

# SCRIPTURE SHARING



*Lent 2025*  
*Kildare and Leighlin Diocese*

## REFLECTING ON THE LENTEN SUNDAY SCRIPTURES IN THE JUBILEE YEAR OF HOPE 2025

We are delighted to bring you these reflections and prayers to accompany your praying with the Sunday scriptures in Lent, as part of a group or individually. We do so, this year, in a Jubilee Year of Hope. The Lenten journey brings us to the joy of Easter, and this is the reason for our hope as Christians. Jesus and his Paschal Mystery – his life, death, and resurrection – is the source of our Christian hope. This shapes and transforms how we live in the world and the stance we take towards our shared human story unfolding in this time in history.

The prayer resources that surround the scripture and scripture reflections draw on the Christian virtue of hope at the heart of this jubilee year. At the beginning of the booklet, we include a specially composed Family Jubilee Prayer that groups or individuals might like to pray when drawing on these resources, perhaps as a closing prayer after the final thought.

As we enter into this sacred season as pilgrims of hope, may this publication support you in the personal invitation to renewal and new life that lies at the heart of Lent as we make our way to the great celebration of Easter.

Julie Kavanagh

Faith Development Services &  
the Diocesan Commission for Liturgical Formation

## **A FAMILY JUBILEE PRAYER**

Father in heaven,  
as we bring our prayers to you (as a family),  
we know that you are with us  
and that you love and care for each one of us.

We thank you for the gift of your son, our brother, Jesus Christ.

May our faith in Jesus encourage us to follow his ways  
as we try to do our best every day and to live happy lives.

As Jesus taught us,  
may we always care for one another and care for your creation,  
may we choose to be kind, understanding and forgiving  
to both friend and stranger.

Every day may we help to bring your peace to our world through what we do and what we say.

We remember and offer our prayers to you for those who are hungry this day,  
those who are without a home this day,  
and those who are living in places of war or conflict this day.  
We place our own prayer intentions before you now.

In this Jubilee Year may we say yes each day to the invitation to be Pilgrims of Hope,  
knowing that our hope is Christ who is alive!  
May the joy and peace of Christ dwell in our home and throughout the earth.  
To you, our God, be glory and praise for ever. Amen.

Diocese of Kildare and Leighlin 2025



## SOME WORDS ON METHOD

Thanks to all those who decide to use our Lenten Scripture Sharing this year.

We hope that the format of these Scriptures may be of use to groups but also to people who wish to reflect on the Lenten readings, but for different reasons cannot join a group.

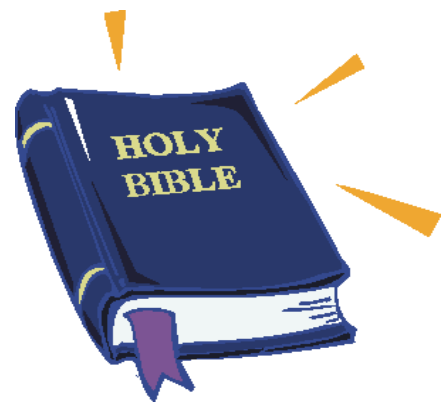
We know that there are many well-established groups both in Kildare & Leighlin and outside who may wish to use these booklets ... thanks for your faithfulness!

Here are some guidelines to help those who are reflecting in groups:

- Wherever you gather, some focus might be very useful, such as a lighted candle or an icon. This can be very simple but serves to remind people that we gather in the presence of the God who wants to speak to us through his Word.
- As you begin, it might be an idea to use a small Taize chant or a well-known hymn, just to set the atmosphere.
- It would be good to pray the opening prayer together as a group.
- Take time at the reading of the Gospel passage. This is the most important part of the gathering. Allow for some minutes of silence afterwards.

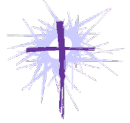
- Arrange with someone beforehand to read the Reflection. Again, after the reflection, please allow for some time of silence. This can be followed by a time of sharing, but no-one should be put under pressure to say anything!
- The prayers given can be supplemented with prayers for the parish or community, or other needs as they present themselves.
- The “Final Thought” is meant to give a small idea for people to take away with them. It can be read out loud, or people can read it in their own time.

Thank you once again for your faithfulness to this reflection on the Gospels. We hope it brings you the hope, joy and peace that comes to those who ‘hear God’s Word and keep it’!



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We wish to acknowledge the generosity of the Cummins family in giving us permission to use the Sunday Lenten Homilies ‘My life in your Hands – Homilies for Year B and Year C’, a collection of homilies by the late Rev John Cummins. May these homilies inspire us all as we make our Lenten journey.



## 1<sup>ST</sup> SUNDAY OF LENT

**Jesus was led by the Spirit through the wilderness and was tempted there.**

### PRAYER

Faithful God, you are with us as we set out on our pilgrim journey of hope this Lent. Help us to be attentive to your word and the hope to which it calls us as followers of your Son, Jesus Christ. May our time of prayer and reflection draw us deeper into his healing and loving presence, so that we may recognise him as our hope and our salvation. Amen.

**May Mary, Mother of Hope, intercede for us as we pray:**

**Hail Mary ...**

### READING

It is a good idea to read the Gospel a number of times, at least twice. Give some time to silence then ... remember, this is the most important part of the time of prayer.

**First Reading: Deut. 26:4-10**

**Psalm 90:1-2, 10-15**

**Second Reading: Rom. 10:8-13**

### READ THE TEXT

**A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke 4:1-13**

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit through the wilderness, being tempted there by the devil for forty days. During that time, he ate nothing and at the end he was hungry. Then the devil said to him, *'If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to turn into a loaf.'* But Jesus replied, *'Scripture says: Man does not live on bread alone.'* Then leading him to a height, the devil showed him in a moment of

time all the kingdoms of the world and said to him, *'I will give you all this power and the glory of these kingdoms, for it has been committed to me and I give it to anyone I choose. Worship me, then, and it shall all be yours.'* But Jesus answered him, *'Scripture says: You must worship the Lord your God, and serve him alone.'* Then he led him to Jerusalem and made him stand on the parapet of the Temple. *'If you are the Son of God'*, he said to him *'throw yourself down from here, for scripture says: He will put his angels in charge of you to guard you'*, And again: *'They will hold you up on their hands in case you hurt your foot against a stone.'* But Jesus answered him, *'It has been said: You must not put the Lord your God to the test.'* Having exhausted all these ways of tempting him, the devil left him, to return at the appointed time.

### WORDS/PHRASES

Suggest that each person says a word or a phrase which stayed with them from the reading (*with no comment from anyone else*)

### REFLECTION

In the first few days of Lent, people are often struggling with whatever it is they've decided to do. These are the days when we're especially conscious of what we're doing or not doing, or what we're giving up; we're adjusting to being without something, and people often find that this consciousness of not being able to eat or drink something, or do something, weighs on them a bit. It's the wilderness experience, going into a different space, perhaps one without some of the comforts or luxuries, and facing ourselves and our God.

We are told that Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted there for forty days right at the very beginning of his ministry, straight after he was baptised in the river Jordan by John the Baptist. It seems strange. Here was Jesus, emerging from the river, and you remember then how the

heavens opened, and the Father spoke, calling him his beloved Son, and how the Holy Spirit came upon him in the form of a dove. It seems strange that the Holy Spirit would come upon him and lead him into the wilderness to be tempted. But there's a reason for it.

The 40 days that Jesus spent in the wilderness are often seen to reflect the forty years that the people of Israel were wandering in the desert, as they journeyed from slavery in Egypt to the freedom of the Promised Land. That journey from slavery to freedom is one that every human being is asked to make. Human history tells the story of our enslavement to sin, to oppression, and our efforts to break free, to journey into freedom. Jesus came to lead us on that journey, to lead us from the slavery of sin into the freedom of the children of God. And what he did in those forty days was to face human temptation, to face what enslaves us human beings, to face that enslavement for us and with us as he started out on the journey that would lead us into freedom. We replicate that journey from slavery to sin into freedom during Lent. With Christ, we go into the wilderness, leaving aside at least some of the distractions of our world, to find the freedom to which he is leading us. If that is a struggle, then perhaps that's how it should be. This is our season of penance, our facing up to the obstacles to God's grace in us, to what hinders our growth in love, facing up to our dependencies. At the end of our journey is the celebration of Easter; that is our focus; that is our destination, not just at the end of Lent, but it is our destination at the end of life itself when we hope to share in the fullness of life with Christ, when we hope to enter fully into the freedom of God's children in the glory of the resurrection. We are called to begin that journey now, to live now something of the freedom that is promised in the future, to cast off the shackles of sin that oppress us, and to open

ourselves to the life of God's Spirit, giving the Spirit space to work in us.

*Allow for a period of five to ten minutes silence*

#### PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

- In the desert of this Lent, Jesus, help me reflect on what life is really about, what's important and what's not.  
**Jesus, listen to my prayer.**
- Jesus, you were so hungry that you thought of turning stones into bread. What can I say No to this Lent?  
**Jesus, listen to my prayer.**
- No hearse has a hitch for a trailer. Jesus, imprint in my mind the fleeting nature of this world.  
**Jesus, listen to my prayer.**
- Jesus, the wheels of your mill turn slowly. Give me the patience not to rush your plans.  
**Jesus, listen to my prayer.**
- Convince me of your presence, Jesus, and renew my confidence in your words: *'I am with you. I will save you.'*  
**Jesus, listen to my prayer.**
- Jesus, I mingle my pain, sickness and worries with your passion and death. Lift them up with your resurrection.  
**Jesus, listen to my prayer.**

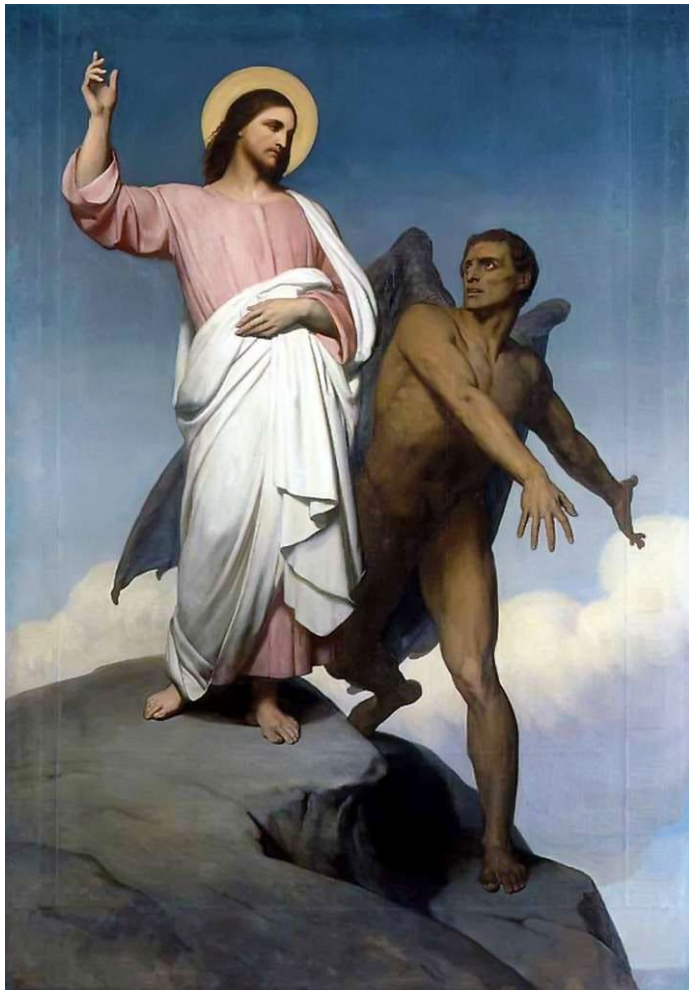
Together, we place our lives in the hands of the Father who loves us:

**Our Father...**

**FINAL THOUGHT**

Hope calls us to be pilgrims in search of truth, dreamers who never tire, women and men open to being challenged by God's dream, which is of a new world where peace and justice reign.  
(Pope Francis, 24 December 2024)

[Family Jubilee Prayer]





## 2<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY OF LENT

**Master, it is wonderful for us to be here.**

**Note for leaders:** It would be very appropriate, today, to have an icon of Christ, maybe particularly an icon of the Transfiguration, or even, simply, a Sacred Heart picture as a centre-piece.

### PRAYER

Lord,  
hope reminds us that you are with us, guiding us forward. As Pilgrims of Hope help us to be aware of your presence in our lives. Help us to be aware of your presence in the world. Gift us with the gift of faith and help us to appreciate the wonder of your creation. Through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

**May Mary, Mother of Hope, intercede for us as we pray:**

**Hail Mary ...**

### READING

Once again, spend some time over the reading, do not rush! God wants to talk to you in these words. Allow a number of people to read in turn, with a little pause for silence. If alone, read the Gospel text a number of times and pause each time for a little quiet reflection.

**First Reading: Gen. 15:5-12, 17-18**

**Psalm 26:1, 7-9, 13-14**

**Second Reading: Phil. 3:17-4:1**

### READ THE TEXT

**A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke 9:28-36**

Jesus took with him Peter and John and James and went up the mountain to pray. As he prayed, the aspect of his face was changed, and his clothing became brilliant as

lightning. Suddenly there were two men there talking to him; they were Moses and Elijah appearing in glory, and they were speaking of his passing which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem. Peter and his companions were heavy with sleep, but they kept awake and saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As these were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, *'Master, it is wonderful for us to be here; so let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.'* He did not know what he was saying. As he spoke, a cloud came and covered them with shadow; and when they went into the cloud the disciples were afraid. And a voice came from the cloud saying, *'This is my Son, the Chosen One. Listen to him.'* And after the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. The disciples kept silence and, at that time, told no one what they had seen.

### WORDS/PHRASES

Suggest that each person says a word or a phrase which stayed with them from the reading (*with no comment from anyone else*)

### REFLECTION

They say that if you want to know someone really well, you should visit their home. Visiting the home of a new friend can help deepen the friendship. Home is where the heart is; it's where the person is most truly themselves, the place where they leave down their guard and take off the masks they wear for the world. We often present an image of ourselves to those with whom we work or socialise. When we go home, the image is off and there's no need to hide any more. To invite someone to our own home is to let them into our inner world, to see us as we really are.

This is what Jesus does when he is transfigured in the presence of Peter, James and John, on the mountainside. He lets them see who he is, gives them a glimpse into his



inner world. When Jesus and the disciples climbed the mountain, they were following the long tradition of going up the hill to pray. People climbed mountains to encounter God in the silence of the hill, to find meaning and understanding. Jesus doesn't exactly bring the disciples to his home, but he does bring them to a place where his true self is revealed to them. In this encounter with God, Jesus' relationship with the Father is made clearer to his disciples.

The image of home used in the second reading speaks to our hearts: "for us, our homeland is in heaven..." A few years ago, while in a parish in Los Angeles, I was disappointed to find that this phrase was absent in the American translation of the lectionary; instead the phrase read "for us, our citizenship is in heaven". Citizenship didn't have the same warmth, same appeal; it felt like a political term that didn't touch the heart in the way that the word "homeland" did. I voiced my disappointment to a parishioner, who happened to be of Mexican origin. He said, "don't you see how important the word 'citizenship' is to us Mexicans? For us, to be a citizen, is not to be illegal, it is to belong, to have a right to be here, to have a home." The experience of the disciples on the mountain opened them to another world. The world they glimpsed was one where they too would be at home. They wanted to stay there, to erect tents; but they could not. Instead, they gained an insight into the meaning and purpose of the life and mission of Jesus, something that would help them make sense of his teaching and the signs he worked. In the turmoil and confusion of the days of Christ's trial and execution, this new perception into the life of Jesus on the mountain would perhaps give them hope and a sense of being citizens of a very different world, one in which the glory of God would be revealed.

Christians have long been encouraged by the vision of the Transfigured Jesus. It reminds us that we too will share his radiant glory. This is the promise of his resurrection, the promise of our baptism. Our journey in Lent mirrors our journey in life; like the climbing of the mountain, they have their challenges and hardships. We are an Easter people. This is where we gained citizenship of God's kingdom. We are citizens of heaven. This is where we belong. In courage we journey in hope and confidence of reaching that homeland, where our true self is fulfilled.

*Allow for a period of five to ten minutes' silence*

#### PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Confident that we are loved by God we present our needs and prayers to him.

- May we learn to appreciate those special moments of hope, joy, love, excitement and peace. On those occasions may we stand in wonder and awe at the presence of God.  
Let us pray to the Lord  
**Lord, hear us.**
- May our awareness of God's love for each one of us fill us with confidence to face the difficulties of life.  
Let us pray to the Lord  
**Lord, hear us.**
- May we care for the earth as we should. May we leave a gentle footprint wherever we go. Help us to Reduce, Reuse, Recycle.  
Let us pray to the Lord  
**Lord, hear us.**
- May world leaders do what should be done to ensure the safety of the Earth and its people.  
Let us pray to the Lord

**Lord, hear us.**

- May people everywhere learn to live in peace and harmony together.  
Let us pray to the Lord  
**Lord, hear us.**

As God's beloved children, we pray:  
**Our Father ...**

**FINAL THOUGHT**

Lift me up, strong Son of God, that we may see further.  
Strengthen our faith that we may see beyond the horizon.  
And when the valley closes in help us to remember the view from the hilltop.

**Flor McCarthy**

As disciples of the Lord, we are called to find our greater hope in him, and then, without delay, carry that hope with us, as pilgrims of light amid the darkness of this world. **(Pope Francis)**

[Family Jubilee Prayer]





### 3<sup>RD</sup> SUNDAY OF LENT

**The Lord is compassion and love, slow to anger and rich in mercy.**

#### PRAYER

Almighty God, you are Father of us all.  
You created the human family to dwell forever with you and to praise your glory.  
Now is the time for your people to turn back to you and to be renewed in Christ, your son.  
A time of grace and reconciliation.  
Open our ears to hear your voice so that we may return to you with sincere repentance for our sins.  
Teach us to see in you Our Loving Father.  
You are full of compassion.  
You are ready to forgive us for turning away from you.  
Each one of us is a fig tree planted in your vineyard.  
And you call us to a life that will bear fruit.  
You offer us a life of unimaginable fruitfulness.  
Restore your gift of new life to us for you alone brings true happiness. **Amen.**

**Mary, Mother of Hope, intercede for us as we pray:**

**Hail Mary . . . . .**

#### READING

Again, ask a few people to read the Gospel text. Keep it slow! Take your time; remember that God wants to speak to you in these words.

Allow for a few minutes of silence.

**First Reading: Ex. 3:1-8, 13-15**

**Psalm 102:1-4, 6-8, 11**

**Second Reading: 1 Cor. 10:1-6, 10-12**

#### READ THE TEXT

#### **A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke 13:1-9**

Some people arrived and told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with that of their sacrifices. At this he said to them, *'Do you suppose these Galileans who suffered like that were greater sinners than any other Galileans? They were not, I tell you. No; but unless you repent you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen on whom the tower at Siloam fell and killed them? Do you suppose that they were more guilty than all the other people living in Jerusalem? They were not, I tell you. No; but unless you repent you will all perish as they did.'*

He told this parable; *'A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard and he came looking for fruit on it but found none. He said to the man who looked after the vineyard, 'Look here, for three years now I have been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and finding none. Cut it down: why should it be taking up the ground?' 'Sir,' the man replied 'leave it one more year and give me time to dig round it and manure it: it may bear fruit next year; if not, then you can cut it down.'*

#### WORDS/PHRASES

Suggest that each person says a word or a phrase which stayed with them from the reading (*with no comment from anyone else*)

#### REFLECTION

One of the big questions that we ask ourselves again and again, particularly in times of tragedy and disaster, is the question 'Why?' 'Why me?' 'Why us?' 'Why did this have to happen?' 'Is God punishing us?' 'What did we do to deserve this?' Whatever words we use, the bottom line is that bad things happen to good people

without any apparent reason, and we don't understand it. Perhaps it is an accident, a sudden death, cancer, the loss of a job. We see tragedies happening in our society every week. Whatever the disaster may be, we are left feeling powerless and helpless in its wake.

In the Gospel today, Jesus speaks in the aftermath of a number of tragedies which had affected the local community. Pilate had killed some Galileans while they were offering sacrifice, probably in Jerusalem. And a tower had fallen at Siloam, and eighteen people were killed; it was probably a construction accident. Jesus tells the people very clearly that those who died were not being punished for anything they did. They were no more guilty than anyone else. Popular wisdom associated disaster with punishment, just as it can do in our minds. Jesus says no, this is not the case. Good fortune and disaster are no indication of a person's spiritual state. Bad things happen to good people; suffering is part of our human experience, but it's not a punishment for anything we've done. In fact, God often calls us to conversion by giving us a special favour; his goodness reminds us of his love for us in spite of our wrongdoing. The image of the fig tree reminds us that God always gives us another opportunity for repentance. He is patient with us, and slow to anger or punish.

The words of Jesus are a call to conversion. Our time is short; we don't know the length of our days, but we do know that we live with uncertainty. We see it in so many lives cut short through illness, accidents and in other ways. A constant theme in the gospels is that we live in the now, in the present; now is the only moment we have to turn to God. Now is the time of repentance. The call of Jesus to turn to him is an urgent call. We do not know where we'll be tomorrow, so turn to him now.

Disasters and tragedies often cause us to be afraid. They may evoke an image of a God who avenges, a God to be feared, a God of terror. And that is so far from the nature of God. God is Love, infinite and total love. The story from the book of Exodus, which we heard in the first reading, reminds us of this incredible love of God. God appears to Moses in the burning bush. Even that is a sign of love – a love that is like a burning flame which does not destroy or consume; it leaves the bush intact. The God who speaks to Moses promises deliverance. He has seen the misery of the people; he knows the disasters which have come upon them, and he will not see them suffer any longer. This is the God of generations past, the God who is always with us – I AM. Just as God was with Moses and the people of Israel, he is with us too. He sees the disasters and tragedies in our communities; he does not cause them. He sees, and he knows the pain that his people undergo. He sees, and he does not abandon us. Our God is the God of compassion and love. We can turn to him with complete and utter confidence, not out of fear, but because we know he loves us, and in an uncertain world, it is the one thing of which we can be absolutely sure. God loves us with an astonishing love, which continually invites us to turn to him to be healed, soothed, restored, forgiven, or simply just to be with him.

*Allow for a period of five to ten minutes silence*

#### PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Let us pray to the God of our Salvation . . .

- For the children of Second Class who are preparing for First Confession and First Holy Communion, that they may grow strong in Faith, Hope and Love. Let us pray to the Lord  
**Lord, hear us.**

- For those who seek renewal in civil and cultural life, that they may be guided by authentic human values.  
Let us pray to the Lord  
**Lord, hear us.**
- We pray for those whose freedom is compromised by patterns of sin or addiction. May they experience the joy of forgiveness.  
Let us pray to the Lord  
**Lord, hear us.**
- For our loved ones and all our faithful departed whose lives are changed but not ended, that they may be transformed by God's mercy and live in his presence.  
Let us pray to the Lord  
**Lord, hear us.**

### **Our Father . . .**

#### **FINAL THOUGHT**

We are like the fig tree . . .  
We are planted . . .  
We are growing . . .  
Listening to God's word and acting on it . . .  
brings fruitfulness

God forgives everything, God always forgives. Do not forget this, which is a way of understanding hope in the Lord. (Pope Francis)

Hope calls us – as Saint Augustine would say – to be upset with things that are wrong and to find the courage to change them. (Pope Francis)

[Family Jubilee Prayer]





#### 4<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY OF LENT

### God reconciled us to himself through Christ.

#### PRAYER

St. Augustine famously said ‘You have made us for yourself O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you’ In our culture, where thousands of voices are vying for our attention, it is difficult to find peace. Yet there are havens of peace and quiet all around us.

The monastic sites around our diocese are sacred places, hallowed by centuries of prayer. They are sacraments of the past which make the past present in a mystical way.

This Lent might be a good time to visit the sacred sites which dot our diocese and be reminded of our ancestors’ search for God, and their appreciation of the beauty of creation as balm for the soul, as they pursued their ultimate goal of holiness and fulfilment and peace in Christ.

Lord still our hearts this Lent.

As Pilgrims of Hope, walking in the footsteps of our native saints, may we find the grace of peace and be renewed in faith and hope.

**Mary, Mother of Hope, intercede for us as we pray:**

**Hail Mary ...**

#### READING

**First Reading: Josh. 5:9-12**

**Psalm 33:2-7**

**Second Reading: 2 Cor. 5:17-21**

#### READ THE TEXT

### A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

The tax collectors and the sinners were all seeking the company of Jesus to hear what he had to say, and the Pharisees and the scribes complained. ‘*This man*’ they said, ‘*welcomes sinners and eats with them.*’ So, he spoke this parable to them:

*‘A man had two sons. The younger said to his father, ‘Father, let me have the share of the estate that would come to me.’ So, the father divided up the property between them. A few days later, the younger son got together everything he had and left for a distant country where he squandered his money on a life of debauchery. When he had spent it all, that country experienced a severe famine, and now he began to feel the pinch, so he hired himself out to one of the local inhabitants who put him on his farm to feed the pigs. And he would willingly have filled his belly with the husks the pigs were eating but no one offered him anything. Then he came to his senses and said, ‘How many of my father’s paid servants have more food than they want, and here am I dying of hunger! I will leave this place and go to my father and say: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as one of your paid servants.’ So, he left the place and went back to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity. He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him tenderly. Then his son said, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.’ But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the calf we have been fattening and kill it; we are going to have a feast, a celebration, because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.*

*Now the elder son was out in the fields, and on his way back, as he drew near the house, he could hear music and dancing. Calling to one of the servants he asked what it was all about. 'Your brother has come' replied the servant 'and your father has killed the calf we had fattened because he has got him back safe and sound.' He was angry then and refused to go in, and his father came out to plead with him; but he answered his father, 'Look, all these years I have slaved for you and never once disobeyed your orders, yet you never offered me so much as a kid for me to celebrate with my friends. But for this son of yours, when he comes back after swallowing up your property, he and his women, you kill the calf we had been fattening.' The father said, 'My son, you are with me always and all I have is yours. But it is only right we should celebrate and rejoice, because your brother here was dead and has come to life, he was lost and is found.'"*

#### **WORDS/PHRASES**

Suggest that each person says a word or a phrase which stayed with them from the reading (*with no comment from anyone else*)

#### **REFLECTION**

They say that familiarity breeds contempt: the more we know somebody the less regard we have for them. This might well be the case with the story of the Prodigal Son.

We've heard it so often and know it so well that we might feel like it's tired and we know all about it. But for some, it's a story that never ceases to deliver something new, a new insight, a different slant. It's a real favourite from the gospel.

The characters of the two sons are fascinating; we might find ourselves identifying with one or other or even both at various times. In Jewish culture, by claiming his inheritance and leaving, the younger son effectively cut himself off from his family, treating his father as if he were dead. His life

in a foreign country represents the distance he puts between himself and his own. He has journeyed away from his family, his culture, his home, in fact even from himself. His life is held in thrall to pleasure, indolence, and sin. His life of indulgence soon dries up; the coming of the famine reveals the real inner poverty of a sinful lifestyle and the young man finds himself tending pigs. He has descended as low as it was possible for a Jew to go, for they believed that pigs were unclean. This is a place of shame and degradation, not just one of hunger, homelessness and deprivation. In his story from time to time we might see reflections of ourselves, attracted by pleasure only to discover its emptiness, trapped in an addiction maybe, sinking as low as one can go. When this young man reaches rock bottom, he remembers the house he left and seeks to return, not dreaming that he might be accepted as anything but a servant. The genuineness of his repentance is evident in his lack of expectation.

But his father is extraordinary. No Jewish father would wait at the door, watching for his wayward son. He would certainly never have run towards him or even come to meet him. He would probably have ignored him outright and refused to see him at all. His actions are shocking to those listening to Jesus. This is not how a Jew would behave. The sympathy of Jesus' audience would be with the elder son. His anger would be justified, and they, like him, would have no truck with this irresponsible young man. But the father challenges his hardness of heart, his resentment, and invites him into the feast. We do not know if he accepted the invitation. This man stands for so many who are filled with resentment, filled with anger and who refuse to allow themselves to be touched by God's mercy and compassion, refuse to allow others to receive it either. Jesus probably intended the Pharisees who were listening to him to identify with this

young man. Forgiveness is hard, and yet it is a key characteristic of followers of Jesus. Which of these figures do you identify with today? The Prodigal, the stray who does his own thing? The elder son, who stays out in the cold, in the dark, and holds his anger tight and close to him, refusing to forgive, to reach out, or even to let himself be touched by the father's compassion? The father, watching, waiting, ready to meet us halfway, eager to celebrate the homecoming of the stray. In this season of Lent, we remember that the Father is loving as no other, compassionate as no other. He yearns to forgive us, even if we do not always recognise our need for forgiveness. He longs to gather us and unites us as one, even if we hold back and reject him. There are many who have walked away from God in our society. Some have simply buried themselves in pleasure and haven't yet discovered the need to come home; others are filled with resentment and guard their hostility and unforgiveness precious, and hold themselves outside the door, refusing to come in.

Today we're challenged to forgive as the Father forgives, to be merciful as the Father is merciful: *Misericordia sicut Pater!*

***Allow for a period of five to ten minutes silence***

#### PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

- For the Church: that we may share the light of the Gospel with all who are struggling to recognize good from evil, truth from lies, and selfless love from self-serving activity.  
**Lord, hear us**
- For the growth of our faith: that God's love for us may be a light for us as we face our daily challenges

and draw us into a deeper relationship with God.

**Lord, hear us.**

- For all who find it difficult to believe in God's love, may their lives be illuminated by the light of God's presence.

**Lord, hear us.**

- For all whose lives are darkened by alcohol, drugs, or other addictions: that the light and hope of the Gospel may shatter their darkness and open a path to living a new life.

**Lord, hear us.**

#### Our Father . . .

##### FINAL THOUGHT

God has become one of us to make us like himself; he has come down to lift us up and restore us to the embrace of the Father... We are called to recover lost hope, to renew that hope in our hearts, and to sow seeds of hope amid the bleakness of our time and our world... We are called to bring hope to the weary who have no strength to carry on, the lonely oppressed by the bitterness of failure, and all those who are broken-hearted.

[Family Jubilee Prayer]







## 5<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY OF LENT

### Neither do I condemn you

#### PRAYER

Lord we come together to reflect and pray. Bless us as we continue our Lenten journey. Open our minds and hearts to listen to your words of hope and promise as you speak through the Scripture, and through each other in the reality of our daily lives. Give us ears to hear, eyes to see and hearts to respond to the promptings of your Holy Spirit.

**Mary, Mother of Hope, intercede for us as we pray:  
Hail Mary ...**

#### READING

Read the text slowly, several times, as if it were the first time you had encountered it. What strikes you? Maybe, there is one phrase which you never noticed before; stay with it and allow yourself to be led by God's Spirit. Try to visualize Jesus, his kind face, his gentle voice, the loving look in his eyes. What do you hear him say?

**First Reading: Isaiah 43:16-21  
Psalm 125  
Second Reading: Phil. 3:8-14**

#### READ THE TEXT

#### **A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to John 8:1-11**

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. At daybreak, he appeared in the Temple again; and, as all the people came to him, he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman along who had been caught committing adultery; and making her stand there in full view of everybody, they said to Jesus, *'Master, this woman was caught in the very act of*

*committing adultery, and Moses has ordered us in the Law to condemn women like this to death by stoning. What have you to say?'* They asked him this as a test, looking for something to use against him. But Jesus bent down and started writing on the ground with his finger. As they persisted with their question, he looked up and said, *'If there is one of you who has not sinned let him be the first to throw a stone at her.'* Then he bent down and wrote on the ground again. When they heard this, they went away one by one, beginning with the eldest, until Jesus was left alone with the woman, who remained standing there. He looked up and said, *'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?'* *'No one, sir,'* she replied. *'Neither do I condemn you,'* said Jesus *'go away, and don't sin anymore.'*

#### WORDS/PHRASES

Suggest that each person says a word or a phrase which stayed with them from the reading (*with no comment from anyone else*)

#### REFLECTION

Did anyone ever remind you as a child that when you point the finger at someone that there were three fingers pointing back at yourself? It could have come from the gospel today. It's always dangerous to point the finger at others, and it's a very human characteristic. We have a tradition of scape-goating people, as if putting the blame on someone makes it alright; then we don't have to face our own faults. Right from the time when Adam in the garden blamed Eve, and Eve in turn pointed toward the serpent, we sit uncomfortably with our own shame and shift it onto someone else. Someone recently was complaining about a certain aspect of religion, and he said that he had no quarrel with the central message of Christianity, which was about being nice to people. I was amazed, and I began to reflect and to realise that for quite a number of people, that's all that Christianity stands for,

being nice to people. It contrasts with the strong negative perception that many others share, that Christianity is a series of thou shalt not's; it's all about what you can't do, nothing more. Both of these viewpoints perceive Christianity to be about the way we behave and act. They forget that the central message of our faith is about Jesus Christ, God become human, who lived, died and rose again to free us from sin and death. Our religion is about our relationship with him and how that relationship affects the way we lead our lives. And so compassion and care for others, action for justice, forgiveness of our enemies, are all part of the way we act as Christians. However, there's always a danger that if we perceive the negative commands as the focus of religion, our own failures will lead us to point the finger at others in order to let ourselves off the hook. That's what happened with those who were about to stone the woman. They focused on her guilt, scape-goated her, forgetting that when they pointed the finger at her, their own three fingers were pointing back at themselves. And in a very subtle, quiet way, as he wrote on the ground, Jesus reminded them that no one is without sin. Morality is another word for what we do or don't do, how we live. Our Christian morality originates in our belief in Jesus Christ and from our relationship with him. St Paul puts it well in the second reading from the Philippians today. 'I believe nothing can happen that will outweigh the supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord.' That's some statement. And he goes on 'I look on everything as so much rubbish if only I can have Christ and be given a place in him.' It is faith in Christ which saves, not a self-righteousness gained by the keeping of the Law. That's not to say that keeping the commandments isn't important; it is. But we keep them because we know God, because we have experienced his love for us and his mercy. Our morality

comes from knowing the mercy of God, who cannot ever be outdone in offering mercy. 'No need to recall the past, no need to think about what was done before' we hear in the first reading.

There are some who say that's all very well, but has the Church gone soft on moral issues. I don't think so. You've only to look at the words of Jesus to the woman in the gospel. 'Neither do I condemn, go away, and do not sin anymore.' Mercy is followed by the morality, but mercy comes first. Jesus engages the woman, just as he wants to engage us. He isn't soft on her; he does not condone her behaviour, but he shows mercy first and then he tells her, and us, not to sin again. Our religion is first and foremost a religion of mercy, or it should be. And from mercy and compassion come healing and forgiveness, and a change in behaviour. As Christians we recognise our need of God's mercy; we are not afraid to hold our hands up and say, 'I am a sinner'. And there are no fingers pointing when we do that. We have dropped the stones we might have carried. We come before God with empty hands. And God fills them with his love.

*Allow for a period of five to ten minutes silence*

#### PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

- We pray for the Pope and all who serve people in the ways of God's Love. May our Church be a place of welcome, inclusion, tolerance and acceptance.  
**Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.**
- We pray for those who find it difficult to believe in God's love and compassion. May their lives be filled with hope and a sense of God's abiding presence.

**Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.**

- We pray for peace in our world especially in Ukraine and the Middle East. May the Lord inspire world leaders to work together to bring about a just and lasting peace. May all those in our world who are suffering intensely as a result of war and conflict find hope through the support and kindness of their neighbours and fellow citizens of our world.

**Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.**

**Our Father . . .**

**FINAL THOUGHT**

‘Whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms.’

‘**The Joy of the Gospel**’. Pope Francis

[Family Jubilee Prayer]





## PALM SUNDAY

**Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!**

### PRAYER

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end, nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore, will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone. Amen.

Thomas Merton

**Mary, Mother of hope, intercede for us as we pray:**

**Hail Mary . . . . .**

### READING

The reading for Palm Sunday has many echoes of the Old Testament and resonates with the hopes of ordinary people. Beneath the cheering, however, if you listen carefully, you might just catch the silent sorrow of a man aware of what is about to take place. Knowing this, he does not walk away but mounts the colt and so his Passion is about to begin ...

**First Reading: Isaiah 50:4-7**

**Psalm 21:8-9, 17-20, 23-24**

**Second Reading: Phil. 2:6-11**

## READ THE TEXT

### A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke 19:28-40

Jesus went ahead, going up to Jerusalem. Now when he was near Bethphage and Bethany, close to the Mount of Olives as it is called, he sent two of the disciples, telling them, *'Go off to the village opposite, and as you enter it you will find a tethered colt that no one has yet ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' you are to say this, 'The Master needs it.'* The messengers went off and found everything just as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owner said, *'Why are you untying that colt?'* and they answered, *'The Master needs it.'* So, they took the colt to Jesus, and throwing their garments over its back they helped Jesus on to it. As he moved off, people spread their cloaks in the road, and now, as he was approaching the downward slope of the Mount of Olives, the whole group of disciples joyfully began to praise God at the top of their voices for all the miracles they had seen. They cried out: *'Blessings on the King who comes, in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heavens!'* Some Pharisees in the crowd said to him, *'Master, check your disciples,'* but he answered, *'I tell you, if these keep silence the stones will cry out.'*

### WORDS/PHRASES

Suggest that each person says a word or a phrase which stayed with them from the reading (*with no comment from anyone else*)

### REFLECTION

*'The whole group of disciples joyfully began to praise God at the top of their voices for all the miracles they had seen. They cried out: Blessings on the King who comes in the name of the Lord!'*

Jesus, Universal King, gentle bearer of the Good News, humbly enters Jerusalem riding on a donkey, ready to complete his mission as Saviour of the World.

His disciples convinced that he is the Messiah because of what they had witnessed, in their great excitement and jubilation, lay down an improvised 'red carpet'. They hail him King, believing that he was the One to free the country of Roman Rule. The Pharisees sternly warn Jesus 'Check your disciples', which is as much as they could get away with at that time, amidst the euphoria. But they have already decided that an end must be put to all this. He had drawn people away from them and from the established religion. They get to work within the next few hours making plans to finally deal with him in the way their ancestors had already dealt with the Prophets. Have him executed.

Jesus had often made it clear in words similar to what he said to Pilate later, 'Mine is not a kingdom of this world.'

We are in the world, but not of it. We 'walk in the Spirit' on our pilgrim way to the New Jerusalem as disciples of Jesus. We have a responsibility to live by, and promote 'The Kingdom' of love, peace, justice, faith, hope, human dignity, freedom and fair play for all.

God Our Father, as we reflect again on the life of Jesus, we are amazed at the patience he showed towards followers who misunderstood his mission, and the extraordinary patience he showed to those who bitterly opposed him. Thank you for waiting patiently for us to reach a better understanding of our own mission in life. Please forgive all the time that was wasted dealing with matters which were of little importance. Forgive us for not listening. Forgive us for the times we were 'too busy' to pray. Forgive the indifference we showed to people 'on the margins', people who needed the support we could have provided.

Help us to see more clearly. Thank you for your patience.

*Allow for a period of five to ten minutes' silence*

#### **PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

Gathered together in Holy Week we are conscious that we are joining with our brothers and sisters around the world in celebrating the great events of this week.

- We pray that our Church will be purified of all evil. We pray for commitment to Jesus on behalf of all members within our Church. We ask for strength and freedom for members of our Church who are suffering persecution. Let us pray to the Lord  
**Lord, hear us.**
- For the gift to see God in people and in nature, and that people everywhere will respect our earth as they should. Let us pray to the Lord  
**Lord, hear us.**
- That Christians will always have in mind our obligation to the poor. Let us pray to the Lord  
**Lord, hear us.**
- That people around the world will cherish life in all its stages, from the baby in the womb to the person of old age. Let us pray to the Lord  
**Lord, hear us.**
- That those who are neglecting their faith will return to God who loves them. Let us pray to the Lord  
**Lord, hear us.**

- For the conversion of people who are deeply involved in evil ways.  
Let us pray to the Lord  
**Lord, hear us.**
- For ourselves, for family and other friends, for the people of our parishes, that during this Great Week we will follow Jesus most closely.  
Let us pray to the Lord  
**Lord, hear us.**

**Our Father . . . . .**

**FINAL THOUGHT**

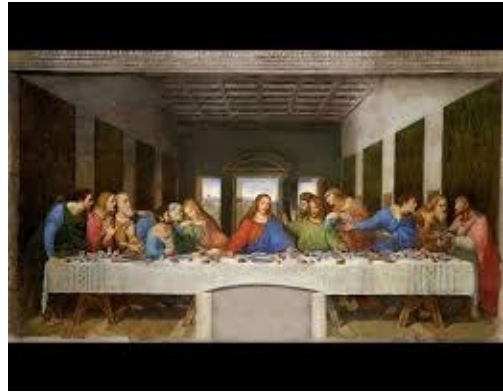
Trust in the Lord with all your heart,  
lean not on your own understanding,  
in all your ways submit to Him,  
and He will make your paths straight.

[Family Jubilee Prayer]



### **HOLY THURSDAY**

God, Our Father,  
We thank you for the gifts you have given us.  
Today, we remember how perfect Christ's love is,  
A love made flesh in humble service of others.  
We celebrate today the gift of Christ to all his followers;  
In him we see and taste your goodness!  
Be with us all our days  
And help us to live the new commandment of love.



### **GOOD FRIDAY**

It is cold on the Hill of Calvary, Lord.  
Mary knew it, she was a mother whose heart broke to see her son die.  
John knew it; he was faithful and felt the blows rain down on his friend.  
Mary Magdalene knew it; she had loved too much and that was her crime and her pain.  
Others know it in our world:  
Those whose lives are ruined by drugs,  
Those whose homes are far away,  
Those who have lost all they own,  
Those who are frightened of what the day may bring.  
They too ask, 'Have you abandoned us?'  
Let them know that you are with them!  
With you there, it is not so cold on that hill.



### **HOLY SATURDAY**

The world waits today in a strange silence,  
Night awaits dawn;  
Darkness awaits the light;  
Sins await forgiveness;  
Hurt awaits healing;  
Despair awaits hope;  
Mary, in tears, waits by the Empty tomb ...

