

A dramatic sunset over the ocean. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright, golden glow that reflects on the water's surface. The sky is filled with scattered clouds, some of which are illuminated by the setting sun, creating a mix of orange, yellow, and blue tones. The water in the foreground is dark blue with white-capped waves, and the overall atmosphere is serene and contemplative.

# *awakenings*

Small Group Faith Discussion Guide  
for Lent 2024

## Awakening Our Deepest Identity

Fr. Richard Rohr writes, *“I believe God gives us our soul, our deepest identity, our True Self, our unique blueprint, at our conception. Our unique little bit of heaven is installed within the product by the Manufacturer at the beginning! We are given a span of years to discover it, choose it, and live our destiny to the full.”*

Although our personal blueprint is unique to us, we need others to help us know the truth about who we are, who God is, and how we might live more robustly in the light of those truths. Small groups are a great resource for learning to live out of our deepest identity, both as individuals and as a collective group of believers— it is a way of being church.

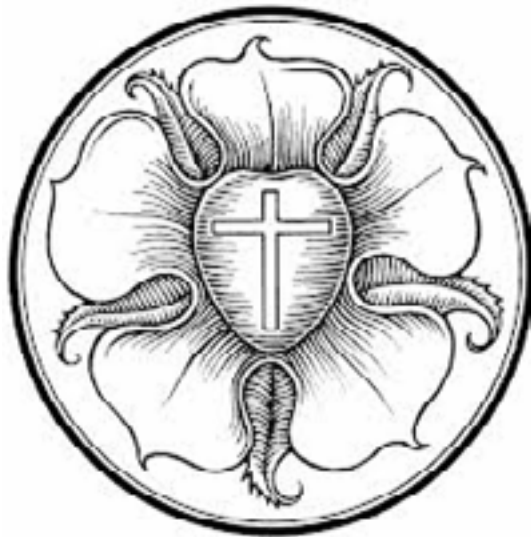
Lent provides us with a season, a regular yearly rhythm, where we are encouraged to clear the clutter from our lives. Since we find God in our world as well as our religious customs, this year’s Lenten guide includes secular quotes and poetry alongside the Old Testament and Gospel readings from the Lenten Sunday liturgies.

May your Lenten small group experience find you, and the people you share it with, reflecting, reframing, and renewing your commitments to lives of faith. May you find yourself celebrating Easter this year living out your destiny to the fullest!

Claire Henning, D.Min.  
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Lent 2024

“Lent comes providentially,  
to reawaken us,  
to shake us from our lethargy”

Pope Francis





## **Faith Sharing Guidelines**

*Faith sharing is a unique kind of conversation. Reminding participants of these guidelines at the beginning of each meeting can be helpful.*

1. Please show up on time (on zoom or in person).
2. What is shared in the group is privileged and stays in the group.
3. Everyone's input is valuable, but no one is required to speak.
4. Please only share on the level at which you are comfortable.
5. Please limit your sharing to a few minutes and wait until everyone has had the opportunity to share before you share again.
6. Only one person speaks at a time.
7. Please, no cross talking, which means no commenting on another person's sharings. "I" statements are better than "you" statements.
8. Please, no side conversations. Value one another by listening.
9. Please silence your cell phone and put it away. If you need to make a call or text, please take it outside or mute your speaker.
10. Periods of silent are natural and allow the Spirit to work. Resist the urge to fill in the silence unless you have something meaningful to say.



## **Opening Prayer for Meetings**

Lord, we ask you to accompany us in our faith sharing.

We bless your presence in all of creation  
and open ourselves to your presence with us.

As we listen deeply to one another,  
may we learn to also listen deeply to the needs of our world.

May our faith sharing bear fruit in our lives  
and in our outreach to others.

We ask this in the name of your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. AMEN



## **Closing Prayer for Meetings**

We thank you Lord for nurturing in each of us a disciple's heart.

A heart that is open to this Lenten journey.

A heart sustained by your Spirit.

A heart encouraged by these fellow disciples.

Help us be mediums of your grace. AMEN

## First Sunday of Lent

# THE COVENANT

*“To every people the land is given on condition. Perceived or not, there is a Covenant, beyond the constitution, beyond sovereign guarantee, beyond the nation’s sweetest dreams of itself.”*

Leonard Cohen



In the Bible, a covenant is an agreement between God and Israel in which both make promises under oath to perform or refrain from certain actions. Western readers have a hard time fully appreciating the biblical portrayal of covenant-based relationships because for us, they are almost obsolete. The fragile institution of marriage remains the most noteworthy vestige of covenant for us today.

This first Sunday of Lent introduces us to two covenants. First, we read the story of Noah. An immense period of time has passed since the Garden of Eden and God’s first covenant made with Adam and Eve. Things have gotten so bad that God has decided to wipe out the human race and start over. But noticing the righteousness of Noah and his family, God commissions Noah to build an ark, a symbolic temple, in which God’s creations, rather than being destroyed, will be preserved and restored.

The gospel gives us a thumbnail sketch of the call of Jesus and the launch of his ministry, which will usher in the New Covenant. This covenant offers us the indwelling of the Holy Spirit – available to all and not restricted to any one group of people. Noah’s ark prefigured the temple. In the New Covenant the temple becomes Christ’s Mystical Body.

## **Covenant** by Margaret Halaska O.S.F

*God  
knocks at my door  
seeking a home for his son*

*Rent is cheap, I say*

*I don't want to rent.  
I want to buy, says God.  
I'm not sure I want to sell,  
but you might come in and look around.*

*I think I will, says God.*

*I might let you have a room or two.*

*I like it, says God. I'll take the two.  
You might decide to give me more some day.*

*I can wait, says God.*

*I'd like to give you more,  
but it's a bit difficult.  
I need some space for me.*

*I know, says God, but I'll wait.  
I like what I see.*

*Hm, maybe I can let you have another room.  
I really don't need that much.*

*Thanks, says God, I'll take it.  
I like what I see.*

*I'd like to give you the whole house  
but I'm not sure ...*

*Think on it, says God.  
I wouldn't put you out.  
Your house would be mine and my son would live in it.  
You'd have more space than you'd ever had before.*

*I don't understand at all.*

*I know, says God, but I can't tell you about that.  
You'll have to discover it for yourself.  
That can only happen if you let me have the whole house.*

*A bit risky, I say.*

*Yes, says God, but try me.*

*I'm not sure –  
I'll let you know.*

*I can wait, says God,  
I like what I see.*

## **Reading** Genesis 9:8-18

God said to Noah and to his sons with him:  
"See, I am now establishing my covenant with you  
and your descendants after you  
and with every living creature that was with you:  
all the birds, and the various tame and wild animals  
that were with you and came out of the ark.

I will establish my covenant with you,  
that never again shall all bodily creatures be destroyed  
by the waters of a flood;  
there shall not be another flood to devastate the earth."

God added:

"This is the sign that I am giving for all ages to come,  
of the covenant between me and you  
and every living creature with you:  
I set my bow in the clouds to serve as a sign  
of the covenant between me and the earth.

When I bring clouds over the earth,  
and the bow appears in the clouds,  
I will recall the covenant I have made between me and you and all living beings,  
so that the waters shall never again become a flood  
to destroy all mortal beings."



## **Gospel Mark 1:12-15**

The Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert,  
and he remained in the desert for forty days,  
tempted by Satan.

He was among wild beasts,  
and the angels ministered to him.

After John had been arrested,  
Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God:  
"This is the time of fulfillment.  
The kingdom of God is at hand.  
Repent, and believe in the gospel."

## **Faith Sharing Questions**

1. In Mark's Gospel the Spirit drives Jesus into the desert where he remains for forty days. The desert is often considered a metaphor for emptiness, loneliness, or isolation. But because there are few distractions, the desert can also be associated with clarity and revelation. Then again, the desert is such a difficult, threatening terrain, it can also represent obstacles and challenges. As you begin your forty-day Lenten journey, what metaphor best describes where the Spirit may be leading you this year?

2. The Greek word for repentance (metanoia) means "changing your mind." When Jesus says, "repent and believe in the gospel," he is asking us to rearrange our way of thinking, feeling and being in order to act differently. What needs rearranging in your life this Lent?

3. Where is there a rainbow in your life?

4. What sort of covenant would you like to contract with God this Lent?

5. What have these readings and faith sharing awakened in you today

## Second Sunday of Lent

### THE MOUNTAIN

*"Great things are done when men and mountains meet;  
this is not done by jostling in the street."*

William Blake



Mountains are significant in the Bible for several reasons. They are often depicted as places of revelation, of divine encounter where God reveals God's self to an individual or group. For example, Mount Sinai is where Moses received the Ten Commandments, and in this week's first reading Mount Moriah is where Abraham is tested by God. Mountains are also associated with prayer, solitude, and spiritual reflection, as seen in Jesus's frequent retreat to the mountains for prayer. Additionally, mountains are used metaphorically to symbolize strength, stability, and the enduring nature of God's promises. Overall, mountains in the Bible carry profound symbolic and spiritual significance.

Perhaps the most significant mountain scene in the gospels, however, is the Transfiguration of Jesus, which we find in this week's gospel. Jesus appears with Moses and Elijah, who themselves encountered God on a mountaintop in the Old Testament. The Transfiguration is the moment when the disciples encounter God through Jesus, and Jesus, in turn, is seen as the fulfillment of the law (Moses) and the prophets (Elijah).

## **The Poet Dreams of the Mountain** by Mary Oliver

Sometimes I grow weary of the days, with all their fits and starts.  
I want to climb some old gray mountain, slowly, taking  
the rest of my lifetime to do it, resting often, sleeping  
under the pines or, above them, on the unclothed rocks.  
I want to see how many stars are still in the sky  
that we have smothered for years now, a century at least.  
I want to look back at everything, forgiving it all,  
and peaceful, knowing the last thing there is to know.  
All that urgency! Not what the earth is about!  
How silent the trees, their poetry being of themselves only.  
I want to take slow steps and think appropriate thoughts.  
In ten thousand years, maybe, a piece of the mountain will fall.

## **Reading** Genesis 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13,15-18

God put Abraham to the test.  
He called to him, "Abraham!"  
"Here I am!" he replied.  
Then God said:  
"Take your son Isaac, your only one, whom you love,  
and go to the land of Moriah.  
There you shall offer him up as a holocaust  
on a height that I will point out to you."

When they came to the place of which God had told him,  
Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it.  
Then he reached out and took the knife to slaughter his son.  
But the LORD's messenger called to him from heaven,  
"Abraham, Abraham!"  
"Here I am!" he answered.  
"Do not lay your hand on the boy," said the messenger.  
"Do not do the least thing to him.  
I know now how devoted you are to God,  
since you did not withhold from me your own beloved son."

As Abraham looked about,  
he spied a ram caught by its horns in the thicket.  
So he went and took the ram  
and offered it up as a holocaust in place of his son.

Again the LORD's messenger called to Abraham from heaven and said:  
"I swear by myself, declares the LORD,  
that because you acted as you did  
in not withholding from me your beloved son,  
I will bless you abundantly  
and make your descendants as countless  
as the stars of the sky and the sands of the seashore;  
your descendants shall take possession  
of the gates of their enemies,  
and in your descendants all the nations of the earth  
shall find blessing—  
all this because you obeyed my command."

## **Gospel** Mark 9:2-10

Jesus took Peter, James, and John  
and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves.  
And he was transfigured before them,  
and his clothes became dazzling white,  
such as no fuller on earth could bleach them.  
Then Elijah appeared to them along with Moses,  
and they were conversing with Jesus.  
Then Peter said to Jesus in reply,  
"Rabbi, it is good that we are here!  
Let us make three tents:  
one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."  
He hardly knew what to say, they were so terrified.  
Then a cloud came, casting a shadow over them;  
from the cloud came a voice,  
"This is my beloved Son. Listen to him."  
Suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone  
but Jesus alone with them.

As they were coming down from the mountain,  
he charged them not to relate what they had seen to anyone,  
except when the Son of Man had risen from the dead.  
So they kept the matter to themselves,  
questioning what rising from the dead meant.

## Faith Sharing Questions

1. Have you ever considered how Abraham must have felt when he realized that he did not have to sacrifice Isaac after all? Mountaintop moments are moments when we experience the power, love, and grace of God in a way difficult to capture in words. They give us a profound sense of God's presence in our lives. Have you ever had an experience that was so profound that it is difficult to capture in words? If so, how did it make you feel?

2. Mountaintop moments are usually fleeting. At the Transfiguration, Peter tries to hold on to his mountaintop moment, to preserve it – to make the fleeting permanent. We all like the view from the mountaintop, but just like the apostles, we all must come down off the mountain and live our lives. We forget the God is as present in the day-to-day as God is on the mountain. Where do you find God in the day-to-day?

3. In Mary Oliver's poem she writes about the importance of perspective, of standing in a place above and beyond the frenzy. "I want to climb some old grey mountain," she says, "I want to take slow steps, and think appropriate thoughts." How do you balance holding a view of the landscape of life from the mountain, while staying engaged in the world?

4. At the Transfiguration apparition the apostles "hardly knew what to say, they were so terrified." There are many occurrences in the New Testament when we find the apostles confused or terrified. Does anything about your call to discipleship confuse or terrify you?

5. What have these readings and faith sharing awakened in you today?

## Third Sunday of Lent

# OPERATING INSTRUCTIONS

*“What do you say, we do what the man says, and make today our masterpiece?” Ted Lasso*



In the first reading we find the Ten Commandments – the operating instruction of the chosen people. While the entire Judeo-Christian tradition uses the same scriptural content for the Ten Commandments, their exact division and numbering vary. The Catholic tradition uses the division of the commandments established by St. Augustine.

According to Richard McBrein, *“It is important to note that the Decalogue [the Ten Commandments] was not intended as the ultimate norm of all morality. Its consistent focus is the needs of the whole community. What was important was the survival of the People of God. Thus, the Ten Commandments were not so much an ethical document as a religious document, i.e., a testimony to the unbreakable bond between God and Israel.”*

In the New Testament, Jesus says “Do you think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish, but to fulfill” (Mt 5:17). The understanding of laws and the practice of laws often change over time, sometimes for the better, sometimes not. Jesus’ life and ministry challenged much of the status quo. In the Gospel Jesus comes upon a scene in the temple that he describes as a “marketplace,” no longer the holy space that is his “Father’s house.” Animals for sacrifice, and the need for money exchange, were an essential part of temple worship. But, for Jesus, the entrepreneurial opportunities the system had come to encourage had become an intolerable commercialization of the house of God.



## **Instructions** by Rudy Francisco

gather  
your mistakes

rinse them with  
honesty and self  
reflection,

let dry until you  
can see every choice  
and the regret  
becomes brittle.

cover the  
entire surface  
in forgiveness

remind yourself that  
you are human

and this too  
is a gift

## **Reading** Exodus 20:1-17

In those days, God delivered all these commandments:  
“I, the LORD, am your God,  
who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery.  
You shall not have other gods besides me.

You shall not carve idols for yourselves  
in the shape of anything in the sky above  
or on the earth below or in the waters beneath the earth;  
you shall not bow down before them or worship them.  
For I, the LORD, your God, am a jealous God,  
inflicting punishment for their fathers' wickedness  
on the children of those who hate me,  
down to the third and fourth generation;  
but bestowing mercy down to the thousandth generation  
on the children of those who love me and keep my commandments.

“You shall not take the name of the LORD, your God, in vain.  
For the LORD will not leave unpunished  
the one who takes his name in vain.

“Remember to keep holy the sabbath day.  
Six days you may labor and do all your work,  
but the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD, your God.  
No work may be done then either by you, or your son or daughter,  
or your male or female slave, or your beast,  
or by the alien who lives with you.  
In six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth,  
the sea and all that is in them;  
but on the seventh day he rested.  
That is why the LORD has blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.

“Honor your father and your mother,  
that you may have a long life in the land  
which the LORD, your God, is giving you.

You shall not kill.  
You shall not commit adultery.  
You shall not steal.  
You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.  
You shall not covet your neighbor's house.  
You shall not covet your neighbor's wife,  
nor his male or female slave, nor his ox or ass,  
nor anything else that belongs to him

## **Gospel** John 2:13-25

Since the Passover of the Jews was near,  
Jesus went up to Jerusalem.  
He found in the temple area those who sold oxen, sheep, and doves,  
as well as the money changers seated there.  
He made a whip out of cords  
and drove them all out of the temple area, with the sheep and oxen,  
and spilled the coins of the money changers  
and overturned their tables,  
and to those who sold doves he said,  
“Take these out of here,  
and stop making my Father’s house a marketplace.”

His disciples recalled the words of Scripture,  
*Zeal for your house will consume me.*  
At this the Jews answered and said to him,  
“What sign can you show us for doing this?”  
Jesus answered and said to them,  
“Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.”  
The Jews said,  
“This temple has been under construction for forty-six years,  
and you will raise it up in three days?”  
But he was speaking about the temple of his body.

Therefore, when he was raised from the dead,  
his disciples remembered that he had said this,  
and they came to believe the Scripture  
and the word Jesus had spoken.

While he was in Jerusalem for the feast of Passover,  
many began to believe in his name  
when they saw the signs he was doing.  
But Jesus would not trust himself to them because he knew them all,  
and did not need anyone to testify about human nature.  
He himself understood it well.

## **Faith Sharing Questions**

1. In the Exodus reading there are eleven lines of instructions warning against false gods – not any shape from the sky, the waters of earth. There is also a warning of punishment, not only for the idolater, but down to the fourth generation of descendants. Some common idols today include our appearance, jobs, finances, material possessions, and entertainments. What idols do you struggle with in your life?

2. In the Exodus reading there is a lengthy instruction regarding rest on the sabbath day. It stipulates that neither you nor your children, male or female slaves, your animals or even any alien who lives with you may work on that day. It reminds the reader that even the LORD rested after creating the world. We live in a culture that celebrates doing, performing, and working while sidelining the importance of rest. Do you need to repair your own relationship with rest? Do you allow for the rest of others?

3. In the Gospel the apostles recall the words of scripture, “zeal for your house consumes me” (Ps 69:9). What is your level of zeal for the Church at this time in your life?

4. The Gospel states that many in Jerusalem began to believe in Jesus because of the signs he was doing. This passage ends with an unusual glimpse of Jesus as being wary of human nature. Although the signs and activity of Jesus drew people to him, he was aware that this kind of attraction did not constitute true faith. What draws you to Jesus today? How has your faith in Jesus changed through the years?

5. What have these readings and faith sharing awakened in you today?

## Fourth Sunday of Lent

### RESCUE

*“The business of second chances is everybody's business.”*

Fr. Greg Boyle



This week we hear the story of the Babylonian captivity in which large numbers of Judeans from the ancient Kingdom of Judah were dragged off and held captive in Babylon following the destruction of Jerusalem, including Solomons temple. We also hear of their rescue, several decades later, when the Persian king, Cyrus, after defeating the Babylonians, set the Israelites free from captivity. Cyrus facilitated their return to the promised land, becoming an heroic figure in Jewish scripture. Cyrus also helped to build the Second Temple in Jerusalem.

In the Gospel we find Jesus speaking with Nicodemus, a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin who is drawn to Jesus' teachings. Like Cyrus, Nicodemus is another powerful man who intercedes. Later in the Gospel of John (Jn 7:40-51), while the crowd, the guards, the chief priests, and Pharisees argue over Jesus, Nicodemus comes to Jesus' defense, reminding his colleagues that the law requires that a person be heard before being judged.

But the ultimate rescue story this week is found in the words Jesus speaks to Nicodemus in the famous quote (Jn 3:16) sometimes seen painted on the faces of people at ball games or on signs at large gatherings. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.”

## **Rescue** by Lauren Daigle

You are not hidden.  
There's never been a moment  
you were forgotten.  
You are not hopeless,  
though you have been broken,  
your innocence stolen.

I hear you whisper underneath your breath.  
I hear your SOS, your SOS.

I will send out an army to find you  
in the middle of the darkest night.  
It's true, I will rescue you.  
There is no distance  
that cannot be covered  
over and over.  
You're not defenseless.  
I'll be your shelter.  
I'll be your armor.

I hear you whisper underneath your breath.  
I hear your SOS, your SOS.

I will send out an army to find you  
in the middle of the darkest night.  
It's true, I will rescue you.  
I will never stop marching to reach you  
in the middle of the hardest fight.

It's true, I will rescue you.  
I hear the whisper underneath your breath.  
I hear you whisper you have nothing left.  
I will send out an army to find you  
in the middle of the darkest night.  
It's true, I will rescue you.  
I will never stop marching to reach you  
in the middle of the hardest fight.  
It's true, I will rescue you.  
Oh, I will rescue you.



## **Reading 2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 18-23**

In those days, all the princes of Judah, the priests, and the people added infidelity to infidelity, practicing all the abominations of the nations and polluting the LORD's temple which he had consecrated in Jerusalem.

Early and often did the LORD, the God of their fathers, send his messengers to them, for he had compassion on his people and his dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God, despised his warnings, and scoffed at his prophets, until the anger of the LORD against his people was so inflamed that there was no remedy.

Their enemies burnt the house of God, tore down the walls of Jerusalem, set all its palaces afire, and destroyed all its precious objects.

Those who escaped the sword were carried captive to Babylon, where they became servants of the king of the Chaldeans and his sons until the kingdom of the Persians came to power.

All this was to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah: "Until the land has retrieved its lost sabbaths, during all the time it lies waste it shall have rest while seventy years are fulfilled."

In the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD inspired King Cyrus of Persia to issue this proclamation throughout his kingdom, both by word of mouth and in writing:

"Thus says Cyrus, king of Persia:

All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD, the God of heaven, has given to me, and he has also charged me to build him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

Whoever, therefore, among you belongs to any part of his people, let him go up, and may his God be with him!"

## **Gospel John 3:14-21**

Jesus said to Nicodemus:

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

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,  
so that everyone who believes in him might not perish  
but might have eternal life.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world,  
but that the world might be saved through him.

Whoever believes in him will not be condemned,  
but whoever does not believe has already been condemned,  
because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

And this is the verdict,  
that the light came into the world,  
but people preferred darkness to light,  
because their works were evil.

For everyone who does wicked things hates the light  
and does not come toward the light,  
so that his works might not be exposed.  
But whoever lives the truth comes to the light,  
so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God.

## Faith Sharing Questions

1. The fourth Sunday of Lent is sometimes called *Laetare* Sunday. *Laetare* is Latin for “rejoice.” In this gospel we have the famous quote, “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.” What do you have to rejoice about this week?
2. Jesus didn’t promise to rescue us from human sufferings or escape from death. He promised that in the end there will be redemption and eternal life. How does Jesus’ promise affect the way you pray?
3. The gospel explains that the light came into the world, but people preferred the darkness. If you had the power to rescue someone or the world from a form of darkness today, who or what would you rescue, and why?
4. Does your faith increase your sense of serenity? If so, how?
5. What have these readings and faith sharing awakened in you today?

## Fifth Sunday of Lent

### HOPE

*"We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope"*  
Martin Luther King, Jr.



In the first reading, Jeremiah writes words of hope amid dark times. He is imprisoned and Jerusalem is besieged by the Babylonian army. The reading shows God's intention of making a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. This new covenant will be different from all other covenants, and God's law will be written on the hearts of the people. This covenant will herald a new age where all people from the least to the greatest, will know how to live in accordance with God's will.

In the gospel we again find hope amid darkness. Throughout his ministry, Jesus and the narrator of the Gospel of John have stated that his hour had "not yet" come. Now, his hour has come and despite any foreknowledge he may have, he is deeply troubled by the task ahead of him. Nevertheless, this gospel ends with hope. "And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself."

## **Hope is the thing with feathers** by Emily Dickinson

Hope is the thing with feathers  
That perches in the soul,  
And sings the tune without the words,  
And never stops at all,

And sweetest in the gale is heard;  
And sore must be the storm  
That could abash the little bird  
That kept so many warm.

I've heard it in the chilliest land,  
And on the strangest sea;  
Yet, never, in extremity,  
It asked a crumb of me.

## **Reading** Jeremiah 31: 31-34

The days are coming, says the LORD,  
when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel  
and the house of Judah.  
It will not be like the  
covenant I made with their fathers  
the day I took them by the hand  
to lead them forth from the land of Egypt;  
for they broke my covenant,  
and I had to show myself their master, says the LORD.

But this is the covenant that I will make  
with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD.  
I will place my law within them and write it upon their hearts;  
I will be their God, and they shall be my people.  
No longer will they have need to teach their friends and relatives  
how to know the LORD.  
All, from least to greatest, shall know me, says the LORD,  
for I will forgive their evildoing and remember their sin no more.

## **Gospel John 12:20-33**

Some Greeks who had come to worship at the Passover Feast came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, “Sir, we would like to see Jesus.” Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.

Jesus answered them,  
“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.  
Amen, amen, I say to you,  
unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies,  
it remains just a grain of wheat;  
but if it dies, it produces much fruit.  
Whoever loves his life loses it,  
and whoever hates his life in this world  
will preserve it for eternal life.  
Whoever serves me must follow me,  
and where I am, there also will my servant be.  
The Father will honor whoever serves me.

“I am troubled now. Yet what should I say?  
‘Father, save me from this hour’?  
But it was for this purpose that I came to this hour.  
Father, glorify your name.”

Then a voice came from heaven,  
“I have glorified it and will glorify it again.”  
The crowd there heard it and said it was thunder;  
but others said, “An angel has spoken to him.”  
Jesus answered and said,  
“This voice did not come for my sake but for yours.  
Now is the time of judgment on this world;  
now the ruler of this world will be driven out.  
And when I am lifted up from the earth,  
I will draw everyone to myself.”  
He said this indicating the kind of death he would die.



## **Faith Sharing Questions**

1. Jeremiah, living in bleak darkness, writes that God's new laws will be found in the hearts of the people. In Christian spirituality that equates to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. How do you experience the indwelling of the Holy Spirit? Is this concept an important part of your personal spirituality?

2. In John's gospel we are told that Greeks have come to Jerusalem who hope to see Jesus. This is sometimes viewed as fulfillment of the complaints made by Jewish leaders that "the world has gone after him." Two disciples, Philip and Andrew, bring this request from "the world" to Jesus. The Catholic Church is a global phenomenon through which untold varieties of people hope to see Jesus. How does the Church support your desire to see Jesus?

3. How do you interpret the passage, "whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life?"

4. What is hopeful about being a Christian?

5. What have these readings and faith sharing awakened in you today?

## Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion

### THE PASSION

*“An unbelieved truth can hurt a man much more than a lie. It takes great courage to back truth unacceptable to our times. There's a punishment for it, and it's usually crucifixion.”*

John Steinbeck, East of Eden



### Reading at Mass Isaiah 50:4-7

The Lord GOD has given me  
a well-trained tongue,  
that I might know how to speak to the weary  
a word that will rouse them.  
Morning after morning  
he opens my ear that I may hear;  
and I have not rebelled,  
have not turned back.  
I gave my back to those who beat me,  
my cheeks to those who plucked my beard;  
my face I did not shield  
from buffets and spitting.  
The Lord GOD is my help,  
therefore I am not disgraced;  
I have set my face like flint,  
knowing that I shall not be put to shame.

## **Gospel** Mark 14:1-15:47

The Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread  
were to take place in two days' time.

So the chief priests and the scribes were seeking a way  
to arrest him by treachery and put him to death.

They said, "Not during the festival,  
for fear that there may be a riot among the people."

When he was in Bethany reclining at table  
in the house of Simon the leper,  
a woman came with an alabaster jar of perfumed oil,  
costly genuine spikenard.  
She broke the alabaster jar and poured it on his head.

There were some who were indignant.  
"Why has there been this waste of perfumed oil?  
It could have been sold for more than three hundred days' wages  
and the money given to the poor."  
They were infuriated with her.

Jesus said, "Let her alone.  
Why do you make trouble for her?  
She has done a good thing for me.  
The poor you will always have with you,  
and whenever you wish you can do good to them,  
but you will not always have me.  
She has done what she could.  
She has anticipated anointing my body for burial  
Amen, I say to you,  
wherever the gospel is proclaimed to the whole world,  
what she has done will be told in memory of her."

Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve,  
went off to the chief priests to hand him over to them.  
When they heard him they were pleased and promised to pay him money.  
Then he looked for an opportunity to hand him over.

On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread,  
when they sacrificed the Passover lamb,  
his disciples said to him,  
“Where do you want us to go  
and prepare for you to eat the Passover?”

He sent two of his disciples and said to them,  
“Go into the city and a man will meet you,  
carrying a jar of water.  
Follow him.  
Wherever he enters, say to the master of the house,  
‘The Teacher says, “Where is my guest room  
where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’”  
Then he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready.  
Make the preparations for us there.”

The disciples then went off, entered the city,  
and found it just as he had told them;  
and they prepared the Passover.

When it was evening, he came with the Twelve.  
And as they reclined at table and were eating, Jesus said,  
“Amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me,  
one who is eating with me.”  
They began to be distressed and to say to him, one by one,  
“Surely it is not I?”

He said to them,  
“One of the Twelve, the one who dips with me into the dish.  
For the Son of Man indeed goes, as it is written of him,  
but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed.  
It would be better for that man if he had never been born.”

While they were eating,  
he took bread, said the blessing,  
broke it, and gave it to them, and said,  
“Take it; this is my body.”

Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them,  
and they all drank from it.  
He said to them,  
“This is my blood of the covenant,  
which will be shed for many.  
Amen, I say to you,  
I shall not drink again the fruit of the vine  
until the day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

Then, after singing a hymn,  
they went out to the Mount of Olives.  
Then Jesus said to them,  
“All of you will have your faith shaken, for it is written:  
*I will strike the shepherd,  
and the sheep will be dispersed.*  
But after I have been raised up,  
I shall go before you to Galilee.”

Peter said to him,  
“Even though all should have their faith shaken,  
mine will not be.”  
Then Jesus said to him,  
“Amen, I say to you,  
this very night before the cock crows twice  
you will deny me three times.”

But he vehemently replied,  
“Even though I should have to die with you,  
I will not deny you.”  
And they all spoke similarly.

Then they came to a place named Gethsemane,  
and he said to his disciples,  
“Sit here while I pray.”  
He took with him Peter, James, and John,  
and began to be troubled and distressed.  
Then he said to them, “My soul is sorrowful even to death.  
Remain here and keep watch.”

He advanced a little and fell to the ground and prayed that if it were possible the hour might pass by him; he said, “Abba, Father, all things are possible to you. Take this cup away from me, but not what I will but what you will.”

When he returned he found them asleep. He said to Peter, “Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.”

Withdrawing again, he prayed, saying the same thing. Then he returned once more and found them asleep, for they could not keep their eyes open and did not know what to answer him.

He returned a third time and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough. The hour has come. Behold, the Son of Man is to be handed over to sinners. Get up, let us go. See, my betrayer is at hand.”

Then, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived, accompanied by a crowd with swords and clubs who had come from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. His betrayer had arranged a signal with them, saying, “The man I shall kiss is the one; arrest him and lead him away securely.” He came and immediately went over to him and said, “Rabbi.” And he kissed him.

At this they laid hands on him and arrested him. One of the bystanders drew his sword, struck the high priest’s servant, and cut off his ear. Jesus said to them in reply,

“Have you come out as against a robber,  
with swords and clubs, to seize me?  
Day after day I was with you teaching in the temple area,  
yet you did not arrest me;  
but that the Scriptures may be fulfilled.”  
And they all left him and fled.

Now a young man followed him  
wearing nothing but a linen cloth about his body.  
They seized him,  
but he left the cloth behind and ran off naked.

They led Jesus away to the high priest,  
and all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes came together.  
Peter followed him at a distance into the high priest’s courtyard  
and was seated with the guards, warming himself at the fire.

The chief priests and the entire Sanhedrin  
kept trying to obtain testimony against Jesus  
in order to put him to death, but they found none.  
Many gave false witness against him,  
but their testimony did not agree.

Some took the stand and testified falsely against him,  
alleging, “We heard him say,  
‘I will destroy this temple made with hands  
and within three days I will build another  
not made with hands.’”  
Even so their testimony did not agree.

The high priest rose before the assembly and questioned Jesus,  
saying, “Have you no answer?  
What are these men testifying against you?”  
But he was silent and answered nothing.  
Again the high priest asked him and said to him,  
“Are you the Christ, the son of the Blessed One?”  
Then Jesus answered, “I am;  
and ‘you will see the Son of Man  
seated at the right hand of the Power  
and coming with the clouds of heaven.’”

At that the high priest tore his garments and said,  
“What further need have we of witnesses?  
You have heard the blasphemy.  
What do you think?”  
They all condemned him as deserving to die.

Some began to spit on him.  
They blindfolded him and struck him and said to him, “Prophecy!”  
And the guards greeted him with blows.

While Peter was below in the courtyard,  
one of the high priest’s maids came along.  
Seeing Peter warming himself,  
she looked intently at him and said,  
“You too were with the Nazarene, Jesus.”  
But he denied it saying,  
“I neither know nor understand what you are talking about.”  
So he went out into the outer court.

Then the cock crowed.  
The maid saw him and began again to say to the bystanders,  
“This man is one of them.”  
Once again he denied it.

A little later the bystanders said to Peter once more,  
“Surely you are one of them; for you too are a Galilean.”  
He began to curse and to swear,  
“I do not know this man about whom you are talking.”  
And immediately a cock crowed a second time.

Then Peter remembered the word that Jesus had said to him,  
“Before the cock crows twice you will deny me three times.”  
He broke down and wept.

As soon as morning came,  
the chief priests with the elders and the scribes,  
that is, the whole Sanhedrin held a council.  
They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate.  
Pilate questioned him,



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“Are you the king of the Jews?”  
He said to him in reply, “You say so.”  
The chief priests accused him of many things.  
Again Pilate questioned him,  
“Have you no answer?  
See how many things they accuse you of.”  
Jesus gave him no further answer, so that Pilate was amazed.

Now on the occasion of the feast he used to release to them  
one prisoner whom they requested.  
A man called Barabbas was then in prison  
along with the rebels who had committed murder in a rebellion.  
The crowd came forward and began to ask him  
to do for them as he was accustomed.

Pilate answered,  
“Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?”  
For he knew that it was out of envy  
that the chief priests had handed him over.  
But the chief priests stirred up the crowd  
to have him release Barabbas for them instead.

Pilate again said to them in reply,  
“Then what do you want me to do  
with the man you call the king of the Jews?”  
They shouted again, “Crucify him.”  
Pilate said to them, “Why? What evil has he done?”  
They only shouted the louder, “Crucify him.”  
So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd,  
released Barabbas to them and, after he had Jesus scourged,  
handed him over to be crucified.

The soldiers led him away inside the palace,  
that is, the praetorium, and assembled the whole cohort.  
They clothed him in purple and,  
weaving a crown of thorns, placed it on him.  
They began to salute him with, "Hail, King of the Jews!"  
and kept striking his head with a reed and spitting upon him.

They knelt before him in homage.  
And when they had mocked him,  
they stripped him of the purple cloak,  
dressed him in his own clothes,  
and led him out to crucify him.

They pressed into service a passer-by, Simon,  
a Cyrenian, who was coming in from the country,  
the father of Alexander and Rufus,  
to carry his cross.  
They brought him to the place of Golgotha  
— which is translated Place of the Skull —,

They gave him wine drugged with myrrh,  
but he did not take it.  
Then they crucified him and divided his garments  
by casting lots for them to see what each should take.

It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him.  
The inscription of the charge against him read,  
“The King of the Jews.”  
With him they crucified two revolutionaries,  
one on his right and one on his left.  
Those passing by reviled him,  
shaking their heads and saying,  
“Aha! You who would destroy the temple  
and rebuild it in three days,  
save yourself by coming down from the cross.”

Likewise the chief priests, with the scribes,  
mocked him among themselves and said,  
“He saved others; he cannot save himself.  
Let the Christ, the King of Israel,  
come down now from the cross  
that we may see and believe.”

Those who were crucified with him also kept abusing him.  
At noon darkness came over the whole land  
until three in the afternoon.

And at three o'clock Jesus cried out in a loud voice,  
"Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?"  
which is translated,  
"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Some of the bystanders who heard it said,  
"Look, he is calling Elijah."  
One of them ran, soaked a sponge with wine, put it on a reed  
and gave it to him to drink saying,  
"Wait, let us see if Elijah comes to take him down."

**Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last.**  
*Here all kneel and pause for a short time.*

The veil of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom.  
When the centurion who stood facing him  
saw how he breathed his last he said,  
"Truly this man was the Son of God!"

There were also women looking on from a distance.  
Among them were Mary Magdalene,  
Mary the mother of the younger James and of Joses, and Salome.  
These women had followed him when he was in Galilee  
and ministered to him.  
There were also many other women  
who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

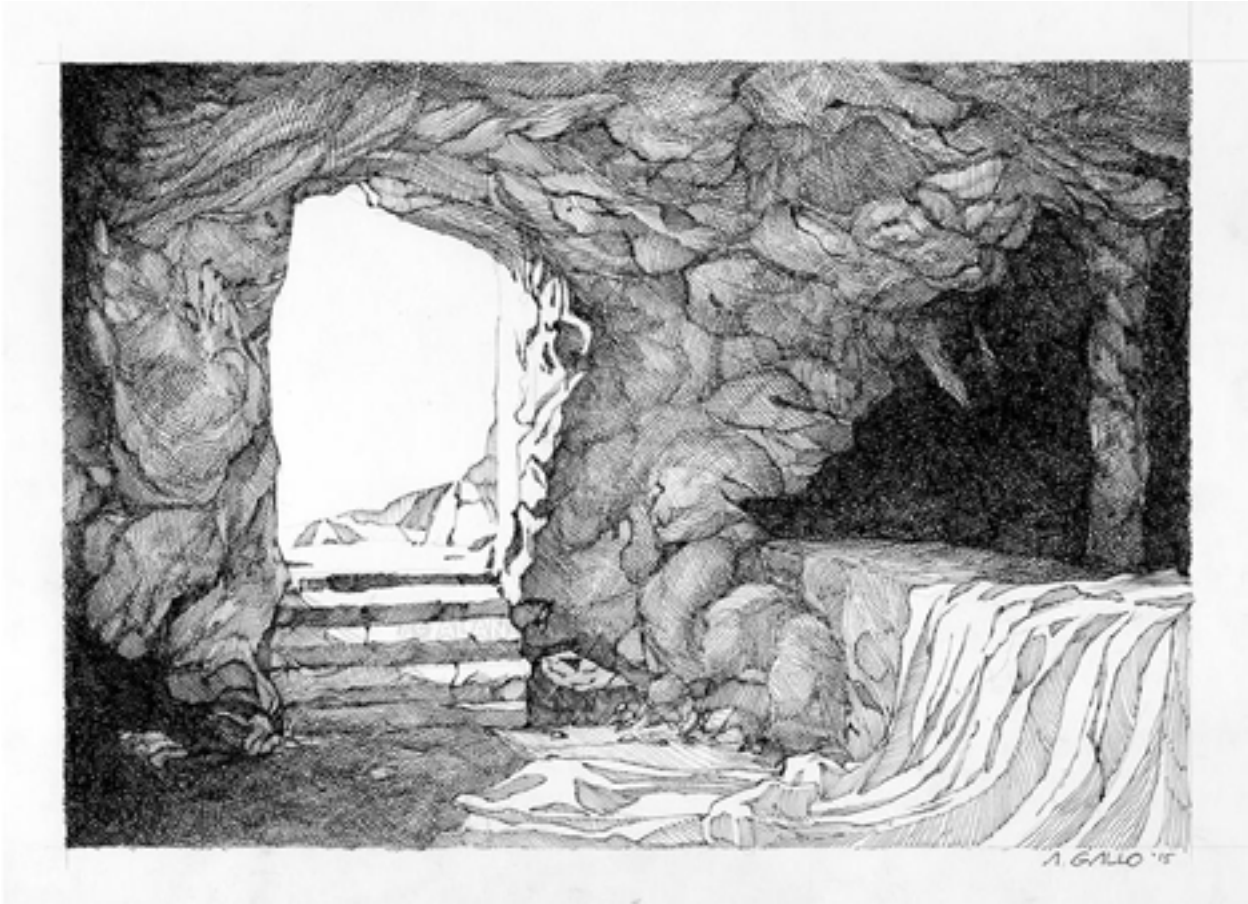
When it was already evening,  
since it was the day of preparation,  
the day before the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea,  
a distinguished member of the council,  
who was himself awaiting the kingdom of God,  
came and courageously went to Pilate  
and asked for the body of Jesus.

Pilate was amazed that he was already dead.  
He summoned the centurion  
and asked him if Jesus had already died.  
And when he learned of it from the centurion,  
he gave the body to Joseph.

Having bought a linen cloth, he took him down,  
wrapped him in the linen cloth,  
and laid him in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock.  
Then he rolled a stone against the entrance to the tomb.  
Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph  
watched where he was laid.

## Faith Sharing Questions

1. In the Isaiah reading we read, “*the Lord God has given me a well-trained tongue, for me to know how to give a word of comfort to the weary.*” Do you believe you have the capacity to comfort others? In what ways are you best able to give comfort, and to whom?
2. After Jesus was arrested, he became passive; he was led away, manhandled, whipped, helped in carrying his cross, and ultimately nailed to it. There are many lessons in this, one being that life and love are given, not just in what we do for others, but also in what we absorb at those times when we are helpless, when we have no choice except to be patient. When have you experienced this form of Christ’s passion in your life?
3. Sr. Helen Prejean writes that “people are more than the worst thing they have ever done in their lives.” In the passion story we have two apostles that outwardly betray Jesus. One is Peter and the other is Judas. Although we never read specifically of Peter’s repentance for denying Jesus, Peter accepted forgiveness and went on to fulfill his calling. For Judas, the shame of what he had done was too much to bear. His shame ended in suicide. What are the lessons that Peter and Judas have to teach us?
4. What part of Holy Week is most meaningful for you? Why?
5. What have these readings and faith sharing awakened in you today?



*We are an Easter people  
and Alleluia is our song.  
Pope S<sup>t</sup>. John Paul II*



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