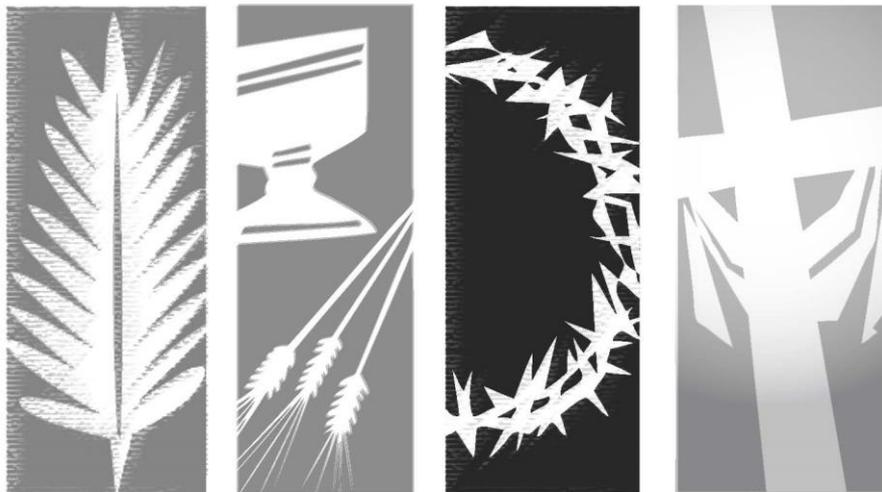


# A LENTEN JOURNEY



A Christian Pilgrimage toward New Life

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The season of Lent is marked by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's holy Word. Lent is a Teutonic word simply meaning the spring season. So, it is about life, new life about to spring forth. Thus, it is appropriate that the catechumens are instructed for Baptism and the Penitents are prepared to be reconciled again to God and the Christian community. It's a spiritual pilgrimage of rebirth to new life.

To be born again is to be born into the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God in this sense is not a system of belief and doctrine or a religious institution, but a living body of Christ, the manifestation of God's love for all creation. On Easter Vigil the newly baptized and the penitents are joined to the Body of Christ, breathing, in turn, new life into the whole body of the Christian community. So, Lent is the garden that nurtures the Christian soul at its root, and the womb in which the Christian soul is formed to burst forth into new life.

The Lenten discipline is not a mere physical and psychological exercise in self-improvement or self-discovery. Much of what is going on in today's religious and spiritual landscape seems to be nothing more than the cult of the self. The obsession with the search of self and its meaning make a god of the self magnified. Spiritual union with God is an ecstasy of being in love with God. Ecstasy is being out of the self-centred and self-absorbed state.

Obsession with one's own sin and guilt can lead one to spiritual narcissism. That's what happened to Judas Iscariot. Overwhelmed by his sin and guilt, he utterly failed to see the possibility that he could be forgiven. He only needed to repent. His ultimate sin lies in his inability see the God's infinite capacity to forgive, which is far greater than his capacity to sin. He effectively made an idol out of his own sin and guilt. In the end, he chose eternal death rather than eternal life.

One of my favourite sayings of Thomas Merton is "Humility is a virtue not a neurosis." Christians have a way of being neurotic about humility during Lent. It is in the spirit of choosing and celebrating life, which is the most extraordinary gift of God. With such a spirit, the Christian must enter into the Lenten discipline of self-examination, fasting and prayer.

This small collection of Lenten meditations is my humble offering to the members of St. John's Episcopal Church in Huntington for Lent 2011. Each meditation is a reflection on the Gospel lesson for the Eucharist each day. I pray that these meditations will help those on a spiritual pilgrimage of Lenten journey toward the Easter joy of new and risen life in Christ.

Fr. Allen Shin  
Lent 2011

## Ash Wednesday

Matthew 6.1-6, 16-21

“Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them.”

True piety is grounded in spiritual poverty and humility before God. So, Lent begins on Ash Wednesday with a humble reminder of our own mortality before God. “Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return.” The imposition of ashes sanctifies the season of Lent from the rest of the year as a particular time of repentance with the spiritual discipline of self-examination, prayer, fasting and self-denial.

It is a time in which I am called to reflect upon my life, dig deeper into my inner self and face the true self within. I must dare to go down to that inner dark place, my inner spiritual wilderness, where I hide and bury all my secrets, wishing that they would be forgotten or go away. But they never go away. They surface from time to time rather embarrassingly or even return with vengeance at times to take over my whole being. I must deal with them one by one, acknowledging each secret sin and offer them up to God for his forgiveness and mercy. God who sees in secret knows all the secrets buried in that inner spiritual grave. It is here that God is searching me out, for God wants my true self. It is here that I can truly come to know God’s mercy and love. It is here that I can embrace God, whose capacity to forgive is far greater than my capacity to sin.

Thus, the imposition of ashes reminds me of life—the life I have been given to live out but have been avoiding to live faithfully and truthfully. I am the only one who can live out this life and the death I will die is my own death. How do I live this life fully and die a meaningful death? If today were the last and the only day left of my life, how should I live it so that it is full of truth and love, so that it can end with some meaning and dignity? I cannot begin to live this life truthfully until I come to know and embrace my true self. Until then, I will be living a life full of lies and of the false self.

The sign of the cross with ashes reminds me about the life I have been given at baptism in which I was marked with the sign of the cross on my forehead with Holy Oil. I was sanctified as Christ’s own and was given a new life in the love of Christ. This very life I live is the gift I have received in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. “Anyone who saves his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake will save it.” Each moment of this life is the eternal life in Christ.

O God, grant me courage to face the secrets of my true self and embrace my weaknesses. Grant me the knowledge of your love and compassion that I may entrust my life to your loving embrace. Grant me faith in your faithful mercy that I may come to embrace you in truth and honesty. Amen.

## Thursday after Ash Wednesday

Luke 9.22-25

“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.”

Christian discipleship consists of the discipline of self-denial and taking up the cross daily. It is refraining from the narcissistic self-indulgence and from feeding the superficial false ego to self-destruction. It is rather embracing my true self, the true image of God reflected in the depth of my soul. It's a daily journey of self-discovery as a child of God and a daily walk toward a spiritual union with God.

In his novel, *Narcissus and Goldmund*, Herman Hesse juxtaposes the two paths of self-discovery—one of inner search and the other of outer experience. One is not better or more valid than the other. They are both necessary paths in life. I cannot just sit and navel-gaze all the time, or continue experiencing life without ever examining it. “Life unexamined is not worth living,” said Socrates. How to do both in a way that each path enriches and benefits the other is the challenge.

Self-denial is not making myself miserable or hating myself for my weaknesses and faults. The Christian discipline of self-denial must be practiced out of love—my love for my true self, my love for those I claim to love, my love for humanity, and my love for Jesus. This calls into question the love I claim to have.

How much do I really love? Enough to give up my life for my wife? For my parents? For my brother? For my parishioners? For the homeless man I occasionally talk to in the street? Do I love Jesus enough to give up my life for him? Do I love myself enough to face the truth within, to let the false self die and to embrace the true self? Or is it all just hypocrisy in the end, mindlessly going along with whatever is convenient at the time and pretending to be a good person and a good Christian?

What is the cross I need to take up? The cross of Christ symbolizes his Passion, his love for his Father and for the world. It is not all negative and burdensome, but positive and life-giving. The word “passion” means suffering. If I love passionately, I must accept gladly the suffering that comes with it for love and out of love. Ultimately, it is about life, a new birth. The cross I must take up is love, my love for God and for neighbor. It takes spiritual courage to take the cross of love daily.

Grant me, O God, the understanding of true love and the courage to engage in that love in all that I do in life. Guide me to truly understand the sacrificial love of Christ for all humanity, to understand what it means that Jesus died on the Cross for my and the world's salvation. Lead me to live the life that reflects the love of Christ. Amen.

## Friday after Ash Wednesday

Matthew 9.14-15

“The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.”

Fasting is recognized in many religions as a spiritual purification before some major ritual or event. In Judaism it is common to fast around Yom Kippur (the day of atonement) or Tisha B'Av (the day of remembering the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem). Muslims fast during Ramadan, leading to the day commemorating Allah's revelation of Qu'ran to Muhammed. In Buddhism, fasting is the first discipline of self-control and is often practiced before a long retreat. Christians fast during Lent in preparation for Easter celebration.

For Christians, fasting is also an act of charity, done out of love for Christ. Embedded in today's gospel passage is Jesus' prophecy of his own death—the bridegroom being taken away. His disciples will, then, fast out of their love for Jesus. Fasting for Christians is the cross they should take up daily as an act of charity—love for Christ, love for self, for neighbor, for humanity. When fasting involves one's whole being in such spiritual wholeness and depth, it can truly be cleansing and renewing.

The Lenten discipline of fasting can be a tricky exercise of self-denial. It should not be a mere self-gratifying exercise. Fasting should be a spiritual discipline that unites the body and the spirit into a whole new person. The Christian is justified before God by faith, not by what the Christian has fulfilled as an obligation. So, for fasting to be an act of faith and not merely works, its focus must be holistic, keeping the physical and the spiritual aspects of one's being together.

Fasting is saying no to things that get in the way of spiritual growth. My days get easily cluttered with things which keep me so busy that I have no time for God and for my loved ones. A calendar filled with things every minute and hour gives me a false sense of self-importance and achievement. It just feeds the false ego. I should learn to fast from the busy-ness of daily life and allow time for contemplative silence in which I can hear the inner voice of God.

Fasting is also saying yes—yes to God's love and mercy, yes to quality time with God and with others. I must say yes to prayer. I must enter into the presence of God in contemplation and let his grace wash over me so that I may be cleansed and purified by his grace, that I may live.

O God, accept my sacrifice of self-denial during this Lent and increase within me the love I have for you and for those I am called to serve. Do not let me be weighed down with the false ego and self-conscious piety. Rather, lift me up with the Cross of your love and compassion that I may learn the same humility of your blessed Son. Amen.

## Saturday after Ash Wednesday

Luke 5.27-32

“Those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

In this story, two groups of people are invited to dine with Jesus: the tax collectors along with those whom the religious legal system has judged to be “sinners”, and the Pharisees and the Scribes who have been deemed to be “righteous” by the same religious legal system. So, we have one group of people who know that they are “sinners” and are thus happy and perhaps even overwhelmed to be invited to dine with Jesus, and the other group who have no idea that they, too, are sinners in Jesus’ eyes and are not happy to be invited to the same banquet with the “sinners.” But, before God they are all sinners in need of a physician and in need of repentance. So, Jesus’ answer applies to both groups of people.

There is something rather subversive about Jesus’ action and reply in this story. The line between the “sinner” and the “righteous” is blurred and thus becomes artificial. Jesus’ words are challenging to the religious legal system which has created these two classes of people. In fact, the religious system has become somewhat of a moot point, for both groups of people are sinners and are in need of the same grace and the same salvation from God. The Law is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, in the subversive justice of his crucifixion and resurrection. We are no longer justified under the Law but under the Cross of the crucified Christ.

There is in me a bit of both the tax-collector and the Pharisee. I am conscious of my sinfulness and know that I am in need of Christ’s salvific grace. However, I don’t think of myself on the same plane as such sinners as murderers or thieves or drug addicts. I would like to think I deserve a better or at least a less harsh treatment than they might receive.

But that’s not how God’s salvation is worked out in Jesus Christ. Everyone is invited to Jesus’ banquet, both the self-aware and the self-righteous sinners. They all need and receive the exact same grace from God, and it comes in immeasurable and infinite abundance. All I have to do is to acknowledge my sinfulness and repent, turn my life around, and receive God’s mercy and the forgiveness of his self-giving love. All I have to do is simply show up. It’s as simple as that and as difficult as that.

Lord Jesus, restore my inner vision to see the sins I have committed, teach me humility to acknowledge those sins and grant me the joy of coming to your banquet to receive your loving grace. I ask this for your love’s sake. Amen.

## First Sunday in Lent

Mark 1.9-15

“You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

The Church Fathers grappled with the question of why Jesus the Son of God needed to be baptized and then to experience temptations. The answer on which most of them settled was essentially the Incarnation. Jesus was fully human and lived a human life just like all of us, and Jesus’ human nature—his earthly life and experience—is assumed by his divine nature and thus redeemed. “That which is not assumed cannot be redeemed,” said Basil of Caesarea, a fourth-century Church Father from Cappadocia in today’s Turkey.

The Spirit that Jesus received at baptism was none other than the divine love of God, for he was called “the Beloved” by God the Father. This self-realization as “God’s Beloved” was the defining moment for Jesus, for he was empowered by the Holy Spirit from this experience and was led into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. It equipped him, further, to carry out his earthly ministry.

In his temptations in the wilderness Jesus handed himself over to God’s will and be tempered by his love, which became deeply embodied in Jesus in the process. This embodiment of the divine love in Jesus was expressed in his absolute confidence and trust in his Father’s love during the temptations, during his earthly ministry and in his Passion. Out of the power and the authority of God’s love, Jesus began proclaiming the Good News of God’s kingdom.

The Christian vocation follows the same pattern. At baptism the same Spirit of God sanctifies the Christian to the body of Christ, and the same divine love is embodied in the Christian. We are all God’s beloved children. My capacity to love others begins with my acceptance of God’s generous love for me. Baptism sends the Christian back into the same life, which now looks uneasily like wilderness.

This sense of unease with the world after baptism is aptly captured in the last stanza of T. S. Eliot’s poem, *Journey of the Magi*:

We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,  
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,  
With an alien people clutching their gods.  
I should be glad of another death.

As the baptized, as the beloved of God, the challenge in my life is to learn to have deeper trust and confidence in the love of God. Lent is the wilderness space in time, set apart to teach me to trust God’s love once again and to hand myself over to be assumed and consumed by his love, for that is my only hope of redemption.

Temper me, O God, with your love that I may learn to trust your love once again. Help my unbelief that I may believe and be healed by your love. Amen.

## Monday of the First Sunday in Lent

Matthew 25.31-46

“Just as you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me.”

This is the last of Jesus’ many teachings in Matthew before his Passion. “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me” (vv. 35-36). When he equates serving the stranger, the poor and the prisoner with serving him, Jesus is identifying himself with the poor, the underprivileged and the oppressed.

When I used to work in Times Square, a homeless person would occasionally come to the church where I worked asking for help. I used to give them a dollar or two. Soon I noticed several coming in daily. The word must have been out on the streets: “There is a sucker priest who gives out money every time you ask.” I had to harden my heart and refuse.

Once a man came in and told me a thirty-minute sob story of his life, even shedding tears that looked genuine enough. He wanted to go back home south to rebuild his life. So, I gave him enough for his bus fare, no small sum for me. A few days later I saw the same man in Times Square trying the same trick. I was angry with him.

Then, there was a homeless woman who used to come to morning and evening services daily. One day I asked her what her name was. She looked at me somewhat surprised and said, “Do you really want to know?” I said, “Yes, of course.” She said, “My name is Kidush.” I said, “Oh, what a beautiful name. What does that mean?” She said again, “Do you really want to know?” I said, “Yes, of course.” She replied, “It means ‘holy’ in Coptic. My father gave me that name. I love coming to this church. It reminds me of home.” I found myself speechless. The strange thing is that I never saw her again after that day.

Perhaps we have the poor, the sick, and the less fortunate around us to teach us to love as Christ has loved us. The Baptismal Covenant calls me to seek and serve Christ in all people and to love my neighbor as myself. But, to seek Christ in the poor, the sick, and the prisoner does not come naturally. If I believe in Christ’s presence in the Eucharist, I must believe in Christ’s presence in fellow human beings. If I can serve Christ in the Eucharist, I must be able to serve Christ in others. If Jesus has so identified himself with the poor and the marginalized of the society, I must seek and serve Christ in them.

Lord Jesus, direct my heart to seek you in others, especially the poor, the homeless, the sick, the stranger, the prisoner . . . those I’d rather avoid. Amen.

## Tuesday in the First Week of Lent

Matthew 6.7-15

“Forgive our debts as we also forgive our debtors.”

While teaching his disciples about practicing their piety secretly and quietly, Jesus here goes on to teach them how to pray. He warns them about being verbose in praying and teaches them a prayer, which we have come to call The Lord’s Prayer. At the end of this, Jesus slips in a short discourse about forgiveness. It’s as if he wants to emphasize the part about forgiveness in the Prayer.

Forgiveness is an important element in prayer as Jesus indicates in this passage. Salvation in Scripture is often described as forgiveness of sins: “To give his people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins” (Luke 1.77), for instance. Prayer, then, is an essential spiritual discipline for forgiveness—both to be forgiven and to forgive. Prayer is coming before God “with open hands,” as the spiritual writer, Henri Nouwen, has described.

To be truly forgiven, I must take the risk of being vulnerable and trust the mercy of the other. To truly forgive, I must accept the other’s honesty and vulnerability and reciprocate the same in being merciful. But, sometimes forgiveness is too difficult or impossible by human efforts alone. The wounds are too great and too deep to be healed by mere words, “I am sorry,” or “I forgive you.” Some wounds perhaps can never heal in this life time.

A spiritual cleansing is necessary to lead the person who has suffered such wounds to forgiveness and to an approximate state of peace. This calls for learning to let go—letting go of the anger, the pain, and the deep-seated grievances. God yearns to touch and heal the deep inner wounds and to embrace and ease the pain. But, I must meet him there in the inner place of pain with an intentional and honest engagement with the dark truth buried within.

It is in these situations that prayer is most helpful. In prayer I can be honest with myself and be truthful and vulnerable before God who searches me out in depth of my heart. It is then I can be healed of my wounds, eased of my pain and learn to let go of the burden that weighs me down.

To see myself as forgiven by God, I must first accept God’s mercy so that I can learn to forgive myself and others as the knowledge of God’s mercy deepens within me and as God’s embrace widens to cover all my sins, heal all my wounds and lift me out of the mire. Learn to forgive everyone for everything.

I come to you with open hands, O God. Accept me as I am and be merciful to me as I learn to be merciful to others. Heal my inner wounds and help me let go of the burdens weighing me down that I may have life again. Amen.

## Wednesday in the First Week of Lent

Luke 11.29-32

“See, some thing greater than Jonah is here.”

Jonah was the prophet chosen by God to prophesy to the Ninevites and to call them to repentance. Upon hearing his prophecy they immediately repented, putting on sack-cloth and ashes, fasting and praying. God forgave them and this made Jonah angry. It seemed just too easy from his perspective. He wanted to see them punished for their sins. In his being angry with God, Jonah judged God for God’s easy merciful judgment. Instead, God’s wrath fell on Jonah. The irony of this story is that the prophet Jonah, too, needed to repent and ask for God’s forgiveness. He was in it thick and deep along with the Ninevites. He was in the same boat as they were.

Playing the god of wrathful judgment is easy and even fun at times. Some have equated natural disasters with God’s punishments for a particular group of “sinners,” a prophecy reminiscent of the puritanical dark ages. But, then, much of the global environmental disasters seem to be due to our own collective self-indulgent and wasteful habits. Our sins may be responsible for natural disasters after all. If so, this calls for us all to acknowledge our collective responsibility rather than scapegoating a particular group of people. No matter where one lives, we are all in this together on this earth. Some of my self-indulgent or uncaring habits can hurt my loved one next to me or cause havoc to a stranger thousands of miles away.

Repentance in this context is no longer just a matter of a spiritualized personal challenge but a concrete challenge with tangible and visceral consequences. It involves very real and visceral images of God in fellow human beings, both loved ones and strangers. We need to repent toward each other for our unintended sins which have resulted in grave consequences in this crowded global village.

The judgment of the crucified Christ is mercy and compassion. God does not desire the death of sinners but rather that they repent and be restored to new life. Repentance, thus, is the right response to God’s justice of mercy and compassion, and this makes repentance that much more urgent.

Jonah the prophet and Jesus the Messiah, what different signs they are indeed! There is no greater sign for us than Christ crucified, whose seat of judgment is the Cross and whose outstretched arms are ready to embrace our repentant souls.

Lord Jesus, clothe me in your Spirit of love that I may have the courage to reach out to others in love and embrace them with open hands as you stretched out your arms of love to bring everyone into your healing and saving embrace. Amen.

## Thursday in the First Week of Lent

Matthew 7.7-12

“Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.”

Life should be so easy! What this tantalizing statement doesn't say is ask how and for what, search where and for what, and knock which door. Ask I must till I get an answer only to find myself asking a new question. Search I continue till I come to a place that feels right only to find myself having to search further. Knock I dare and the door opens to something totally unexpected. Life is like that, for God who beckons us is a God of hidden surprises and hidden truth.

In order to ask, I must acknowledge my ignorance and formulate questions. Socrates described wisdom as being aware of not knowing. This awareness of not knowing is a posture of humility and the beginning of a humble quest for truth. In order to search, I must embrace the uncertainty of life and be willing to take the journey toward an unfamiliar territory. This is a temperament of patience and the beginning of spiritual growth toward new horizons in life. In order to knock, I must awaken my curiosity and get close enough to the door. This is an intentional stance of courage and inspires creative imagination for life's mysteries.

Ask, search and knock—they are all one and the same quest for truth, the truth of God's love. Jesus ends this discourse saying, “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him?” In the end, all quests for truth, all journeys to new horizon, and all searches for hidden mystery lead to love, for love is the source, the reason and the goal of all that we do and search for in life. After all is said and done, to know that I am loved and to know that my love is accepted is what makes my life meaningful. And the greatest love of all is the love of God, who is ready and eager to shower his abundant grace upon those who ask, search and knock.

A student begins a true scholar's journey when he or she realizes how much he or she doesn't know rather than how much he or she knows. This is the beginning of the humble journey in search of truth. Fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, the Psalmist said. Humility awakens my senses to be open to truth hidden from my proud heart and gives me courage to continue the daily journey toward the deeper truth of God.

O God, create in me humble wisdom to know that I don't know, awaken in me patient hope to never give up searching, and inspire in me creative courage to ever walk closer to you that your love for me may strengthen and deepen my love for you and for others. Amen.

## Friday in the First Week of Lent

Matthew 5.20-26

“Leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.”

Which is “real” life, the reconciled life of wholeness we hope for, or the unreconciled life of brokenness we are lamentably reduced to? No one would claim that reconciliation is a bad thing. Many, however, would find it difficult and tricky. Sometimes reconciliation is impossible if the other party is not willing, and parting may be a sensible solution for all involved.

The notion of ‘irreconcilable differences’ is a way of rationalizing our failure to reconcile and of comforting ourselves for it. Having failed to find a way toward reconciliation, it’s time to move on we’d say. But, the wounds and scars from brokenness never go away. It’s often the innocent others who must bare the brunt and pay the price of the ‘irreconcilable differences’—the children in failed relations, the innocent victims of wars among nations, the faithful in the pew who just want small reassurances of God’s love from Sunday to Sunday. There is always need and room for reconciliation in our lives.

Reconciliation requires mutual trust and vulnerability. It requires selfless love. If the reconciliation between two individuals is difficult, how much more challenging and complex the reconciliation between nations or religions! We are living with divisions, fragmentations, fractures on just about every level and every front of our lives—personal relationships, family, community, church, faith, religion, society, economy, politics, nation, world . . . Reconciliation could not be more urgently needed than it is today.

For Christians, Jesus Christ is the personal embodiment of the two most irreconcilable differences—the divine and the human natures (Incarnation), and the Eucharist is the sacramental participation in that reconciliation. The sacramental mystery of the Body and Blood of Christ helps me glimpse and taste the fruit of reconciliation in Jesus. Christianity ultimately is not a mere doctrine or a system of beliefs but Christ living in me and in all others, uniting all to Christ himself.

What Jesus is calling for is the reconciliation of our Christian faith with our Christian life. What’s the point of offering our souls and bodies to be reconciled to Christ, when we remain unreconciled in our relationships with our loved ones and fellow human beings? Which is “real” life, the reconciled life of wholeness or the unreconciled life of brokenness? Answering that question is easy, but living a life of reconciliation is not.

Lord Jesus Christ, help me see the fruit of your redemption within me and in others that I may receive the gracious gift of your Communion rather than reject it for my selfish and childish principles. Amen.

## Saturday in the First Week of Lent

Matthew 5.43-48

“But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you”  
“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Oy vey! The Lenten discipline and reflections are getting absurdly more challenging with today’s lesson, and it’s only the first week in Lent. I am just struggling to perfect my love for those whom I love, let alone my enemies. This seems like a lofty goal sure to set myself up for failure. Twenty years on I am still trying to let go of anger toward the person who caused the car accident that killed my younger sister. Nine and a half years on I am still trying to deal with the residual fear and anger from 911.

Thomas Merton described hell as a place “where no one has anything in common with anybody else except the fact that they all hate each other and cannot get away from each other and from themselves.” In this shrinking global village, it’s getting more difficult to get away from those I fear or hate. Even if I manage to get away, they will always be with me in my own fear and anger.

John Dear in his book *Living Peace* talks about Archbishop Dom Helder Camara, a great advocate for the poor in Brazil. When he was asked who his most difficult opponent was, he held up his forefinger and quietly turned it inward to point to his own heart. Gandhi was invited to talk about his struggles against injustice and violence. When he finally got to talking about himself—his own inner struggle, his selfishness and imperfection, he confessed saying, “There I have very little say.”

To learn to love as God loves, I must deal with the enemy within, the part of me which is unwilling to let go of anger, hatred and violent feelings. It feeds and thrives on these negative emotions and thoughts until it grows to be an inner monster. It will take a St. George to slay that monster. But, if I let go of these negative emotions, that is, if I starve the inner monster until it dies, out of its death will come a new life, the life of inner peace and tranquility. This is what it means to live life in the Christian paradigm of death and resurrection.

This requires giving myself over to the love of Jesus Christ who handed himself over to crucifixion by those who hated and feared him. I may never attain Christ-like love in my life time. But, I can learn to let go of the inner anger, hatred and violence so that I may come that much closer to a new life of peace and love. My Lenten discipline of fasting must include denying myself such self-indulgent negative feelings and thoughts so that the inner monster might die and that I may have new life with the risen Christ on Easter.

Gracious God, I cannot do this alone. So, help me let go of any feelings and thoughts of anger, fear, and hatred. Help me empty myself of these negative thoughts and emotions that I may be filled with your love and walk nearer to you. Amen.

## Second Sunday of Lent

Mark 8.31-38

“What will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed what can they give in return for their life?”

These two life-searching questions of Jesus invite me to stop everything and think about what I am doing and where I am going in life. What will I give in return for my life? But, then why should I give anything in return for my life? Isn't it enough to just live this life out to the best of my abilities? What am I expected to give for life?

When I was young, “What do I want out of life?” was the searching question of life. As I got older, the question became “What does life want out of me?” Life is not a joy ride. My life demands all of me, all of who I am, everything I have, in order for me to live it fully and meaningfully. The more I give of myself to life the more life will give back in return.

Life demands *me*, my deep true self. Life doesn't demand power, money, status or wealth. These are the superficial things I used to wish for in life. They give me an illusion of fulfillment and meaning. But, life demands my being. This brings into question the state of my soul and my being. How is the state of my soul? Have I sold it for more glitz and power? Am I truly happy inside with myself and with my life? Life's happiness depends on my being true to myself.

In his temptations in the wilderness Jesus was tempted by Satan in three different ways or for three different things—material wealth, vainglory, and power. In each temptation Satan demanded Jesus' submission to him. Each time Jesus refused to sell his soul to Satan, remaining faithful to God and choosing to save his soul. In the end, he was crucified. He had to hand himself over to life in God. He chose life not death. The whole of humanity was killed with him that day, and the whole of humanity was given the hope of new and eternal life that day. God's love has power to resurrect and restore the human dignity even from such an undignified death. Faith in the resurrection sustains me in hope—hope for human dignity, hope for my soul.

These two soul-searching questions of Jesus invite me to stop everything and think—think about what I am doing, think about what I am saying, and think about where I am going in life. What will I give in return for my life? There is nothing else I can give in return for life but myself.

Living God, the source of all life and lover of souls: grant me the courage not to forfeit my life for earthly treasure but to suffer for heavenly treasure of risen and eternal life in Jesus Christ your Son. Amen.

## Monday in the Second Week of Lent

Luke 6.36-38

“Be merciful just as your Father is merciful.”

This should remind me first of all how merciful God has been to me. In hindsight, I see God’s mercy at work at each crooked bend in my life. Despite my weakness and failures, I’ve been protected from and led out of the consequences of my failures. God’s mercy is the source of inspiration for me to be merciful to others.

“The measure you give will be the measure you get back.” Jesus gave the whole of his life and being for the salvation of the world and in return he received eternal life as Son of God in the Trinity. I have difficulty giving even an ounce of my heart sometimes, being afraid that I might lose it or self-righteously thinking that others do not deserve it. How can I, who have difficulty giving even a trivial measure of mercy, hope to gain a new life in the risen Christ?

Some Christians turn Jesus’ teachings into a moral code and thus a tool of judgment. In the name of God, of Jesus and of the Bible they judge and exclude others who hold different views from their views of God. This makes them feel superior and holier. But, in the same Gospel passage today, Jesus says, “Do not judge and you’ll not be judged.” I don’t think Jesus meant his teaching to be trivialized into a mere moral code and thereby a convenient tool of judgment to judge others with.

A Hindu person once told me that while Christianity is a rule of life, Hinduism is a way of life. He trivialized Christianity into a collection of rules, dogmas, doctrines and moral codes, while aggrandizing Hinduism as a holistic and wholesome way of life without the oppressive rules, dogmas and doctrines. I don’t know Hinduism to say much about it or its religious practices. But, this man’s view of Christianity is a caricature of the Christian faith and religion, which, sadly is shared even by many Christians themselves. But, how wrong and dangerous this view of Christianity is!

Being merciful as God is merciful does not point to a dogma but a way of life in humility and selfless love. And it all begins with one small moment of prayer, one small gesture of reaching out to another person and one ounce of love shared. God’s love and mercy, which transcends human justice, is always at the heart of Jesus’ moral teachings. God’s justice of mercy is the true and final judgment, and the source of all mercies and the measuring stick for all judgments.

O God, whose pleasure it is always to have mercy: Open my eyes to see your mercy in my life and open my heart to be merciful to others as you have been merciful to me. Teach me to give my life to others in love for your mercy’s sake. Accept my life, the whole of my life, that I may receive life in your Son Jesus Christ, the mercy of all mercies. Amen.

## Tuesday in the Second Week of Lent

Matthew 23.1-12

“All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

The tricky thing about humility is that the moment I try to be humble or am aware of my humility, the chances are that I am no longer truly humble. Yet, I am called to be humble, and this feels like an impossible situation.

Some years ago I had a student who used to come to chapel but left somewhat frustrated. He had heard that faith is God’s gift. He wanted to receive it, too, and thought if he came to chapel he would receive it. But, he began to feel out of place and frustrated as he wasn’t experiencing the kind of ‘inspiring feeling’ he had heard about. Not feeling any such ecstasy, he left.

Desiring God can lead to turning God into an object of one’s desire, as if God were something one can possess and own or an item on a check list of many desires. It turns God into an extension of one’s selfish desires. Yet, I am bound to desire God in order to satisfy my deepest needs and desires. One of the paradoxes of the mystical life, Thomas Merton said, is that “a man cannot enter into the deepest center of himself and pass through that center into God, unless he is able to pass entirely out of himself and empty himself and give himself to other people in the purity of selfless love.”

Humility is the key to faith in God. In order to find God and be close to God, I must be willing to pay the price of humility before God. Otherwise, I am most likely refusing God *something*. Humility is pure selfless love toward others, which leads me to deeper faith in and union with God. It is by Christ’s own humility that I have the chance of being in communion with God and with others.

Ecstasy is the state of being out of oneself. Freud likened religion as a kind of drug and faith as a form of addiction. Drug-induced ecstasy is an illusion, an escape from life, and leaves one in the emptiness of the self. Over time it spirals the person down to utter despair, which is an extreme form of selfishness and pride. God-centered ecstasy is a fulfillment in life. It is self-forgetfulness in God, giving of oneself over to God. It fills one with lasting inner peace and love. God-centered ecstasy begins in humility and leads to hopefulness; drug-induced ecstasy begins in selfishness and leads to despair.

Prayer for me is the spiritual discipline of emptying myself over to God. It’s a way of entrusting all of who I am to God’s care that my cares may be intermingled in God’s loving care for his creation. I suspect that it’s a life-long discipline and then some.

O Jesus, teach me to humble before God as you were humble before your Father. Give me strength and courage to hand myself over to God’s care in the humility and purity of heart. Amen.

## Wednesday in the Second Week of Lent

Matthew 20.17-28

“You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?”

The mother of James and John asks Jesus to have her sons each sit at his right and at his left in his kingdom. She is asking for the best for her sons. What mother wouldn't? But, Jesus tells her, “You do not know what you are asking.” The other disciples become angry about this, and Jesus teaches them about the humble ministry of being God's servants.

Had she known of Jesus' imminent death on the cross and its implication for her sons, she most likely would not have been so quick to ask for such a favor from Jesus. Had the disciples understood the true implication of Jesus' messianic kingship for their lives, they would not have been so quick to be angry and quarrel.

The disciples, nonetheless, remained faithful in their journey with Jesus and were led to nowhere else but Calvary. Then, they lived out their lives in the service of God in their own witness to Christ. For their faithfulness to Jesus, they are all seated with Jesus on his right and on his left in his heavenly kingdom. James and John have been given more than what their mother asked for; the disciples have received more than they were angry about. Such is the hidden surprise of saving grace God has in store for his faithful servants.

We are no wiser in our understanding of salvation than the mother of James and John and the disciples of Jesus. Salvation is often trivialized into a vapid synonym for piety, a certain moral propriety or superficial disposition. In his death and resurrection, it is not just the human nature in Jesus Christ that is “saved” by God's mercy, but, above all, the unique whole human *person*. The unique whole of my being is the object of God's salvation. My whole being needs rescuing from the abyss of confusion, superficiality and absurdity of this earthly life and of the worldly self within me. To be “saved” means to return to the inviolate place of the eternal truth of divine love.

I don't always know what I am asking or searching for in life. But, I can remain faithful in my journey with Christ, seeking and serving Christ in others and handing my worldly self over to Christ to peel away the layers of my superficial self that my true unique inner *person* may be “saved” by God's mercy.

God of mercy and grace, I don't always know what I am asking. But, guide me in my journey to seek and serve you faithfully in others; take me to that place where my true, unique and whole being is fully revealed and finds rest in your eternal love. Amen.

## Thursday in the Second Week of Lent

Luke 16.19-31

“Between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.”

This is a story of heaven and hell. Lazarus, who used to beg by the gate of the rich man’s house, died one day and was carried away into heaven to be with Abraham. The rich man, who didn’t look after this poor man, also died and was sent to Hades to suffer in eternal torment. The great chasm between heaven and hell had already been fixed during their earthly lives.

This chasm of heaven and hell reflects the chasm in our life on many levels. The global economic and environmental crises reveal that there is no longer a mere gap between the haves and the have-nots but a chasm which seems impossible to bridge. The escalating violence and injustice in our own society and around the world reveal a social and political chasm which has just about paralyzed some pockets of society or even an entire nation.

The chasm between heaven and hell also exists deep within a person’s inner being, in one’s spiritual life or lack there of. To fill the inner chasm between heaven and hell we keep reaching for the false and superficial good of vanity and power, digging ourselves deeper into Hades. There is a connection between the inner chasm within us and the social and political chasm we see and experience in the society.

Yet, in the midst of war, life continues to sprout resiliently, and charity holds up its torch of hope undaunted by violence and injustice. Deep within our inner being, a still small voice beckons us back to life, and a deep desire for true love restores hope in us once again.

For Christians, any hope of bridging the chasm between heaven and hell is with Christ, who bridged the chasm between the divine and the human, united the heavenly and the earthly, and defeated the sting of death by his resurrection. It is the risen Christ in me who can help me bridge the chasm of heaven and hell within me. It’s the risen Christ who can bridge the chasm of heaven and hell in our collective, communal life.

Give me, O God, the inner ear to hear your voice in my heart and guide my inner desire to seek the true love which is yours alone. Grant me the joy of new life in the risen Christ. Amen.

## Friday in the Second Week of Lent

Matthew 21.33-46

“Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of this kingdom.”

The kingdom of God is not something we can possess and own. The kingdom of God is here and now—on this planet earth, in this time of our life, and within our hearts. Everything we enjoy here and now is a gift from God. We possess none of it and take none of it with us when we die. We have to give it all back. This raises the issue of stewardship, and that is a spiritual issue.

Perhaps the gravest issue facing all of us is our irresponsible stewardship of this planet. While our contribution to ecological disasters might be debatable, it is apparent that the ecology of this planet is taking a seriously disastrous turn and we need to do something about it. It's pointless to argue about who or what is responsible for this. This earthly vineyard we have been entrusted with is not ours to keep. We are simply temporary tenant stewards of its resource and we have the responsibility to be good stewards now.

When it comes to inheritance we often think in terms of material wealth. But, spiritual wealth is also an important inheritance for future generations. The vineyard of our heart, our inner spiritual life, is also entrusted to us for our stewardship. It needs our care of digging, tilling, turning, watering and pruning to produce spiritual fruits worthy of God's kingdom, worthy of inheritance to the next generation. If we are not nurturing our own spiritual life now, it will be difficult to leave behind anything spiritually worthy for the next generation to build upon. Perhaps many of the social ills we see today reflect our failures to nurture our spiritual life both individually and collectively.

We are all stewards of God's kingdom here and now. How we nurture this gift and in what state we leave it as an inheritance to the next generation is our responsibility, and that's also a spiritual issue. The vineyard may be taken away from our children, our children's children. And then what? It will be too late by then.

God of all creation and giver of life, guide us to be good stewards of your gift so that, having nurtured and produced good fruits of your gift, we may return it for your good pleasure as an inheritance for generations to come. Amen.

## Saturday in the Second Week of Lent

Luke 15.11-32      The Prodigal Son

“Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.”

The title traditionally given to this story, *The Prodigal Son*, makes us focus on the younger son, causing us to identify with his sinfulness and his eventual repentance as a model for our moral life. But, there are other important characters in the story. It isn't too difficult to see the self-righteous and judgmental elder son in us. In fact, the elder son may be more readily identifiable to many of us in our self-righteous piety and high-browed religiosity. How easy it is to be envious and judgmental rather than simply to celebrate with others in their joys of life!

What about those servants and slaves in the house—the bystanders just observing uncommitted? Perhaps they are on the side of the elder brother. Aren't many of us on some level like these bystanders—noncommittal or even reluctant to commit ourselves to a cause, especially when it comes to faith, just observing from a safe distance yet still making all the self-righteous judgments? What about the pig farmer who hired the downtrodden younger son? Was he taking advantage of his misfortune or was he actually helping him out by hiring him as a slave? The ways to enter into this story are richly endless.

The story itself is also open-ended. Does the elder son repent and join the party in the end? How long does the father stay with him to get him to come inside and join the banquet? Does the elder son rebel and leave in anger? The open-endedness of the story invites us to unleash our imagination into the story and at the same time to examine ourselves.

The father? I would be hesitant to identify with him so readily myself. But, the father's generous hospitality is the centrally inspiring point of this story. His patient and generous love invites both brothers and, indeed, all of us, in a spirit of humility, to extend the same generous hospitality to others. In whatever way we enter this story and with whichever character we identify ourselves, we will always end up with the father, whose generous love is the ultimate and true inspiration.

Gracious and generous God, stay with me and help me see my selfishness and hardness of heart. Soften my hardened heart with your gentle and patient love. Receive me when I return home to your embrace of unchanging and merciful love. Amen.

### Third Sunday in Lent

John 2.13-22

“Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.”

This is a story about Jesus’ driving out the merchants from the temple market. This story has often been called Jesus’ purification of the Temple. Unfortunately, this title has sometimes led to an anti-Semitic interpretation, equating the cleansing of the Temple with Christianity’s supersession of Judaism. This passage has also been cited as an example of Jesus’ outburst of anger and moral outrage. I’ve also heard it being cited as a scriptural basis to support the Just War theory: Jesus’ violent act in this implicitly justifies our violent actions in defense of faith and justice. In some cases, this passage has even been used to justify excluding those who are deemed unfit.

Just because Jesus was angry and carried out a violent act doesn’t give us the license to carry out violence ourselves or to exclude those we don’t like. I am suspicious of using the Bible and Jesus to excuse human violence and injustice. I think it’s more honest and courageous to own up to our sins and ask for forgiveness than to use Jesus as a convenient excuse to rationalize away our violent behaviors.

But, nowhere in this passage does it explicitly say that Jesus was angry. In fact, the narrator goes out of his way to clarify that Jesus was using his whip to drive out only the animals and not the people: He “drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle” (v. 15). Jesus’ action here seems rather straightforward and matter of fact.

The statement, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up,” has two meanings. It’s both the prophecy of the destruction of the temple and the prophecy of his own death, as the narrator explains that “he was speaking of the temple of his body.” So, after Jesus’ death and resurrection the disciples must have remembered this incident and connected the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem with the destruction of the temple of Jesus’ body, as the narrator alludes.

So, rather than remaining in despair after Jesus’ death, the disciples were able to find hope and consolation and new meaning of life in his resurrection. Rather than the purification of the Temple as such, this story is a prophetic act on the part of Jesus, prophesying his own death and resurrection. This is also consistent with chapter 2 of John’s Gospel which deals with the identity of Jesus as the Messiah and with Jesus’ discourse with Nicodemus about rebirth, which comes right after this.

O God, look with compassion upon the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that in your good time all nations and races may serve you in harmony in your heavenly kingdom. Amen.

## Monday of the Third Week in Lent

Luke 4.24-30

“No prophet is accepted in the prophet’s own home town.”

Prophecy is not just about predicting the future events, but more importantly about speaking forth the truth of the present situation. The price many prophets had to pay was rejection and unjust punishment as Jesus alludes in this saying. Jeremiah, for instance, was almost put to death (Jeremiah, ch. 26) and was later imprisoned (Jeremiah, ch. 37) for speaking the truth and prophesying doom.

It’s difficult and painful to hear the truth of the present situation and a prophecy of doom on top of that. I don’t necessarily want to hear about the truth of my present personal situation if I am making a mess of it. Neither do we necessarily want to face the truth of our bad collective situation. But, face the truth of my present situation I must, even if it hurts my ego and pride, and deal with the truth of our collective situation we must, even if it is painful and shameful.

Perhaps global warming is one such example. But, it has also become more complicated. With so many spin doctors and so many conflicting theories and rhetoric, it is difficult to know the truth of our present collective situation. The “resistance” test perhaps is one measure we can adopt in such cases. When we find it difficult and painful to accept what is being said and resist the search for truth, perhaps it’s an indication that we need to take the situation seriously and examine ourselves and our lives.

There is a prophetic voice within our souls which nags at our consciences to face and deal with truth. It’s so much easier to silence this voice, brush this under the rug and push it off the edge of our conscience. But, in the end we will be brought to account for our own lives.

It is doubly difficult when the inner prophetic voice is that of Jesus. The revisionist spin doctor in me looks for ways and even examples in the Bible to rationalize away my iniquities. But, still in the end I as a Christian must account for the truth of my own life before Christ the judge. To stand before Christ with even a modicum of dignity and integrity, I must make a home for the prophetic voice of Jesus within me and accept and face the truth of my present self and my present life.

Give me courage to hear and face the truth always. Amen.

## Tuesday in the Third Week of Lent

Matthew 18.21-35

Peter asks Jesus, “Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” Jesus' reply is a challenging one, almost impossible: “Not seven times, but seven times seven” (v. 22).

The Old Testament has several Hebrew words for “forgive.” *nasha*, literally meaning “to lift up,” is often used in conjunction with God’s covenant of forgiveness, for only God can “lift up” the burden of the people’s breach of God’s Covenant. *salach*, meaning “to pardon,” is perhaps a legal term often used in conjunction with the Law to indicate the pardoning of debts. *Kaphar*, meaning “to cover,” “to appease” or “to atone,” is often used in connection with the prophets or the priestly sacrifice of atonement for the sins of their people. All these terms are also interchangeably used.

In the New Testament, the Greek the word most often used for “forgive” is *aphiemi* which has a wide range of meaning—“to send away,” “to depart,” “to let go” or “to give up.” It is most often used in the passive form. Thus, Jesus in healing miracles, almost always says, “Your sins are forgiven,” or “You are forgiven your sins” rather than “I forgive you your sins.” *charozomai*, meaning “to do a favor,” “to be gracious” or “to restore one to another,” is sometimes used in the sense of forgiveness. *apolyō* which means “to send away,” “to put away,” or “to set free” and is often used for divorce, is but rarely used to mean forgiveness.

If these words indicate a wide ranging and vague understanding of forgiveness, our understanding of forgiveness is no more concrete and clearer. Actually, the sense of sin and forgiveness in both the Hebrew and Greek languages conjures up more concrete images and understanding than ours. Sin is a burden or weight one carries around and forgiveness is lifting up or letting go of that burden, being liberated from the yoke that weighs one down with all sorts of emotional, spiritual and even physical manifestations of the burden.

Forgiveness, therefore, is essential in order to celebrate life truly without constraint and without shame. The centrality of forgiveness in the Eucharistic celebration evokes such a sense of liberation and touches on something very deep at the core of our being. I need to forgive because I have been forgiven. Forgiveness is a gracious gift of God and the ultimate gift I can receive graciously and can give gracefully. Forgiveness is at the heart of Communion and thus of all communions in life.

Gracious God, help me to be gracious to accept forgiveness and help me to be graceful to forgive that in doing so I may be in communion of grace with you and others always. Amen.

## Wednesday in the Third Week of Lent

Matthew 5.17-19

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

Perhaps some members in the early church community for whom Matthew wrote this Gospel wished to diminish the status of the Law and the prophets in the Bible and thought it was even wrong to continue to keep the Law. But, Jesus in this passage stresses the importance of being faithful to the Law and the commandments of God, and his followers are not exempt from keeping the Law.

Marcion was a heretic in the second century who taught that the God of the Jews in the Old Testament was an inferior God of wrath and judgment, while the God of the New Testament was a superior God of redemption who sent Jesus Christ. So, in his version of the Bible he excluded the Old Testament and all Jewish elements in the New Testament. Marcion included only Luke's Gospel without the Old Testament quotes and ten epistles of Paul. The vigorous disputation against Marcion by Tertullian and other Church Fathers gradually led to the agreement of the canon of the Bible as we have it and the eventual condemnation of Marcion and his sect at the ecumenical council in Nicaea in 325.

Things haven't improved much in terms the Christian's view of and attitude toward the Old Testament. I've heard it said and taught in some churches that the God of the Old Testament is a God of wrath and judgment and the God of the New Testament is a God of love and peace. This is at best laziness of mind and at worst an age-old heresy of Marcion and anti-Semitism.

The Christian Bible includes both the Old and the New Testaments and Christians believe that all that is necessary for salvation are contained in the Bible, both Testaments not just the New. This is to say that the God of the Old Testament and the God of New Testament are one and the same God unchanging and eternal. So, this saying of Jesus is no less challenging to the Christians today than it was to his followers two thousand years ago.

The key to understanding the fulfillment of the Law and the prophets in Jesus is the mystery of the Incarnation. The law and the prophets are the human response to God's divine gift of the covenant to his people. In Jesus, God fulfills his Covenant with his people, the divine side of the bargain so to speak, in his self-emptying love. In Jesus, the law and the prophets, the human side of the bargain, are fulfilled in his self-sacrificing love according to the Father's will. Thus, in Jesus the Law and the prophets are fulfilled in perfect communion with God's gracious gift of his covenant. And at the heart of this union of fulfillment is the mutual self-giving love between the divine and the human in Jesus Christ.

Eternal God, let my life find fulfillment in your covenant of love and mercy. Amen.

## Thursday in the Third Week of Lent

Luke 11.14-23

“Whoever is not with me is against me and whoever does not gather with me scatters.”

Jesus heals a mute possessed by a demon and is accused of being Beelzebul, a god of demons. They demand a real sign from heaven. They fail to see the true sign of heaven standing right before them in person. They are unwilling to accept Jesus for who he is. Jesus turns the tables around and accuses them of trying to divide the household of God in their testing of him.

Testing God is one of the temptations Satan tries on Jesus in the wilderness. It's an archetypal temptation, along with the temptation of material wealth and power. It is connected to our deep-seated need for control. To a greater or lesser degree, we all have need to control, and most of all need to control God, because God represents the uncontrollable, the unknown, the surprises in life. But, when the need to control controls a person, the person becomes a control freak, which is a form of psychological and spiritual illness.

Life itself is a miracle given to us by God. Yet, we want more miracles and signs, not the miracles and the signs out of our control but within the box of our control. It's comforting to control and exclude the unknown and the unexpected surprises as outside the realm of a neatly organized life, and thus outside our responsibility and care. We don't like God as simply as God. We like God to be “my God” and “our God” rather than God who declared himself to Moses as “I am who I am,” the God of openness and surprises.

However, control, on some level, seems to be necessary for us to live out this life without falling into chaos. In the institutional Church, the collective need to control manifests itself in dogmas and doctrines, which provide its theological boundaries. But, when we become dogmatic and doctrinaire at the expense of hospitality and generosity, we come dangerously close to putting God in a rigid box, tricking ourselves into thinking that outside such a box there is no God. Some say that they will never compromise for the sake of Christ or of the Bible or of the Dogma. But, do they stop to ask whether *such* an image of Christ, *such* an understanding of the Bible or *such* a rigid dogmatic piety is doing to others, to the Church and to themselves?

A genuine search for true identity should lead to a confident and peaceful spirit of generous hospitality, not an anxious and fearful spirit of prejudice and bigotry. Letting go of the control that controls me is one of the most difficult spiritual challenges.

Guide me, Lord, to find my identity in your being that I may find peace in your eternal peace. Help me let go of my control agenda that I may attain the spirit of confident hospitality. Amen.

## Friday in the Third Week of Lent

Mark 12.28-34

“You are not far from the kingdom of God.”

A scribe who has been observing from the sidelines approaches Jesus and asks him which commandment is the most important of all. Jesus gives his answer as any good rabbi would: “The first is, ‘Hear O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is on; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with your mind, and with your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” The scribe acknowledges the importance of these commandments over other ordinances of burnt offerings and sacrifices in the Law. Then, Jesus tells him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.”

This passage echoes the ones in Deuteronomy in which Moses gives the commandments and the ordinances and after a long sermon says to his people, “God is near you.” In this Gospel passage, the scribe has physically come nearer to Jesus and thus to the kingdom of God. And in acknowledging the primary importance of the commandments to love God and love neighbor, he has come nearer to the kingdom of God in his spiritual pilgrimage.

The very life I am living is my pilgrimage toward the kingdom of God, and this pilgrimage is love—to love God and to love my neighbor and those I am called to love and serve. While romantic and sentimental love is good to have and share, it’s not helpful to romanticize and sentimentalize love in neglect of the labor and the sacrifice required by love. After the romance and the sentiment cool down, the real work of love must begin—the work to keep the romantic flame kindled and the sentimental energy awakened. The labor of sacrificing and suffering, the passion for love, must take place in order for love to be genuine and lasting.

What am I willing to sacrifice for love? How much am I willing to suffer for love? How passionate is my love? The love Jesus labored for is none other than the love ultimately revealed in his Passion. Indeed, it takes enormous work to make love true and genuine. I only have this life in which to love and this is my spiritual pilgrimage toward God and his kingdom.

Loving God, fill my heart with your love that I may not take love for granted or trivialize its power. Awaken my spirit with your Passion that my love for you and for my neighbor may be the labor of true love so that in my pilgrimage of this life I may ever walk nearer to your kingdom. Amen.

## Saturday in the Third Week of Lent

Luke 18.9-14

“All who exalt themselves will be humbled but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

In this story the Pharisee thanks God that he hasn't turned out to be sinful like thieves, rogues, adulterers or this tax-collector. He tries to justify his conscience by numbering the righteous deeds he has done such as fasting and tithing. The tax-collector, on the other hand, beating his breast from afar and unable to look up to heaven, prays, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” According to Jesus, the tax-collector went home justified rather than the Pharisee.

Is it such a bad thing to be thankful to God for not having turned out to be a thief, a murderer, a drug addict or a rogue, etc.? I, too, am thankful that I haven't turned out to be a grave sinner like that. The problem is that it's almost as if the Pharisee is going out of his way to justify himself before God. When someone is overly defensive or rationalizing, it raises suspicion whether the person is trying to hide something. So, what is the Pharisee trying to hide? By pointing out that he is not a sinner like other graver sinners, he is trying to cover up the fact that he, too, is a sinner. This Pharisee is aware and rather boastful of his humility in his prayer to be genuinely humble.

Deep down I know that I am a sinner before God and need his saving grace like anyone else. It's not just my deeds that lead me to be justified by God, but my faith in God's mercy which ultimately takes me to the side of salvation. Good works are necessary responses. But, without the humility of faith before God, they are just what they are—good deeds which make me look good. God desires more than that. God desires a deep personal relationship with me, and that can only take place in faith and in humility before God.

The tax-collector acknowledges that he is a sinner and humbly begs for God's mercy. There is no reason to think that he might not have done some good deeds. He might have even fasted and tithed to the temple. As far as this tax-collector is concerned, any good deeds he might have done, for which he has no less reason to be proud than the Pharisee, do not figure into his desire for a right relationship with God. The only thing that matters to him is God's mercy and love and his faith and hope in that. He has nothing to hide or cover up, but simple supplication, “God be merciful to me, a sinner.”

I can vaguely say that I have a good relationship with God, with others and with creation on the whole. But, I also know that none of these relationships are perfect.

God, be merciful to me, a sinner. Amen.

## Fourth Sunday in Lent

John 3.14-21

“Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.”

In Numbers 21, the Israelites complained bitterly against God and against Moses for bringing them out of Egypt into the wilderness without enough water and food. So, God sent poisonous serpents which bit the people and many died. They came to Moses repenting and asking him to pray to the Lord to save them. Moses prayed and God told him to make a brazen image of the serpent and put it upon a pole. Anyone who had been bitten by a serpent could look up to the brazen serpent and live. This story of Moses and the brazen serpent in this Gospel passage is being used for prophesying the kind of death Jesus was to die. The brazen serpent Moses lifted up on a pole has been interpreted as a type of Christ on the cross.

The mystery of the Cross, the redemptive death and resurrection of Christ, is at the heart of the Christian story of salvation of the world: (v. 17). Christ, offering himself as a sacrifice to atone for human sins on the Cross, reveals the divine mystery of the self-sacrificing love of God. The mystery of the Cross calls for the human participation in that sacred act, which is renewed and celebrated in the Eucharistic sacrifice. The corporate participation of all the faithful is the ideal and the norm of this objectively sacred act of sacrifice.

The Cross is the judgment seat of Christ, the holy of holies for Christians. In every Eucharist the faithful approaches and comes face to face with the crucified Christ. Here death is not the end but the threshold into eternal life. The gifts of bread and wine, the produce of the earth and of human labor and toil, are united with and transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. In receiving the Body and Blood of Christ, our souls and bodies are united with Christ. This is our participation in the eternal life of Christ here and now.

Almighty God, whose Son our Savior Jesus Christ was lifted high upon the cross that he might draw the whole world to himself: Mercifully grant that we, who glory in the mystery of our redemption, may have grace to take up our cross and follow him. Amen.

## Monday in the Fourth Week of Lent

John 4.43-54

“Unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe.”

A royal official comes to Jesus asking him to heal his son, who is on the verge of death at home. Jesus says, “Unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe,” and tells the man to go home for his son will live. The man believes in Jesus and returns home. As he approaches his home, his servants come to tell him that his son is alive. The man asks them at what hour his son was made well and learns that it was the hour when Jesus told him his son would live. The royal official and his whole household come to believe.

Why is it that some believe and some don't and probably most don't care? What is such a big deal about believing? Can we live without believing? Most of us, perhaps all of us, believe in something or someone on one level or another. Otherwise, we couldn't live as a normal person. Paranoia would consume us all.

“Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11.1). Faith is our innate spiritual faculty: the spiritual eye to see the invisible, the spiritual ear to hear the silent inner voice, the spiritual intellect to integrate the unknown with the known and the spiritual wisdom to discern the truth in life. It is the inner spiritual faculty to help us see the signs and wonders of life. As long as we remain spiritual beings, the innate faculty that helps us live a spiritual life is faith.

Faith is deeply connected with our capacity to hope and our need for transcendence. Yet, as Nietzsche objected, “Hope in reality is the worst of all evils because it prolongs the torments of man.” But, we cannot live without hope. When there is no more hope, one might as well be dead. To hope is to have some future vision of life which, in turn, gives meaning to the present. Even when life seems utterly hopeless, it is by sheer faith one can go on. Faith is the essence of our hopefulness.

“Faith, hope and love abide, these three, and the greatest of them all is love” (1 Corinthians 13.13). We also have an inner desire to transcend our limitations, to reach beyond what is known and seen. Spiritual fulfillment comes from transcendent achievements. Faith seeks communion with the transcendent goal (*telos*) we hope for. Love—our capacity to love and the need to be loved—is the source *and* the end goal of our faith and hope. God has faith and hope in the return of his creatures for he loves them. God is the source and the ultimate and proper end of our faith, hope and love.

Lord, I believe; help my unbelief that my hope is not in vain and my love not unrequited. Amen.

## Tuesday in the Fourth Week of Lent

John 5.1-16

“Do you want to be made well?”

Jesus asks the lame man this question. It’s a question that demands a simple yes or no. Instead, the man, probably out of exasperation, launches into a lengthy explanation of why he couldn’t reach the cleansing pool, blaming others who keeps stepping in his way. Perhaps he is thinking that Jesus is offering to help him to get to the pool. But, that’s not what Jesus is asking, and the man does not hear what Jesus is asking. He cannot see outside the box of the familiar ritual practice of cleansing in this pool, which has been the only choice and possibility for his life. Perhaps he has been coming to this pool regularly all his life.

Behind Jesus’ question, however, is the premise that the man has choice in life, and he is being offered an alternative choice for his life. Now, it’s up to him to decide whether he truly wants to be made well or not. Often we, too, fail to see that we have choice in life. The best choice is often not so readily apparent. It’s easy to blame it all on everyone else and everything else—parents, situations, other people, jobs, etc. The list can go on.

Jesus is asking the man if he is ready to be made well, to take up his mat and walk, to live and be accountable for his own life instead of moping around the pool and blaming others for getting in the way, to live the life of his dream and of his choice.

As the story unfolds, the healing of this man pushes the legal button of the system, and the lawfulness of healing on the Sabbath becomes an issue. The codependent relationship between the sick man and the ritual system of the pool is about to be turned upside down, and the system doesn’t like it. But, Jesus’ healing brings in this man a whole new person with a whole new life. It transcends the religious system of cleansing centered around this pool, thereby rendering moot the legal question of healing on the sabbath. Jesus is the fulfillment of the law.

“Do you want to be made well?” The power to make the choice for his life is restored to him in this question. Jesus offers him the freedom to choose the new life of a healed, whole person. What a startling yet empowering question this is!

“Do you want to be made well?” A simple yes or no will do.

Lord, healer of souls and giver of life, touch me with your healing hand and make me a whole person that with freedom and confidence I may enjoy the gift of new life. Amen.

## Wednesday in the Fourth Week of Lent

John 5:19-29

“Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise.”

I spent the majority of my life trying to be independent of my Dad and trying to be different from him. I used to tell myself I'd never be like him and never take on some of his habits. Then, one day my wife started telling me how I am just like my Dad and pointed out all the little annoying habits and personality traits that are just like his. I furiously denied, of course. But, deep down I knew that I had become just like him in many ways.

Parents often tell their children to do as they say, not as they do. But, children end up doing as the parents do, for actions small or big have a greater influence and impression on children than words. Children see what the parents do and they do exactly that.

What Jesus learned from his Father is the unconditional, self-giving love, by which he received the Holy Spirit, by which he was called the Father's Beloved, by which he was given the power to heal and for which he handed himself over to the Father. The depth of the mutually self-giving love between the Father and the Son is beyond our imagination and understanding. But, it is to such love that we are all called into. It is this mutually loving relationship that models for us how we should build and maintain our relationships with others.

I have come to accept the fact that I am just like my Dad in many ways. Perhaps that's what keeps me endeared to him that I see in him some reflection of myself and in me some reflection of him. Perhaps that's the physical manifestation of the love I have for him and the love he has for me. But, I can only hope to love him as much he has loved me, for in my mature years I am finally learning to get used to being loved by him and to accept his love.

Lord, help me open my heart to receive your love and let it wash over me that I may learn to love as you have loved me. Amen.

## Thursday in the Fourth Week of Lent

John 5.31-47

“How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not accept the glory that comes from one who alone is God?”

What does glory have to do with belief? The Greek word for “glory” is *doksa*, and has a range of meaning: opinion, judgment, expectation or repute (normally good). So, in Greek the word has somewhat different usage from our use of the word “glory” and has more to do with judgment or discernment for truth. So, the question Jesus poses in this passage can be restated as “How can you believe when you accept judgment from one another and do not accept the judgment that comes from one who alone is God?” So, what’s the relationship between judgment and glory?

In the scene of the Last Judgment based in the Book of Revelation, Christ the King is seated on his throne of glory at the center, surrounded by the angels and the Apostles on either side. They are judged by the judgment of Christ and are glorified in the glory of Christ the King. There is also the Archangel, holding a balance and a sword to judge and divide the saved and the condemned.

Before God’s judgment of love and mercy, the earthly glory of external and superficial characters means nothing. We all stand before God as sinners, and we all need his love and mercy just the same. The glory that comes from God rests on the spirit of poverty, humility, and trust. The earthly superficial and vainglory judgment values credentials, status, power, wealth, and information. God’s judgment is rooted in credibility, virtue, spiritual poverty, wisdom and truth.

The earthly judgment promotes distrust as a more sensible value than trust. How can we move from the spirit of distrust to the spirit of trust? Ironically, that’s why we need faith in God, for we cannot trust one another. But, is it possible to have faith in God as long as we continue to seek and accept the earthly judgment and glory which is based on distrust? How could I believe if I accepted glory from others and did not accept the glory that comes from the one who alone is my judge and who alone can save me?

Almighty God, who knows the secrets of our hearts and judges in secret: guide me to trust your judgment of love and mercy and seek only the glory that comes from you. Amen.

## Friday in the Fourth Week of Lent

John 7.1-2, 10, 25-30

“His hour had not yet come.”

In this story, the authorities wish to have Jesus arrested and killed but do not dare to, because, as the narrator interjects, “his hour had not yet come.” ‘Hour’ designates a certain definite time or moment and the ‘hour’ in this statement is usually understood to mean the hour of Jesus’ death. This and similar statements are interjected in the Gospel stories to remind the audience of who is in charge of the unfolding drama of the salvation of the world. It is God who is making it happen and, thus, the ‘hour’ of Jesus’ death, by which the world is to be redeemed, can only be as God decides.

Timing is everything, and there is a right time for everything. But, when is the right time and how do we know? Discerning the right timing is one of life’s challenges we all face at one time or another. Intuitively, we sense the right time as everything seems to fall into place in harmony; it feels right. But, this is not blind fatalism or karma.

“The hour” in life is the decisive moment when Immanuel, God with us, acts in life. The Old Testament is not merely a historical account of the Israel, but a story of God in the history of Israel. The Gospel is not a mere biographical sketch of the historical Jesus, but the story of God in union with the man Jesus. “My hour has not yet come,” is an active listening on the part of Jesus for God’s active presence in his life.

To listen for God’s presence in my life is an active participation in the life of God acting in my own life. The word, ‘obedience,’ comes from the Latin word, *oboedire*, meaning ‘to hear or to listen to’. The word, ‘absurd,’ is related to the Latin word, *absurdus*, which means ‘out of tune’ and is related to ‘being deaf.’

To listen for “the hour” in my life, the decisive moment of God’s acting, requires active obedience to God’s will and my readiness in and engagement with God in the course of my own life. It’s a life of obedient listening, not of absurd living. It’s an active participation in the life of God who is present in my life.

Open the ear of my soul, Lord, to listen for your story unfolding in my life rather than being deaf to your voice and presence. Amen.

## Saturday in the Fourth Week of Lent

John 7.40-52

“So there was a division in the crowd because of him.”

People are divided over who Jesus is. Some say he is the Messiah and others, a prophet. The same division about Jesus continues to this day. The early Church continued to grapple with Jesus’ messianic identity and its doctrinal implications. The fundamental issue is how to deal with the divine and the human natures of Jesus Christ and how to keep the paradoxical tension of the union of the two natures. Almost all doctrinal debates boil down to the fundamental question, “Who do they say that I am?”

Division is unavoidable on one level, for we are not capable of containing the knowledge of God in its entirety. I can only see and know God in so far as God reveals himself to me in my own personal experience and understanding. Even the sum of our knowledge of God couldn’t contain God in his entirety. Yet, the doctrinal boundaries are still necessary to have some sense of coherence and order.

God we believe in is a God of union who united the irreconcilable division of the divine and the human natures in Christ. God of the Christian faith is a God of Communion, not a God of disunion, and is big enough to contain all the divisions we create and heal the fractures of our divisions.

Communion is not of our own creating but a gift from God. When Communion is broken as a result of our inability to reconcile, we comfort ourselves, saying it is the will of the Holy Spirit. Disunion is contrary to God’s nature and will, and thus, never the will of the Holy Spirit. Rather, we must be clear that it is our own limitation that leads to the breaking of Communion. Therefore, a more honest approach would be for us to hold ourselves accountable for the sin of breaking the Communion. If anything good is still salvaged despite our sinfulness, it is only by the sheer grace of God that it happens.

Relationships fall apart and break, not because God orders it so or cannot heal the divisions and bring the divided parties into union, but because we have lost hope in Communion. And when we can no longer hope in Communion of God, we have effectively lost our faith. Only by God’s grace can wounds be healed and faith restored.

But, if we can let go (forgive) of our differences and divisions and trust in God’s capacity to keep us in communion with him, we can transcend our differences and our hope and faith in Communion can be renewed and restored. Rather than the Communion of likenesses and even similarities, it is the differences, even violent divisions, still brought together in Communion with God that I find more moving and inspiring.

May God forgive us all for breaking his gift of Communion over and over again! Amen.

## Fifth Sunday in Lent

John 12.20-33 The Passion Sunday

The word, ‘passion,’ comes from the Latin word, *patis*, meaning ‘to suffer’ and the noun form, *passio*, meaning ‘suffering.’ Passion is often closely linked with love. True and pure love is love even to the point of suffering and death. Since the early 11<sup>th</sup> century, the word, ‘Passion,’ came into the Christian usage to specifically designate the dramatic story of the sufferings of Jesus Christ before his death.

The Passion is God’s dramatic journey of handing over Christ his Son, his Word made flesh, to human suffering in order to redeem the world. This is God’s self-revelation of his compassion (“to suffer with”)—God suffering with his creatures. This, by no means, is glorification of suffering, a dangerous pitfall of the romantic dramatization of the Passion, perhaps best exemplified by Mel Gibson’s film, *The Passion of Jesus Christ*. Nor is this fatalism, suffering to which one is supposed to submit blindly and thus with neither purpose nor hope.

Suffering without hope degenerates into dark cynicism and blind fatalism; hope divorced from suffering degenerates into false hope, a pie in the sky. The Gospel of the Passion of Christ cannot be separated from the Gospel of the redemption of the world. “Behold the wood of the cross whereon was hung the world’s salvation” sings the deacon, carrying the Crucifix in the veneration of the Cross on Good Friday.

In his Passion, Jesus Christ embodies both suffering and hope. The Passion of Christ was not just another capricious tragedy or karma, for Jesus freely chose suffering with a clear purpose of the salvation of the world. Nor is this a form of suicide, for Jesus did not act out of despair or vengeance, but out of hope and faith in the compassionate power of God the Father. Central to the Passion of Christ is the divine compassion of God in Christ.

Almighty God, whose Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, was moved with compassion for all who have gone astray and with indignation for all who have suffered wrong; enflame our hearts with the burning fire of your love, that we may seek out the lost, have mercy on the fallen and stand fast for truth and righteousness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(Prayer of Divine Compassion)

## Monday in the Fifth Week of Lent

John 8.1-11

“Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.”

Men of religious authorities bring to Jesus a woman who was caught in adultery. They cite the Mosaic Law of Leviticus 20.10 and Deuteronomy 22.22 which stipulate that both the man and the woman who commit adultery should be stoned to death. But, here as they just bring the woman, it seems that the woman didn't get a fair hearing in the court. Just before this story, Nicodemus reminded the men of authorities that “our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing” (7.51).

They have brought this woman to test Jesus and to catch him saying something against the Law in order that they might stone him to death as well. No court hearing for him would be necessary then. Jesus bends down and writes something with his finger on the ground. One interpretation puts Jesus bending down right in front of this adulteress so that he is physically protecting her from being stoned. That makes for a nice dramatized image for a television series and perhaps that might have been so. But, the story doesn't make it clear.

Jesus replies, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” He doesn't enter into an argument with them about the legal or religious principles. Rather, he cuts right through their agenda and turns the table around on them. At once, Jesus corrects two accounts of injustice—one against the woman and one against himself.

This story points symbolically and prophetically to something more profound. Just before this story, the temple authorities found themselves in a quandary over whether Jesus is the true Messiah or a genuine prophet. The argument ended with the men of authorities declaring that “Search and you will see that no prophet is to arise from Galilee” (7.52).

In the Old Testament, Israel is often accused of apostasy and called an adulteress or a harlot. It often takes a prophet's defense and intercession before God to save Israel. Inevitably, God forgives and redeems Israel. Here in today's story, Jesus plays both the prophet who defends the harlot and a God who makes the decision to forgive. Symbolically, the adulteress is Israel and Jesus is both a prophet and the Messiah.

This prophet-Messiah turns upside down the system of injustice and oppression and proclaims the prophecy of mercy and compassion of God, calling for repentance and bringing hope to sinners. So, Jesus says to the adulteress, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way and from now on do not sin again.”

Lord Jesus, help me trust in your compassion and mercy that I may sin no more. Amen.

## Tuesday in the Fifth Week of Lent

John 8.21-30

“You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world.”

Enjoying the riches of this life is sometimes called incarnational. But, the Incarnation is something a bit more than just enjoying life. The Incarnation foremost is an act of God, who is both the initiator and the end of that mystery. The human part is the active participation in that mystery by offering our souls and bodies. In the Incarnation, the person of Jesus embodies the union of everything human and everything divine. So, Jesus says, “I am from above” and “I am not of this world” (v.23), for the fullness of his humanity is revealed from above, not from below, by God’s divine act of the Incarnation.

St. Augustine taught that one is truly and perfectly free when one does what God wills. God created us in the fullness of humanity in perfect freedom and gave us free will. When we exercise our free will to do God’s will, we are choosing the perfect freedom of being fully human as God created us to be. But, when we exercise our free will not to do God’s will, we stop being perfectly free and fully human as God created us to be. We forfeit our true freedom to the illusion of freedom and hand our souls over to the bondage of sin and chaos.

That’s what Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden. They exercised their free will against God’s will and handed themselves over to the bondage of sin and death, no longer perfectly free and no longer fully human as God created them to be from above. What they reveal is the fallen humanity from below.

In the Incarnation, human flesh is assumed by the divine Word; thereby the human nature is united with the divine. The Church Fathers called this ‘divinization,’ because the human nature is ‘divinized’ by the Word’s assumption of the human flesh. I call it ‘full humanization,’ because the fullness of humanity in Jesus is revealed when the divine Word assumes the human nature.

Jesus is the revelation of the perfect humanity in its fullness as God created it to be, the perfect image of God, just as he is also the revelation of the full divine nature of God. Jesus is the supreme sacrament, for his humanity is the visible and outward sign of the invisible and inward grace of God.

It is through our union with Christ in his Body and Blood that we, too, may be divinized and show forth the glory of humanity in its fullness as God created us to be, from above. Thus, rather than mere enjoyment of life, the joy of Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ is central to the incarnational life.

Gracious God, you manifest in your servants the signs of your presence. Send down upon us your Spirit of love that in our union with Christ and in our companionship with one another your abounding grace may increase and visibly shown forth; through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Wednesday in the Fifth Week of Lent

John 8.31-42

“You will know the truth and the truth will make you free.”

Chapters 8-10 in John can be described as the truth discourse. Jesus is in argument with the men of authorities over the truth of who he is and tells them, “You will know the truth and the truth will make you free” (v. 32). Despite his miracles, they cannot and do not want to accept the truth of who Jesus is. But, Jesus has nothing to hide, for he is clear about his own identity. Truth is not always easy to face or easy to know. But, it is when I have nothing to hide that I am truly and perfectly free to be who I am.

Later in 8.47, Jesus says to them, “I tell you the truth, why do you not believe me?” Truth is the major theme in John’s Gospel. “I am the way, the truth and the life,” says Jesus to Peter in 14.6. Later on, when he is interrogated by Pilate, Jesus tells him, “For this I was born and for this I came in to the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” And Pilate cynically asks, “What is truth?” Jesus is silent, for Pilate’s answer is standing right before him in person.

For John, truth is the *person* of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. It’s the whole person of Jesus Christ, not facts about him or his natures human and divine or even the prophetic words of the Bible, but the Word of God enfleshed and living as the *whole person* of Christ. It is this truth, the person of Christ, who will set us all free.

So what does it mean that Jesus Christ is the truth? WWJD (What would Jesus do?) is a dangerous question to ask in search of truth, for the right answer always is that he laid down his life for the salvation of the world. There is no other answer. As Christ is lifted up and nailed on the Cross, truth is there on the Cross for all to deal with. Can we really handle such truth?

My first instinct is to resist and turn my face away from such naked truth, for starkly displayed and reflected by Christ crucified is my own truth of sinfulness and of the violent and brutal injustice of this world. Unless we collectively and individually come to terms with this truth with honesty and humility, we cannot be made truly free but remain enslaved by the bondage of human sinfulness.

Lord Christ, our way, our truth and our life. Give us courage to face the truth of our sinful ways of life and by your truth of love and compassion we may be made free. Amen.

## Thursday in the Fifth Week of Lent

John 8.51-59

“So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.”

In this passage Jesus is being threatened with stoning by the men of the authorities. The grounds for stoning Jesus are: breaking the Sabbath (Numbers 15.32-36), being a medium or a wizard such as the demonic spirit of Beelzebul (Leviticus 20.27), blasphemy against God (Leviticus 24.1-16) and engaging in idolatry (Deuteronomy 17.2-7) or seducing others to do so (Deuteronomy 13.7-12).

Jesus' clash with the religious authorities in John's Gospel begins with the healing of the lame by the pool of Bethzatha in chapter 5 and climaxes in chapter 8 where he saves an adulteress from being stoned to death. But, he escapes from the temple just at the moment they are ready to capture him. This is a turning point in Jesus' earthly ministry, for from here on he is really a fugitive of the religious authorities who constantly try to arrest him or kill him.

Stoning as a form of capital punishment has a long history as evident in the Code of Hamurabi, the Bible, the Qu'ran and in many cultures. Stoning is mostly sanctioned for two categories of crimes—apostasy and sexual crimes. It saddens me how such a savage act as stoning has become an acceptable form of punishment. Being stoned to death unfortunately continues to be a real fear for many even today, especially women and female children in many parts of the world. There should be no place for stoning as a form of punishment.

It also saddens me that we have had to resort to capital punishment, especially in the religious code of ethics. Socially and philosophically it was perhaps a necessary form of punishment. But, philosophical issues aside, no matter how efficiently capital punishment is carried out, sanitized of all emotional issues, it still brings all of humanity down to the lowest common denominator of savagery. It does not help us in any way to transcend human violence.

It is an example of an imperfect solution for an imperfect system and society. And the innocent victims wrongly killed under capital punishment, are they just “necessary casualties” of an imperfect system of human justice?

There is also something inherently insidious about devoting scientific and technological skills toward making capital punishment as efficient and painless as possible. Calling it “humane” seems to twist the very meaning of the word. It is a sad paradox of human society and life. I pray for the day when we don't have to resort to capital punishment to keep order in our collective life.

God of compassion and mercy, help me to be compassionate and merciful as you are. Amen.

## Friday in the Fifth Week of Lent

John 10.31-42

“Then they tried to arrest him again, but he escaped from their hands.”

Jesus is back in the temple for the Dedication festival. Again, he gets into an argument with the men of the temple authorities. Again, they try to stone him for saying that he is from God. They try to arrest him but he escapes and goes across the Jordan. Many come to him there and believe in him.

I wonder if his disciples wished that Jesus would remain quiet and play it safe, just teaching his close disciples and secretly healing those who were brought to him. Indeed, in Mark's gospel Jesus commands them not to go around telling other people about his healing miracles and teaches his disciples in parables, a kind of secret language which only he and his followers are supposed to understand.

But, in John, Jesus goes around teaching and healing quite openly and publicly and gets involved in lengthy and open confrontations with the religious authorities. It's as if he is asking for trouble. But, he cannot help himself, for he must do the works of his Father and teach what he has heard from his Father. He has no choice, for he is the Word of God made flesh, who is not accepted by his own people. He is the light that shines in the darkness, whom the darkness could not overcome.

Away from Jerusalem, away from the hub of the religious life, out in the margins of the society across the Jordan, that's where Jesus was accepted for his prophetic teaching and was believed for his works. It is there that he was able to do the works of his Father and not in the temple.

Immanuel, God with us, is often a challenging and disturbing presence to the very institutions and the status quo we cherish and feel most comfortable with in life. The Spirit of divine pathos challenges the apathetic injustice and oppression of the institutional system and status quo.

The men of the temple authorities, despite their belief in God, fail to see their own collective apathy toward those in the margins of their society and the injustice caused by such apathy. At one point, they accuse Jesus of being a Samaritan and having a demonic spirit.

Agnosticism is a form of spiritual apathy and resistance to God's self grace. Flannery O'Connor said we resist grace because grace changes us and change is painful. We want to improve but we don't want to change, or we want everyone else to change to accommodate us. Selfishness feeds apathy, and apathy, in turn, further feeds selfishness. It takes God's grace, the Spirit of divine pathos, to break this cycle of apathy.

God of grace, open the eyes of my soul to see your presence and blow your Spirit of pathos into my spirit of apathy; let your grace enter into my life and mould me into your likeness. Amen.

## Saturday in the Fifth Week of Lent

John 11.45-57

“It is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.”

As Jesus’ fame and popularity spread as a result of his amazing miracles, the temple authorities become fearful that the Romans might destroy the temple and the entire Jewish population over this troublesome one man. Caiaphas the high priest gives this clever reply: “It is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed” (v. 50). From that day on they plan to have Jesus put to death. Jesus in the meantime hides away out in a wilderness town called Ephraim with his disciples. As the Passover approaches, thinking that Jesus might turn up in Jerusalem, they put out an arrest notice on Jesus among the people.

Caiaphas’s rationalization reminds me of a Talmudic story about a fugitive and a rabbi in Henri Nouwen book, *Reaching out*. A fugitive was on the run from the enemy soldiers and turned up in this village. The people were kind to him and gave him a place to stay. But, the enemy soldiers tracked him to the village and asked where he was. They threatened to burn the village down and kill everyone unless the fugitive was handed over. The people became fearful. So, they went to the Rabbi and asked what they should do. The Rabbi went to his room and prayed and began reading the Bible. In the early hours of the next morning, his eyes fell on these words: “It is better that one man dies than that the whole people be lost.” The Rabbi closed the Bible and called the soldiers and told them where the fugitive was hidden. When the soldiers took the fugitive away, the village folk held a great feast to celebrate having been saved. But, the Rabbi was still disturbed. Overcome with sadness, he stayed in his room. That night an angel appeared to him and asked, “What have you done?” The Rabbi answered, “I handed over the fugitive to the enemy.” The angel said, “But, didn’t you know that you handed over the Messiah?” “How could I have known?” the Rabbi answered. The angel said, “Instead of reading your Bible, had you visited the fugitive and looked into his eyes, you would have known.”

I am daily challenged to look deeper into the eyes of others I encounter, especially those whose presence makes me feel uncomfortable, and to see the image of God in them. I am also challenged to look deeply into myself as God sees me—the fugitive within me, the fugitive conscience within, the fugitive I wish would go away. How easy it is to hand over the inner conscience to the very enemies of my soul!

Creator God, you created us in your own image. Help me see your face in others; direct my heart to seek and serve others as your beloved. Help me see myself as your beloved. Amen.

## Palm Sunday

Mark 11.1-11; 14 (Liturgy of the Palm)

Mark 14.1-15.47 (The Passion)

In the Palm Sunday service we take a strangely paradoxical journey with Christ from his triumphal entry into Jerusalem to his Passion and Crucifixion—one moment it's all noisy and gleeful glory, the next all sombre and austere glory. They both point to glory—different senses of glory, but paradoxically one and the same glory on a deeper level.

In his triumphal entry the people come out into the streets rejoicing and singing hosanna, for they think they are welcoming the Messiah, the earthly king for the redemption of Israel. But Jesus is not the kind of the earthly Messiah they've been expecting. He is to be arrested, interrogated, beaten, crucified and put to death. His Passion is not for his own self-glorification, but for the glorification of God the Father. For this, Jesus is glorified in his resurrection as the true Messiah and King of heavenly realm.

This is the supreme manifestation of God's grace at work. What the humans muck up so terribly, the killing of the Messiah, is transformed into the greatest gift of all, the salvation of the world by the sheer grace of God alone. The people cheer and rejoice for all the wrong reasons at Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, but by the sheer irony of God's grace their joy and hosannas still remain appropriate.

With Palm Sunday we enter into the Paschal mystery, the Holy of Holies in the Christian spiritual pilgrimage. For Christians, there is nothing holier than the Triduum—Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Vigil. The Triduum is not three different liturgical acts, but one liturgical act of remembering and re-enacting God's act of redemption. God carried out one act of sacrificial atonement once for all to redeem the world.

It is important that Christians participate in the Triduum and preferably, if possible, do so in one same church rather than in different churches, for it is one liturgical act. In a very mysterious and mystical way the whole point of the Christian spirituality and faith is driven home in the Triduum.

This means that those serving the worshipping body of Christ must take this seriously and prepare with utmost care and reverence. On Palm Sunday, we begin our final walk with Christ to Calvary that, having walked in the way of his suffering and crucifixion, we may share in the glory of his resurrection.

Almighty and everliving God, in your tender love for the human race you sent your Son our Savior Jesus Christ to take upon him our nature, and to suffer death upon the Cross, giving us the example of his great humility: Mercifully grant that we may walk in the way of his suffering and also share in his resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Monday of Holy Week

John 12.1-11

“Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you but you do not always have me.”

Mary’s anointing of Jesus’ feet seems on the one hand to be a natural and appropriate response to Jesus’ earlier resuscitation of her brother, Lazarus. But, this extraordinary act also looks forward to Jesus’ own washing of his disciples’ feet in chapter 13 and to Jesus’ death, as Jesus says that she bought the oil for his burial.

Mary could not express her deep faith and love for her Lord with words but only by this extravagant action. This is a prophetic act: a confession that Jesus is the Messiah, a humble adoration of the Lord, and an anointing suitable for the Messiah and a king just before his triumphal entry into Jerusalem and his treacherous walk to Golgotha.

The fragrance of the perfume fills the house, creating an almost surreal and other worldly atmosphere. This is the fragrance of Mary’s extravagant love for her Lord. It is the fragrance of the beauty of holiness that enables everyone in the room to transcend their own fear of this terrifyingly intimate act of love. They are so awed and remain utterly speechless, all except one.

“Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?” It is telling that Judas is the one who dares to question this extravagant act. While this may be a reasonable and well-meaning question on the surface, it’s a voice of reason that doesn’t understand love, extravagant love. The generous, unconditional and extravagant love of God is what Judas doesn’t get, but Mary of Bethany gets it and acts it out.

Those who don’t believe in God will never understand the believers’ love for God. Out of his extravagant and abundant love for his Father, Jesus gave all of his life to God. With Mary, we, too, are called daily to love God extravagantly so that the fragrance of our love may fill the atmosphere around us where ever we go.

Generous and loving God, help me see and understand the extravagance of your love so that I may love you extravagantly. Amen.

## Tuesday of Holy Week

John 12.20-36

“While you have the light, believe in the light so that you may become children of light.”

As we look toward the Triduum and Easter, today’s reading invites me to reflect upon the symbolism of light. In the creation, light was the first thing God created with his *ruach* (breath) and his words, “Let there be light.” Then, he created water and the vegetation and the animal life. Light is the first of the created order, the source of all life in creation, and thus the very symbol of creation of itself.

In the Prologue of John’s Gospel, the Word of God is the source of life that is also the light of all people. Light is the life and the source of all life. Earlier in chapter 8 Jesus says, “I am the light of the world” (8.12). Light in John’s gospel signifies new creation and Jesus Christ is this light of new creation and new life. Those who believe in him are born anew in this light. In the Easter Vigil, the minister carries the single Paschal light into the darkness and proclaims, “The Light of Christ.” This lone light shines in the darkness as the only source of new creation, giving life to those who believe. The new creation under this light is culminated in the resurrection of Christ.

A Romanian theologian and ascetic, Staniloae said, “Pure prayer is concerned with the reuniting of the mind (*noús*) and the heart. . . . It is not feeling that must be chilled by thought, but thought which must warm itself in the feeling of the heart in real contact with the infinity of God, and thus give this feeling a definite content.” The mind finds its rest in the heart, in the infinite love of God experienced by the heart and understood by the mind. The two light of the heart and the mind are embodied in all human persons. They are brought in to union in Jesus Christ, the Light of the World.

Traditionally two candles are lit on the Altar, symbolizing the two natures united in Christ. Each candle shines out its own light, but together they form one light, the unique person of Christ, the light of the world and the light of life. It is this unique light that leads me to Calvary and to a risen life with him. This light of life leads and brings me to Communion with God.

Lead, kindly Light, amid th’encircling gloom, lead Thou me on!  
The night is dark, and I am far from home; lead Thou me on!  
Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see  
The distant scene; one step enough for me.

(John Henry Newman)

## Wednesday of Holy Week

John 13.21-32

There is nothing more devastating and painful than when someone you love and trust betrays you. But, can there be betrayal where there is no love or trust? All human relationships must be based on trust on some level in order for any meaningful relationship to develop.

Judas's betrayal of Jesus was a betrayal of the whole community of the disciples. They must have felt betrayed by Judas and felt insecure about themselves. "Who's next?" they probably thought. It had a profound effect on their relationship with Jesus. They found themselves all the more baffled and in the dark about who Jesus was.

Judas's betrayal stands as a type of human betrayal of God as with Adam and Eve's betrayal. So, Judas's betrayal affects all humanity. It takes us into the dark side of the human nature of greed, fear and guilt and into the chaos of fragile and fragmented human existence.

But, the final ending of the story is not Judas's death but Jesus' resurrection and our redemption. Judas's betrayal in the grander scheme of God's grace is insignificant. The evil in Judas's act is not outside the realm of God's grace, but rather it remains within the order of divine compassion and is thus transformed into an occasion for God's redemptive work. The real power is with God. The evil power of greed, fear, and distrust is powerlessness. It is no power at all.

Jesus, betrayed by one of his beloved disciples, enters into a journey of pain and suffering. Because of his betrayal, Judas has lost his capacity to take that journey with his Lord. He wallows in remorse and guilt to the point of committing suicide. Judas to the end fails to see and accept God's generous love to forgive and restore trust. He chose death in despair rather than life.

Judas's betrayal of Jesus is an event that thrusts us into a life-changing spiritual journey, a rite of passage from death to resurrection. One time or another we all have experienced the pain and the guilt of betrayal, which shatters our cozy and well-ordered view of the world. A shattered heart can easily turn into a heart of stone, a heart that refuses to be thrust into a journey toward a new life of trust and love.

The Triduum invites me to take this journey with compassionate God, to allow my heart to be broken as God allows his heart to be broken, to live into the pain of broken trust and love as God lives into the pain of being betrayed. It is this God who can heal my wounds and restore trust and love in my heart. So, I dare to take the journey to the Holy Cross.

Lord, help me to see beyond the darkness of betrayal and to trust still in the power of your compassion. Give me the courage to take this rite of passage with Christ betrayed, crucified and risen. Amen.

## Maundy Thursday

John 13.1-17, 31b-35

“Do you know what I have done to you?”

Jesus kneels before his disciples and gently washes their tired, dirty feet. This is a demonstration of the most intimate love and the most humble service. Having done this, Jesus commands them to wash each other's feet as he has just done. This is perhaps the most awkward and difficult liturgical service to give and to receive. Simon Peter takes the words right out of my mouth when he says to Jesus, “You will never wash my feet.” The others remain understandably speechless. The physical intimacy of this act is both embarrassing and terrifying.

It's often more awkward and difficult to receive such a generous gift of love than to give it. Giving is easier and safer than receiving. Giving puts me on the upper hand; receiving, especially receiving overwhelming generosity, humbles me. My ego makes it difficult for me to receive.

In giving, I don't have to open my hands. I can hide behind my generosity of giving. But in receiving, I often have to open my hands. This puts me in a position of vulnerability and possibly of humility. The posture of receiving Communion has to be a posture of openness and vulnerability. Receiving in this sense is an act of hospitality itself. It requires a spirit of genuine hospitality and graciousness, for in receiving I make myself vulnerable and accept not just the gift but the person who gives it.

Unbeknownst to them, as Jesus washes their feet, the disciples are now one with Jesus in his humble servant ministry. Jesus says, “Unless I wash your feet, you have no share with me.” They are now united in him as servants of the divine compassion. Earlier Jesus' feet were anointed by Mary of Bethany (John 12.1-8) which prepared him for his triumphal entry into Jerusalem and for his journey of Passion to Golgotha. Here Jesus anoints the disciples' feet, preparing them for their walk with him to Calvary and for their subsequent servant ministry of love.

The terrifying intimacy and the incomprehensible depth of Jesus' love are all too overwhelming. But, it is this love of Jesus that we must receive in order to comprehend our salvation achieved by his Crucifixion. He commands his disciples and us to do the same for one another, to love one another as he has loved us. And it is by such love that we are known to be his disciples.

By all means, give all the love you can give. But, receive also all the love that comes to you, for it is by being at the mercy of love that we are redeemed by love.

Lord Jesus, grant me your spirit of generous and humble hospitality that, having had my feet washed by you, I may likewise wash the feet of others and humbly love and serve them as you have commanded. Amen.

## Good Friday

John 18.1-end of 19 (The Passion)

Good Friday takes me directly and deeply into the mystery of the Cross, the essence of Christian faith and life. Words can never do justice to this mystery, but only awestruck silence before the *mysterium tremendum* of Christ crucified. I can only live into this mystery, for it is the living God who draws me in to this essence of his divine life.

The cross stands between God and the world. What is displayed on the cross is the full revelation of the Word of God enfleshed in human body. If the Incarnation is manifest in the birth of Christ, it must hold true now more than ever in the crucifixion of Christ. This is a sacramental revelation of God's invisible grace. God who is with us must also suffer with us in order that suffering may be assumed and transformed by God's grace into a sacramental occasion for new life.

Christ crucified, the person of Jesus, is at the centre of God's redemptive work. In the personal suffering of Christ, the Communion of the human with the divine is achieved, the union of the human passion and the divine compassion. Christ crucified is the personal threshold to new life. The mystery of the cross calls me to a journey through this threshold of suffering with Christ to a new risen life with Christ. This is not merely a life experience, but the experience of and with God.

The barren tree of the cross becomes the tree of new life, bearing the first fruit of God's redemption. With this tree of new life at the centre, the barren hill of Golgotha becomes the new Garden of Eden. Here the fallen world has a chance of being reconciled to God by the cross of reconciliation.

Hope of this new life directs me still to life here on earth, for I must still partake of this earthly life to the very end, just as Christ did, in order to be resurrected with Christ. Yet, being reconciled by the cross, I as a Christian live my life here on earth with the risen Christ in the midst of the godless world. This is what it means to live into the mystery of the cross here and now; this is what it means to take up my cross and follow Christ. It is carried in this life here on earth to the very end, to his suffering, his crucifixion and then to his resurrection.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,  
because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

## Holy Saturday

John 19.38-end

Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus take the body of Jesus down from the cross, embalm and wrap him in linen clothes and bury him in a new tomb nearby. We usually gloss over this bit. But, this is an extremely important detail, for it points to the embodied spirituality of the Christian faith.

The burial drives home the truth of Jesus' full humanity. He didn't just give up his spirit on the cross and disappeared from the cross. He had to be buried like everyone else. His burial was carried out according to the Jewish custom according to the Mosaic Law. Even down to the last detail, the Law had to be kept in order for it to be fulfilled in Jesus.

This also looks forward to the 'bodily' resurrection of Jesus which unfolds in the ensuing chapters. Without this detail of the proper care of Jesus' body after death, we have no Gospel as we know it. The manner with which Joseph and Nicodemus cared for the body of Jesus after his indignant and cruel death is a witness not only to their respect and love for Jesus but also to the human dignity of Jesus. This is recognition of the sacramental reality of the body of Jesus Christ, and thus of all human bodies and bodily existence. This detail adds visceral reality to the Church's Sacrament of Body and Blood of Christ. The body of Jesus is the supremely visible sign of the invisible grace of God. It makes tangible and concrete the mystery of God with us, the living God in the midst our existence.

Burial of the dead is extremely important in many cultures and religions, for it has to do with the respect for human dignity. How we care for the body of the dead says a lot about our attitude toward our own bodies and bodily existence. Genocides is the most degrading violation of human dignity and sanctity. Only those who have no sense of dignity and sacredness of life in themselves can carry out such an atrocious violation against humanity. I also wonder what kind of dignity a suicide bomber attaches to his or her own body and to those of others. Any form of extreme spiritualization of life to the point of degrading the body is exactly what Christianity has stood against since the beginning.

The extreme rationalization of life characteristic of the modern enlightened culture and society can degrade the body to mere scientific data, disposable and meaningless after death. This is why some of the most atrocious violence can occur in the most advanced societies. Europe, despite all its enlightened and sophisticated advancement, has also been the place of the most horrific violence against humanity. Rational enlightenment alone cannot save human beings from violence. Where the body is not recognized as holy there can be no holiness of life.

O God, as the crucified body of your dear Son was laid in the tomb and rested on this holy Sabbath, so may I wait with him the coming of the third day and rise with him to his risen life. Amen.

## Easter

Having undergone the journey of spiritual purification and the final walk with Christ in his Passion, we learn that his Crucifixion is not the hopeless end. The threshold of death and resurrection thrusts us into new hope and new life. On Easter, we declare the hope of resurrection against all that keeps this world in despair and meaninglessness. Easter hope is the hope of this life on earth. Easter joy is the joy of this life on earth.

After the memorial service of a famous scientist in Keble College Chapel, Oxford, a man said to me as he was leaving, "What nonsense all this resurrection business!" He said it with a cynical smile as if I ought to agree with him. His insensitivity of saying such a thing after the memorial service which everyone else found so moving and beautiful, his cowardice of saying it to the priest rather than to the loved ones of the deceased and saying it just as he was leaving so that all I could do was to offer a polite smile in return, his haughty, moral certitude brought up all sorts of emotions in me in an instant. But, I was sad for him that he failed to see resurrection in the midst of this life, in his own life. How sad for him to deny himself the joy of Easter!

The beauty of life, I find, is in the unexpected surprises hidden behind its paradoxical and often irrational nonsense. How supremely dull life would be otherwise! The hidden mysteries of life awaken my senses, beckon me to keep searching for deeper truth and eventually reorder my view of life. This makes me be humble before life and see its profound beauty of holiness.

Hidden underneath the resurrection nonsense is the unexpected treasure of the joys of faith and the blessing of new life. It is this unexpected treasure the Apostles discovered and experienced; it is this unexpected treasure continually rediscovered and renewed by the Christians generation after generation.

Resurrection is not just about the realm beyond this life. Rather, it is very much part of the paradigm of this life. Without death there can be no resurrection. Thus, resurrection is not a denial of death but an embracing of death not as an absolute terminus of life but a threshold into a new life. If death is the only true ultimate end of life, then life must be defined by death. But, if death is not the true ultimate end, then it is life that defines death. Death and resurrection is the Christian paradigm of life, the paradigm of here and now.

Easter joy is the celebration of both the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. So, Easter remains a challenge and a stumbling block to the most enlightened, rational person. What those who deny Easter cannot understand is that the resurrection directs and takes us to this life here and now, and gives hope and joy to this life. This is why the Christian story of redemption is not a mythology but a living hope and a living joy that concern this very life and existence. Easter hope is the hope of this life. Easter joy is the joy of this life.

Alleluia, Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed, alleluia!





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