassionate One...all ways that express our relationship to God.

### **PRAYER**

Holy One, by what name do I address you today?

How do I need to relate to you during these Lenten days?

I trust that You are with me and will walk this journey towards  
Easter with me. Amen.

### **PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

I will pay attention to the names I use for God  
and what they might reveal about my relationship to my God.

*Sue McCreary, CSJ  
Kalamazoo, MI*

## WEDNESDAY - FEBRUARY 21

### SCRIPTURE

Jonah 3:1-10

Ps. 51: 3-4, 12-13, 18-19

Lk. 11: 29-32

### REFLECTION

*"A broken and humbled heart, O God, you will not scorn."*

*Ps. 51:19*

As we begin this season of Lent we hear Jonah's warning, "In forty days Nineveh will be destroyed." How the Ninevites responded is an example for us. We are called during this season of forty days to examine how we are living today. Are there some actions we need to change? Maybe attitudes toward people who don't look like us? Or talk like us? Or pray like us?

This is a special time the church gives us each year to really look at who we are and what we are doing. It is not meant to make us hard on ourselves, since that may only lead to discouragement or self-loathing. It is a time to simply look at ourselves honestly and maybe see where we could improve.

Today we have a message from one greater than Jonah, Jesus, to show us the way. It is the way of love, respect for everyone, forgiveness, inclusion, and kindness. This is what we are to bring to God during this Lent: a humble and contrite heart that reaches out to all people and to our earth with care and compassion; to not take ourselves too seriously and rather find ways to manifest God's love and joy to our world.

It may be in very simple and ordinary ways – a smile, picking up some litter, returning the shopping cart to the rack, even a simple thank you to the mail carrier or trash collector. If we do these things, then at the end of these forty days we can celebrate with Jesus on Easter Sunday and God will surely look favorably on us as God did the Ninevites.

### PRAYER

Loving God, walk with us these forty days of Lent that we may learn and respond to your invitations and walk where you lead us.

### PERSONAL CHALLENGE

At the end of today try to recall at least one act of kindness, to yourself or others, that you did intentionally. And thank God with a humble and contrite heart.

*Mary Ann Wyllie, CSJ  
St. Clair Shores, MI*

## THURSDAY - FEBRUARY 22

### SCRIPTURE

1 Pt 5:1-4

Ps. 23: 1-6

Mt. 16: 13-19

### REFLECTION

*“Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve.”*

*1 Pt 5: 2*

Let us pause in silence and reflect on the call to keep watch over all those in our home. We look at the lonely, the sad, the happy, the ones different from us, and those similar. It is easy to care for our “friendly sheep,” but those who disturb us may cause us to “walk the other way.” Those whose personality, behavior or temperament are different from ours may bother us and we may not wish to reach out to them as our sister or brother. Those who are going through traumas in life especially the ill, mentally diminishing, physically challenged may cause us to not want to walk with them in the field of life. We may not want to be their shepherd. But we remember *“The Lord is my Shepherd, I lack nothing!”* We are shepherds to those around us and when one appears to stray, we are invited to bring him home. Let’s walk together and shepherd unconditionally all those whom we meet each day.

### PRAYER

Oh Good and Gracious Shepherd, help me to reach out to those who bother me, are different from me. You love me and my errors and moments of my life, help me to do the same to those from whom I have strayed and who have strayed from me.

### PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Can I name the persons near and around me from whom I have strayed, who bother me, who are different from me?  
Bring them in prayer, say hi, reach out and help them to be welcomed into the flock of your love of the Dear Neighbor living with me and around me.

*Robert Labadie Funaro, CSJ Associate  
Grand Rapids, MI*

## **FRIDAY - FEBRUARY 23**

### **SCRIPTURE**

Ez 18: 21-28

Ps 130: 1-4, 5-8

Mt 5: 20-26

### **REFLECTION**

*"Is it my way that is unfair, or rather, are not your ways unfair?"*

*Ez 18:25*

Today's readings invite us into an honest reality check around what is truly fair and just. God asks, "are not your ways unfair?" God is bringing to our awareness the everyday things that are easily overlooked as normal, but in reality, are unjust. We live in a world where some have abundance and others live in instability; a world where a few identities are lifted up while others are ignored and oppressed. Our Gospel tells us that our version of fairness is not the way. Jesus tells us to go and reconcile with those with whom we are opposed. What I think Jesus is really trying to say is that our choices mean something. Our ability to be generous, loving, and rooted in reality matter in God's plan for reconciliation of all creation. Thank goodness there is always hope, which is provided in the psalm: a promise of God's kindness and redemption, and a call to trust God's ways.

### **PRAYER**

God of Great Love, open our eyes to the ways we participate in injustice and give us the grace to choose reconciliation.

### **PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

Take some time this week to have a conversation with God about your relationship to fairness. Ask God to reveal to you God's vision of fairness.

*Sarah Simmons, CSJ  
Westchester, IL*

## **SATURDAY - FEBRUARY 24**

### **SCRIPTURE**

Deut. 26:16-19

Ps 119:1-2,4-5, 7-8

Mt. 5:43-48

### **REFLECTION**

*“Today the LORD is making this agreement with you.”*

*Dt. 26, 18*

This Deuteronomy reading takes place on the Plains of Moab. The Exodus generation had finally died off and Moses had led the new generation from their wandering to the edge of the wilderness, as it were. Encamped there, they were waiting for the word from God to cross the Jordan and enter the Land of Promise. But the Covenant they had broken must first be renewed. God will fulfill all the promises God made. But now the people must renew their promises to God, with all their hearts.

This Lent, we too, standing on the edge, are being called to renew our covenant relationship with our faithful God. Covenant renewal is the true purpose of Lent, which we sometimes miss by focusing on our penitential practices. Jesus is our leader who encourages us: “Be perfect as your faithful Abba,” or in other words, “You must, therefore, set no bounds to your love just as your heavenly Father has set no bounds.”

### **PRAYER**

God, strengthen us to be faithful to the covenant  
and to walk with you toward everlasting life in Christ,  
by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### **PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

Today I will renew my covenant with God and be aware of not  
setting any bounds to my love.

*Lucy Silvio, CSJ  
Baton Rouge, LA*

## SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT - FEBRUARY 25

### SCRIPTURE

Gn. 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18

Ps 116:10, 15-19

Rom 8: 31b-34

Mk 9:2-10

### REFLECTION

*“There you shall offer him up as a holocaust on a height  
that I will point out to you.” Gn.22:2*

*“I know now how devoted you are to God, since you did not withhold  
from me your own beloved son.” Gn. 22:12*

*“He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all,  
how will he not also give us everything else along with him?”*

*Romans 8: 32*

*“This is my beloved Son, Listen to him.” Mark 9:7*

The readings today are about “letting go.” No coincidence that the Transfiguration reading teaches us: “This is my beloved Son, listen to him” enabling us to respond to what God is asking.” Romans assures us, God did not spare his own Son. As Abraham listened, he “let go” and did not withhold from God his own beloved son. In a recent homily, Father Mike provided a dramatic example of what this “letting go” looks like. Father Mike took a small baby from her parents. He placed the baby on the altar as he does after each baptism. He continued, “I then ask the parents, Godparents, and all present who are standing around the altar to take a step back!” Yes, a real picture of “letting go.” The altar representing the person of Christ, the parents entrusting the child to Christ. Taking a picture and showing it to the child at First Communion and as the child matures keeps the act of “letting go” central throughout life.

### PRAYER

Beloved, help us to listen as we rest in your heart of love.

Open our hearts to follow your word  
and to surrender all to you each day. On our journey,  
may we model “letting go” and “letting God.”

### PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Each morning I will spend time listening as I rest in the heart of love, and whole-heartedly respond to what is asked.

*Rita Schmitz, CSJ  
St. Louis, MO*

## MONDAY - FEBRUARY 26

### SCRIPTURE

Dn 9:4b-10

Ps 79: 8,9,11,13

Lk 6: 31-38

### REFLECTION

*“Be merciful as your God is merciful.”*

*Lk. 6:36*

Mercy is clearly NOT a value or virtue in our culture. When we are hurt by another or others, our culture would advise us to seek retribution, to sue the other for perceived damages.

The theme of the Scriptures today is clearly God’s mercy. According to the Bible, the people of ancient Israel experienced the mercy of God time and again. The Hebrew word *hesed* is often translated as mercy, but that is too general a definition. *Hesed* is rooted in relationship and refers to God’s faithfulness to the covenantal relationship. When Israel sins while on the Exodus journey and begins to worship the golden calf, thus breaking the covenant, God is released from the obligation to keep that covenant. But God does not. It is **mercy** by which God remains faithful.

We who are baptized are also in covenant with God: Christ is our God, and we are God’s, Christ’s own. God always treats us with mercy. As in the parable of the Prodigal Son, mercy is the source of care, of loving kindness, of forgiveness, of compassion, even when it is unearned and underserved.

The merciful person is an image of God, recognizes the relationship with all as brother or sister, as dear neighbor, and is ever called upon to show mercy. To be merciful is indeed to be “stimulated by the Holy Spirit of love and attentive to her inspirations.”

### PRAYER

May your mercy be on us, Oh God, as we place our trust in you!  
And inspire us to be merciful as well.

### PERSONAL CHALLENGE

I will reflect on the times I have been shown mercy in my life  
and the times I have shown mercy.

I will make every effort to be merciful as God is merciful.

*Sallie Latkovich, CSJ  
Ft. Myers, FL*

## **TUESDAY - FEBRUARY 27**

### **SCRIPTURE**

Is 1:10, 16-20

Ps 50: 8-9, 16bc-17, 21-23

Mt 23: 1-12

### **REFLECTION**

*“Learn to do good. Make justice your aim: redress the wronged,  
hear the orphans plea, defend the widow.”*

*Isaiah 1: 17*

Learn to do good. We believe we know how to do good, don't we? So what do we need to learn? To do what is right? That sounds so simple.

In this complicated and fast-moving world, it often feels like the definition of right and good change on a daily basis. Do good by giving of your time, talent, and treasure.

Do good by reaching out with both hands to your neighbor no matter their race, color, or beliefs. Do good by volunteering at the food pantry at your parish or helping the flood of incoming immigrants. All of it doing good. All of it brings learning if we open to it. For me, however, the learning comes from the simple acts of good. Opening a door for someone. Saying a heartfelt thank you. Bringing someone chicken soup when they are sick. Simply listening quietly to someone's words of joy or pain. Is all this how we redress the wrongs? Aim for justice?

How is learning to do good manifested in your life this Lent?

### **PRAYER**

Bringer of all that is good, help us to open ourselves to the opportunities life presents to us to bring your goodness to the earth and all its inhabitants.

### **PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

To live by the example of so many around me  
who do good every day.

*Linda Matonich, CSJ Associate  
La Grange, IL*



## **WEDNESDAY - FEBRUARY 28**

### **SCRIPTURE**

Jer 18:18-20

Ps 31:5-6, 14, 15-16

Mt 20:17-28

### **REFLECTION**

*But Jesus summoned them and said, "You know that the rulers  
of the Gentiles lord it over them,  
and the great ones make their authority over them felt.  
But it shall not be so among you."*

*Mt 20:25-26*

Jesus always invites us to respond to others with love. Jesus calls his disciples to lead with humble service, rather than commands and authority, which must have been hard for them to comprehend. When I think of people who lovingly serve others, those who come to mind are steady, reliable, and joyful people; their spirit is contagious! They inspire us with their open hearts and steadfast commitment to heal the wounds of our earth and all its dear neighbors, whether those wounds are caused by loss, war, famine, injustice, sickness, displacement, poverty, waste, greed, or political turmoil. No doubt, the needs of our world can be overwhelming, and no one person can solve all its problems; however, each of us is able to do something to alleviate suffering. When we remember God's kindness and choose to trust Jesus, we, too, may respond with love and generosity of spirit. In doing so, we become hope, courage, and inspiration for one another.

### **PRAYER**

Jesus, bless us with the humility to serve others,  
bringing comfort to those who mourn,  
peace to those who struggle, and loving care for our earth  
and all its dear neighbors.

Make us aware of the needs of others and help us  
respond to them with care and compassion.

### **PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

Pray for grace to respond to some small need in your family,  
community, or world each day.

*Barbara Szulc, CSJ Associate  
Western Springs, IL*

## THURSDAY - FEBRUARY 29

### SCRIPTURE

Jer 17: 5-10

Ps 1:1-4,6

Lk 16: 19-31

### REFLECTION

*"Blessed is the one who trusts in God, whose hope is in God."*

*Jer. 17:7*

I was with a young man recently, whom I did not recognize. Hearing his name, I remembered meeting him and recalled that we had interacted at two previous events. I was embarrassed, ashamed really, that I failed to **see** him on those occasions. As I looked at him again, I asked myself how I could not have noticed his beautiful face, his youthful energy, his engaging smile. This experience comes back to me as I reflect on Lazarus and the rich man. The sin of the rich man was not having an abundance of riches, but how he allowed his self-indulgent lifestyle to make him unable to see Lazarus at his gate every day.

In preparing this reflection I found many commentaries on heaven and hell and the sinfulness of riches. But perhaps Jesus' real message is for us to open our eyes more fully to see the Dear Neighbor in need - in our household, in encounters along the way, in the environment. Perhaps Jesus wants us to see that we live in a time of grace with abundant opportunities for new beginnings.

### PRAYER

Jesus, you call us to truly see the Dear Neighbor in every encounter. Open our eyes, our minds, and our hearts so that we may be ever more faithful to this call.

### PERSONAL CHALLENGE

What in my life – attitudes, thoughts, judgments, preoccupations – makes it harder to really see those around me?

*Janet Fleischhacker, CSJ  
Kalamazoo, MI*

## **FRIDAY - MARCH 1**

### **SCRIPTURE**

Gn 37:3-4, 12-13a, 17b-28a

Ps 105:16-21

Mt 21:33-43, 45-46

### **REFLECTION**

*“But his brothers, seeing how much more his father loved him than all his other sons, came to hate him so much that they could not say a civil word to him. “*

*Gn 37:4*

How many families have experienced deep and sometimes long-lasting jealousy that has torn them apart? It may boil over when a parent dies, resulting in an ugly inheritance battle. My sibling told me decades later that growing up, she felt she could never match up to me as the firstborn, based on her perception of parental preferential love and attention. A different relative is still confronting serious sibling rivalry issues at her mother's end of life stage. As a parent I believe that I truly love my three sons equally, which is infinitely. Certainly, God's love is more perfect than our human attempts. God keeps inviting each of us, over and over, despite our inattention or preoccupation. Rather than being jealous of another's blessings, good fortune, or being loved, let me be open to God's love and the love of others and realize that both are far more abundant than we admit.

### **PRAYER**

Holy Spirit, grant me the Wisdom to recognize your unending love showered on me and your world.

Grant me the courage to reach out to those to whom I am tempted to not say a civil word.

### **PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

Am I the one refusing to see how much love is being extended to me today by those of whom I am jealous?

*Tony Bezouska, CSJ Associate  
La Grange, IL*

## **SATURDAY - MARCH 2**

### **SCRIPTURE**

Micah 7:14-15, 18-20

Ps 103:1-4, 9-12

Lk 15:1-3, 11-32

### **REFLECTION**

*“Show us wonderful signs.”*

*Micah 7:15*

Can we even begin to imagine the extravagant love of God? The prophet Micah feels surrounded by violence, evil, corruption, and family discord, and yet chooses to believe that God will heal and save the people. The psalmist tells us that God’s mercy towers above us like the heavens. Can we accept that our God is a God so loving and kind?

When things are not going so well for me, I often recognize how much is my fault and that discourages me from embracing God’s love. Yet, in the Gospel, Jesus’ explanation of who God is goes far beyond the younger brother’s need to make amends and the older brother’s sense of obligation. Neither grasps that they are loved solely because they are so much more than servants – they are beloved family members, and that love reaches across all they may have done or not done. As Micah did, I choose to put my faith and hope in God.

### **PRAYER**

Loving God, help me to join in the feast of love you have prepared for me. Let me find signs of your extravagant love in all the people and events I encounter, regardless of their outcome. Strengthen me in your purpose and desire that I may become your face of love.

### **PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

I will let go of my expectations of what I deserve and embrace what God is offering to me.

*Celeste Cotter, CSJ  
Westchester, IL*

## THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT - MARCH 3

### SCRIPTURE

Ex 20: 1-17

Ps 19: 8-11

1 Cor 1: 22-25

Jn 2: 13-25

### REFLECTION

*“Remember to keep holy the sabbath day. Six days you may labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord, your God.”*

*Ex 20: 8-10*

This is one of only two commandments that do not begin with “You shall not....” And as such, it is often left off our examination of conscience checklist as something we fell short of or someone we offended. Instead of commanding us to refrain from sins of idolatry, stealing, lying, envy, adultery, or stealing, this third commandment tells us do something: remember and make holy. Growing up, there was a definite routine to Sundays. After sleeping in a little later, we got dressed in our “church clothes” and went to Mass. Dinner was a bit more special than the rest of the week and frequently included other relatives around the table. Afternoon outings might include a trip to the cemetery, a visit with family or friends, a ball game, or some other out of the ordinary outing reserved for Sundays. Stores were closed and life’s pace slowed down. Although not necessarily described as “holy,” Sunday was definitely a day of gathering, celebration, remembrance, and rest.

Not coincidentally, the other “You shall” commandment tells us to honor our parents, and it’s interesting that observing the sabbath is so closely related to spending quality time with family. Life is different today, and its pace has quickened. Sundays have frequently become a day to catch up on anything that didn’t get done during the week. The pandemic lockdown had us watching live-streamed Masses and keeping in touch with family via Zoom. Time may be at more of a premium in our busy lives, but we still should be intentional about how we live into the third commandment. And maybe the fourth commandment can be a reminder of how to keep the sabbath holy?

### PRAYER

Loving God, thank you for the gift of life and all that sustains us every day. In the busy-ness of our week, help us to pause, remember, and celebrate your goodness and mercy... recognizing that you are the source of all good things.

### PERSONAL CHALLENGE

On this Sunday, dedicate some time to a person or activity that you name as “holy” ...and thank God for it.

*Jim Boyd, CSJ Associate  
Chicago, IL*

## MONDAY - MARCH 4

### SCRIPTURE

2 Kgs 5:1-15ab  
Ps 42:2, 3; 43: 3-4  
Lk 4: 24-30

### REFLECTION

*"I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand there before me, calling on the name of the Lord, his God, and wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy." 2 Kings 5:11*

*"Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. Please accept a gift from a grateful person." Kings 5: 15*

### REFLECTION

How many times do we have preconceived ideas on how God should answer our prayers? And, just like Naaman we get angry, upset, and mad at God because our prayers were not answered in the way we believe they should have been answered. We want it done and we want it done our way.

After we've had time to think about the situation and reflect on the answer given, we soon realize the way our prayer was answered was exactly what we needed at the time. We still may not like the answer, but it was the answer we needed.

The process we go through is not unlike the grieving process; in fact, it is a different sort of grief. It is a grief of letting go of our own idea and accepting God's answer. The process may look something like: request, answer, anger, questioning, understanding, accepting, then moving on.

### PRAYER

God, give me the insight to recognize when my own ideas are overshadowing the process of allowing you to work in my life.

Give me the strength to let go, no matter the outcome, and become a grateful person just as Naaman was.

### PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Reflect on a time when you made a request during prayer with God. Can you see how God worked in your life and how the answer you received was a blessing in your life at the time?

*Kate Theriot, CSJ Associate  
Houma, LA*

## TUESDAY - MARCH 5

### SCRIPTURE

Dn 3:25, 34-43

Ps 25: 4-9

Mt 18:21-35

### REFLECTION

*“Do not take away your mercy from us.”*

*Dn 3:35*

*“... how often must I forgive...”*

*Mt 18:21*

In the Prayer of Azariah, from the Book of Daniel, Abednego makes a plea as to why God’s mercy should remain in place and not be withheld.

And in Matthew, Peter asks Jesus how often must we forgive?

We have all been in need of mercy and forgiveness many times in our lives. On the flip side of that though, have you ever withheld mercy and forgiveness from anyone? Left in place the pall that covers another’s soul?

As I sit and pray with the words, “how often must I forgive...?” the echo I hear back is, “How big is your love?” Are there opportunities for me to open my heart a little wider and to emulate the empathy and compassion, love, and mercy that we ourselves want and desire from God? After all, if I can’t forgive, why should I expect God/others to forgive me?

I want to free up interior space to both give and receive light. Love can do that!

### PRAYER

Compassionate God,

Just as I desire your mercy and forgiveness, help me to extend those same graces to others, especially those with whom I find it difficult to share. Expand my heart. Increase my love. Remember your mercies, O Lord. Amen.

### PERSONAL CHALLENGE

How big is my love? How might I cultivate mercy and forgiveness with self/others?

*Barb McCartney, CSJ  
Charleston, WV*

## **WEDNESDAY - MARCH 6**

### **SCRIPTURE**

Dt 4:1, 5-9

Ps 147:12-13, 15-16, 19-20

Mt 5:17-19

### **REFLECTION**

*“However, take care and be earnestly on your guard not to forget the things which your own eyes have seen, nor let them slip from your memory as long as you live, but teach them to your children and to your children’s children.”*

*Dt 4: 9*

*“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.”*

*Mt: 5: 17*

When I first read the scriptures for today, I said to myself “Oh no, I have the laws and decrees readings.” As I reflected, I realized this is about much more than laws. Recently, I heard a former law professor speak of teaching law students that the law is the lowest of moral principles. When Jesus said he came not to abolish the law but to fulfill, I think he was speaking to how we have more to consider than the law. Our own eyes have seen how to live a life of love, respect, and care for others. Family, friends, mentors, and others have taught us not only by rules and laws but by example. A friend, Sr. Joyce DeShano, spoke of how she would sit in an airport and watch how others demonstrated love by their behaviors. How and where have your eyes seen how to treat others beyond what is required by the law?

### **PRAYER**

Loving God, you have taught us to follow not only the law, but also to follow the examples in scripture and of others.

Guide us to be our best selves each day of our lives and to pass our values on to the next generation.

### **PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

Take time to observe and to listen to how others love, and do not forget what your own eyes have seen.

Teach your values to the next generation.

*Marie Hogan, CSJ  
Detroit, MI*



## THURSDAY - MARCH 7

### SCRIPTURE

Jer. 7:23-28

Ps 95:1-2, 6-9

Lk 11:14-23

### REFLECTION

*“O that today you would listen to his voice! Do not harden your hearts...”  
Ps. 95:7, 8*

The message of the responsorial psalm indicates that God speaks to us far more than we realize. God wants to communicate with us directly and often. But we can “harden our hearts” through fear, disbelief, over preoccupation with life’s issues, or the future.

God can speak to us anywhere: in Church, at our place of work, in our kitchen, backyard, while out for a walk, gardening, serving the neighbor, and so forth. We are invited to find God everywhere, in all things.

Gratitude, peace, and joy are ways God communicates with us; consolation, too, when we are in a stressful or sorrowful state of mind and heart.

You are holding a baby, who looks at you with total trust, and you feel a deep-down joy. Where does this powerful feeling come from?

You are outside in your backyard. It’s a sunny day and suddenly you are filled with gratitude for just being alive.

You have just lost a dear friend and are deep in grief. During this trial a feeling of consolation overwhelms you.

These are “God moments,” ways that God wants to communicate with us. The invitation to listen to God’s voice may at times surprise us. We need regular quiet time, listening to God, in order to have the strength, courage, and vitality required for social action: for moving against injustices, speaking truth to power, and assisting in humanitarian efforts.

### PRAYER

God, wrap me with your grace this day, so that I may listen to your voice, even in times of challenges and new opportunities.

### PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Take time today to listen to God’s voice, then carry out his invitation for social action.

*Ileana Fernandez, CSJ  
Wheeling, WV*

## **FRIDAY - MARCH 8**

### **SCRIPTURE**

Hos 14:2-10

Ps 81:6c-11b, 14, 17

Mk 12:28-34

### **REFLECTION**

*“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength.*

*The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*

*There is no other commandment greater than these.” Mk 12:30-31*

Love is so much of who we are as the Congregation of the Great Love of God. We are called to love God with all our hearts, with all our souls, with all our minds, and with all our strength and we are called to love our neighbor. To love God with our whole being means to love God with everything that we’ve got. We cannot know how to best love our neighbor without loving God with all that we are. We cannot have one commandment without the other. They must go together. We cannot say “I love God” and then do nothing to help those who are suffering.

We must carry our love of God to the dear neighbor, to see them with the compassionate eyes of God. Our love for God is seen in our love for others.

Is following these two commandments easy? No. Does this mean that we quit trying? No.

We are called to continue to strive to live out these commandments as disciples.

### **PRAYER**

Good and gracious God, help me to love you with my whole heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love the dear neighbor without distinction.

### **PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

Take time to reflect on what loving God and neighbor wholeheartedly look like during the day.

*Tami Schab, CSJ  
Kalamazoo, MI*

## **SATURDAY - MARCH 9**

### **SCRIPTURE**

Hos.6:1-6  
Ps. 51:3-4,18-21  
Lk.18:9-14

### **REFLECTION**

*“As certain as the dawn is God’s coming.  
God will come to us like the rain, like spring rain that waters the earth.”  
Hos.6:3.*

Here I sit on this wintry day looking out at white, whipping around an Earth exposed to cold, frigid temperatures. We’ll soon long for spring after a few months of this foul weather. We think that Earth is at rest, but our human eye cannot see what awaits below her frozen crust.

Spring is coming! This time of waiting gives us pause to admire this current beauty of snow and slush with hope. God is present here. She groans in the wind and prepares for a new beginning of tulips and daffodils and green grasses.

In today’s reading, Hosea shows us this hope in waiting. You are reading this for Saturday, March 9, 2024, as shoots prepare to sprout from a long nap. If you find yourself in the wintertime of your life, look ahead and prepare for what is to come - new life in abundance! The hope is in the waiting, in the anticipation, knowing all will be well, despite what politics and television and naysayers tell us. As certain as the dawn is God’s coming.

### **PRAYER**

God of all-knowing, help me have the awareness to see what is beyond my own eyes and trust you to keep Earth in your presence and care.

### **PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

Bless the Earth today. Go outside if you can.  
Take a deep breath and admire what beauty is unfolding before you. Be present to it.

*Kathy Jeffers, CSJ Associate  
Beaver, PA*

## FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT - MARCH 10

### SCRIPTURE

2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23

Eph 2:4-10

Ps 137: 1-6

Jn 3: 14-21

### REFLECTION

*“For by grace you have been saved. . . and this is not from you; it is the gift of God. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the good works that God has prepared in advance, that we should live in them.” Ephesians 2:8a,10*

#### **You have been saved by grace. . .**

You have God’s life in you.

By God’s grace, you have been lifted into the light of God’s love.

You are a spark of divinity.

#### **This is not from you; it is the gift of God. . .**

You did nothing to deserve this.

This is the first of many gifts God gives you out of boundless love.

You are holy because God is holy.

#### **We are God’s handiwork. . .**

You are unique in all the world.

God loves what God has made.

Those who see clearly, see you as God’s handiwork.

When you see clearly, you see yourself, and all people,

as God’s handiwork.

#### **We are created in Christ Jesus for the good works that God has prepared in advance.**

God has a plan for you as a disciple of Christ Jesus.

*You* are a good work God has prepared in advance.

God will help you do what God has planned for you to do.

Understand that others working near you are also doing God’s work.

Whatever you do, you do in God’s name.

### PRAYER

Creator God, I am the work of your hands. I belong to you.

Take me, use me to bring your love to our world.

I know I do not work alone.

### PERSONAL CHALLENGE

I will walk the world with you, helping to make  
your kin-dom come.

*Jeanne Cmolik, CSJ  
Cleveland, OH*

## **MONDAY - MARCH 11**

### **SCRIPTURE**

Is 65: 17-21

Ps 30: 2-6, 11-13

Jn 4: 43-54

### **REFLECTION**

*“Lo, I am about to create new heavens and a new earth.*

*The things of the past shall not be remembered or come to mind.*

*Instead, there shall always be rejoicing and happiness in what I create.”*

*Is 65:17*

How many of us have been in or witnessed situations that were out of our control? How many of us have been in or witnessed a situation that looks hopeless? In this Old Testament passage, Israel is reminded that God is on the move. Not everything that trouble brings to us is necessarily bad. Trouble can be the very instrument God uses to deepen our trust and faith and bring us to mercy and grace.

Living as people of faith means recognizing the compassion of God when we have been given healing, joy, and freedom; when we have experienced a dramatic change of circumstances or direction of life. That is God acting. Faith is remembering who the hero is of our life story. In today's gospel, Jesus sees the heartache of the father for his dying son and extends the healing compassion of God. As described in the household of the centurion and experienced in our own lives, there is great joy when faith is met with realized hope.

### **PRAYER**

Gracious God, you know the brokenness I experience  
and the desire of my heart.

Guide me to realize your blessing and movement in my day.

Help me to be open to and trustful of your grace.

### **PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

Today, I will listen more deeply and look more closely  
in order to notice how God is working in me, not only for myself  
but also for the dear neighbor.

*Bea Boyd, CSJ Associate  
Chicago, IL*

## **TUESDAY - MARCH 12**

### **SCRIPTURE**

Ez 47: 1-9, 12

Ps 46: 2-3, 5-6, 8-9

Jn 5: 1-16

### **REFLECTION**

*It's the Sabbath. You can't carry your bedroll around. It's against the rules." Jn 5: 10 (The Message)*

What could it have been like to wait helplessly as an invalid for 38 years for a chance to finally be healed? Hard as his plight must have been, today I'm even more taken with Jesus' compassion. Seeing the man and knowing the backstory, Jesus asked him if he wanted to get well, then immediately took action to heal him. "Get up, take your bedroll, start walking." Did Jesus stop to think it was the Sabbath and that he'd face public criticism from the Pharisees? Who knows? But what we do know is that Jesus' compassion trumped the rules of the day, i.e. the many required Sabbath observances. And we have evidence that whenever Jesus was asked: "What's the greatest commandment?" His answer was not to "follow the rules." His answer was "to love." May we take the risk to do likewise as Jesus, Pope Francis and many of our heroes have shown us the way.

### **PRAYER**

God of Healing Love, inspire me to see the invalids,  
migrants and those who are suffering (including Earth),  
to feel compassion and then to take action,  
starting with prayer.

### **PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

To journal about my inclination to close my eyes to the horrible images of suffering and how I will stay open with compassion and action/ prayer.

*Mary Jo Hazard, CSJ Associate  
Naperville, IL*

## **WEDNESDAY - MARCH 13**

### **SCRIPTURE**

Is 49:8-15

Ps 145:8-9, 13c-14, 17-18

Jn 5:17-30

### **REFLECTION**

*“Sing out, O heavens, and rejoice, O earth, break forth into song, you mountains, for the Lord comforts his people and shows mercy to his afflicted.” Is 49:11-12*

Sometimes called the Book of Consolation, Chapters 40-55 of Isaiah exemplify two seemingly contradictory images of God: tender as mother and powerful as one who levels mountains. In this passage, Isaiah paints a vision of what God has in store for us even “on earth as it is in heaven.” This is the Creator’s original hope and one filled with possibilities when we put our hands to the plow, partnering with God to work the field, e.g. our Visionary Directions.

Jesus joins his work to the creative Father’s in total self-emptying desire and compassion. Like Father Medaille and the first women, we too are invited to do “anything of which woman is capable,” willingly embracing God’s dream. With Pope Francis we go to the margins, field hospital that we are. Lent is a time to purify and strengthen our resolve, so that we will live magnanimously, with gratitude and joy for the gift of life and talents we’ve been given.

### **PRAYER**

Jesus, join my life to yours, my thoughts to your thoughts,  
my affections to your affections, my heart to your heart,  
my works to your works, my whole self to yourself,  
in order to become, through this union, more holy  
and more pleasing in the sight of your Father.

*Jean Pierre Medaille, SJ*

### **PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

Today I will reflect on the mystery of God’s motherly tenderness and compassion joining God’s immense power to embody the dream described in Isaiah.

*Cynthia Sabathier, CSJ  
Baton Rouge, LA.*

## THURSDAY - MARCH 14

### SCRIPTURE

Ex. 32: 7-14

Ps. 106: 19-23

Jn 5: 31-47

### REFLECTION

*Ps 106: 44-45*

*“When you heard their cry, you saw they were in distress;  
you remembered your Covenant for their sake.”*

Our world has so much to grieve: the killing of one another, destroying the place we call home,

contributing to a world of power and greed, the brokenness and division on all sides, and the list goes on and on and on. The suffering of people and the suffering of the land is overwhelming.

God mourns with us. “I will weep and wail...” *Jer. 9:10.*

At times I want to hide under the covers, wishing the troubles would subside and go away. I am realizing, more and more, how fragile this life is. If only we would dig deeper for the life buried beneath the winter-wrapped earth and look and listen for signs of hope. Spring is gently calling and reminding us of God’s faithfulness. Eventually something or someone, awakens us to the awareness of God’s promise that our cries are heard, and we are drawn into the loving arms of God once again.

### PRAYER

Open my eyes and heart that I may see the frozen earth gently  
awakening to new life and the promise of hope.

Fill me with a whisper of your presence.

### PERSONAL CHALLENGE

On the days I grow weary and heavy of heart, I will pause  
and remember God’s covenant with me and all creation.

*Jackie Schmitz, CSJ  
Burr Ridge, IL*



## FRIDAY - MARCH 15

### SCRIPTURE

Wis 2:1a, 12-22

Ps 34:17-21, 23

Jn 17:1-2, 10, 25-30

### REFLECTION

*"Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths".*

*Ps 25:4*

*John 17:18-19*

*"In the same way that you gave me a mission in the world,*

*I give them a mission in the world.*

*I'm consecrating myself for their sakes*

*So they'll be truth-consecrated in their mission."*

### REFLECTION

Praying with Jesus' words in John 17 never fails to stir my heart. As a Sister of St. Joseph, I experience from it a felt sense of both the reality and promise of oneness with God as well as the trust and reliance that we, too, are consecrated and called to continue God's mission that all are one in God's all-inclusive love. Just as Jesus came into the world to make a difference and to show us a new way, we embrace our mission of unity, believing that our attitudes and actions can transform the world, one dear neighbor at a time.

Jesus' words are a sending forth, which is very different from simply sending out or sending off. Jesus is not speaking of sending us *out* or *off* to a particular destination. Sending forth begins a journey of fulfillment: a journey of mission that carries the hope and promise of eventual transformation. What a privilege it is to be "truth-consecrated" for mission!

### PRAYER

God of Unifying Love, thank you for the work that is ours to do.  
May we listen closely so as to discern the next best steps in this  
healing and whole-making mission.

May the quality of our presence and actions mirror Jesus  
always and in all ways. Amen

### PERSONAL CHALLENGE

How do I examine the quality of my presence and actions on a  
regular basis?

*Judith Minear, CSJ  
Cleveland, OH*

## **SATURDAY - MARCH 16**

### **SCRIPTURE**

Jer 11:18-20

Ps 7:2-3, 9bc-12

Lk 8:15

Jn 7:40-53

### **REFLECTION**

*“Blessed are they who have kept the word with a generous heart and yield a harvest through perseverance.”*

*Lk 8:15 Verse Before Gospel*

College sports teams begin practicing for the next season a few weeks after their current season ends.

Exercise does not end for those who want to hone their skills to perfection. It is not just a matter of repeating the same exercises, but correcting plays done incorrectly, strengthening skills that are more difficult to master, learning new techniques that will help propel the athlete forward to new heights.

Lent came early and, as spiritual athletes, we were back at our penitential and prayer practices soon after the Christmas season ended. Hopefully, this primed us to go deeper into our spiritual lives. It's been four weeks, so let's take stock. Have we repented of those things that we have been doing incorrectly? Are we strengthening any new spiritual habits we've learned, ensuring that those practices are well established? Have we learned new prayer techniques that might take us deeper? Perseverance pays. It is time to go deeper.

### **PRAYER**

The Lord is my coach! Challenge my reading of the Scriptures so that I am more open to the revolutionary power of Christ's words. Help me persevere in the exercise of my prayer, quiet time, fasting, and almsgiving. Help me enter ever more deeply into union with You, myself, others, and all creation.

### **PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

I will review my Lenten game plan to see what can be cut, what can be strengthened, and how I can go deeper.

*Denise Waytes, CSJ Associate  
Dexter, MI*

## **FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT - MARCH 17**

### **SCRIPTURE**

Jer 31: 31-34

Ps 51: 3-4, 12-15

Heb 5: 7-9

Jn 12: 20-33

### **REFLECTION**

*"I will make a new covenant...I will be their God  
and they shall be my people."*

*Jer 31: 31, 33*

A covenant is holy. It is not simply an agreement or an exchange of goods or a promise to fulfill a pledged obligation. Rather, it is an interior gifting of one to another, a promise of fidelity to reverently receive the other and, in turn, to fully offer oneself. The covenant vowed in Jeremiah is especially sacred because it bonds us with God. It is astonishing that God, the Holy One, would so deliberately and explicitly enter into such a covenant with each of us. We would not dare to imagine such a reality except for the fact that it is God's Own Self who initiates and fulfills the covenant.

God's covenant is made visible in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. "The grain of wheat that falls to the ground and dies and produces much fruit." Jesus yields himself completely to us with His Divine hope we will completely yield ourselves to Him. As with Jesus, this covenant is not fulfilled with a promise in words, but by the daily receiving of God and giving of ourselves to God. What is of essence is to be seized by God's unyielding fidelity to us.

### **PRAYER**

Place, O God, your law of love within me  
and write it upon my heart.

Let nothing less than you be my God,  
and let me completely belong to you.

### **PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

In my examine today, I reflect on and thank God  
for God's fidelity to me and my fidelity to God.

*Marcella Clancy, CSJ  
Detroit, MI*

## MONDAY - MARCH 18

### SCRIPTURE

Dn 13:41c-62

Ps 23:1-6

John 8:1-11

### REFLECTION

*“Only goodness and kindness follow me all the days of my life.”*

*Ps 23:6*

When Jesus went to the temple to teach, Scribes and Pharisees brought a woman forward and accused her of adultery. This Gospel about the adulterous woman helps me think about why I am **not** to judge others. I do not know what they personally are struggling with in their lives. I do not know what hardships that they meet daily. Each one of us has struggles, hardships, and even some failures.

However, in spite of the accusations made about the woman brought before him, Jesus forgives her. That is the lesson of this Gospel message: forgive without judgment.

When we forgive, we are letting go of grudges, judgment, pain, and hurt. This is what the Holy One teaches us by example.

In her book, The Power of Forgiveness, Emily J. Hooks tells us:

“The forgiveness process is about releasing hurt feelings in exchange for compassion and empathy. Love is the ultimate actor. As Jesus said, Love heals all wounds.” P. 7

As Jesus taught us by forgiving the woman, we are called to BE compassion and empathy toward others without exception.

### PRAYER

O Holy One, help us follow your example of unconditional love by being non-judgmental and forgiving towards others.

### PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Today, instead of judging others, I will forgive because I do not know the burden that they are carrying.

*Joellen Sbrissa, CSJ  
La Grange Park, IL*

**TUESDAY - MARCH 19**  
**SOLEMNITY OF ST. JOSEPH**

**SCRIPTURE**

2 Sam 7:4-5a, 12-14a, 19:2-5, 27, 29  
Rom 4:13, 16-18, 22  
Mt 1:16; 18-21, 24

**REFLECTION**

*“He believed, hoping against hope...”*

*Rom 4:18a*

*“Joseph, do not be afraid...”*

*Mt 1:20*

I love the sculpture titled *Joseph on the Journey* (Mary Southard, CSJ) that stands life-sized on the grounds of several CSSJ centers, and also in miniature on my bookshelf. Depicted in mid-stride, Joseph walks tall: a light traveling bag slung on his shoulder, his eyes intent on what’s ahead. He seems confident, but wait...one cannot tell what’s going on behind his eyes. Only that he’s taking the next step.

I was reflecting on all of this when I gazed over to an array of mementos on another shelf and fixed on a gift from Mom: my baby shoes. I’d learned to walk in them, she’d told me. Their scuffs and wear hint of a story of both missteps and persistence.

Today we are more than mid-way through our Lenten journeys, and—many of us can surely say—our *life* journeys as well. Perhaps we recall too readily our stumbles and falls. Let’s focus instead on how we’re *still* learning to walk with a steady gait, which simply entails taking one step at a time. As we go, may we hope against hope in our tender companion, God, whoever whispers in our hearts, “ *Do not be afraid...believe!*”

**PRAYER**

I am with you on the journey, and I will never leave you.

I am with you on the journey, always with you.

(Sung prayer mantra, Kathy Sherman, CSJ)

**PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

Choose a piece of art on your wall or a memento on your shelf, and deepen your appreciation for why you keep it before your eyes.

*Mary Jo Curtsinger, CSJ*  
*Chicago, IL*

## **WEDNESDAY - MARCH 20**

### **SCRIPTURE**

Dn 3:14-20, 91-92, 95

Dn 3:52-56

Jn 8:31-42

### **REFLECTION**

*“If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”. Jn 8:31-32*

During this holy season of Lent we are training ourselves to stay close to Jesus and overcome anything that might distract us from Him. In the Book of Daniel, we meet three of God’s most devoted disciples who have the courage to die for their faith. Because of this, God sends an angel who comforts and encourages them in the fiery furnace. In the Gospel Jesus speaks with His Jewish brothers and sisters, who argue with Him. They cannot accept that He is the Messiah. We all seek to be as courageous and faithful as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, but we probably have more in common with Jesus’ Jewish followers, who struggled with His Gospel message of forgiveness. This is the perfect time to pause and review what challenges us the most in our faith. How can we become more self-emptying and bold? Do we have the courage to walk into the furnace with Christ?

### **PRAYER**

Christ, Teacher and Friend, we turn to you in this time of Lenten retreat. We seek to remain in You, and to know the truth in every aspect of our lives. Help us to recognize how sin has enslaved us. And lead us to true freedom. Amen.

### **PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

I will identify the aspect(s) of the Gospel that are the most challenging for me and I will talk with Jesus about it.

*Megan Mio, CSJ Associate  
Chicago, IL*

## THURSDAY - MARCH 21

### SCRIPTURE

Gn 17:3-9

Ps 105:4-9

Jn 8:51-59

### REFLECTION

*"I AM"*

*Jn 8: 58*

This chapter from the book of John covers several days and occurs in the Temple area. The chapter begins and ends with the possibility of "a stoning," a call to impose a death penalty. The chapter contains three encounters and a repeated revelation. First, an encounter with mercy. Next, an encounter with the "Light of World who invites us to be a *Light of Life*." Three times in this chapter Jesus reveals his very self in proclaiming, "I AM!"

In the third encounter Jesus invites those gathered to hear God's voice, to open to the truth, and they shall never see death. Our first reading reminds us of Abraham's belief, his encounter with the Divine. Yet, those who are present in the Temple area encounter the Divine and their hearts are closed. They are bound to earthly knowledge, earthly recognition. They cannot hear God's word; they cannot see God's love.

### PRAYER

God the Almighty,  
And Light of Life,  
You have promised us Eternal Life.  
Help me to hear and keep your Word,  
And to rejoice in You, the great I AM!

### PERSONAL CHALLENGE

How might I be a "light of life" and address our continued use of death penalties? How might I befriend a condemned prisoner, an unhoused person, a refugee, the Pope, a governor, legislator, activist, the Earth.

*Pat Warbritton, CSJ  
Kalamazoo, MI*

## FRIDAY - MARCH 22

### SCRIPTURE

Jer 20:10-13

Ps 18:2-7

Jn 10:31-42

### REFLECTION

*"We are not stoning you for a good work but for blasphemy."  
Jn 10:33*

*Good works* = healing, feeding, peacemaking, forgiving, expressing compassion and empathy, calling forth Christ within, drawing all into loving union and wholeness and new life.

*Blasphemy* = sacrilege, profanity, irreverence, impiety, desecration, defilement.

It seems the Jews are very attached to or stuck in legalistic platitudes and judgments, whereas Jesus, living in full unity and oneness with Divine Love, is about simply good works. Because the Jews have little or no understanding of the Son of God identity that Jesus incarnates, Jesus directs them to believe not him, but to believe instead the works he performs. Jesus knows the good works themselves reveal that he is "in the Father" and "the Father is in" him, which is to say that the works disclose the truth of the mutual Divine Indwelling.

What if we all understood that to be Christian isn't about strict adherence to laws or religious doctrine or narrow scriptural interpretations? To be Christian is to live a life of love doing the good works that magnify Christ.

### PRAYER

Christ of the Cosmos, we know that the one who is violent toward or maliciously dominates any dear neighbor defiles his own human heart. Guide the whole human community into greater awareness and fuller experience of our Child of God identity so that all violence and domination end.

### PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Beware of the temptation to blaspheme; it arises easily.

*Barbara Foreman, CSJ Associate  
La Grange, IL*



## **SATURDAY - MARCH 23**

### **SCRIPTURE**

Ez 37:21-28

Jer 31:10-13

Jn 11:45-56

### **REFLECTION**

*“He prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation,  
and not only for the nation,  
but also to gather into one the dispersed children of God.”  
John 11: 51-52*

“No good deed should go unpunished!” We often hear this said when someone has a difficult experience that seems to result from doing a good deed. Should Jesus get into trouble with the authorities because he did the good deed of raising Lazarus from the dead? Yet that’s what happened. The ruling elite class of the Jewish society was not interested in jeopardizing the favor afforded them by their Roman occupiers, which they could maintain as long as things stayed quiet under oppressive Roman rule. When the members of the Sanhedrin debated what to do about this Jesus and the trouble he seemed to be stirring up, the solution was clear to Caiaphas: take him out! And the life of Jesus could now be traded for thirty pieces of silver! “For which of these (good deeds) do you intend to stone me?”

Though Caiaphas was motivated strictly by self-interest, it is ironic that to get Jesus out of the way, he unintentionally proclaimed Jesus’ mission of Unifying Love with great accuracy. Jesus is Love poured out in complete self-emptying, so that all Humanity and all Creation may be gathered into the one Love, which is God.

### **PRAYER**

Jesus, during these Holy Days, I ask that I may accompany you with great love as you give yourself to us and for us.

### **PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

I will enter into the Heart of God which longs to gather all Humanity and all Creation into this one Love. I will invite God into my heart so that I may live and work that God’s dream “that all may be one” may come to be.

*Sue Torgersen, CSJ  
Cottage Grove MN*

## **PALM SUNDAY - MARCH 24**

### **SCRIPTURE**

Mark 11:1-10 or John 12:12-16

Isaiah 50: 4-7

Psalm 22: 8-9, 17-20, 23-24

Phil 2: 4-11

Mark 14:1 – 15:47

### **REFLECTION**

*“Rather, he emptied himself...” (Philippians 2:7)*

One of the key themes of Palm-Passion Sunday is how different the power of God’s love is from worldly power, which is anxious for its own self-preservation. We see how the cheering crowds turn on Jesus—a reminder of the fleetingness of power based on popularity—as well as how the chief priests, Pilate, and even the disciples anxiously grasp for power and control through falsehood, manipulation, and violence. In contrast, Christ reveals the heart of God by freely laying aside the status that was rightfully his to enter the human condition. The Passion definitively shows how God’s power is not seen in conquest and domination, but rather in the freedom of self-emptying love.

Today (March 24) also invites us to remember the witness of Saint Oscar Romero, who did not regard power and privilege as something to be grasped, but rather chose to stand in solidarity with the poor, even if it cost him his life.

### **PRAYER**

God, help me to trust in the power of your love  
when I am tempted to grasp for control and privilege.

### **PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

Take a few moments to reflect on how the drama of American electoral politics has been affecting you this month. In this season when the desire for power over others is present all around us, how can you be a witness to the power of self-emptying love?

*Jessica Wroblewski, CSJ Associate  
Cleveland, OH*

## MONDAY OF HOLY WEEK - MARCH 25

### SCRIPTURE

Is 42:1-7

Ps 27:1-3,13-14

Jn 12:1-12

### REFLECTION

*“Here is my servant whom I uphold,  
my chosen one in who my soul delights.  
I have endowed you with my spirit that you may  
bring true justice to the nation.”*

*Is. 42: 1-2*

This Holy Week, listen to the call to live in the heart of the mystery of how God chooses to become one with us. Who is the one in whom God delights? Yes, the writer intends we know that God delights in Jesus, his beloved son. Yet is God also delighting in YOU? Do you recognize how you are known, chosen, loved, and enough? Trusting that God delights in YOU opens your soul to create new ways to make our world a more compassionate, caring, loving, and just place for all. Consider giving birth to a deeper understanding of those who suffer: migrants, victims of all forms of violence and, yes, our earth. As you painfully acknowledge the many divisions in our world and your deep concern for our earth, this Holy Week how will you show up? Can you, like Jesus, choose to heal our broken world through your compassionate and unifying loving?

### PRAYER

God of unifying love, thank your for delighting in me. As I embrace the call to “the MORE,” continue to impel me to be a person with a heart of justice and love who risks relationships so that all may be one.

### PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Choose to focus on healing our broken world through personal prayer, building relationships with the marginalized people of your city/neighborhood/family and through other choices that create a more unified, loving, and just world.

*Linda Bronersky, CSJ Associate  
Bollingbrook, IL*

## TUESDAY OF HOLY WEEK - MARCH 26

### SCRIPTURE

Is 49:1-6

Ps 71:1-6, 15-17

Jn 13:21-33, 36-38

### REFLECTION

*"I say to you, one of you will betray me...  
the one to whom I hand the morsel"*

*Jn 13:21, 26*

The disciples look incredulous. Simon Peter nods; the beloved leans against Jesus, asking a question. Jesus offers the morsel and Judas accepts. Intrigued by these dynamics, I try to fathom the mystery. Is Jesus' action both love and accusation? Or simply a continuation of his love, fully knowing that the betrayal is in progress? I imagine that Jesus hands *each* disciple a morsel. Is Simon Peter's "omission" and thrice denial better than Judas' "commission," identifying Jesus to the wrong people? As disciples, we are both betrayer and betrayed. While initially incredulous when wronged, we may acknowledge the betrayal and continue to love the other. When we have betrayed ourselves or harmed another, we may cry out, "depart from me, for I am a sinful person" (Lk 5:8) and feel tempted to despair. But God's love continues. No matter how small the morsel, we confess, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." (Jn 21:15).

### PRAYER

O God, thank you for your love that "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things [and] never fails" (1 Cor 13:7-8a). Grace me with vision to see opportunities where I may offer nourishment and love to myself, my neighbor, and our world, O Lord my God. Amen.

### PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Today, I will see opportunities to practice love and graciousness.

*Theresa Pitruzzello, CSJ  
New Orleans, LA*

## WEDNESDAY OF HOLY WEEK - MARCH 27

### SCRIPTURE

Is 50:4-9

Ps 69:8-10, 21-22, 31, 33-34

Mt 26:14-25

### REFLECTION

*"[God] has taught me so I speak as his disciple and I know how to sustain the weary. Morning after morning [God] wakes me...to hear, to listen like a disciple. [God] comes to my help. ...I will not be disgraced." Ps 50: 4, 7*

*"While they were eating, Jesus said, 'Truly, I say to you: one of you will betray me.'" Mt 26:21 (Christian Community Bible)*

If I read Matthew before Isaiah, I could suppose that Jesus learned to be a disciple of God from God who sustains the weary, who will not be disgraced even when facing betrayal and brutality. When reading Isaiah first I get the sense that the prophet is speaking to himself as well as to others. Or maybe he is speaking to the Prophet who will come 700 years in the future, even as far into the future as beyond ours. I read in a commentary once that "the prophet speaking here appears less like a prophet and more like a sage, a faithful disciple of Yahweh." Jesus spoke in the language of the prophets and would arrange options in a schematic form as they did?

We can ask ourselves if we can relate to God waking us each morning to listen like a disciple, knowing that with God's presence and help we will not be disgraced. Some days may be filled with drama or dismissal of our person, distress, or even betrayal. On those days, listen harder as a disciple to moments of thankfulness, rich relationships, and, perhaps, some sage understanding.

### PRAYER

Generous and Loving God, you wake us each morning  
to a new day in discipleship.

You are always near to us in times of personal distress  
and when we tend to others who are weary.

Help us to bring your presence to the suffering  
and the grieving in our midst.

### PERSONAL CHALLENGE

At each day's end I will reflect on my discipleship. I will look for the balance of thankfulness and tending to the weary, including myself.

*Karen Kirby, CSJ  
Cleveland, OH*

## HOLY THURSDAY - MARCH 28

### SCRIPTURE

Ex.12:1-8, 11-14

Ps.116:12-13, 15-16bc, 17-18

I Cor. 11:23-26

Jn. 13: 1-15

### REFLECTION

*"This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."*

*I Cor. 11: 25*

*Took off his outer garment, . . . began to wash his disciples' feet. . ."*

*Jn. 13:4-5*

Don't miss what is happening here! Servants, not lords of the house, wash the feet of a guest as a gesture of hospitality! But look, Jesus, called Lord, removes his outer garment, disclosing the heart of God, bends to wash feet! Lord becomes servant! Jesus undoes the meaning of the words, overturns a world held in place by the temple of domination and separation—this temple that is destroying the planet and all creation of God! Jesus is welcoming disciples into the house of God (Love). No servants, lords, or privilege here. All are friends who live in one another (as Jesus lives in God and God in Jesus). In the house of God (Love) all say, "This is my life, my body, my soul given to nourish you that you may live more fully. Take. Eat. Drink. Become one with me." We (every living being) must give ourselves to one another. Must dwell in. This washes the world of sin! "Do This. Remember Me!"

### PRAYER

Poured-out Love, awaken us to privileges of race, species, gender, sexual orientation. . .

Pour us out—bodies, souls, lives so that all called "other" flourish.

Lead us deeply into this Passover from the world of privilege, domination, and separation to your Dwelling Place.

In this Communion of Love all gifts are celebrated, given, and received. You Are Re-membered!

### PERSONAL CHALLENGE

When did I experience the communion of Love today?  
How is my life being summoned for the flourishing of Love tomorrow?

*Pat Bergen, CSJ  
Westchester, IL*

## GOOD FRIDAY - MARCH 29

### SCRIPTURE

Is 52:13-53:12

Ps 31:2, 6, 12-13, 15-16, 17, 25

Heb 4:14-16; 5: 7-9

Jn 18:1-19: 42

### REFLECTION

*"...so shall he startle many nations, because of him  
kings shall stand speechless."*

*Isaiah 53:15*

Good Friday is simultaneously the most painful and most powerful celebration in our Church year. As we accompany Jesus, we struggle to understand the mystery of suffering -- especially innocent suffering such as his. Many explanations have been offered for why Jesus had to suffer. One of the most insidious is that somehow God willed Jesus' crucifixion to make up for our sins. While Jesus' death did overcome the sin (singular, not plural) of the world, it was not because God willed or caused it. Human beings caused it. Specifically, in the first century (as today), religious and political leaders used violence to preserve their own power.

Johannine scholar Sandra Schneiders, IHM puts it this way: "The crucifixion was a classic case of scapegoating, and Jesus is the paradigmatic scapegoat who enters freely into the dynamic in order to subvert it at its root and definitively conquer the Ruler of this world [Satan] on his own [violent] turf..." In this way Jesus exposed "the futility of this strategy [violence] for self-salvation." God's role was "to accompany Jesus in his self-giving and, by raising him to life, giving him back to those who killed him." Thus, Schneiders concludes, God's love "cannot be neutralized nor abrogated by our violence. Murder is our work from which *this* murder will finally free us."

### PRAYER

Jesus, help me notice the violence in my own heart and deepen my acceptance of your unconditional love.

### PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Today I will visit [paxchristiusa.org](http://paxchristiusa.org) and consider strategies for subverting violence as a means of resolving conflict.

*Christine Schenk, CSJ  
Cleveland, OH*

## **HOLY SATURDAY - EASTER VIGIL - MARCH 30**

### **SCRIPTURE**

*God said, "Let there be light, and there was light." Genesis 1:3*

### **REFLECTION**

At the Passover ritual to this very day, the youngest child asks the question: "Why is this night different from every other night?" At the Easter Vigil, we too might ask: "Why is this night different from every other night?"

The Exsultet near the beginning of the dramatic ritual gives an answer: "This night shall be as bright as day and full of gladness... Christ coming back from death's domain has shed his peaceful light on humanity and lives and reigns forever." Yes, this is what we celebrate.

But the night of the Easter Vigil certainly is different! It is an ancient ritual, to which we are unaccustomed in our culture. It is full of words and symbols that seem foreign to us; and the very length of the ritual is difficult for us in our fast-paced world where almost everything shorter is better. Let's try to understand and to pray:

The service of light, in which a "blazing fire" represents the light of Christ, which is sung and gives light to all in the candles we each hold. It is stunning in a darkened Church. The Liturgy of the Word begins with SEVEN (count them, seven) readings recounting the creation and saving actions of God. Then, the Gloria erupts as a shout of great joy. After the Gospel of the Resurrection, the liturgy of Baptism takes place, when we remember the grace of our own. We then continue with the Liturgy of the Eucharist, which is much more familiar to us.

Let us not be bothered by the "difference" in the ritual of this night, but enjoy and savor every bit of it. For our Christ is risen from the dead, and so are we, and so are we. ALLELUIA!

### **PRAYER**

Our hearts are filled with joy, oh God, as we celebrate this greatest and most important feast of the year. For we believe that Christ is risen and that he will raise us up on the last day, too.

### **CHALLENGE**

Let us set our minds and hearts to ENJOY the Easter Vigil, and its celebration so different from what we do each Sunday of the year.

*Sallie Latkovich, CSJ  
Ft. Myers, FL*



## **MASS OF EASTER DAY - SUNDAY - MARCH 31**

### **SCRIPTURE**

Acts 10: 34a,37-43  
Ps. 118: 1,2, 16-17 22-23  
Cor. 5: 6-8  
John 20: 1-9

### **REFLECTION**

*"We are witnesses of all that he did...he commissioned us  
to preach to the people..."  
Acts 10; 39,42*

Today we are invited to shout a confident ALLELUIA. The readings are both the glorious announcement of a promise fulfilled and a challenging mandate. CHRIST IS RISEN! Like those faithful friends who went to the tomb early on Easter morning, we realize that life will never be the same.

I wonder about the range of emotions those closest to Jesus must have experienced in the days between the Crucifixion and that glorious Sunday morning. Some had betrayed their friend, some stood despondent under the cross, helpless to do anything to alleviate the gross injustice that brought him to that day. All of his most faithful followers must have been so deeply disappointed...where was the Kingdom they thought would be theirs? And now they come to an empty tomb!

As today's readings indicate, they were both excited and fearful. Later the Risen One suggests: "You have seen me rise from the dead. You too will have new life...But in the meantime, you need to imitate what I did. Preach my word, take care of those who are in need, Believe!"

The Easter Alleluia is a call to celebrate the fulfillment of a promise and also a challenge to reflect the life that the Risen One models. Resurrection is not a "won and done" time event. It is an awareness that the message of Christ mandates that we try to live as he did. The empty tomb compels us to nothing less.

### **PRAYER**

God of promise and possibility, as I celebrate the joy of Easter, may I also realize that there is much yet to be done in a world in need of hope and healing. May I be encouraged by this Easter celebration and try to do my part to live as you lived, always attentive and willing to respond to the needs of others.

### **PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

I will take a few minutes at the end of the day to remember both the joy of Easter and the ways I am challenged to live in that joy.

*Jean McGrath, CSJ  
Chicago, IL*







1515 W. Ogden Avenue  
La Grange Park, IL, 60526-1721