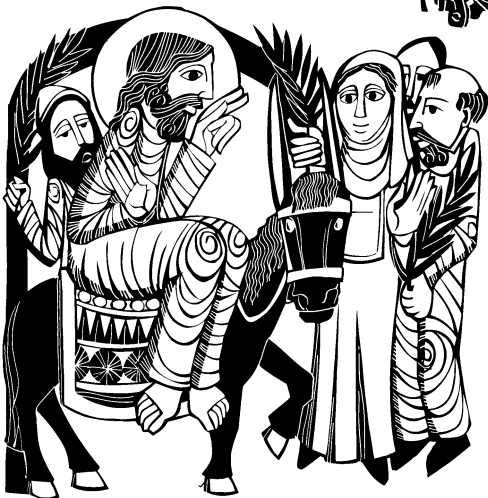


Lent



St. Francis of Assisi R.C. Parish Sangre Grande Lent Family Pack 2022



PARISH FAMILY / HOUSEHOLD PACK

LENT 2022

This package contains:

- 1. Letter from your Parish Priests**
- 2. Lent**
 - a. Lent - by Msgr. Michael De Verteuil**
 - b. Lent Calendar**
- 3. Stations of the Cross for the Family**
- 4. Poem on Faith**
- 5. Soul Food**
- 6. Children's Activity x 2**
- 7. Breaking Open the Scriptures as a Family**
- 8. God Is Our Co-Parent**
- 9. Adult Colouring Activity**

Letter from the Parish Priests

Dear brother and sister parishioners,

The peace of the Lord be with you.

Lent has arrived. Are we ready for this season of soul searching, of discipline, of conversion? Lent is different from the other seasons of the Church year - at Advent we focus on the Second Coming of Jesus and prepare to celebrate his first; at Christmas we celebrate Jesus's birth in his first coming; Easter brings us to the rejoicing of the Resurrection, the Ascension, and the sending of the Holy Spirit; in Ordinary Time we celebrate the everyday life of Jesus, his teaching and his acts.

In all of this the focus is on Jesus but at Lent the focus, as it were, is on us. Not that we forget the Lord - we remember his love which should spur us on to conversion. But the focus is on us and all we need to do to be more faithful to the Lord, to be better members of his body, to be purified to celebrate the Easter feasts. (See overleaf for more on this.)

The parish will be having a number of activities during this season and we urge you to take part whenever possible, particularly, of course at Sunday Mass.

Meanwhile, let us go forward together in faith, hope and love, on the path ahead of us - the path that leads to life!

Blessings,

Msgr. Michael de Verteuil
Parish Priest

Fr. Matthew Ragbir
Parish Priest

Lent – by Msgr. Michael de Verteuil

Lent is basically about our ongoing conversion. We may be tempted to think of it as a season with its focus on the suffering of Jesus but listen to the words of the Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year (27) - “Lent is ordered to preparing for the celebration of Easter since the Lenten liturgy prepares for the celebration of the Paschal Mystery both catechumens.... and the faithful...”

And some of the prayers of Masses in the season, e.g. “Pour out the grace of your blessing on your servants who are marked with these ashes, that.... they be worthy to come with minds made pure to celebrate the Paschal Mystery of your Son.” (Blessing of Ashes). “You have given your children a sacred time for the renewing and purifying of their hearts...” (Preface 11, Lent).

Preparation - this is the reason for the season. What are we preparing for? To say “Yes” again to God as we renew our Baptismal promises. At Easter as we celebrate the new life won for us by Jesus Christ, we renew our Baptismal commitment, we recommit ourselves to the Covenant saying to the Lord, “You are our God, we are your people.” We do this during the Easter vigil and the Easter Sunday Masses when we are asked to renew our Baptismal promises with six questions about three things we reject and three we believe e.g. Do you reject Satan..... ? Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.....? Having made this profession, we are sprinkled with water as a reminder of our Baptism.

Lent is given to us to check on ourselves, to see those areas of our lives for which we have to ask pardon and God’s help to change. It can be looked at as a long retreat in which through self examination, prayer, fasting, almsgiving, reflection on the readings and prayers of the Lenten Masses, retreat/mission, Confession, we can undergo some conversion and become more faithful members of Christ’s church. All of this so that when we come to Easter we may rejoice in the Resurrection and, with purified hearts and minds, say yes again to God with renewed devotion and love.

In this sense Lent is a joyful season as it provides space and help for us to become more and more what we have been created to be - faithful children of God. May this Lent be a beautiful journey of conversion for us.

LENTEN FAMILY CALENDAR



SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			Ash Wednesday Attend an Ash Wednesday Mass or prayer service today.	As a family, research and select a charity that you will support during Lent.	Fast from taking second helpings at meals.	Take over a disliked chore for a family member.
First Sunday of Lent Attend Mass often. The Eucharist is our greatest communal prayer and a surefire way to encounter Jesus.	Pray with your family at mealtime. Make a point of praying for people in need.	At bedtime, pray for people who are homeless and sleeping on the streets tonight.	Be more courteous in your attitude, words, and deeds.	Make a list of ten things you are grateful for in your life.	Fast from criticizing others aloud or silently in your mind. Seek to understand instead.	Pray while creating a piece of artwork. Do something creative, and do so for the glory of God.
Second Sunday of Lent Forego a favorite TV program for a week.	Go through your closets and donate usable clothing and household goods to a local charity.	Pay attention to someone you are tempted to brush aside.	Fast from gossip.	Pray at the sound of sirens from emergency vehicles. Pray for the people who might be in trouble.	Fast from e-mail, text messaging, or both for a day.	Speak less and listen more. Give others the gift of your undivided attention.
Third Sunday of Lent Pray while you go for a walk.	Fast from overscheduling your time. Leave some time to simply be.	Curtail your extra spending and donate what you save to your chosen charity.	At the end of the day, take time to thank God for all the graces you received during the day.	Pray the Rosary or other traditional prayers of the Church. Realize that you are joining your voice to millions of others who have prayed these prayers through the years.	Fast from the habit, substance, practice, or mindset that most stands in the way of your growing closer to God.	While grocery shopping, purchase an additional day's supply of food and drop it off at a local food pantry.

LENTEN FAMILY CALENDAR



SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Fourth Sunday of Lent During prayer, picture yourself meeting Jesus in a scene from the Gospels. Imagine your reaction and response.	Send a greeting card or a letter to a relative, friend, or fellow parishioner who is homebound.	Fast from eating food mindlessly, that is, from not even bothering to taste it.	Clean up a common area at work, in the neighborhood, or at home. Do it as a gift for the good of all.	Invite a widowed neighbor to join your family for a meal.	Fast from worrying. Trust God instead.	Plant a tree that will benefit future generations.
Fifth Sunday of Lent Pray for the willingness to seek forgiveness from people you have hurt.	Fast from light. Sit by the light of one candle in your home. Remember that Jesus has called you to be a light for the world.	Make a prayer out of performing a loving action for others. For example, when you take out the garbage or help your child with homework, do it mindfully.	Pick a day when you fast from using electronic appliances.	When you see or hear a news story about someone in trouble, pray for the person as a family.	Fast from hitting the snooze alarm. Get up and use the extra time for prayer.	At the grocery store, pray for the farmers and all those who help make available the food that you will bring to your table.
Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion Prayerfully read one of the Gospel accounts of Jesus' Passion, Death, and Resurrection.	Monday of Holy Week Volunteer for a parish program that helps those in need.	Tuesday of Holy Week Let a favorite hymn run through your mind as a prayer.	Wednesday of Holy Week Fast from comparing yourself to others. We are all one in God.	Holy Thursday Recognize your own needs and give them their due. Allow others to help you from time to time.	Good Friday of the Lord's Passion Fast from complaining. Notice how often you are tempted to complain!	Holy Saturday Be mindful of all that God has done for you.
The Resurrection of the Lord Celebrate Easter!						
<i>Notes and Reflections...</i>						

Stations of the Cross for the Family

History of the Way of the Cross

God sent his only son Jesus to the world, in order to show us how much God loved us. Jesus also came to teach us how to live a good life, so we can enjoy eternal life with God. God knew that people are weak and they needed help. So, God let his Son take the human body, but not just that, He let his Son pay the price for our sins.

Jesus chose to suffer for us, so we can go to heaven. Therefore, all what we have to do now is, repent for our sins, accept JESUS as our SAVIOUR and start living a life of love.

Do we want to accept this entry into heaven?

So how did Jesus suffer for our sins?

The stations of the cross gives us a small glimpse of what Jesus went through. In reality it was far more worse – yet meditating upon just fourteen events helps us as families to offer our sufferings in this world and combine them with the sufferings of Jesus in a prayerful manner.

How did the Way of the Cross come about?

The way of the cross is based upon the gospel (Bible reflections) on how Jesus carrying his cross walked through the streets in Jerusalem towards the place of execution called Golgotha. Most of us call it Calvary or the place of the skull. The church meditates upon fourteen special events that happened to Jesus on his way to Calvary – these fourteen events are called the stations of the cross.

Every Friday at 3pm the Franciscans follow the way of the cross with the faithful. The present road is known as the Via Dolorosa, or the Sorrowful Way. The last four stations are made on Calvary in the basilica of the Holy Sepulcher.

The Catholic church later set up fourteen stations in every Catholic church and chapel, so that people all around the world may share in the rich blessings of meditating upon the way of the cross.

What can I do now to follow the Way of the Cross?

You can make your home a little Jerusalem, when you with your family can pray and meditate upon the Way of the cross.

It is a wonderful way of spending lent if you can teach your children how to meditate upon the Stations of the cross.

Please note, that the Family Prayer of the way of the cross on this website, is specially formulated for parents and youth older children. You can yet read the reflections with your younger children, but instead of the Family Prayer, let them say a prayer from the heart.

1ST STATION – JESUS IS CONDEMNED TO DEATH

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Matthew 26:66 *“What is your judgement?” They answered, “He deserves death.”*

Reflection: Jesus, though He was innocent, was falsely accused and unjustly judged. Yet, He trusted in His heavenly Father to rescue Him from the designs of the wicked. Let us imitate Jesus’ faith in God.

Family Prayer: Dear Lord, many times in families, parents are misunderstood by children and children are misunderstood by parents. Husbands and wives misjudge each other; siblings falsely accuse each other. When we are falsely accused, dear Lord, give us the strength to bear the injustice with patience as our way of following You, on the way to the cross. We love you, Jesus.

1 Our Father - 1 Hail Mary - 1 Glory Be ...

O Jesus Crucified - for us you suffered - for us you died - On the Cross



2ND STATION – JESUS ACCEPTS HIS CROSS

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

John 19:17 *“Jesus was led away, carrying the cross by himself.”*

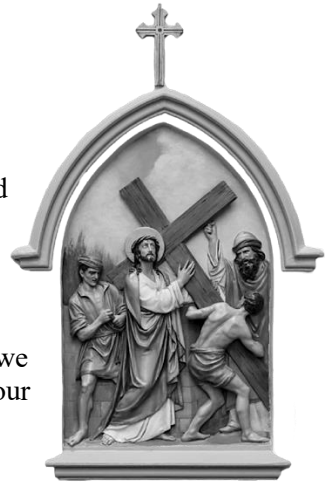
Reflection: Just as Jesus embraced the cross out of love for us so we must put up with the trials and contradictions we meet in following Him. Thus, our individual cross can become a means of salvation for us.

Family Prayer:

When we are faced with a pressing family problem, like a seriously sick child or the loss of a job, we question, “Why me, God?” or “Why us?”. Help us like Jesus to accept the cross with love and bear our trials as a prayer for the salvation of souls. We love you God.

1 Our Father - 1 Hail Mary - 1 Glory Be ...

O Jesus Crucified - for us you suffered - for us you died - On the cross



3RD STATION – JESUS FALLS THE FIRST TIME

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

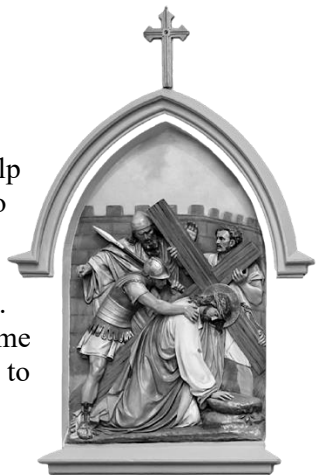
Hebrews 13:12 *“Jesus suffered outside the gate to sanctify his people with his blood.”*

Reflection: Jesus, our Lord, fell beneath the weight of His heavy cross. He knows we need His help when we stumble and fall in following Him. When we turn to Him in our distress, He will not fail to come to our aid.

Family Prayer: Jesus, you took our human nature to know what it means to fall when one is weak. There are times among family members, that we just cannot bear the mistakes of others. That’s the time Lord, we fall by giving in to our anger and pride. Yet we know Lord that with your help we are able to make peace and love again. We love you Jesus.

1 Our Father - 1 Hail Mary - 1 Glory Be ...

O Jesus Crucified - for us you suffered - for us you died - on the cross



4th Station – Jesus Meets His Mother

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

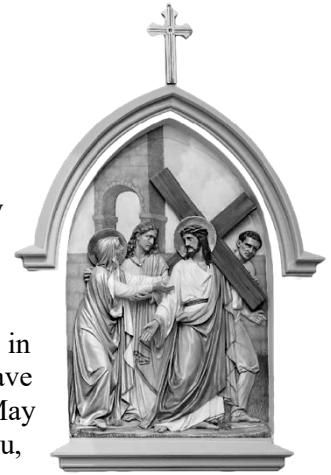
Isaiah 51:3 *“For the Lord will comfort Zion; He will comfort all her waste places.”*

Reflection: How Mary must have grieved to see her Son, Jesus, being led to crucifixion. Our Lady shared the pain with her son, and so she also shares in His triumph over death. Our Saviour gives us this same opportunity.

Family Prayer: Mother Mary, only a mother could feel a glimpse of your sorrow that you carried in your heart, as you followed Jesus on the way to the cross. Please give our mothers the grace to have that trust in God, when things go wrong and they have to watch their children or husbands in pain. May all mothers surrender their loved ones totally to God, as you did with your agonising son. We love you, Mother Mary.

1 Our Father - 1 Hail Mary - 1 Glory Be ...

O Jesus Crucified - for us you suffered - for us you died - on the cross



5th STATION – SIMON OF CYRENE HELPS JESUS

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

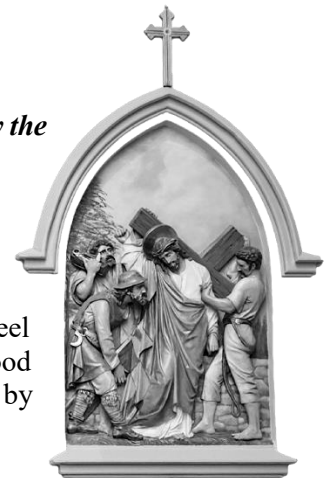
Matthew 27:32 *“They meet a Cyrenean named Simon. This man they pressed into service to carry the cross.”*

Reflection: Christ’s yoke is easy, and His burden light as Simon learned in helping Jesus. Though we naturally resist pain and hardship, we also will find that serving Christ will be a joy.

Family Prayer: Jesus, we pray here for fathers of our families. Specially for those fathers who feel pressured to keep their difficult jobs going, in order to pay the bills, put food on the table, give a good education to their children and keep their families happy. Give our fathers the joy to know that by serving their families, they are serving Christ. We love you Jesus.

1 Our Father - 1 Hail Mary - 1 Glory Be ...

O Jesus Crucified - for us you suffered - for us you died - on the cross



6th STATION – VERONICA WIPES JESUS’ FACE

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

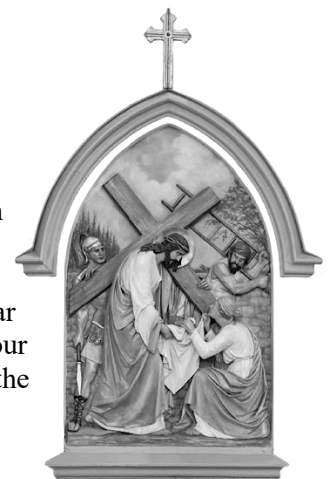
Matthew 25:40 *“As often as you did it for one of my least brothers, you did it for me.”*

Reflection: Anything we can do for anyone, Our Lord counts as done for Him. To help those in pain or trouble is always an act pleasing to God, one that will not go without a reward.

Family Prayer: Jesus, you rewarded Veronica with the imprint of your face. Imprint your face dear Lord in our hearts, so we together with our family will work among the suffering people in our communities. Specially the lonely, the sick, the disabled, the ones without a voice – the refugees, the aged and the unborn. We love you Jesus.

1 Our Father - 1 Hail Mary - 1 Glory Be ...

O Jesus Crucified - for us you suffered - for us you died - on the cross



7TH STATION – JESUS FALLS A SECOND TIME

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Isaiah 35:3 “*Strengthen the hands that are feeble, make firm the knees that are weak.*”

Reflection: Our Lord fell again under the weight of His cross. When we weaken, falter and fall, Our Saviour knows how hard our way is. He will strengthen us in sorrow, and come to help us. He will be our strength.

Family Prayer: Dear Lord we pray for families who suffer the consequences of addictions. Alcohol, gambling, drugs, pornography, social websites and addiction for vanity have separated family members from each other. Lord, these families act like strangers at home and find it hard to get up again from their addiction. We hold them up to you Lord, and we know that with your blessings they can build their family relationships again. We love you Jesus.

1 Our Father - 1 Hail Mary - 1 Glory Be ...

O Jesus Crucified - for us you suffered - for us you died - on the cross

8TH STATION – JESUS SPEAKS TO THE WOMEN

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Luke 23:28 “*Do not weep for me, but for yourselves and for your children.*”

Reflection: The heart of Jesus was full of pity for the sufferings His people were destined to undergo. So, too, does he have immense pity for us for whom He once suffered and died. Ask Him now to help you.

Family Prayer: Dear Jesus, most probably the children of those women, were the church’s early Christians who were persecuted for their faith. When we choose to follow you Jesus, we are persecuted in our schools, universities, work places, and even in our homes by family and friends. Non-believers make fun of us and ridicule us. When this happens Jesus, help us to remember to take up our cross and follow you to Calvary. We love you Jesus.

1 Our Father - 1 Hail Mary - 1 Glory Be ...

O Jesus Crucified - for us you suffered - for us you died - on the cross

9TH STATION – JESUS FALLS A THIRD TIME

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Psalms 22:12 “*Be not far from me for I am in distress; be near, for I have no one to help me.*”

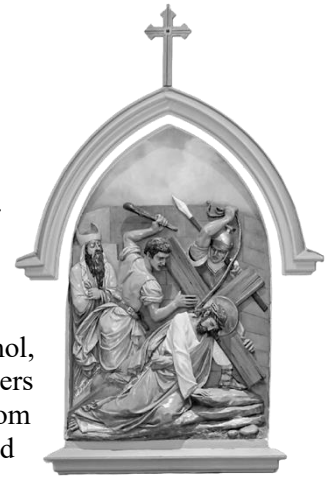
Reflection: How frail at this stage is Christ in His human nature! Yet, He endured despite His weakness and failing strength. So must we carry on in spite of our infirmity and failings to do God’s work.

Family Prayer: Dear Lord, sometimes we feel so wretched and so weak with the burden of our sins, that we just don’t have the strength or spirit to get up again. Help us then to remember you in that state, so weak and fallen by the burden of our sins. Give us the wisdom to know that it is in our utmost weakness, that we experience Your immense LOVE and MERCY for us. We love you Jesus.

1 Our Father - 1 Hail Mary - 1 Glory Be ...

O Jesus Crucified - for us you suffered - for us you died - on the cross

A PROJECT OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI R.C. CHURCH, S. GRANDE LENT 2022 EDITION



10TH STATION – JESUS IS STRIPPED OF HIS GARMENTS

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Mark 15:24 *“They divided up His garments by rolling dice for them to see what each should take.”*

Reflection: Just as Christ’s clothing was taken away, so one day will we be separated from all the possessions given to us in life. Nothing we own belongs with us permanently, so we must each be generous with the gifts and talents God gives us.

Family Prayer: Dear Jesus, we pray for the youth in our families. Please help them to know that all what is good in them belongs to God. Please help them to use their gifts and talents to work passionately for you. Bless them in their vocations. Help them to stand against the attacks on marriage and family life. Strip them of all vanities in the world that brings temporary pleasure to the body. Help them to build a whole new generation of zealous Christians. We Love you Jesus.

1 Our Father - 1 Hail Mary - 1 Glory Be ...

O Jesus Crucified - for us you suffered - for us you died - on the cross

11TH STATION – JESUS IS NAILED TO HIS CROSS

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Mark 15:27 *“With Him they crucified two insurgents, one at His right and one at His left.”*

Reflection: The soldiers nailed Christ to the cross so that he knew the pain and anguish of being unable to move hand or foot. In distress he cried out “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”

Family Prayer: Dear God, we pray for those families in deep distress: Parents crying for their dying child in a hospital; children in distress watching their parents go through a divorce; parents who have lost their children for an addiction or in prison; children who have lost a parent for a mental illness; parents who have lost their unborn babies and families who have lost their loved one in war ... You know it all Lord.

When we cry in anguish, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”, help us to remember your agony on the cross. We love you Jesus.

1 Our Father - 1 Hail Mary - 1 Glory Be ...

O Jesus Crucified - for us you suffered - for us you died - on the cross

12TH STATION – CHRIST DIES ON THE CROSS

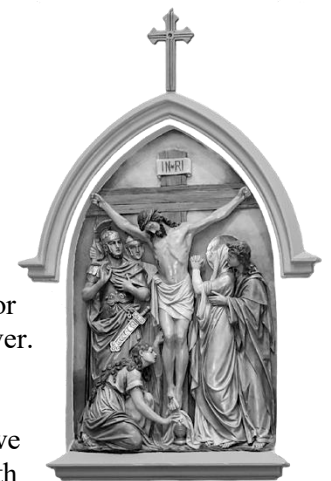
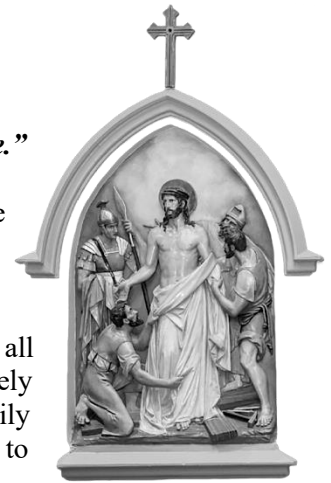
V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Mark 15:37 *“Then Jesus uttering a loud cry, breathed His last.”*

Reflection: When it comes to our turn to die, let us meet death as Jesus did, trusting in God for deliverance. Having suffered with Christ, and dying with Him, we shall rise to reign with Him forever.

Family Prayer: Dear Lord, while our families choose to follow you on your way to the cross, we know that someday you will deliver us from the sufferings of this world. When that time of death comes close, please help us to remember that ‘death’ is only the entrance to our new life with you. Save us then from the distractions of the evil one, and help us to know that we are so close to experiencing your loving embrace. We love you Jesus.



1 Our Father - 1 Hail Mary - 1 Glory Be ...

O Jesus Crucified - for us you suffered - for us you died - on the cross

13TH STATION – JESUS IS TAKEN DOWN FROM THE CROSS

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Luke 2:35 “*And a sword will pierce through your own soul.*”

Reflection: Mary pondered on the words of Simeon... Christ’s death is the final proof of His humanity. Unless He was human, he could not have died. Unless He was also God, His death would profit us nothing. “Ours were the sufferings He bore.”

Family Prayer: You gave yourself totally to us Jesus, and now your lifeless body lies in the hands of your sorrowful mother - Our Mother who bore the pain on behalf of us. As her heart agonised in sorrow, and as she held her son's dead body, we wonder what went on in her mind?

(Pause for a minute. Close your eyes and remember how Mary held her son's lifeless body in her arms).

As we look at her sorrowful eyes, Mary might say to us: “Here is my son who died FOR YOU”. Mary our Mother, lead our families with your gentle hand towards Jesus. We love you Jesus and Mary.

1 Our Father - 1 Hail Mary - 1 Glory Be ...

O Jesus Crucified - for us you suffered - for us you died - on the cross

14TH STATION – JESUS IS LAID IN THE TOMB

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

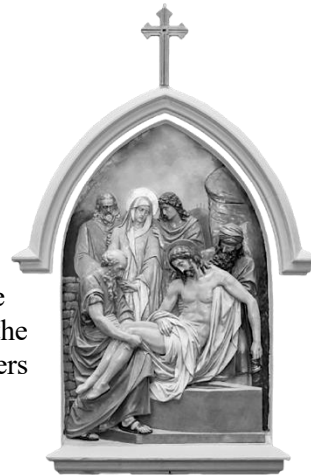
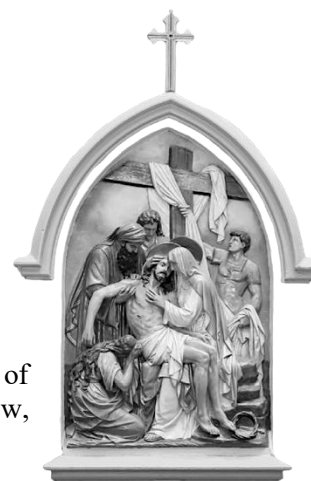
Mark 15:46 “*Joseph of Arimathea laid Him in a tomb, and rolled a stone across the entrance.*”

Reflection: Christ’s lifeless body is laid to rest. The King of all universe, laid in a borrowed tomb.

Family Prayer: “The King of all universe, laid in a borrowed tomb”! Even at that most sorrowful time – a mother’s anguish was satisfied. Help us Lord as families to remain humble, even through the most sorrowful experiences. Help us to know and trust that God will take care of us. It is during the saddest times in our life – that we experience the love and care of family, friends and even strangers like Joseph of Arimathea. We love you God.

1 Our Father - 1 Hail Mary - 1 Glory Be ...

O Jesus Crucified - for us you suffered - for us you died - on the cross



Source: <http://www.family-prayer.org/stations-of-the-cross.html>

Called To Be Catholic: A Reflection

Once there was no me.
Then, out of nothingness
infinite love called me to be.
Love called me to be Catholic

Called to be a disciple, a follower of Jesus,
I try to live my life according to the values
taught by Jesus, the loving face of God.
Whatever my state in life might be,
single or married, young or old,
sick or healthy,
There I am called to live in a way
pleasing to The Lord, open to ongoing
conversion through the Holy Spirit
I am called to be Catholic.

I am called to forgive in an unreconciled world,
to respect life in all its stages,
and in all its different skin colours,
to serve God in the least of the Lord's brothers and sisters,
to see the presence of God in all around me.
I am called to be Catholic.

I am called to friendship with the Lord,
to know myself as a child of the Father,
to live with God now and forever
with the Saints in Heaven

Called to be a person of The Word.
From the Scripture I read
and hear proclaimed in the Church, I am formed and fed,
for no-one lives on bread alone but on every word
that comes from the mouth of God

I am called to be Catholic.
Called to be a person of the Sacraments.
Through the waters of Baptism
and the oil of Confirmation
I became a Catholic,
healed in the Sacraments of
Reconciliation and Anointing,
committed to service in the Sacraments
of Marriage and Ordination.

Called to be Catholic,
I gather on the day of The Lord
with other Catholics, my brothers and sisters,
fellow disciples, pilgrims together on the journey,

to listen to the Word, to take bread and wine,
to remember and give thanks,
to share the Body and Blood of the Lord,
and make of our lives a gift,
a spiritual sacrifice pleasing to the Father.

Called to be Catholic,
from the Eucharist we go, the Body of Christ.
As Jesus brought healing, truth, joy and reconciliation
when he walked on earth, now we, Christ's Body,
united in constant prayer with Mary our Mother,
continue his mission building the civilization of love.

Jesus, the head of the Church,
the light of the World,
the one who came to serve.

And we the Church,
called to be light and servant of the World,
called to be Catholic.

~ **Msgr. Michael de Verteuil**

SOUL FOOD

“Grief and loss in the time of COVID-19”

April 1, 2020

By Father Lawrence Johnson

“Many aspects of our lives have changed in a very short period of time. Coronavirus has changed our lives in unexpected and unwanted ways. Uncertainty has become a way of life. The duration of these changes is unknown and some of these changes may stay with us for a very long time, if not permanently.

We did not choose these changes. People are working from home in the presence of family. Children are making demands for time, attention and assistance with a new way of schooling. Shopping for food and other basic needs has become a time-consuming and unsettling challenge. Everywhere there is fear of coming into contact with the virus. All of this is real. We do not know what is to come.

One aspect of the challenge of living in these times is dealing with death, dying and grief. This is not addressing the threat of death from coronavirus. This is death as it is encountered and experienced in the normal course of human experience. Grief becomes increasingly complicated and painful when the normal rituals and experiences surrounding death and dying are disrupted. During this time of isolation and separation, ...mandates have dictated that no more than ten people may gather in one place. In a hospital, nursing home or hospice setting, this narrows to two people, and then only when the care provider determines that death is imminent.

This raises a painful and crucial question: what happens when a loved one is dying and the family is unable to be at their side through the dying process? What happens when a family member is dying and their family is unable to properly say goodbye? What happens when the family cannot gather around their dying loved one to be present, tell stories, share memories and prepare for the separation to come? What happens when familiar funeral rituals cannot be observed at the time of death?

In many of our cultural and religious traditions, rituals provide structure and predictability in the aftermath of death. What happens when the rituals are taken away? Funeral directors struggle with the limitation of ten people gathering and the inability to embalm and prepare a body for viewing if the family so desires. Gathering with family and friends is no longer an option. Conducting a traditional funeral is no longer an option in these times.

These are the rituals humans have relied on for millennia to help us grieve and heal. When this does not take place grief becomes prolonged and complicated. The impact on family and friends is immeasurable. Not being able to be at the bedside to hold a dying loved one's hand is going to leave scars that may never disappear.

For the grief therapist, pastoral caregiver, counselor or clinician there are no easy answers. There are no tried-and-true protocols. There is no convenient solution or process that will solve the problem of complicated grief. Indeed, complicated grief is not a problem that can be solved.

What will help is wise intervention to assist someone walk through the experience of loss and grief. Many grief therapists, clinicians and pastoral caregivers will be busy helping people grieve. The loss on our rituals such as gathering at the bedside, saying goodbye, giving the patient permission to die, viewing the body and gathering with family and friends to celebrate and observing religious rituals will take a toll that we do not yet know or understand.

As a clinician, therapist, counselor or pastoral caregiver, your role is not to take someone's grief away. No one chooses to experience grief but it is a natural and necessary human experience. As painful as it is, **the bereaved person needs and often wants to pass through the experience of grief as a necessary part of the process of adapting to a new reality.**

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For the caregiver, some tips may be helpful. Many of these may be familiar, but they bear repeating:

- Don't say "It will be okay." (It is not okay)
- Do encourage the bereaved to talk to a grief counselor or competent pastoral care giver.
- Be patient. The process of grieving cannot be hurried.
- Do not impose a time limit. Every individual grieves in their own time and in their own way. -Some people grieve for the rest of their lives.
- Grief is not a problem to be solved.
- Don't say: "He/she is in a better place."
- Don't say: "It will get better with time."
- Grief is not something you get over. Grief is something you learn to live with.

Simply being a listening, compassionate presence is often the best method to help someone move through their grief. One vitally necessary task is for the therapist or counselor to reflect on your own experience of grief. We have all experienced death, loss and grief. We will all experience it again. Grief is an unwelcome but inevitable presence in our lives. And we will live through it."

Source: <https://catholicreview.org/grief-and-loss-in-the-time-of-covid-19/>

First Sunday of Lent

Luke: 4:1-13

REFLECT ON THE WORD

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, ask each family member what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

It might seem strange to think that Jesus was tempted by the devil. Remember, though, that Jesus is both fully God and fully human, and temptation is definitely a part of being human. Take a moment to think about the reading we just heard.

♦ What do you notice about the humanity of Jesus?

Because Jesus is fully human, he knows and has experienced all that we go through. Jesus ate and played and learned just like us. Today's Gospel even notes that Jesus was hungry from fasting!

♦ How does understanding Jesus' humanity help you to grow in your own relationship with Jesus?

The devil tempted Jesus with food, riches, and power. Even so, Jesus remained steadfast and did not give in to the temptations. What does temptation look like in your life? Sin sometimes seems so glamorous that we are easily drawn toward it. While we want to take good care of ourselves, we don't want the self-care to turn into selfishness. While we appreciate the gifts and talents of other people, we don't want to live in jealousy and envy of our classmates.

♦ How do you deal with temptation?

Reread the last line of today's Gospel passage: "When the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from him for a time" (Luke 4:13). Even when Jesus refuses to give into today's temptations, the Gospel writer notes that Jesus will be tempted again in the future. Jesus is not afraid, however, and



continues his journey. We know that Jesus, unlike us, will not give into the temptations presents to him because he is divine. Today's Gospel passage of the temptation of Jesus reminds us that we must stay focused on growing in our relationship with God. Even when we encounter temptation and choose to sin, we can be mindful and try to do better next time. God loves us so much that nothing we do can ever separate us from God's love.

♦ What are some ways God reminds you of his love for you?

This season of Lent gives us the opportunity to examine how we use the freedom God gives to us. Do we make choices that draw us closer to God? Do we consciously move towards the life and love that God unconditionally offers? Do we work to build the kingdom of God here and now? Taking moments for reflection throughout this Lenten season can help us intentionally recall that all we do is directed to God.

ACT ON THE WORD

Temptations Today

For this activity, you will need sheets of paper, pens and Bibles.

Divide the teens into small groups and give each group a Bible. Ask each group to imagine what the Gospel passage would look like if this story took place in today's world. Have the groups develop scenarios around the dialogue between Jesus and the devil. Encourage them to be creative. They can add dialogue to match the new setting, add new lines for Jesus as he refuses the devil's offers, or other creative additions. They can find the story in their Bibles (Luke 4:1-13). After the teens have had time to create their modern retelling of this passage, have the groups act out their version. After each group "performs," invite the rest of the group to share constructive feedback about the content of the presentations. Guide the teens in discussing some of the common themes that surround temptation today.

Pray Differently

You will need to prepare some informational material on various Catholic prayer practices (some examples are mentioned in the activity below). Be prepared to share these with the teens.

Remind teens that prayer, fasting and almsgiving are all components of Lenten spirituality. As Lent

beings, encourage the young people to research different types of prayer within the Catholic Tradition. You may wish to provide them with some examples, including lectio divina, praying with music, praying the Rosary, imaginative or Ignatian prayer, adoration, etc. invite students to choose and practice one of these methods or prayer during this season of Lent. Prayer is our way of communicating with God. The more we communicate with him, the stronger we become to fight temptations and follow Jesus.

Closing Prayer

Ever faithful God,
the power of your Spirit fills our lives and our world.

Help us to trust always in this power,
especially when doubts and fear threaten our faith.

As we journey through these forty days to the joy of Easter,

may our eyes remain focused on Christ,
our hope and our salvation.

We make our prayer through him, with him,
and in him,

who reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

one God, for ever and ever.

Amen

Second Sunday of Lent

Luke 9:28b – 36

REFLECT ON THE WORD

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, ask each family member what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

Transformation isn't always easy, but it is an essential part of life. We all experience some form of transformation, or change, every day. Our relationships, interests, and goals can change frequently. Even though the process can be unsettling, we ultimately grow in our knowledge of self and others.

♦ **How do you think Peter, James and John were transformed or changed by their experience on the mountain with Jesus?**

Just as Jesus was transfigured, God calls each of us to be transfigured every day. It is a process. As Christians we constantly strive to love more generously, live more graciously, and practice greater hospitality. We work to include the excluded, to promote peace and to turn away from hate, selfishness, and sinful actions. When we do these things, we are changing our lives to become more like Jesus. Take some time to consider the idea of transformation in your own life.

- ♦ **How is God calling you to transfigure your own life?**
- ♦ **How is God calling you to transfigure the world?**
- ♦ **What are some things that keep you from being transfigured?**

Part of being transfigured is simply the willingness to be open to God's work in your life. Peter trusted Jesus although he could not fully understand what was happening. Even so,



Peter, James, and John all recognized they were in the presence of God.

♦ **What are some of the ways you know that you are in the presence of God?**

Peter, James and John hear God's voice from the heavens telling them to listen to Jesus because he is God's Son. We have the opportunity to listen to God's word every time we hear the Scripture proclaimed at Mass. We know that the Scripture stories we hear at Mass aren't just any stories: they are the Word of God. This is even emphasized by the dialogue at the end of the readings when the lector says, "The Word of the Lord." We respond, "Thanks be to God," acknowledging that what we just heard is truly God's Word. The same is true for the Gospel when the priest or deacon says, "The Gospel of the Lord," and we respond, "Praise to you, Lord, Jesus Christ." We affirm that what we have heard is not just the retelling of a story but the voice of God speaking directly to us through the Scripture text.

♦ **What are some of the ways you pray with Scripture?**

Spending time in prayer with the Word of God in Scriptures helps us to transform our lives. We believe that the kingdom of God is both now and not yet. Even during Lent, Christians are still an Easter people. We live each day in the joy of Christ's victory over sin and death, yet we know that there is still so much sin and sadness in our world. We strive to transform the world into a better image of God's kingdom. Even so, we wait for the day when we will fully live in the joy of the glorified Christ in heaven,

the very thing Peter, James and John experienced ever-briefly on the mountain with Jesus.

ACT ON THE WORD

Group Lectio Divina

One way to have a deeper encounter with the Word of God in the Scripture is through the practice of lectio divina. *Lectio divina*, or “divine reading,” is an ancient prayer practice that has been used by Christians throughout history. Invite everyone in the group to move to a comfortable space in the room for this prayer time. Spread out and dim the lights to create a prayerful environment. Invite everyone to spend a few moments in silence to prepare themselves for prayer. Then, use the following steps to lead the teens in this modified lectio divina exercise.

- Step 1: Choose your Scripture passage. In this case, use today’s Gospel for your prayer
- Step 2: Read through the passage slowly aloud, savoring each word. There is no rush. When you have finished, invite the teens to consider any words or phrases that speak to them in a special way. What stood out to them as they listened? Encourage the teens to think about and pray with this word or phrase as you move to Step 3.

- Step 3: Read the passage aloud again, in a similar manner.
- Step 4: After a few moments of silent prayer and reflection, invite the teens to share their word or phrase with the rest of the group. If time permits, invite students to discuss why that word or phrase seems significant.
- Step 5: Share a prayer of thanksgiving for this period of prayer. Encourage the young people to think about how God is calling them to transformation this week, especially in life of their word or phrase from this lectio divina activity. If time permits, the teens can share their responses.

Closing Prayer

O God,

*how good it is for us to be with you,
and know of your presence in our lives.*

*Help us to build tents of justice, love and light
that shower others with the goodness
of compassion that you have given us.*

Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Third Sunday of Lent

Luke 13:1-9

Reflect on the Word

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, ask each family member what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

Although it might not seem like it at first, there is definitely much "good news" in today's Gospel. Jesus makes it clear that we cannot compare ourselves with others, as each of us sin and each of us fall short of who we are called to be. It is not helpful, then, to try to distinguish levels of sinfulness.

◆ Why do you think Jesus points this out to his followers?

Jesus continues presenting this idea of a compassionate, loving God through the parable of the fig tree. In this story, patience outweighs practicality. Does it make sense that the landowner would want to uproot the barren tree that probably looks rather dead and is certainly draining other resources? Of course! But the gardener reminds us that our lives as Christians are about more than practicality.

◆ What do you think it means to say that Christian life is about more than practicality?

◆ What are some characteristics of the Christian life? How would you describe it to someone?

One characteristic of the Christian life is hope, and we see this in today's Gospel reading. Notice that we don't know what happens to the fig tree. While the gardener pleads with the landowner and promises to cultivate the plant, we do not know for certain if the owner agrees to the plan or if the tree responds to the tending. We do know, however, that there is hope for the future of the tree. Likewise, there is hope for us even



when the future is unknown or uncertain or when we have sinned.

- ◆ Where do you find hope?
- ◆ What helps you to live out this hope in your daily life?

St. Bernard of Clairvaux, a twelfth-century Cistercian monk, spoke of the need for patient endurance while growing in life in Christ. Lent is a great opportunity to remember this image of endurance and today's Gospel highlights the significance of patience in light of Christian hope. St. Bernard reminds us that there is nothing that we cannot overcome through Christ if we are willing to unite our lives with his.

- ◆ What does it mean for you to unite your life with Jesus?

Act on the Word

Letters to the Elect

For this activity, you will need card making materials such as markers, coloured pencils and blank paper. You will also need envelopes and pens or pencils.

Lent is a time of final preparation for those people who are going to be baptized at the Easter Vigil and enter into the Body of Christ and the community of faith. These people are called the “elect.” It is important to remember that the process of initiation involves *all* people of faith. As people who are already baptized into Christ, we are called to share God’s love with others and encourage their growth in Christ.

Have the teens reflect on their understanding on Christian hope and God’s love. Then, give them

materials to make greetings cards or write letters to the elect. In both cases, the young people should share with the elect their reflections on their hope in God’s love. Let the elect know that they are welcomed into this community of faith.

Share these letters with the elect of the parish. Remember, we are on body in Christ and it important that we support each other, especially our newest members of the community.

Closing Prayer

*God of every good grace,
direct our hearts and minds to your service.
Help us to fulfill your commands
and bring others to know of your mercy
until we are united in the halls of heaven.
Through Christ our lord.
Amen.*

Fourth Sunday of Lent

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

REFLECT ON THE WORD

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, ask each family member what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

- ◆ **Notice what causes Jesus to share this parable. What situation is Jesus in? Why might this context be significant?**

Jesus addresses his parables to many different audiences. In today's Gospel, we hear that the religious leaders of the time were complaining about Jesus' mercy towards sinners. Because of this, Jesus tells them a story of God's generous love and forgiveness.

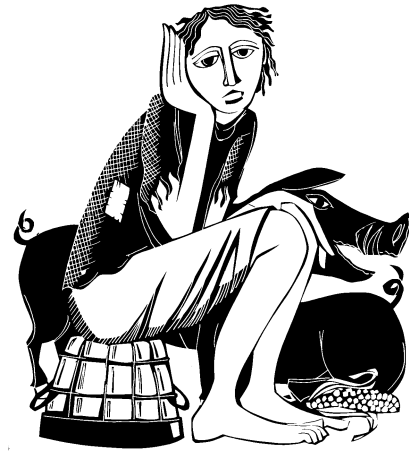
The parable begins with a shocking situation. When the younger son asks for his share of the inheritance, he is very much saying to his father, "I wish you were dead so I can have what belongs to me."

- ◆ **Why do you think the son would ask this of his father?**
- ◆ **How might his father have felt when he heard such a request?**

We hear that the younger son comes to his sense and decides to return home. From his own self-reflection we can see it must have been difficult to gather the courage to admit to his father that he made a mistake.

- ◆ **What do you feel like when you have to admit you made a mistake? Why does it seem so difficult to admit when we are wrong?**

Consider the details Luke includes when sharing this story. The father is not angry with the younger son. In fact, it seems as if he is longing



for him.
hear that

We
the

father notices the returning son when he was still far away. The father clearly loves his son, even though his son did not act in a loving way toward him.

- ◆ **How might this image be significant in reflecting on your own image of God?**
- ◆ **The father says that the son was dead, when clearly he is still alive. Why might this word choice be significant?**

The parable could have easily ended with the return of the younger son. It is a joyful moment and full of love and hope. It would be the picture perfect ending.

- ◆ **Why, then do you think Jesus includes the interaction between the older son and the father? What does this relationship contribute to understanding the parable and the context in which it was told?**

We all feel jealous of others at times and want things to be "fair" But God's love and mercy goes beyond our sense of what is fair. It is the perfect love. As Christians, we are called to imitate this love in all our relationships.

ACT ON THE WORD

The Prodigals of Today

For this activity, you will need current newspapers or access to online new sources for the teens. It may also be helpful to have notepaper available for the teens to use.

Separate the teens into small groups. Give each group newspapers or allow them to use their phones or other devices to look up news online. Then, ask each group to find a contemporary news story that seems to parallel the reality that is described in today's parable the reality that is described in today's parable about the prodigal son. Encourage the young people to be creative in making connections, as the truths of the parable transcend the context in which it was originally told.

Once the groups have found their news stories, have each group turn the current even into a parable and share this fresh perspective with the larger group. After each group presents, invite the other teens to comment on the similarities and differences between the stories. You may want to guide the discussion by asking how these stories reveal the relationship between God and human beings.

Closing Prayer

*God of mercy and love,
you call on sinners
to renew their lives in you.
Grant to us, your servants,
hearts alive with forgiveness
following the example of Christ,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of
the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.*

Fifth Sunday of Lent

John 8:1 – 11

REFLECT ON THE WORD

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, ask each family member what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

We know where we are going. A few more weeks and we will be at the trial, death and resurrection of Jesus. This is the Fifth Sunday of Lent and we are seeing Jesus being tested. The people are looking for a way to condemn him and his teachings. They are trying to stir up trouble.

- ♦ **Do you know people like that?**
- ♦ **Are there times when you intentionally stir up trouble?**

As they bring him the woman they caught in adultery, the scribes and Pharisees try to make Jesus choose between the law of Moses (which was an important part of their religious tradition) and the law of love Jesus has been proclaiming. But what does he do? He draws in the sand. We all ask God to listen to us. How must have the Pharisees and scribes felt when Jesus seemed like he was ignoring them? When you want an answer to something and you get ignored, it can be very frustrating. Finally though, Jesus tells them that whoever has never sinned can throw the first stone at the woman. Knowing this is not possible, since they are all aware of their sinfulness, they walk away.

- ♦ **Are you aware of your sinfulness? How does this awareness affect your actions toward others who have sinned?**

The relief that washed over the woman when they left her must have been easily felt. Yet, she still faced Jesus. She still faced her Lord and was waiting for his judgment.



- ♦ **How do you feel when you know you have made a wrong choice and now you are accountable for it?**
- ♦ **How do you feel after receiving the sacrament of reconciliation?**
- ♦ **How would you feel if you were in the woman's shoes?**

The end of this Gospel passage is very beautiful. The woman does not deny her sin. Jesus does not ask her to explain herself. There is no room for excuses when it comes to our relationship with God. All he wants is our love and when we think about, that is all we want too.

Jesus notes that they did not condemn her and neither does he. Instead, Jesus shows her mercy. He shows her love and sends her away with peace. There is a freedom in knowing you sinned, feeling God's forgiveness, and being sent away in peace and mercy.

The scribes and Pharisees were faced with their own sinfulness. The woman was gifted with a mercy she had not known before. Jesus continues his ministry, which will lead to his death and our new life in him.

- ♦ **How can you share Jesus' merciful love with others?**
- ♦ **How is our task of spreading the good news of the gospel connected to our recognition of sin and God's forgiveness?**

Act on the Word

Celebrating God's Mercy

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For this activity, you will need to print out copies of an examination of conscience (one form the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops can be found here:

<http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/sacraments-and-sacramentals/penance/sacrament-reconciliation-young-adults-examination-of-conscience.cfm>

If possible, you will also need to arrange to have a priest available for the sacrament of reconciliation during this time or at another agreed upon time. If you are not able to set it up for a time when you are already meeting, find out when your parish has time for reconciliation scheduled and encouraged the teens to go.

Today's Gospel readings and reflection remind us that none of us are free from sin. No matter how small our sins might be seen, all of them take us farther away from God. It is especially appropriate to consider our sins during this season of Lent, as we prepare ourselves to celebrate the resurrection of Christ. In the sacrament of reconciliation, we are invited to identify those times when we have turned away from God and return to him through his grace, forgiveness, and mercy.

Pass out copies of the examination of conscience to the young people. Remind them that sin is not just

about breaking the rules, it is about breaking our relationship with God. The sacrament of reconciliation helps us repair that relationship. Encourage the teens to spread out in your meetings space and spend time in prayer reflecting on this examination of conscience. If space permits, do this in a chapel or other prayer space in your parish. You may want to play quiet, reflective music during this time.

If a priest is available, invite the teens to participate in the sacrament of reconciliation. If this is not possible during your meeting time, let them know when they can receive the sacrament at the parish.

Closing Prayer

*God of gentleness and mercy,
you shower your servants
with your compassion and goodness.
Prompt us to be generous
with the gifts of love and kindness
as we witness your joy and care
in the midst of conflict and division.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion

Luke 22:14 – 23:56

REFLECT ON THE WORD

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, ask each family member what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

- ♦ **Have you ever seen something so awful happening that even though you wanted to turn away, you couldn't?**

This reality is true for many Americans they recall watching the news, seeing the large, commercial airplanes crash into the Twin Towers in New York City in 2001. For months, the news coverage continued, and viewers could not stop watching. Many asked, "What happens now?" Some responded with ideas for new political policies, some lost their faith. However, some had faith that we would come together and comfort those who had lost someone in the cash, or help those who were on the front lines. Some had faith that God would comfort the hurting and bring peace to those who embraced tragedy.

When Jesus was on his way to Calvary, those who were following him, I imagine, could not turn away. They knew the most unjust injustice was happening, and they could do nothing to stop it. They were following their Lord, that man that redefined love, compassion, and discipline for them. When he got to the top of the hill, they saw him crucified. And if that was not enough, he was jeered at while on the cross. After his death, darkness fell over the whole earth. They knew in the depths of their hearts that the worst thing in their world had happened.

"The worst thing" in your world is different from what we hear in the Gospel today. We could go around this room and everyone in here would have their own version of the "the worst thing"



in their
Death.

life.

Divorce. Breakups. Abuse. Abandonment. Jail. Hunger. Homelessness.

- ♦ **Spend a minute thinking about one of these times in your life. See if you can recall the emotion that accompanied that moment.**

Today's Gospel reading is bleak. We do we find hope in it? God is still in control, even in the dark moments of our life. We hear Jesus offer mercy and salvation to the criminal on the cross. We hear of the soldier's belief in God after Jesus had died. God is forever faithful, loving, and forgiving. We can be overwhelmed by circumstance in our life or we can embrace God even tighter than we have ever before. We have the freedom and the power to trust God. We can stand up to evil and proclaim that whatever we are going through, being a disciple of Christ is better than being part of the catastrophe of evil.

- ♦ **Spend a few minutes in silent reflection asking the Holy Spirit to give you the strength to turn to God in moments of despair.**

ACT ON THE WORD

Amidst the Storm

For this activity, you will need to print out a recent news story – it can be on any topic, but if you can find an article about people doing good works in your community, that would help with the theme of this activity. Divide the article into five parts, and have each part printed on a separate sheet. You will also need to play a recording of “Praise You in the Storm” by Casting Crowns.

Ask for five volunteers to each read a part of the article. Have them stand in front of the group and instruct them to only begin reading when you point at each person. Instruct the rest of the group to listen carefully and try to make sense of the story they are hearing. Point to one of the teen who does not have the beginning of the article to start. Then, after about ten seconds, point to another reader and have them begin their part, continuing this pattern until all are reading aloud at the same time. Have them continue reading until the listeners give up and get frustrated or the article comes to an end. Have the readers rejoin the group and discuss the following questions with all the young people.

- ♦ **If you were a reader, how did it feel to be interrupted by someone else? Was it hard to concentrate? What was most distracting?**

- ♦ **If you were a listener, what was the most challenging part of hearing the article? Was it easy to piece together the information?**

Guide the discussion back to today’s reflection topic. When there are so many things going on in our life, Satan can use moments like that to distract us from the safety of God’s love. Remind the young people that God is always with us and his love overcomes any darkness. Close the discussion by listening to the Casting Crowns song “Praise You in This Storm”.

Closing Prayer

*God of mercy,
you transformed the cross of Jesus
into the tree of life.
Bless us with the grace to learn from
the example of his passion
and to share in the glory of his resurrection.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus
Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity
of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.*

Source: The Living Word Sunday Gospel Reflections and Actions for Teens 2021 - 2022

God Is Our Co-Parent

'By calling God 'Father,' the language of faith... thus draws on the human experience of parents, who are in a way the first representatives of God for man.

CCC 239

Our children don't belong to us. They belong to God. God gives his children earthly parents he wants them to be able to feel his love through your body and see his face in your eyes. Christian moms and dads are meant to be the face of God to our kids!

Some parents, rather than being comfortable by this, are scared witless. They think, "Don't you know how broken/crazy/tired/stressed/lonely/confused/etc. I am?!? I can't possibly show them God's love all by myself!" The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* recognizes that because we are sinful, we aren't capable of perfectly showing God's face to our kids. The good news is, you're not supposed to do it all by yourself. God wants to help you. But that might mean learning to pray a little differently than you're used to.

Firstly, it is so important to pray with your spouse every day. Thank God for the gift of your family. Ask God to help you be the parents he created you to be. Ask him for the grace to be generous to each other and your children. Ask him to help to see part of your home life – the joys and the struggles – as another opportunity to fill your hearts with his love and grace. If you haven't made a habit of praying daily as couple, our book *Praying for (and With) Your Spouse* can help you painlessly learn the steps to creating a lifegiving couple-prayer life.

Second, it's critical to pray with your kids every day – not just at formal prayer time, but all day long. If you're having a good moment, don't forget to pray. Out loud. With you kids. Say something like, "Lord, thank you for letting me enjoy my little ones so much right now!" Similarly, if you're struggling, don't forget to pray. Out loud. With you kids. Say something like, "Lord, I'm kind of losing my mind right now. Please help me love these kids with your love." Regardless of how awkward this might feel at first, the more you do it, the more God will bless you through it. Keep it simple. Keep it short. But pray from your heart and pray all day. Don't run away from your kids to be close to God. Invite God to stand next to you all day as you parent. By all means, do whatever you can to carve out special time for prayer, reflection, and adoration, but don't reserve your faith for "special times". Talk to God as if he were another family member standing right next to you and waiting to lend a hand. Because he is!

One tip we discuss in our book *Discovering God Together: The Catholic Guide to Raising Faithful Kids* is to teach your kids to pray over you. We regularly give our kids blessing by laying our hands on them and asking God's grace for the day, or before special moments (like a test, game, or performance), or when they're hurting physically or emotionally. Once you've modeled this practice, you can also ask your kids to pray over you. We can't tell you how healing it is to be able to call your kids over and say, "Mom/Dad is having a hard day, guys. Can you please pray over me?" and have your 4-year-old put his hand on your knee and say, "Jesus, please help Mommy feel better". Or even, "Please help me be good for Daddy." In the Popcak household, our children have been praying over us their whole lives – just as we have been praying over them all of theirs. Teaching them to pray over you acquaints them with the spiritual power they've been given in baptism as sons and daughters of God. It also reminds them that when *we're* driving *them* crazy (hey, it happens), they can go over our heads and talk to their heavenly Father, secure in the knowledge that he will help them out.

Of course, it's also good to create a little space every day for family prayer time. Dinner time or bedtime is a good time for many families, but you can do what works best for you. There are many different formats you can use for family prayer. One we developed uses the acronym **PRAISE**. This stands for:

Praise and thanksgiving – Take turns acknowledging the blessing of the day.

Repentance – Take turns asking God for the grace to handle different challenges you faced today better the next time.

Ask for your needs – Take turns asking for God's help with special intentions.

Intercede for others – Take turns asking God to bless those who need our prayers.

Seek his will – Bring all the decisions your family faces to God and ask for his wisdom to help you make the right choices so you can be the family he wants you to be.

Express your desire to keep listening – As you wrap up, ask God for the grace to keep listening to his voice speaking to you through the events of the day so that you can continue to hear him until you meet together again in prayer.

Every family should feel free to tailor this format to their need, integrating spontaneous or more formal prayers as you see fit. Our template allows you to create a meaningful family prayer ritual that "covers the bases" while still letting you customize it to your family's needs. It can take as little as five minutes or as long as you like depending upon the time you have.

Another great resource for family prayer is the *Household Book of Blessings* published by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. It's a great book filled with family prayers and blessings for all occasions.

Of course, as Catholics we don't just enjoy the spiritual communion with Christ that prayer can facilitate. We experience Jesus "up close and personal" through the Eucharist. Human parents often say that their children are their "very own flesh and blood." Through Communion, we literally become God's very own flesh and blood. His Precious Body becomes one with our flesh, and his Precious Blood courses through our veins.

As the old church-camp songs says, there is "wonder-working power in the precious blood of the Lamb." Teach your children that as much as you love them, God loves them more. Teach that the Eucharist makes them God's sons and daughters even more than they're yours. We highly encourage regular Eucharistic adoration for families. Remember what Jesus said, "Let the children come to me" (Mt 19:14). There are many ways to do this, of course, but one way we highly recommend is a wonderful program called ChildrenOfHope.org that makes Eucharistic adoration accessible to even preschool children.

The power of the sacraments shouldn't be underestimated. A friend of ours shared this story about how his relationship with Christ in the Eucharist helped him when his parents and teachers couldn't:

When I was a child, I came to have a really special connection to Jesus in the Eucharist. My parents were great. They shared their deep love of God with me in lots of different ways – especially in the way we prayed together and celebrated the sacraments regularly.

They also sacrificed a lot to send me to Catholic school. Unfortunately, that was an awful experience because I was bullied mercilessly. Neither my teacher or parents were able to help. It got so bad, by junior high, I thought about killing myself. I was so miserable.

Eventually, I started sneaking into the church across the playground during recess. At first, it was just to get away from the bullies, but in time I came to feel that God was calling me to him and holding me in his arms. I felt loved and protected in his presence. I would bring my concerns to him. I would pray for God to help me deal with the kids at school. He did that by giving me a real sense of how loved and precious I was in his eyes. Sometimes I even got in trouble for "hiding out" in church during recess. I guess the teacher thought I was up to something. I didn't care. God's love was the only thing that got me through the years. I wouldn't wish my grade-school experience on anyone, but I wouldn't give up that time I spent in God's presence for anything. The graces I received there helped me be the man I am today as much as anything my parents ever did – and they did a lot.

In sum, pray with your kids. Pray over your kids. Teach them to pray over you. Help them experience God's love in a personal way through all the sacraments. Teach them to think of God as the person who knows them best and loves them most. Just remember that all day, every day, God wants to parent alongside you and to fill in whatever gaps even your best efforts to love your kids will inevitably leave behind.

Prayer

Lord, help me to remember that my children are your children first that you want to parent with me. Please come into every moment of my parenting life. Let me remember to lead my children in thanking you for that good times and asking you for help in the difficult times. Help me to experience your love more deeply in the Eucharist and to bring the love I find there home to my family. Help me lean more on the love, mercy, patience, joy, and strength that flows from your heart – especially when my own runs dry. Make me the parent you want me to be so that when my children look into my eyes, they will always see your loving face smiling back at them.

Holy family, pray for us. Amen.

Questions for Discussion

What practical difference would it make to behave as if God were parenting alongside you all day long?

What specific parenting challenges would you like to ask God's help with? How could you invite God into those moments when they are happening? What difference would it make for you to do so?

What ideas from this chapter would you like to start practicing today? How could you tailor these suggestions to your family?

Source: *Chapter 1: The First Difference: God Is Our Co-Parent, Protecting Your Kids with Grace (Birth to Age 10)*
by Dr. Greg and Lisa Popcak