

**CLOSING PRAYER:**

**~A Prayer for Strength during Lent~**

Lord Jesus,  
I offer You this Lent.  
I offer it to You  
with love and trust.  
Grant me the strength  
and the light  
to truly put You first  
in everything I think,  
say and do.

Enable me  
to make sacrifices for You  
and do positive actions  
of service for others.

I especially want to grow  
in my prayer life.  
Strengthen my will  
so that I will truly take the time  
to speak with You  
and listen to You I  
n prayer each day.

Help me to conquer  
my fears of sharing my faith.  
I want to help others  
love You more this Lent.

Mary,  
you stood by your Son  
in His suffering and death,  
stand with me  
and help me believe,  
trust and love as you did.  
Amen.

**CAMPUS MINISTRY OFFICE:**

The Campus Ministry Office is located in **Our Lady Chapel**.  
phone: [440] 473-3560 [office] or 216-570-9276 [cell].  
e-mail: blazekj@gilmour.org

# Our Lady Chapel



*Our Lady Chapel is a Roman Catholic community founded in the love of the Father, centered in Christ, and rooted in the Holy Cross tenets of building family and embracing diversity. We are united in our journey of faith through prayer and sacrament, and we seek growth through the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in liturgy and outreach, while responding to the needs of humanity.*

**FAITH EDUCATION:**

Our Faith Education classes meet on **Sundays from 8:45—9:45 AM**. This is followed by **Mass in Our Lady Chapel at 10 AM**. Please join us as we come together to begin our faith journey for this year by entering into prayer and worship together. If you have any questions, please contact Patty in the Chapel Office [[440-473-3560]. **Upcoming class dates: Jan 28-Feb. 4-11**. Thank you for taking care of this important responsibility.



**LENTEN NOTES:**

The season of Lent has begun. During this sacred time, each of us is called to spiritual growth — particularly through a turning away from sin. Lent is a time for “new beginnings” — a time to grow in our relationship with God and each other. There are 3 major spiritual practices during Lent to which Scripture calls us: **prayer, fasting, and almsgiving**.

**—LENTEN DEVOTIONALS:**

On the table in the Narthex of the Chapel are 3 Lenten Devotionals for you. **The Little Purple Book** is a Young Person’s devotional. **The Little Black Book** is for High School and Adults. Finally, **The Word Among Us** is a Scripture centered devotional based on the daily scripture readings.



**—LENTEN REGULATIONS:**

**Good Friday** is a day of **fast** for all between the ages of eighteen and fifty-nine. Fasting means that one full meal for the day is allowed, along with two light meals [snacks]. No eating between meals. Those not included in these “ages” are encouraged to take upon themselves some aspects of the fast, whenever possible.

**All Fridays** during Lent are days of **abstinence** from meat, for those who are fourteen and older. Again, those not included in these “ages” are encouraged to participate whenever possible.

**FORGIVENESS:**

Everyone makes mistakes. Or, that’s the constant reminder, at least. The reminder that when we fall short in the eyes of our friends and family, we are not alone. To take this adage one step further in saying it aloud, we may remind ourselves that all is forgiven in the eyes of God. But that part is easy to forget when we are so deep in the throes of self-pity, frustration and sadness. That’s when forgiveness seems even further out of reach. We let our emotions overrule God’s love, we stand in our own way, and block the grace of wiping the slate clean and starting anew. It’s a gift that we take for granted often.

In our human frailty, we forget that forgiveness is often more for us than it is for the person to whom we need to extend that grace. Hurtful words during a heated conversation, lying by omission, and selfishly putting our interests before the care of others are examples of everyday human behavior that places us in conflict with the people who know and love us the most. When we call to mind those sins with a heavy and humble heart, God gives us the grace of forgiveness. In situations where we are wronged in those same ways, we must pay it forward: the forgiveness we are extended by God is the forgiveness that we should extend to others. It’s the only way to remain clean of heart and spirit, for “*a heart contrite and humbled, O God, you will not spurn*”. Psalm 51 reminds us that paying it forward never gets old, and forgiveness given must be passed on. Whenever I stumble, God is there to catch me. When people I love take a misstep, I catch them. And so it goes: the cycle of forgiveness is strengthened by our vulnerability and humility, and supported by the love of God.

—Deena Sellers



**PRAYER REQUESTS:**

Jesus calls us to pray for one another. Please keep all these people in your prayers.

**PRAYERS FOR OTHERS:**

- For an end to the war between Israel and Hamas.
- For an end to the war between Russia and Ukraine.
- For an end to violence as a means to resolve differences.
- For an end to sexual abuse and lack of respect for human persons.
- For a greater respect for human life, from the moment of conception until natural death.
- For all caregivers.
- For all service men and women serving our country, and for their families.
- For a greater awareness of our call to create a more humane and just society.

**PRAYERS FOR THE DECEASED:**

- For Father Bob Brennan, C.S.C.
- For Father Frederick Serraino, C.S.C.
- For Larry Chernauskas, former Girl’s Basketball Coach.
- For Ella Louise Jones, mother of Basketball Coach, Randolph Keller.
- For Father Patrick Sullivan, C.S.C.
- For Mike Kiec

**ATTENDANCE:**

If you attend Mass regularly here at Our Lady Chapel, it would be helpful if you filled out a Registration Form [name, address, phone number, children, etc.] indicating this fact, if you have not already done so. Such information not only helps us to know who is attending Our Lady Chapel; it also is of great assistance to us in record keeping [for our friend, the IRS] of any contributions which you may make.

**ENVELOPES:**

- When you need a **new supply** of envelopes, please feel free to take a supply of them from the table in the vestibule, or call Father John at the Campus Ministry Office [473-3560].
- When you **use** your envelope, please make sure that **your number** is on it. If you need to know your number, please call the Campus Ministry Office. Thanks.

**WEEKLY OFFERING:**

Baskets are located on the pillars just inside the center door when you enter the chapel. Please place your offering in the basket. Baskets will not be passed during the offertory time. Your offering will help offset chapel daily operating expenses. When you choose to use the envelopes, you can request a printout of your offerings for the year to submit to the IRS. God bless you.

**Total Offerings: Saturday [2/10/24] ----- \$ 309.00**  
**Total Offerings: Sunday [2/11/24] ----- \$ 541.00**  
**Total Offerings: Wednesday [2/14/24] -----[Ash Wednesday]----- \$ 60.00**

**SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION:**

Father John is available to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation with you. Please call him [440-473-3560] to arrange for this experience. All social distancing will remain in place. Always remember the Lord’s invitation: “I will give them a heart with which to understand that I am the Lord. They shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart” [Jeremiah 24:7].

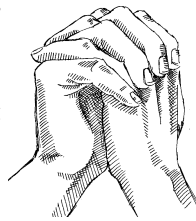


**PRAYER REQUESTS:**

Jesus calls us to pray for one another. Please keep all these people in your prayers.

**PRAYERS FOR THE SICK:**

- For Father Larry Jerge, C.S.C., who is under the care of Hospice.
- For John Zippay, family friend of Bernadette and Stephen Ritley, who is critically ill.
- For Jill Thompson, who is undergoing treatment for mental health issues.
- For Nora Beach, wife of former Gilmour Religion Instructor, Bob Beach, mother of Hannah [‘98] and Miriam [‘99] Beach, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Chuck Campanella, father of Anthony Campanella, who continues in rehab following serious surgery.
- For Mike Heryak, husband of Janet, father of Lillian [‘09], Rosa [‘12] and Edwin [‘17] Heryak, who is seriously ill.
- For John Roddy, brother of Tim Roddy [‘87], and brother of Gilmour Marketing associate, Mary Roddy Stretar, uncle of Katie Stretar [‘29], and cousin of Daniel [‘83], Mike [‘85], and Matt [‘86] Roddy, who is undergoing treatment for a recurrence of cancer.
- For Robert O’Neill, grandfather of Bobby O’Neill [‘33], who is undergoing treatment for bladder cancer.
- For Josephine Fernando, mother of Melvin [‘83] and Raymond [‘88] Fernando, mother-in-law of Imelda Deogracias Fernando [‘88], who is ill.
- For JoAnne Fisher, wife of Jim, mother of Bill [‘10] and PJ, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Pam Spicer, wife of former Gilmour coach, Bob Spicer, who is under the care of hospice.
- For Lincoln Nye, former Gilmour student, brother of Maddie Nye [‘25], who is undergoing medical treatment.
- For Richard DeBacco, father of Michelle Chiacchiari [‘96], father-in-law of Mark Chiacchiari [‘94], grandfather of Aurelia [‘28] and Olivia [‘30] Chiacchiari, who is undergoing treatment for lymphoma
- For Marc Williams who is critically ill with ALS
- For Shobir Corraya, brother of Brother Victor Corraya, C.S.C., who is undergoing treatment for a brain hemorrhage.
- For Frances Meyers who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Michael Nestor [‘98], who is under the care of hospice.
- For Paul Serra, score keeper for Gilmour athletics, who is undergoing treatment for blood clots.
- For Janie Brooks, mother of Trustee, Sherri Beedles, grandmother of Alexander Beedles [‘22], who is ill.
- For Jean Ann Liott, who is undergoing treatment for heart issues.
- For Joseph Crowe, father of Elizabeth [‘06], Katie [‘07], and Patrick [‘08], who is critically ill.



**NOVENA TO BLESSED BASILE MOREAU:**

Blessed Basile Moreau was the founder of the Congregation of Holy Cross, to which Fr. John and the Brothers at Gilmour belong. We have two booklets with Novenas to Blessed Basile Moreau. One is used for a personal intention or healing; the other is used when praying for the intention or healing of someone other than yourself. The Novenas were composed by Father Thomas Looney, C.S.C. Many have received blessings and healings through the intercession of Blessed Basile Moreau, and now we want to extend this invitation to you and your family. Please see Father John and he will be glad to give you the booklets.



**NEXT BIBLE STUDY — WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28<sup>th</sup>:**

Our next Virtual Bible Study will be on Wednesday, February 28<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 PM. Bible Study continues to meet bi-weekly. The Bible Study is open to everyone — all middle and high school students, college students, young adults, and all adults. We will all come together to be enriched by God’s word. It’s a great time, and a good witness of our faith to others. If you can’t come at 6:30, come when you can. Gather your favorite snack and/or drink, but be prepared to be nourished on God’s word.



**Our topic: Lenten Penance**

Mark your calendars and be part of this wonderful activity that will deepen your spiritual journey. We will meet every other week — topic to be decided at the end of the previous meeting. Join us. You’ll have a blast, and celebrate your faith along the way..

**SCHEDULE FOR THE WEEK:**

Sunday, February 18: 1 <sup>st</sup> Week in Lent	10:00 AM In Person & Live Stream
Monday, February 19:	NO MASS
Tuesday, February 20:	NO MASS
Wednesday, February 21:	NO MASS
Thursday, February 22: Chair of St. Peter	NO MASS
Friday, February 23:	NO MASS
Saturday, February 24: 2 <sup>nd</sup> Week in Lent	5:00 PM In Person only
Sunday, February 25: 2 <sup>nd</sup> Week in Lent	10:00 AM In Person & Live Stream

**SERVING THE LORD IN THE POOR — MARCH 16<sup>th</sup>:**

Our Savior Lutheran Church — across the street from the Chapel — has a Food Pantry which distributes food to the community on the third Saturday of each month. They welcome volunteers. On Saturday morning at 9 AM, they need help unloading the trailers and setting up items for distribution and preparing for the food pantry to open. It serves around 150 clients each time. The food pantry serves clients from 9:30 AM—1:30 PM on Saturday.



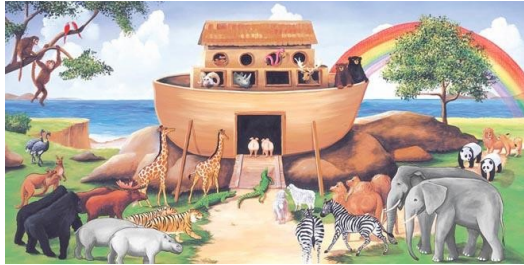
Our Savior Lutheran’s Food Pantry was formed to serve those in emergency situations and/or with on-going need in the cities of Mayfield Heights, Mayfield Village, Highland Heights and Gates Mills. The Food Pantry respects social and cultural diversity and upholds the worth and dignity of those it serves. All those in the area with need will be served equally, as supplies allow. The food pantry is a member of the Greater Cleveland Food Bank.

**REFLECTION FOR THE WEEK:**

The next Sunday in Ordinary time will be June 10<sup>th</sup>. Between now and then we celebrate various seasons in the liturgical year — beginning with Ash Wednesday — which we just observed — and the First Sunday of Lent. Lent is a "joyful season" because it is a time for growing. Here in the northern half of the globe, spring and Lent go together; Lent actually comes from the German word for "spring." It is the time for raking away the deadly things and rearranging and straightening our gardens and our spirits.

Lent is also a "joyful Season" because we, as a Church, are preparing to receive those who will enter full-communion with us at the Easter Vigil. They are presently being introduced to our faith and its traditions and ways. We join more closely during these days of final preparation, lest we be embarrassed by their finding in us a community not being faithful to what they had expected. We will renew our own baptismal promises at Easter with them — and so we are also preparing to re-enter — perhaps more deeply — the Catholic Church.

The Opening Prayer for this 1<sup>st</sup> Week in Lent says it all: "may we grow in understanding of the riches hidden in Christ." And so our prayer these days must be oriented towards understanding Christ's life, death and resurrection. We are invited to pray then to understand what it means to be loved beyond all our understanding — because that is what His redemptive life offers us. We are oriented to try in our little ways to comprehend, in our meager human ways, the incomprehensible love of the creating, redeeming reality, mystery, person, we fumblingly call "God".



To do this properly we must strive to acquire humble patience as our minds trip over images, metaphors, intellectual concepts, and human experiences of love. We are called to reflect on our being so loved in the loving way we walk our paths. And we strive for the freedom to astonish this world by how our love for others and the dying to ourselves enables that love to manifest itself. We will need more than forty days to advance these desires, but we need to begin.

In the beginning of the Book of Genesis, God is pictured as hovering over the waters and breathing upon them. This breath brings about light and dark, heaven and earth — and God saw that it was "good" [see Genesis 1]. But as we begin this 1<sup>st</sup> Week in our Lenten Journey, we turn to the second creation narrative within the Book of Genesis [9:8-17]. The story goes that God's creation forgot the Creator, and lived unloving lives of selfishness and disrespect. God is so disappointed that He just about brings back the waters of chaos in order to dis-create what God He had made. His creation — and especially humanity — is "bad". Just almost God did this — except for the second-chance "luxury" liner — the Ark. I deliberately use the word "luxury" because its root meaning contains the image of "light" which was the very first of God's creation — "Let there be light" [Genesis 1:3]. So the Ark of "Light" extends God's covenantal-creational love.

Noah and his crew of life weather the storm of God's anger, and when this storm blows itself out, God rested the case against creation and repented as the boat rested again on the earth. If you are sensitive to proper English usage, you have noticed that God, while pronouncing the new covenantal sign, says, "me and you" — which violates our polite way of putting "you" before "me". It happens three times. But what is important to remember is that theologically this is correct, if not perhaps grammatically. In the "Covent" form, the initiative of the covenant is offered by God — God is doing the offering, the recreating, the redeeming of all creation. The "bow" in the sky — the rainbow — is placed there by God as a reminder to God of the promise to continue creation through God's redeeming love.

**THE PURPOSE OF CONVENANTS:**

Although the scripture readings throughout Lent are continually about covenants, I'm afraid some of us Catholics don't know the first thing about Scriptural covenants. We've heard the word, and know it has something to do with "things" between us and God, but that's about as far as we go.

Covenants are at the heart of both biblical theology and our liturgical practices. The reason, for instance, we take from the cup during the Eucharist revolves around a covenant Jesus presumes we've made with him. A covenant was also why the early church originally didn't permit non-Jews to become Christians.

A covenant is basically an agreement — usually between two or more parties [although the covenant with Noah and his family is made solely by God]. It's similar to contracts people enter into with one another. Each covenant has two main elements — the parties enter into it freely, and each accepts the responsibilities the agreement demands. Every semester, for instance, I sign a contract with the community college at which I teach. I agree to the terms the college sets forth for its employees — spend X number of hours in the classroom, regularly evaluate my students, and present my subject in a scholarly way. On the college's part, it agrees to pay me the ultra-low wages adjunct professors earn at many such institutions.

The most frequently entered into covenant in our culture is marriage.

Knowing these basics about covenants, it's significant that the original Israelites go against the practices of their pagan neighbors and conceive of their unique relationship with God as a covenant agreement. God has responsibilities; they have responsibilities. They have certain things they can expect from God; and God has certain things he/she can expect from them. Neither can treat the other at whim.

In the case of Noah and his family, God is bound by his responsibility never again to send "a flood to destroy all mortal beings." And as most covenants have an outward sign to show the parties have entered into the agreement — a wedding ring in the case of marriage — God makes the rainbow the outward sign the earth won't again have to worry about such a disaster [Genesis 9:8-17].

The unknown author of the Letters of Peter understands that Jesus has modified those standard Jewish covenants to include dying and rising with him [1 Peter 3:18-22]. If we fulfill our responsibility to die for others in the ways that Jesus died for others, he's "obligated" to give us a share in the same life he achieved.

Mark's Jesus, on the other hand, doesn't seem too interested in that new life taking place only after our physical deaths. Mark is concerned with the unique life Jesus offers us here and now. Scholars are convinced the "kingdom of God" Jesus wants his followers to join him in experiencing revolves around God being present and working effectively in our everyday lives. But in order to reach that point, we must also join him in "repenting:" in doing a 180-degree switch in our value system [Mark 1:10-15].

Most of us don't realize we have a covenant responsibility to constantly change the way we look at people and situations around us. Such a readjustment of our values isn't something we do for "extra credit" — it's at the heart of our faith. Each of us agreed to that responsibility either at our baptism, or when we first made a free choice of accepting the faith of Jesus.

One of these days we'll explore the outward sign of Jesus' covenant — receiving from the Eucharistic cup. Until then . . . —taken from the writings of Father Roger Karban, which appear on the internet

**WE HAVE IT BACKWARDS:**

If we're honest, culture forms us much more than the gospel. It seems we have kept the basic storyline of human history in place rather than allow the gospel to reframe and redirect the story.

—Father Richard Rohr, O.M.I.

dream, to allow dreaming to give them the ability to be creative and the courage to take risks. Francis told them that dreaming leads toward grasping God's own dream for creation.

When we pray: "Remember that your compassion and love are from of old" [Psalm 25:6], we instinctively know that God needs no reminders; rather, we need to ponder our experiences of God's compassion and give thanks for those who have revealed God's love to us. Doing so, we'll understand the truth of the phrase: "Good and upright are you, Lord, showing sinners the way" [Psalm 25:8]. This prayer puts us in touch with God's invitation to us — sometimes gentle, sometimes terrifyingly impelling.

The First Letter of Peter expresses this invitation in terms of cultivating a clear conscience [1 Peter 3:18-22]. We usually think of conscience as a call to remember our sin and repent. Following Jesus' example in the desert, we can rethink that — "conscience" combines the words "con" [with] and "science"; thus, Christian conscience describes a way of knowing together with God. That is exactly what Jesus sought in the desert — he took the time to know with God and understand what he was called to be and do.

As we begin Lent, rather than choose something to give up, a more radical approach could be to commit to taking the leisure that allows us to dream beyond our current horizons. That would bring us into the realm of the kind of sacrifice that consecrates our time. It leads us to go, like Jesus, into the sacred activity of coming to know ourselves and our world from God's perspective.

Beware! Taking time for sacred leisure can make us vulnerable to being driven like Jesus.

—taken from the writings of Sister Mary McGlone, C.S.J., which appear on the internet

## THE POWER OF WATER:

Last March, I was traveling home to our novitiate in Huaycán, Peru, with our four novices after a relaxing day in Lima — the capital city. As we approached our town, I noticed that the traffic was heavier than usual. I assumed it was an accident; however, I also noticed that the road was increasingly wet — a strange occurrence for us since our area is semi-desert. Inching along, I made a turn toward the east when a stream of water hit the car with such force that I instinctively lifted my feet from the floor of the car — a "huaico".

"Huaico" is the indigenous Quechua word for the phenomenon where enormous masses of rock and mud are dislodged by torrential rains and rush down the mountainsides into local rivers causing them to overflow their banks. Here in Huaycán, most people live on barren hillsides. They are the first victims of the "huaico". Next are those who live below. No one is safe.

Such was the experience of those living in the time of Noah during the great flood. The destructive power of water — of sin. All of us are vulnerable. How do we ensure that we are in the boat with Noah? We remain safe through obedience — a deep and responsive listening to God. "Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him" [Genesis 6:22].



In the Gospel, we find Jesus alone in the desert surrounded by wild animals and being tempted by the enemy of our human happiness. How is he going to make it through this struggle [see Mark 1:10-15]. Through obedience.

Just prior to being driven into the wilderness, Jesus is baptized by John in living water, in cleansing water, in water that saves. He emerges from the river and hears His Father tell Him: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased". Jesus holds fast to those words, trusting that God His Father will never abandon Him even when the forces of nature — of humans, or of the devil himself are against Him.

God loves us. As our Lenten journey begins, we need to place ourselves in the ark of God's love, so that the raging waters of temptation — from within and from without — begin to disappear.

—Brother Jonathan Beebe, C.S.C.

Mark's Gospel opens with Jesus having a little Lent Himself — forty days in the desert facing "wild beasts" [Mark 1:10-15]. It is difficult to know why Mark's account of this experience is so brief. What we do know is that immediately after the angels ministered to Him, Jesus began proclaiming His central truth — the time has come for God's love to flood the earth and of salvation and the Rainbow of God's Fidelity.

God "repented" in Genesis from the dis-creational judgment. In Mark's Gospel, God asks for a "repenting" on the part of humanity from its irreverent relationship with God and God's creation. Jesus begins proclaiming that the reception of God's love is the number one priority for living as one of God's creation which God saw as "very good". In the same first Chapter of Genesis, from verse 27 through 31 -the end of the chapter- God is pictured as creating male and female and giving them all creation as a gift to be received and revered. Jesus begins recalling God's people back to their original relationship with God through creation.

All things were created in Him, and so Jesus is the Ark containing all life's meaning. All creatures, large and small, all things bright and beautiful, all these revelations of God can dominate human beings with their facility to be taken as gods. The repentance Jesus is calling for in Mark's Gospel is a recovery of sight. The "light" has again appeared dividing heaven and earth and showing the earth as having come from the God of heaven and earth. Jesus is the new Ark containing the light to see once more who we are and what we are to God.

This Lent is a joyful time as we spend these days taking off the bandages from our eyes and earmuffs from our heads so as to see and hear again more clearly the goodness of creation, the goodness of ourselves, and all as a revelation of the goodness of God. We may have to face the "wild beasts" within us which just might be the causes of our being "wild beasts" in the lives around us. Forty days of repenting from disrespectfully eating, drinking, self-hating, silence-smashing, relationship-wrecking, beauty-marring, ungiftedly-grabbing, dark and numbing existence. We repent from calling this "very good" and return to seeing ourselves and all as "very good" in Christ.

Forty days we have, to prepare for reflecting the meaning of Christ's life, death and resurrection in just how we relate with ourselves, with creation around us and with God. Forty days we have to get back into and on board the New Luxury-Liner where all are safe, blessed, and glad to be back home.

—taken from the writings of Father Larry Gillick, S.J., which appear on the internet

## STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS:

We grow spiritually through powerlessness and a willingness to change. In Twelve Step Programs, there is no side to take. It is not a worthiness contest. There is only an absolutely necessary starting point! The experience of "powerlessness" is where we all must begin. The Twelve Steps are honest and humble enough to state this, just as Jesus himself always went where the pain was. Wherever there was human suffering, Jesus was concerned about it now, and about its healing now.

God seems to have hidden holiness and wholeness in a secret place where only the humble will find it. Why such a disguise? Why such a game of hide-and-seek? I cannot pretend to understand God, but this is what I see: People who have moved from seeming success to seeming success seldom understand success at all, except a very limited version of their own. People who fail to do something right, by even their own definition of right, are those who often break through to enlightenment and compassion. It is God's greatest surprise and God's constant disguise, but we only know it to be true by going through it and coming out on the other side. We cannot know it just by going to church, reading Scripture, or listening to someone else talk about it, even if we agree with them.

Until we bottom out and come to the limits of our own fuel supply, there is no reason to switch to a higher-octane fuel. For that is what is happening! Why would we? We will not learn to actively draw upon a Larger Source until our usual sources are depleted and revealed as wanting. In fact, we will not even know there is a Larger Source until our own sources and resources fail us.

—Father Richard Rohr, O.F.M.

**ENTERING THE WILDERNESS:**

We know that Mark is the shortest of the Gospels, and on this 1<sup>st</sup> Week in Lent, we are presented with his very brief account of the Temptation of Jesus [Mark 1:10-15]. The Gospels of Matthew [see Matthew 4] and Luke [see Luke 4] have more extended accounts, and include many more details. In both of these accounts, Jesus is tempted to turn stones into bread, and then the devil takes Jesus first to the pinnacle of the Temple, and then to a High Mountain for further temptations. Jesus dismisses the devil's blandishments, whereupon the devil leaves him. In all three of the Synoptic Gospels, the Temptation of Jesus comes immediately after His Baptism, and before he inaugurates his public ministry.

We need to pay attention to the words that Mark uses in his account. One of the most important things is that the Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. The Baptism of Jesus has just taken place, but there is to be no lingering on the banks of the River Jordan where Jesus basks in the affirming words of the Father — “You are my Son, the Beloved; my favor rests on you.”

Immediately upon coming up out of the water, the Spirit “drives” Jesus into the wilderness. This makes it clear that the initiative comes from God. From this we can understand that right from the very beginning of his ministry there is to be confrontation between Jesus and the powers of evil. This is his mission.

Mark does not go into the specifics of this battle — only that Jesus was tempted. The battle between Jesus and the forces of evil has begun. Of course, Jesus confounds the devil in the wilderness, but we are in no doubt that the devil will make further appearances in different guises throughout Jesus' ministry.

Mark also tells us that Jesus was “with the wild beasts and the angels looked after him.” I imagine that many of Mark's early readers would have picked up an allusion to the wild beasts some of them might have to confront in a Roman amphitheater in times of persecution. Like them, they surely hope that, as with Jesus, the angels would protect them.

It is with that backdrop that Mark swiftly moves on to the actual beginning of Jesus' ministry as he enters Galilee and announces to the people that the favorable moment has arrived and begins to preach the Good News.

The Scripture Readings for this 1<sup>st</sup> Week in Lent always begin with one of the accounts of the Temptations of Christ — this year we are reading from Mark's Gospel. As we begin this period of austerity and penance, we ought to consider how we deal with temptation in our own lives. As we read the various accounts, the first thing we notice is that the temptations that Christ experienced in the desert are expressed in a way that is quite different from the temptations that we ourselves experience. Although we may have made decisions to give up sweets or sugar or alcohol — or perhaps we have resolved to attend mass on a particular weekday, or say extra prayers, or undertake some fasting — even with these voluntarily penances we will inevitably experience the temptation to give them up.

Now you might consider that the temptation to eat a few sweets is pretty low grade as temptations go; but it can be an indication of how we deal with bigger temptations. Bigger sins such as infidelity in marriage, watching inappropriate content on the internet, theft, lies — only to name a few — need to be resisted. In the moral life habit is everything. It is important that we train ourselves to keep our Lenten promises. It is vital that we set personal standards and make the decision not to deviate from them.

If we get into the habit of telling lies or gossiping, we soon grow accustomed to these things, and then we find ourselves believing that these minor things don't matter. Unfortunately, what then happens is that we are tempted by greater things, and because we have easily given way in comparatively minor matters we find it hard to resist these new and greater temptations.

We call this self-mastery. If we get into the habit of controlling ourselves and exercising discipline



But such a God is also not the God whom Jesus revealed.

Were we to look into the eyes of God's, says Julian, what we would see there would “melt our hearts with love and break them in two with ecstasy.”

—taken from the writings of Father Ronald Rolheiser, O.M.I., which appear on the internet

**RUN THE RACE:**

The shock of sorrow comes only to those who think this world is fixed and absolute — that there is nothing beyond. They think everything here below should be perfect. Hence, they ask questions: “Why should I suffer? What have I done to deserve this?” Maybe you did nothing to deserve it. Certainly, Our Lord did nothing to deserve His Cross. But it came, and through it, He went to His glory.

—Venerable Fulton Sheen

**LEISURE — A LENTEN DISCIPLINE:**

The Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert. That's no two-cent word! The word Mark chose to explain how the Spirit prompted Jesus into the desert is the same word the Gospels use to refer to driving out demons [see Mark 1:34], to people “cast out” into the darkness [see Matthew 8:12], and to Jesus' eviction of the people who had turned the temple into a marketplace [see John 2:16]. Mark tells us that the Spirit impelled Jesus to go apart immediately after his baptism. Was it to seek the meaning of what he had seen and heard at the baptism? He did have a lot to meditate on after the heavens were torn open, the Spirit descended upon him, and the voice proclaimed: “You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased” [Mark 1:11].

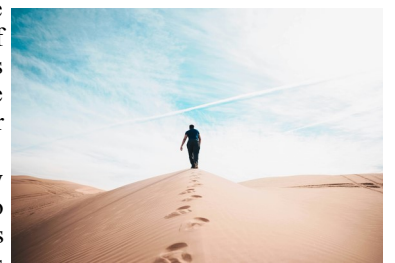
No Gospel tells us why Jesus decided to submit to John's ritual [Mark 1:10-15]. Mark, who wrote the first Gospel, might have seen Jesus' baptism as a symbol of his incarnation and the mortality it implied [see Philippians 2:5-8]. In baptism, Jesus had made himself one with people who were putting their whole heart and soul into metanoia — a graced decision that impelled them to break free of narrow visions that restrict hope. Unlike Matthew and Luke who describe Jesus' temptations as a recapitulation of Israel's history and of different approaches to being Messiah, Mark gives us precious few details — Jesus spent 40 days; he was tempted; he was accompanied by wild beasts and angels. That's it.

Perhaps Mark is giving us a clue for interpretation with that last phrase: “He was among wild beasts and angels ministered to him.” Even more than Matthew and Luke's description of the temptations of bread, temple and idolatry, this phrase depicts Jesus as entering into the heart of contradictions — the implacable and frightening forces of nature and the spiritual realities hidden in all matter testifying to what is beyond the palpable. It seems that Jesus may have been driven into the desert to discern about what was deepest in himself, God's hopes for creation, and how the two were to go together.

Jesus' being driven by the Spirit reveals that he was particularly sensitive to God's movement in the world and was seeking to experience God even more profoundly. To do that, anyone — Jesus included — needs to take time apart. Jesus' sojourn in the desert was like a prolonged Sabbath — a time of leisure, of setting aside his own projects to allow God to touch and re-form his imagination.

The prayer that Jesus prayed during this time might well have been Psalm 25 — “Make your way known to me” [Psalm 25:14]. Maybe it should be our prayer also. When we are sincere in praying: “Make your ways known to me,” we open ourselves, like Jesus, to being impelled to escape from our ceaseless activity. This prayer calls us, strange as it may sound, to the “discipline of leisure.” It allows wonder to lead us beyond what we think we know.

Pope Francis recently said as much when he urged a dialogue group of Marxists and Christians to



## HOW CAN IT ALL HAVE A HAPPY ENDING?

There's a line in the writings of Julian of Norwich — the famous 14<sup>th</sup> century mystic and perhaps the first theologian to write in English — which is endlessly quoted by preachers, poets, and writers: “But all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.” It's her signature teaching.

We all have an intuitive grasp of what that means. It's our basis for hope. In the end, the good will triumph. But the phrase takes on added meaning when it's seen in its original context. What was Julian trying to say when she coined that phrase?

She was struggling with the problem of evil, sin, and suffering. Why does God allow them? If God is both all-loving and all-powerful, what possible explanation can there be for the fact that God lets us suffer, lets us sin, and lets evil be present all over the world? Why didn't God create a world without sin, where we would all be perfectly happy from birth onwards?

The God of our imagination, re-enforced by certain false interpretations of scripture, does get offended, does get angry, does take vengeance, and does meet sin with wrath. Julian had heard enough sermons in church to know the standard apologetic answer for that — namely, that God allows it because God gave us the great gift of freedom. With that comes the inevitability of sin and all its sad consequences. That's a valid answer — though one that's often seen as too abstract to offer much consolation to us when we are suffering. But Julian, despite being a loyal daughter of the church and having been schooled in that answer, doesn't go there. She offers something different.

For her, God allows evil, sin, and suffering because God will use them in the end to create for everyone a deeper mode of happiness than they would have experienced if sin, evil, and suffering hadn't been there. In the end, these negatives will work towards creating some deeper positives.

What Julian wants us to draw out from this is not the idea that sin and evil are of little consequence, but rather that God, being so unimaginable in love and power, is able to draw good out of evil, happiness out of suffering, and redemption out of sin in ways that we cannot yet grasp. This is Julian's answer to the question: Why does God allow evil? She answers by not answering — because, in essence, no adequate answer can ever be imagined. Rather, she sets the question into a theology of God within which, beyond what we can imagine at present and beyond what theology can really account for, God's power and love will eventually make all things well, dry every tear, redeem every evil, erase every bad memory, unfreeze every cold heart, and turn every manner of suffering into happiness. There's even a hint in this that the final triumph of God will be to empty hell itself so that, indeed, absolutely every manner of being will be well.

In a subsequent vision, Julian received a five-fold assurance from God that God may, can, will, and shall make all things well and we ourselves will see it.

All of this is predicated, of course, on a particular concept of God. The God that Julian of Norwich invites us to believe in is a God who is precisely beyond our imagination — both in power and in love. Any God we can imagine is incapable of making all manner of being well — as many atheistic critics have already pointed out. This is not just true in terms of trying to imagine God's power — it's particularly true in terms of trying to imagine God's love. It's unimaginable in our present human condition to picture anyone — God or human — who cannot be offended, is incapable of anger, holds nothing against anyone no matter what evil he or she may have perpetrated, and who — as Julian describes God — is completely relaxed and has a face like a marvelous symphony. The God of our imagination, re-enforced by certain false interpretations of scripture, does get offended, does get angry, does take vengeance, and does meet sin with wrath. Such a God is incapable of making all manner of things well.



in small things, we will find it much easier to resist greater temptations.

One of the most important aids to resisting temptation is prayer. If we are constant in our daily prayer, we will experience closeness to God and, in itself, this will help us to resist temptations when they come along. Prayer is the foundation course that we all need to live our lives so that we are spiritually strong enough to withstand temptation when it arises.

Temptation must also be positively resisted and this needs to be done promptly — the instant the temptation arises. The easiest way to do this is to immediately dismiss the thought from our minds and to start thinking about something more wholesome. Evil can only be fought with good, and so substituting a good thought for a bad one will be an effective way of resisting temptation.

We should never forget to give thanks to God once a temptation has been successfully resisted. We know that we could not resist without his grace, and so we must thank him, and this has the extra effect of strengthening ourselves against future temptations.

Another thing to keep in mind is that we need a strong sense of what is right and what is wrong. If we are hazy about this and get confused, we will easily fall into the trap of thinking that some bad things are actually good and this will cause us a great deal of difficulty in life.

What is good comes from God, and what does not come from God is to be avoided. We are told in the first chapter of Gospel of John to walk in the light [see John 1:6-7]. So, in our lives we avoid what is shameful and relish those things that we can be proud of. We shun the darkness and walk always in the light of the Lord. In this way we will know that our actions will always be good and decent, honest and truthful, and that we will not have succumbed to the wiles of the devil and all his agents.

—taken from the writings of Father Alex McAllister S.D.S., which appear on the internet

## LORD, JOURNEY WITH ME:

Underlying the penances of Lent and the rules and regulations of our faith is the salient reality of God's love. It is where we begin and end, and even as we drift away, or experience faith-shaking hardship — a death, a job loss, chronic illness, estrangement — that love is always on offer. As we begin this journey — this experience — let us turn to the Psalmist for guidance.

In Psalm 86, we read: “Incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me, for I am poor and needy. Preserve my life, for I am devoted to you; save your servant who trusts in you” [Psalm 86:1-2]. These words remind us that God is truly walking the way with us, listening closely and with love to the needs and concerns we express in prayer. We do not need to be apologetic about this relationship — God wants to be one with us.

Petitionary prayer may be hard for us — we may be embarrassed to make mundane requests of a God who feels remote and transcendent, or afraid that our prayer will not be heard, or skeptical that our insignificant petition will be granted. Sometimes we entertain larger doubts: amid the complexities and difficulties of modern life — what good does prayer do anyway? Does God really listen? Is God even there?

Our psalmist — whose life surely had its own complexities — is confident that God is both nearby and attentive. Ask God to “incline his ear”; image God bending to listen closely to better hear what you have to say. “Answer me,” “Save your servant”, and we imagine again, God stooping down to enter our day-to-day life and make things right.

“Prayer of petition,” wrote the British Dominican priest Father Simon Tugwell, “is always an act of faith in this immediacy of God's presence.” In the very act of making our petitions, we acknowledge that God knows us, sees us, and wills nothing but our good.

—taken from the writings of Betsy Cahill which appear on the internet.

## POWERFUL:

No act is charitable if it is not just.

—St. Bruno

**THE LENTEN MESSAGE OF POPE FRANCIS:**

My Brothers and Sisters:

When our God reveals himself, his message is always one of freedom: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” [Exodus 20:2]. These are the first words of the Decalogue given to Moses on Mount Sinai. Those who heard them were quite familiar with the exodus of which God spoke — the experience of their bondage still weighed heavily upon them. In the desert, they received the “Ten Words” as a thoroughfare to freedom. We call them “commandments”, in order to emphasize the strength of the love by which God shapes his people. The call to freedom is a demanding one. It is not answered straightaway — it has to mature as part of a journey. Just as Israel in the desert still clung to Egypt — often longing for the past and grumbling against the Lord and Moses — today too, God’s people can cling to an oppressive bondage that it is called to leave behind. We realize how true this is at those moments when we feel hopeless, wandering through life like a desert and lacking a promised land as our destination. Lent is the season of grace in which the desert can become once more — in the words of the prophet Hosea — the place of our first love. Here “God shapes his people; he enables us to leave our slavery behind [see Hosea 2], and experience a Passover from death to life. Like a bridegroom, the Lord draws us once more to himself, whispering words of love to our hearts.

The exodus from slavery to freedom is no abstract journey. If our celebration of Lent is to be concrete, the first step is to desire to open our eyes to reality. When the Lord calls out to Moses from the burning bush, he immediately shows that he is a God who sees and, above all, hears — “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey” [Exodus 3:7-8]. Today, too, the cry of so many of our oppressed brothers and sisters rises to heaven. Let us ask ourselves: Do we hear that cry? Does it trouble us? Does it move us? All too many things keep us apart from each other, denying the fraternity that, from the beginning, binds us to one another.

During my visit to Lampedusa, as a way of countering the globalization of indifference, I asked two questions, which have become more and more pressing: “Where are you?” [see Genesis 3:9], and “Where is your brother?” [see Genesis 4:9]. Our Lenten journey will be concrete if, by listening once more to those two questions, we realize that even today we remain under the rule of Pharaoh — a rule that makes us weary and indifferent. A model of growth that divides and robs us of a future. Earth, air, and water are polluted, but so are our souls. True, Baptism has begun our process of liberation, yet there remains in us an inexplicable longing for slavery — a kind of attraction to the security of familiar things, to the detriment of our freedom.

In the Exodus account, there is a significant detail — it is God who sees, is moved, and brings freedom; Israel does not ask for this. Pharaoh stifles dreams, blocks the view of heaven, makes it appear that this world, in which human dignity is trampled upon and authentic bonds are denied, can never change. He put everything in bondage to himself. Let us ask: Do I want a new world? Am I ready to leave behind my compromises with the old? The witness of many of my brother bishops and a great number of those who work for peace and justice has increasingly convinced me that we need to combat a deficit of hope that stifles dreams and the silent cry that reaches to heaven and moves the heart of God. This “deficit of hope” is not unlike the nostalgia for slavery that paralyzed Israel in the desert and prevented it from moving forward. An exodus can be interrupted: how else can we explain the fact that humanity has arrived at the threshold of universal fraternity and at levels of scientific, technical, cultural, and juridical development capable of guaranteeing dignity to all, yet gropes about in the darkness of inequality and conflict.

God has not grown weary of us. Let us welcome Lent as the great season in which he reminds us: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” [Exodus 20:2]. Lent is a season of conversion, a time of freedom. Jesus himself, as we recall each year on the

**A SPIRITUAL TRAFFIC JAM:**

Is your faith journey stalled in a spiritual traffic jam? You are in your car and you’re in a hurry. The problem is that no one else around you seems to be in a hurry. For “rush hour”, no one seems to be “rushing” anywhere. The stress begins to build. Your eyes scan for the lane with the least amount of traffic. You are ultra aware of every minute that ticks away. Your heart is racing. You begin asking yourself why you waited so long. You want to get to where you are going, and you begin looking for the shortest possible route.

It’s at that moment that you begin speaking to inanimate objects. You curse red lights, and pray out loud for green arrows. You allow turn signals [whether used or unused] to send you spiraling downward into a sea of irritability and rage.

Welcome to the traffic jam.

Now, if you think this situation has to do with your car, than let me suggest you read John 10:10 — “I came so that you might have life, and have it more abundantly” — but this time read it not only literally, but symbolically [as we are called to read Scripture — literally and symbolically].

Do you see what I’m getting at? If I’ve lost you, hit the brakes and turn down the radio. That’s what “Lent” is — it’s hitting the brakes and refocusing our spiritual “journey”.

Everyone is in a hurry to live life on earth, but there is little urgency in living a life worthy of Heaven. We get in our steel coffins everyday, fight through the masses of other souls deep in need but shallow in “want”, and just try to “survive” until tomorrow. But Jesus doesn’t call you to merely survive — He calls you to live — and not merely to “live”, but to “live life to the fullest”.

How does God help us to do that? He gives us signals along our life route. Some are stop signs. Some are green arrows. Sometimes we need to switch lanes, or even directions. The signals are there in your life — you just have to keep your eyes open for them. That means, too, that if you’re intentionally closing your eyes, it’s time to open them again. If you don’t — you could die.

Where might God be putting stop signs in your life? He’ll throw stop signs on the path of people struggling with addictions or sexual sin. You know if your actions are contrary to God’s plan and His hope for you. Stop signs riddle the path of those who turn to drugs, abuse alcohol [or let alcohol abuse them], use others selfishly, abuse their sexuality, are suffocated by pornography, give into rage, gossip freely, are guided by self — there are stop signs there, though they might just be a “red blur”. If they are, it’s time to open the eyes and stop the car. You might need to slow down to notice God’s stop signs in your life.

Where might God be putting green arrows in your life? He’ll give green arrows to people who are making serious effort to change or improve their lives. You’ll see green arrows in healthy relationships, in prayer, and in areas that will make you more healthy — physically, mentally and emotionally. That’s part of Lent, too, not just “giving stuff up”, but “adding on” — doing things that will make you healthier and holier in the process. There are opportunities to improve everywhere. Start new types of prayer. Begin [or increase] exercising. Eat better. Rest more. Enter more deeply into Scripture. Seek mercy in Reconciliation. Encounter Christ more frequently in the Eucharist. God’s giving you the green arrow — look for it, and take it, now.

Where might God be putting turn signals in your life? He might be calling you to change lanes or directions and the need for you to alert others of your intentions. Often times, a turn signal is necessary after you’ve been jolted by a stop sign, or after you’ve hit the brakes. It’s great that you have listened to God, and that you are willing to give up premarital sex, or stop drinking, or get away from pornography, [or whatever sin God is calling you out of] — but the next step is to hit your turn signal, and let those people around you know that you’re changing lanes, or changing the direction of your life — that change is coming and you’re not afraid to profess [and confess] it.

And, if you’re afraid you’re missing all the signals, there’s one more thing you can do. Ride shotgun. Hand God the keys and buckle up. With God in the driver’s seat, and you riding shotgun, the traffic jam ends — now you’re in the carpool lane.



**SURVIVING IN THE DESERT:**

On the first Sunday of every Lent we find Jesus in the wilderness. He is in the desert without food, without shelter. He is tempted by Satan. I think the most important detail about this gospel is that if Jesus is in the desert, he did not choose to go there. Mark says that immediately after his baptism, the Spirit drove him out into the desert [Mark 1:10-15]. Being in the wilderness was not a part of Jesus' plan, but nevertheless he found himself there in barrenness and isolation. This detail invites us to ask whether we can locate deserts in our own lives. Are there barren circumstances in which we find ourselves and into which we have not chosen to come?

Perhaps these barren places are caused by the financial situation in which many of us find ourselves: fearing for our jobs, dealing with reduced income, worrying about our future. We didn't choose this situation, but here we are, and there doesn't seem all that much we can do about it. Perhaps there is a barren place in our life caused by sickness, either physical or emotional. We find ourselves coping with disease either in our own lives or in the lives of someone that we love. We didn't choose to have this evil in our lives. But here it is, and we have to face it. Maybe we are dealing with a desert experience because of a failure in a relationship: a fiancé who rejected us, a marriage that came to an end, the loss of a friend. We didn't choose that these relationships fall apart. But they have, and now we find ourselves in barrenness and loss.

The gospel of Mark tells us that Jesus, just like us, had to experience periods of barrenness and desolation in his life. The gospel also shows us how to deal with those deserts. In just a few words, it describes Jesus' desert experience, "He was with the wild beasts, and angels ministered to him." What are the deserts of our lives like? They are places in which we find both wild beasts and angels. Both of them are true.

The deserts of our life are populated by wild beasts. Beasts can bite. The evils of our lives are real. They are not illusions. They have teeth. It is a real loss when we find ourselves no longer available to afford the college that a son or daughter wants to attend, or when we have to rethink the viability of retirement. It is painful when someone rejects us in a relationship. There is justified fear when we have to deal with a sickness that will cause us to alter our life significantly and perhaps even brings it prematurely to an end. Our faith does not insure us that we will avoid suffering and pain. The beasts in our desert are real. It is understandable how they frighten us as they circle around us. There is no guarantee that they will not pounce upon us.

But if the beasts in our desert are real, so are the angels. If there is evil in our life, there are also blessings. In the darkest moments there are nevertheless rays of light. In our driest deserts there are moments of grace. And often that grace is more clearly seen when it comes to us in the desert. When we have to deal with financial concerns, they often provide us an opportunity to recognize more deeply the importance of family. When we have to cope with hardships, those hardships give us the opportunity to express love and sacrifice to one another in deeper ways. When some people reject us, it provides the opportunity of us appreciating more deeply the people who still stand with us. When we must depend upon others in our sickness, we can perhaps for the first time realize how deeply we are loved.

Deserts are dangerous places. That is why none of us choose to go there. But when we find ourselves in the wilderness, it is important that we accept the full truth of our circumstances. If there is fear and suffering and pain, there are also God's blessings. We must both recognize those blessings and embrace them. It is only by accepting our blessings that we will survive.

After forty days Jesus came out of the desert. We believe that we too in time will be able to come out of the deserts of our lives. But as long as we have to remain in those waste places, it is important to recognize the complexity of our situation. There is not only evil, there is also grace. There is not only fear, there is also blessing. God is with us in the wilderness and we must never forget that. Even as we cope with the fear of the wild beasts, we must not ignore the angels. We must find them and let them minister to us.

—taken from the writings of Father George Smiga, which appear on the internet

first Sunday of Lent, was driven into the desert by the Spirit in order to be tempted in freedom. For forty days, he will stand before us and with us: the incarnate Son. Unlike Pharaoh, God does not want subjects, but sons and daughters. The desert is the place where our freedom can mature in a personal decision not to fall back into slavery. In Lent, we find new criteria of justice and a community with which we can press forward on a road not yet taken.

This, however, entails a struggle, as the book of Exodus and the temptations of Jesus in the desert make clear to us. The voice of God, who says: "You are my Son, the Beloved" [see Mark 1:11], and "You shall have no other gods before me" [see Exodus 20:3] is opposed by the enemy and his lies. Even more to be feared than Pharaoh are the idols that we set up for ourselves; we can consider them as his voice speaking within us. To be all-powerful, to be looked up to by all, to domineer over others: every human being is aware of how deeply seductive that lie can be. It is a road well-travelled. We can become attached to money, to certain projects, ideas or goals, to our position, to a tradition, even to certain individuals. Instead of making us move forward, they paralyze us. Instead of encounter, they create conflict. Yet there is also a new humanity, a people of the little ones and of the humble who have not yielded to the allure of the lie. Whereas those who serve idols become like them, mute, blind, deaf and immobile [see Psalm 114:4], the poor of spirit are open and ready: a silent force of good that heals and sustains the world.

It is time to act, and in Lent, to act means to pause — to pause in prayer in order to receive the word of God, to pause like the Samaritan in the presence of a wounded brother or sister [see Luke 10]. Love of God and love of neighbor are one love. Not to have other gods is to pause in the presence of God beside the flesh of our neighbor. For this reason, prayer, almsgiving and fasting are not three unrelated acts, but a single movement of openness and self-emptying, in which we cast out the idols that weigh us down, the attachments that imprison us. Then the atrophied and isolated heart will revive. Slow down, then, and pause! The contemplative dimension of life that Lent helps us to rediscover will release new energies. In the presence of God, we become brothers and sisters, more sensitive to one another: in place of threats and enemies, we discover companions and fellow travelers. This is God's dream, the promised land to which we journey once we have left our slavery behind.

The Church's synodal form, which in these years we are rediscovering and cultivating, suggests that Lent is also a time of communitarian decisions — of decisions, small and large, that are countercurrent. Decisions capable of altering the daily lives of individuals and entire neighborhoods, such as the ways we acquire goods, care for creation, and strive to include those who go unseen or are looked down upon. I invite every Christian community to do just this: to offer its members moments set aside to rethink their lifestyles, times to examine their presence in society and the contribution they make to its betterment. Woe to us if our Christian penance were to resemble the kind of penance that so dismayed Jesus. To us too, he says: "Whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting" [Matthew 6:16]. Instead, let others see joyful faces, catch the scent of freedom and experience the love that makes all things new, beginning with the smallest and those nearest to us. This can happen in every one of our Christian communities.

To the extent that this Lent becomes a time of conversion, an anxious humanity will notice a burst of creativity, a flash of new hope. Allow me to repeat what I told the young people whom I met in Lisbon last summer: "Keep seeking and be ready to take risks. At this moment in time, we face enormous risks; we hear the painful plea of so many people. Indeed, we are experiencing a third world war fought piecemeal. Yet let us find the courage to see our world, not as being in its death throes but in a process of giving birth, not at the end but at the beginning of a great new chapter of history. We need courage to think like this". Such is the courage of conversion, born of coming up from slavery. For faith and charity take hope, this small child, by the hand. They teach her to walk, and at the same time, she leads them forward.

I bless all of you and your Lenten journey.

—Francis

**ALL THE COLORS OF THE RAINBOW:**

Today we have the story of the flood and Noah's ark [Genesis 9:8-17]. It is a wonderful story. And every time we look at a rainbow, we are reminded of God's promise. The rainbow — this most beautiful and transient of all things — is a reminder of God's covenant — the close bond he established with us after the great flood. God makes his promise not only to humankind, but also to every living creature. Respect for creation is not something new — the creator himself respects the whole of creation more than we ever could. The rainbow is a wonderful sign of God's love because of all its wonderful colors — Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, Violet. All the colors are there — and all the shades in between — there are even colors we can't see. This shows the breadth of God's love. His love covers the whole range of existence — and even things that we are totally unaware of.

In some ancient cultures, the rainbow is a sign of a weapon as in a bow and arrow; they say the rainbow is God's bow and the lightning is his arrow. The rainbow for them is a sign of anger, but for us it is a sign of God's love.

We do enough things to provoke God's anger, but in this great covenant God says that he will be merciful to us. Although we have sinned, God holds back his anger; instead he will love us all the more. St Paul sees in this water of the flood a pre-figuring of Baptism. In Baptism, we not only are freed from our sins. Rather, our baptism becomes a special sign of God's love for us individually. By baptism God singles us out and unites us to himself by a special bond — we are his sons and daughters.

We are now in Lent. When people think of Lent, they usually think about fasting and doing penance. In Mark's Gospel [1:10-15], Jesus spends time in the desert. He went there to be tested, and he experienced all kinds of temptations there. He emerged victorious, just as he was to emerge victorious after the greatest test of all — his passion and death on the Cross. The account of the temptation in Mark's Gospel reads almost like a telegram — it is sounds staccato.

Typically, the language of Mark is also a lot stronger. In both Matthew and Luke, we read that Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert. But that's not strong enough for Mark — no, the Spirit "drove" Jesus out into the desert. We shouldn't think of this as Jesus not wanting to go — and so having to be driven. Rather it reflects the fact that there is an underlining closeness between Jesus and the Spirit.

Mark does not bother about the content of the various temptations — he simply states the fact bluntly that Jesus remained in the desert for forty days and was tempted by Satan. The wild beasts are traditional symbols of evil and like Satan they prowl around looking for any signs of weakness. Surprisingly there is no actual mention of fasting in this desert — but then, it is probably not necessary to mention it because that's what you would have to do anyway in a desert, unless you took along a lot of supplies which is most unlikely.

There's no 4x4 available to bring in any luxuries. This is a testing — and by enduring it successfully, Jesus demonstrates that he is the Messiah. Both Moses and Elijah before him endured such periods of fasting, and here in the desert Jesus proves that he is their true heir. The forty days is also a symbolic allusion to the forty years the Chosen People spent in the wilderness being tested by God. They spent those years of wandering in the desert in great adversity, but through them learned some very hard lessons.

All testing involves privation and suffering. It involves doing without the comforts we are used to — whether this be health, little luxuries, or emotional supports. If all testing involves suffering, then in spiritual terms we can also say that all suffering is a testing. And this is indeed so. In physical suffering, we find all sorts of things removed from us that we normally consider essential for our daily life. And not only our health, but also all the comfortable routines and things we have around us. The test is what we put in their place — let us hope that it will be increased faith and trust in God. We can also undergo spiritual suffering when we experience times of doubt and darkness; these are also a testing.



God seems so far away.

We find it hard to place ourselves in his presence. We feel uncomfortable when the conversation turns to matters of faith. We sit in Church and wonder if all this isn't a complete waste of time. This is a real testing. The wild beasts are prowling looking for our weaknesses. But just as with Jesus, the Angels are not far away — they guard us even though we are not conscious of their presence. Any realistic person dreads being put to the test, but it is something we all have to endure. It is an essential element of our pilgrimage of faith. But you notice that even for Jesus it was for a fixed time — forty days. There is always an end. The Church gives us the liturgical season of Lent to help us to endure the time of testing whenever it comes.

In Lent, we are invited to undergo some small hardship as a spiritual exercise, as a strengthening and a preparation for that real time of testing that awaits us. However, we don't need to go into an actual desert — for in a sense we are already in a desert. The world is a desert, for it lacks the most essential thing of all — knowledge of God. In the desert we can place ourselves in God's hands relying trustfully upon him. When we are tested we remember those hidden Angels who are not so far away. When we experience these trials, we unite ourselves with Christ and ask him to endure the Temptation with us. We then recognize that all these sufferings and difficulties we must endure are part and parcel of the life of a Christian, and we know that they are only a sign of the victory that is to come. When we emerge from the desert, we enter more fully into the presence of God, and it will have all the beauty and more of the rainbow.

—taken from the writings of Father James Gilhooley which appear on the internet

**READINGS FOR THE WEEK:**

**Monday:** Leviticus 19:1-18, Matthew 25:31-46

**Tuesday:** Isaiah 55:10-11, Matthew 6:7-15

**Wednesday:** Jonah 3:1-10, Luke 11:29-32

**Thursday:** 1 Peter 5:1-4, Matthew 16:13-19

**Friday:** Ezekiel 18:21-28, Matthew 5:20-26

**Saturday:** Deuteronomy 26:16-19, Matthew 5:43-48

**2<sup>nd</sup> Week in Lent:** Genesis 22:1-18, Romans 8:31-34, Mark 9:2-10

**LIFE TEEN and EDGE:**

**Our Life Teen and EDGE youth group is meeting in-person again.** We will meet for an hour beginning at 11:30 AM following our 10 AM Sunday Mass in the Chapel. If you are unable to join us, there are many resources available for you on the Life Teen

website — [lifeteen.com](http://lifeteen.com). There are numerous blogs and videos for you to connect with. The Life Teen national office continues to release many new programs. **Please contact Father John for more information. And please join us each Sunday for our Mass at 10 AM — in person or live-streamed, and then come to our Life Teen/EDGE gathering after Mass.** And above all, let us continue to join each other in prayer. **Father John is available for you. Please contact him [cell: 216-570-9276].**



LIFE TEEN

**THE CROSS:**

You must accept your cross; if you bear it courageously it will carry you to Heaven.

—St. John Vianney