

SCRIPTURE SHARING



Lent 2023

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 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!

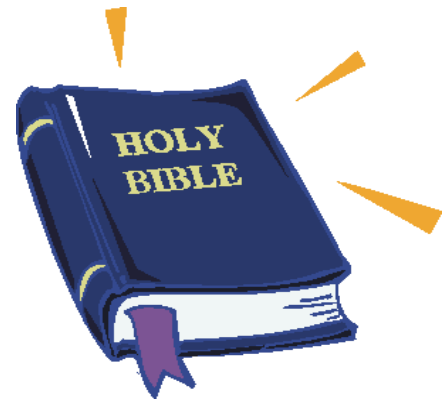
Here are some guidelines to help those who are reflecting in groups:

- 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.
- Before 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 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 of the Gospels. We hope it brings you the joy and peace that comes to those who ‘hear God’s Word and keep it’!



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We wish to acknowledge the JP11 students of Mountrath Community School and their Award Leader, Anne Moore, Margarita Bedding, Imelda Butler, Monica Healion and Noeleen Lynam, for generously giving their time to contribute to our Lenten Scripture Sharing with such wonderful reflections and prayers. May these reflections and prayers inspire us all.



1ST SUNDAY OF LENT

PRAYER

Lord,
As we begin our Lenten Journey,
Send us your Spirit,
to illuminate our lives,
to light our areas of darkness,
to strengthen us in our commitment,
to guide us in all our choices,
to remind us that we are the beloved sons
and daughters of the Father.

With Mary, we pray:

Hail Mary ...

READING

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

First Reading: Gn. 2:7-9, 3:1-7

Ps. 50: 3-6

Second Reading: Rm. 5:12-19

Read the Text

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew 4:1-11

Jesus was led by the Spirit out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, after which he was very hungry, and the tempter came and said to him, *'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to turn into loaves.'*

But he replied, *'Scripture says: Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'*

The devil then took him to the holy city and made him stand on the parapet of the Temple. *'If you are the Son of God'* he said *'throw yourself down; for scripture says: He will put you in his angels' charge, and they*

will support you on their hands in case you hurt your foot against a stone.'

Jesus said to him, *'Scripture also says: You must not put the Lord your God to the test.'*

Next, taking him to a very high mountain, the devil showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. *'I will give you all these'* he said, *'if you fall at my feet and worship me.'* Then Jesus replied, *'Be off, Satan! For scripture says: You must worship the Lord your God and serve him alone.'*

Then the devil left him, and angels appeared and looked after him.

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 this gospel from St. Matthew, we see Jesus in that time between his baptism and the beginning of his public ministry. It is a sort of "in-between time", a time when he is led out into the desert and fasts for forty days and forty nights. Notice that he didn't just wander out into the wilderness – he was guided there by the Spirit. He was about to take up his mission and we hear that he was 'tempted'.

When we think of temptations, perhaps we think of all the things that trip us up – sexual sins, gossiping about others, resentments we carry, telling lies etc. But Jesus' temptations are bigger; they are for material wealth, status and power. In the face of this testing, he remains true to his Father and to his purpose in life.

Just as Jesus spent forty days in the desert, we too are given this gift of Lenten time - forty days – to stop and step back a little from our everyday activities. Lent is a gift because it allows us to reflect on how we are living out our baptismal calling. In a world that values wealth, status and power, am I

lured by their voices or do I cling to my Father and listen to his voice as the source of all life? Do I make space in my everyday life for his word? Do I recognise him as my Creator from whom everything I have comes? Do I give him all honour and glory? As Jesus was led into the desert, we are led into this Lenten time by God's Spirit. It is a time to reflect, to see where we need God's healing power in our lives; a time to recommit to the call of our baptism. In this time of Lenten reflection, let us be guided by God's Spirit as was Jesus.

Allow for a period of five to ten minutes silence

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Lord God, you invite us to come into the wilderness where you will speak to our hearts; remind us, during these days, of your great love for us and of the privilege of being your sons and daughters.

R. Hear our prayer

- As we begin our Lenten journey of prayer and reflection, may we be guided into a deeper awareness of God's love for us and of our call to follow Jesus.
Lord, in your mercy
- May your word nourish us in our daily lives and may we always know your presence with us on our journey.
Lord, in your mercy
- May these precious days of Lent be days when your light shines upon us and enables us to see our weaknesses and sinful tendencies.
Lord, in your mercy
- May our worship during these Lenten days lead us to a deeper love

of God and a commitment to serve our brothers and sisters, wherever they may be.
Lord, in your mercy

As Jesus taught us, we pray, **Our Father ...**

FINAL THOUGHT

Remember the long way that the Lord, your God, has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments. (Deut. 8: 2)





2ND SUNDAY OF LENT

PRAYER

Lord, as we gather to reflect on your Holy Gospel, open our minds to understand your Word, open our lips to speak your Word and open our hearts to love your Word. We pray this through your Son, the Beloved, in union with the Holy Spirit.

With Mary, 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 several times and pause each time for a little quiet reflection.

First Reading: Gen. 12:1-4

Ps: 32:4-5

Second Reading: 2 Tim. 1:8-10

Read the Text

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew 17:1-9

Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain where they could be alone. There in their presence he was transfigured; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became as white as the light. Suddenly Moses and Elijah appeared to them; they were talking with him. Then Peter spoke to Jesus. 'Lord,' he said, *'it is wonderful for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.'* He was still speaking when suddenly a bright cloud covered them with shadow, and from the cloud there came a voice which said, *'This is my Son, the*

Beloved; he enjoys my favour. Listen to him.'

When they heard this, the disciples fell on their faces, overcome with fear. But Jesus came up and touched them. 'Stand up,' he said, *'do not be afraid.'* And when they raised their eyes, they saw no one but only Jesus.

As they came down from the mountain Jesus gave them this order. *'Tell no one about the vision until the Son of Man has risen from the dead.'*

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

Peter, James and John are the privileged witnesses to this wonderful event. They appear to be an "inner circle" of Jesus' disciples. (They are also the only witnesses to see Jesus raise Jairus' daughter from the dead (Luke 8:49-56), and only they accompanied him while he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-38), but a lot will be expected of them.

Jesus takes them up a mountain where he is transfigured. For the people of the Old Testament, to climb a mountain is to draw closer to God. The Transfiguration, where Jesus' face shines like the sun and his clothes become as white as light, indicates clearly to the disciples that Jesus is more than an earthly being. He belongs with God. This is later confirmed when the voice of God approves of him, calling him *Son* and *Beloved*.

The experience is so wonderful for the disciples that understandably they want to stay on the mountain. Here they see Jesus in glory, they are in the presence of ancient heroes, life is good. By pitching tents, they can prolong the experience, safe on top of a

mountain where the cares of everyday life, and other people cannot spoil the event. But a cloud comes and covers them in shadow. Reality intrudes, even up on the mountain. It is unusual that the image of a cloud, a shadow is used to indicate the presence of God. But this scene takes place just before Jesus goes to Jerusalem, the Sanhedrin is waiting, Pilate is coming to the city, the crowd is getting restless. Jesus is transfigured but the passion and death are immanent.

From the cloud, in the shadow, in the middle of the fear experienced by Peter, James and John, God reassures them. God points them to Jesus, he identifies Jesus as his Son, his Beloved, Jesus enjoys his favour. There is no need to be afraid.

They have to come down from the mountain. Jesus must also return to the plain. Real life cannot, indeed must not, be avoided. The mission of Jesus can only be completed in Jerusalem, in Gethsemane, on Calvary. But Jesus knows he is doing the will of the Father, God has affirmed him and will be with him every step of the way.

The three privileged disciples also have a mission that will take them far from Mt. Tabor. They will face many fears, persecution, and death. But their faith and trust in Jesus, inspired by the Transfiguration will remain steadfast.

Allow for a period of five to ten minutes' silence

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

We ask for faith in Jesus the Son of God, the Beloved.

R. Lord, let the light of your face shine on us

- May we be open to his word in this time of Lent, listening to his teaching and eager to renew our confidence in him.

- For all of us making the Lenten journey of conversion and renewal; that we may encounter the transfigured Jesus in the challenges and joys of our daily living.
- For all children and young people that they will be strengthened in their faith journey by Jesus' abiding presence with them.
- That those living in the darkness of poverty or injustice be led to the light of God's vision of justice and care for all and that each of us answers the call to bring God's light to the world.
- We pray for ourselves; we pray that the Transfiguration will renew our faith in God and give us courage to believe the good news revealed in Jesus.

As Jesus taught us, we pray, **Our Father ...**

FINAL THOUGHT

God our Father, you have asked us to listen to your beloved Son. Grant that we may always be faithful to him and that one day we too may see him in his glory. Amen





3RD SUNDAY OF LENT

PRAYER

Dear Lord

- Awaken our thirst to be cleansed and purified by your Living Water
- Awaken our spirits and souls with thirst for you
- Awaken us to form a true living loving relationship with you
- Awaken our desire to live as members of your Divine Family forever and ever.

We ask this through Christ our Lord

With Mary 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. 17:3-7

Ps: 94:1-2, 6-9

Second Reading: Rm. 5:1-2, 5-8

Read the Text

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to John 4:5-15, 19-26, 39-42

Jesus came to the Samaritan town called Sychar, near the land that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well is there and Jesus, tired by the journey, sat straight down by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink.' His disciples had gone into the town to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, 'What? You are a Jew and you ask me, a

Samaritan, for a drink?' – Jews, in fact, do not associate with Samaritans.

Jesus replied: *'If you only knew what God is offering and who it is that is saying to you: Give me a drink, you would have been the one to ask, and he would have given you living water.'*

'You have no bucket, sir,' she answered, *'and the well is deep; how could you get this living water? Are you a greater man than our father Jacob who gave us this well and drank from it himself with his sons and his cattle?'*

Jesus replied: *'Whoever drinks this water will get thirsty again; but anyone who drinks the water that I shall give will never be thirsty again; the water that I shall give will turn into a spring inside him, welling up to eternal life.'*

'Sir,' said the woman *'give me some of that water, so that I may never get thirsty and never have to come here again to draw water.'*

'Go and call your husband' said Jesus to her *'and come back here.'*

The woman answered, *'I have no husband.'* He said to her, *'You are right to say, 'I have no husband'; for although you have had five, the one you have now is not your husband. You spoke the truth there.'*

'I see you are a prophet, sir' said the woman. *'Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, while you say that Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.'*

Jesus said: *'Believe me, woman, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know; for salvation comes from the Jews. But the hour will come—in fact it is here already—when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; that is the kind of worshiper the Father wants. God is spirit, and those who worship must worship in spirit and truth.'*

The woman said to him, *'I know that Messiah – that is, Christ – is coming; and when he comes, he will tell us everything.'* *'I who am speaking to you,'* said Jesus *'I am he.'*

At this point his disciples returned, and were surprised to find him speaking to a woman, though none of them asked, *'What do you want from her?'* or, *'Why are you talking to her?'* The woman put down her water jar and hurried back to the town to tell the people, *'Come and see a man who has told me everything I ever did; I wonder if he is the Christ?'* This brought people out of the town and they started walking towards him. Meanwhile, the disciples were urging him, *'Rabbi, do have something to eat,'* but he said, *'I have food to eat that you do not know about.'* So, the disciples asked one another, *'Has someone been bringing him food?'*

But Jesus said: *'My food is to do the will of the one who sent me, and to complete his work. Have you not got a saying: Four months and then the harvest? Well, I tell you: Look around you, look at the fields; Already they are white, ready for harvest! Already the reaper is being paid his wages, already he is bringing in the grain for eternal life, and thus sower and reaper rejoice together. For here the proverb holds good: one sows, another reaps; I sent you to reap a harvest you had not worked for. Others worked for it; and you have come into the rewards of their trouble.'*

Many Samaritans of that town had believed in him on the strength of the woman's testimony when she said, *'He told me all I have ever done,'* so, when the Samaritans came up to him, they begged him to stay with them. He stayed for two days, and when he spoke to them many more came to believe; and they said to the woman, *'Now we no longer believe because of what you told us; we have heard him ourselves and we*

know that he really is the saviour of the world.'

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

Our Gospel reminds us as we journey through Lent that Jesus is the source of our life. The gospel tells us of the meeting between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well. This woman was treated as a sinner and an outcast by her society. She had to go for her water at the hottest time of the day, separately from the other women of the town. She was not the kind of woman with whom the Jews would associate.

Yet, Jesus engaged her in conversation about water and telling her about her history. She realised he was not talking about the physical water from the well that you drink. He was talking about a much deeper thirst ... a spiritual thirst and he knows that she thirsts for this deeper life in Christ. The woman thirsts but she cannot put words onto the longing ... she thirsts for life, for truth, for love, she thirsts for God. This woman represents us. We too thirst for God. But sometimes we too look in the wrong places for God's love.

Jesus also thirsts for those who are lost in life, those who do not know the way, for sinners – and we are all sinners. Jesus thirsts for our love, and sometimes we don't return his great love for us.

Jesus promises to quench her thirst.

Jesus promises to quench our thirst with living water. This living water is the gift of the Holy Spirit. This gift of living water has been given to us in Baptism and Confirmation. It remains within us as a little spring, and it has the potential to change our lives if we choose to drink from it.

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

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Father, cleanse and refresh us as we thirst for you alone this holy season of Lent

R. I am sorry Lord

- For the times I have not listened to you Lord and for not responding to my inner thirst for you
- For the times my selfishness, fears and lack of trust may prevent me from reaching out to others
- For the times I have turned my back on you Lord

R. Lord, graciously hear us

- Lord, just as you opened the mind and heart of the woman at the well, open my mind and heart to receive your word
Lord, hear us.
- Just as the woman at the well was transformed having met you, may my life also be transformed
Lord, hear us.

As Jesus taught us, we pray, **Our Father ...**

FINAL THOUGHT

Our relationship with the Lord shapes how we think, act and live our lives.

- Recognise and know that Jesus is our best friend who is with us always
- Keeping our thoughts focused on Jesus helps us grow our relationship with him

- Whatever we do, we do for the love and glory of God and not for self interest
- We live our lives as best we can according to God's divine plan for our lives
- A forgiving heart knows the art of living in freedom and truth.

“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost”. Isaiah 55: 1-2





4TH SUNDAY OF LENT

PRAYER

Loving God, in today's Gospel you showed your concern for the blind man.

Help us to realise that you are concerned about us too, and that you are with us in the trials and difficulties of our lives.

May we, like the blind man, trust in you to be our strength and consolation in times of need.

We ask you this, through Christ our Lord, Amen.

With Mary, we pray:

Hail Mary ...

READING

First Reading: 1 Sm. 16:1, 6-7, 10-13

Ps. 22

Second Reading: Eph. 5:8-14

Read the Text

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to John 9:1-41

As Jesus went along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. His disciples asked him, *'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, for him to have been born blind?'*

'Neither he nor his parents sinned,'

Jesus answered *'he was born blind so that the works of God might be displayed in him.'*

'As long as the day lasts, I must carry out the work of the one who sent me; the night will be soon here when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.'

Having said this, he spat on the ground, made a paste with the spittle, put this over the eyes of the blind man and said to him, *'Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam'* (a name that means 'sent'). So, the blind man

went off and washed himself, and came away with his sight restored.

His neighbours and people who earlier had seen him begging said, *'Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?'* Some said, *'Yes, it is the same one.'* Others said, *'No, he only looks like him.'* The man himself said, *'I am the man.'* So, they said to him, *'Then how do your eyes come to be open?'* *'The man called Jesus'* he answered, *'made a paste, daubed my eyes with it and said to me, 'Go and wash at Siloam'; so, I went, and when I washed, I could see.'* They asked, *'Where is he?'* *'I don't know'* he answered.

They brought the man who had been blind to the Pharisees. It had been a Sabbath day when Jesus made the paste and opened the man's eyes, so when the Pharisees asked him how he had come to see, he said, *'He put a paste on my eyes, and I washed, and I can see.'* Then some of the Pharisees said, *'This man cannot be from God; he does not keep the Sabbath.'* Others said, *'How could a sinner produce signs like this?'* And there was disagreement among them. So, they spoke to the blind man again, *'What have you to say about him yourself, now that he has opened your eyes?'* *'He is a prophet'* replied the man.

However, the Jews would not believe that the man had been blind and had gained his sight, without first sending for his parents and asking them, *'Is this man really your son who you say was born blind? If so, how is it that he is able to see?'* His parents answered, *'We know he is our son and we know he was born blind, but we don't know how it is that he can see now, or who opened his eyes. He is old enough: let him speak for himself.'* His parents spoke like this out of fear of the Jews, who had already agreed to expel from the synagogue anyone who should acknowledge Jesus as the Christ. This was why his parents said, *'He is old enough; ask him.'*

So, the Jews again sent for the man and said to him, *'Give glory to God! For our part, we know that this man is a sinner.'* The man answered, *'I don't know if he is a sinner; I only know that I was blind and now I can see.'* They said to him, *'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?'* He replied, *'I have told you once and you wouldn't listen. Why do you want to hear it all again? Do you want to become his disciples too?'* At this they hurled abuse at him: *'You can be his disciple,'* they said *'we are disciples of Moses: we know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this man, we don't know where he comes from.'* The man replied, *'Now here is an astonishing thing! He has opened my eyes and you don't know where he comes from! We know that God doesn't listen to sinners, but God does listen to men who are devout and do his will. Ever since the world began it is unheard of for anyone to open the eyes of a man who was born blind; if this man were not from God, he couldn't do a thing.'* *'Are you trying to teach us,'* they replied, *'and you a sinner through and through, since you were born!'* And they drove him away.

Jesus heard they had driven him away, and when he found him, he said to him, *'Do you believe in the Son of Man?'* *'Sir,'* the man replied, *'tell me who he is so that I may believe in him.'* Jesus said, *'You are looking at him; he is speaking to you.'* The man said, *'Lord, I believe'*, and worshipped him. Jesus said: *'It is for judgement that I have come into this world, so that those without sight may see and those with sight turn blind.'*

Hearing this, some Pharisees who were present said to him, *'We are not blind, surely?'* Jesus replied: *'Blind? If you were, you would not be guilty, but since you say, 'We see', your guilt remains.'*

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

Our Gospel reading today is taken from John's Gospel, where a major theme was light vs. darkness. The gospel tells us of Jesus healing a man who was born blind. If we are lucky enough to have no difficulty with our sight, it's extremely difficult to imagine what it must be like to be born blind and never be able to see anything – not the colours of a flower, the clothes you're wearing, your family's faces, your friends' faces, the furnishings in your home etc. etc. This was the reality for the man in today's gospel. He had spent his life in darkness. Then Jesus arrived and healed him. The blind man now had a new lease of life: he could see for the first time. He had gone from darkness to light.

You'd think this would be a cause for great celebration – and it probably was for the blind man – but not for the Pharisees. They couldn't believe that Jesus had healed this man on the Sabbath, so in their eyes, Jesus was to be condemned because he had broken the law by working on the Sabbath. They had closed their eyes to seeing who Jesus really was.

By contrast, when Jesus tells the man that he had been healed by the 'Son of Man' he says, 'Lord, I believe'. He is no longer in any form of darkness.

Jesus comes to bring light to our darkness, to give assistance where we need it. He wants to lead us from the dark, difficult areas of our lives, into the light of his love and mercy. So, like the man who was born blind, let us put our trust in the Lord and ask him to bring light to the darker areas of our lives – to our worries and disappointments, to our cares and concerns. Let us trust in Jesus to lead us from darkness into light and, unlike the Pharisees, may we not be blind to God's loving presence and care at work in our lives and in our world.

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

to lean on to lighten the load and beacon of
hope in times of difficulty or stress.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

R. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer

- For those grappling with the darkness of worry, ill health, any form of addiction, financial troubles or anxiety, may the Lord, in his goodness, comfort and assist them. May he lead them to get the help they require from the various individuals and organizations who work to support them.
- That all of us may see the light of Christ at work in our lives. May we appreciate our faith and those who pass on the faith to us. May God bless the work of our Church leaders, local clergy, schools, families and all who play a role in passing on the faith to others.
- For those who have not yet seen the light of Christ. May they come to experience God's love through the joy and care of those who profess the faith.
- For all areas of the world struggling with natural or man-made disasters at present, that the love of God, working through other people, may bring some light and peace to their troubled lives.



As Jesus taught us, we pray, **Our Father ...**

FINAL THOUGHT

As we go about our daily routines this week, may we make every effort to be a light for others, a ray of hope in times of darkness, a guide through difficult situations, a shoulder



5TH SUNDAY OF LENT

PRAYER

Lord, our God, as we gather together, we pray that your Word will find rich soil within our hearts and minds and our lives. My adorable Jesus
May our feet journey together
May our hands gather in unity
May our hearts beat in unison
May our souls be in harmony
May our thoughts be as one
May our ears listen to the silence together
May our glances profoundly penetrate each other
May our lips pray together to gain mercy from the Eternal Father.

With Mary 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: Ez. 37:12-14
Ps: 129
Second Reading: Rm. 8:8-11

READ THE TEXT

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to John 11:1-45

There was a man named Lazarus who lived in the village of Bethany with the two sisters, Mary and Martha, and he was ill. – It was the same Mary, the sister of the sick man, Lazarus, who anointed the Lord with

ointment and wiped his feet with her hair. The sisters sent this message to Jesus, *'Lord, the man you love is ill.'* On receiving the message, Jesus said, *'This sickness will end not in death but in God's glory, and through it the Son of God will be glorified.'* Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, yet when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed where he was for two more days before saying to the disciples, *'Let us go to Judaea.'* The disciples said, *'Rabbi, it is not long since the Jews wanted to stone you, are you going back again?'* Jesus replied: *'Are there not twelve hours in the day? A man can walk in the daytime without stumbling because he has the light of this world to see by; but if he walks at night he stumbles, because there is no light to guide him.'* He said that and then added, *'Our friend Lazarus is resting, I am going to wake him.'* The disciples said to him *'Lord, if he is able to rest, he is sure to get better.'* The phrase Jesus used referred to the death of Lazarus, but they thought that by 'rest' he meant 'sleep', so Jesus put it plainly, *'Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there because now you will believe. But let us go to him.'* Then Thomas – known as the Twin – said to the other disciples, *'Let us go too, and die with him.'* On arriving, Jesus found that Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days already. Bethany is only about two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to sympathise with them over their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus had come, she went to meet him. Mary remained sitting in the house. Martha said to Jesus, *'If you had been here, my brother would not have died, but I know that, even now, whatever you ask of God, he will grant you.'* 'Your brother' said Jesus to her *'will rise again.'* Martha said, *'I know he will rise again at the resurrection on the last day.'* Jesus said:

'I am the resurrection and the life. If anyone believes in me, though he dies he will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?'

'Yes Lord,' she said, 'I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who was to come into this world.'

When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in a low voice, *'The Master is here and wants to see you.'*

Hearing this, Mary got up quickly and went to him. Jesus had not yet come into the village; he was still at the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who were in the house sympathising with Mary saw her get up so quickly and go out, they followed her, thinking that she was going to the tomb to weep there.

Mary went to Jesus, and as soon as she saw him, she threw herself at his feet, saying, *'Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died.'* At the sight of her tears, and those of the Jews who followed her, Jesus said in great distress, with a sigh that came straight from the heart, *'Where have you put him?'* They said, *'Lord, come and see.'* Jesus wept; and the Jews said, *'See how much he loved him!'* But there were some who remarked, *'He opened the eyes of the blind man, could he not have prevented this man's death?'* Still sighing, Jesus said, *'Take the stone away.'* Martha said to him *'Lord by now he will smell; this is the fourth day.'* Jesus replied, *'Have I not told you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?'*

So, they took away the stone. Then Jesus lifted up his eyes and said: *'Father, I thank you for hearing my prayer. I knew indeed that you always hear me, but I speak for the sake of all these who stand round me, so that they may believe it was you who sent me.'*

When he had said this, he cried in a loud voice, *'Lazarus, here! Come out!'* The dead man came out, his feet and hands bound with bands of stuff and a cloth round his

face. Jesus said to them, *'Unbind him, let him go free.'*

Many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary and had seen what he did believed in him.

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

Lazarus, Martha and Mary were Jesus' very good friends and he often visited and stayed with them. When they sent word to Jesus that Lazarus was sick, they expected Jesus to come immediately, and they were upset that it took so long for him to get there. But Jesus wanted to teach his disciples that he was master even over death.

By raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus revealed something new about himself to his followers. He showed them that he had the power over life and death. He tells them that he is the resurrection and the life and that whoever believes in him will never die for they will have Eternal life. And he asks them: *'Do you believe this?'*

What would have been my answer if I was there and Jesus asked me: *'Do you believe this?'*

What does Jesus mean when he says, *'Whoever lives and believes in me will never die.'*

The point that Jesus is making in all these encounters is *'Believe in Me'*.

Each person who was asked that question encountered Jesus in a real and different way.

It was following that experience of Jesus that they were able to say *'Yes, Lord, I believe you are the Resurrection and the Life. You are the Christ.'*

Having raised Lazarus from the dead Jesus had to invite people to *'Unbind*

him, let him go free.’

What binds do I need to cut? What needs to be removed from my life so I too can go free? ~ to love and to serve the Lord.

Allow for a period of five to ten minutes silence

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Dear Lord, today we witness the power of Jesus over death and sin as we await his Resurrection to new life. We place our needs and the needs of the world before our Lord who is compassion and love.

R. Lord, graciously hear us

- In the words of the Gospel, we ask Jesus to ‘unbind us’ to free us from all that imprisons us and prevents us from living as God wants us to live
Lord, hear us
- Lord, unbind us so we can live in the freedom of God’s children, freed from all sin and temptations, freedom to love and live in divine peace
Lord, hear us
- Lord, bless those who are preparing to meet you in the Sacraments of Reconciliation, Eucharist and Confirmation. May they come to know and love you as the Christ.
Lord, hear us
- Lord, bless all who are struggling with their belief in you. Let them experience your healing love.
Lord, hear us

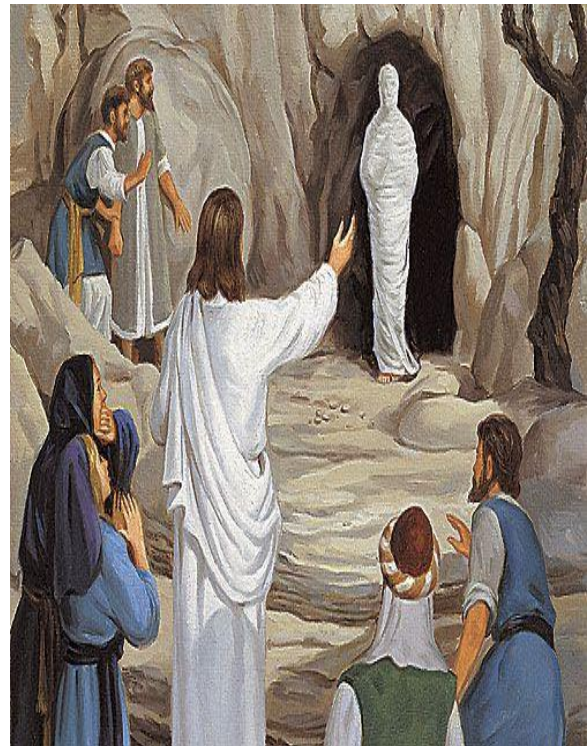
- Lord, bless all those who have died. Particularly bless those who taught us and nurtured our belief in you.
Lord, hear us

As Jesus taught us, we pray, **Our Father ...**

FINAL THOUGHT

My soul is waiting for the Lord, I count on his Word. My soul is longing for the Lord more than watchman for daybreak. Let the watchman count on daybreak and Israel on the Lord.

With the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption. (Psalm 129)





PALM SUNDAY

PRAYER

As we begin Holy Week, may we prepare ourselves to celebrate the Lord's Paschal Mystery.

May we journey with him through the trials and difficulties of this week before celebrating his Resurrection on Easter Sunday.

**With Mary 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: Is. 50:4-7

Psalms 21:8-9, 17-20, 23-24

Second Reading: Phil. 2:6-11

READ THE TEXT

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matt. 21:1-11

When they were near Jerusalem and had come in sight of Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, *Go to the village facing you, and you will immediately find a tethered donkey and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you are to say, 'The Master needs them and will send them back directly.'*

This took place to fulfil the prophecy: *Say to the daughter of Zion: Look, your king comes to you: he is humble, he rides on a*

donkey and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.

So, the disciples went out and did as Jesus had told them. They brought the donkey and the colt, then they laid their cloaks on their backs and he sat on them. Great crowds of people spread their cloaks on the road, while others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them in his path. The crowds who went in front of him and those who followed were all shouting:

'Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessings on him who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heavens!'

And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil. *'Who is this?'* people asked, and the crowds answered, *'This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.'*

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

This Gospel passage which begins Palm Sunday shows Jesus entering Jerusalem to great cheers of greeting from the assembled crowds. They shout greetings and spread their cloaks and branches of trees on the ground as a sign of welcome.

We know, however, that this greeting was short lived. In just a few days, the chants of greeting changed to shouts of *'Crucify him, crucify him!'* In fact, instead of being surrounded by people, he is very soon almost alone later that week. Even his disciples desert him, for fear that they too may be crucified.

As we begin this most holy week, it might be good to consider where we are in the reality of our relationship with Jesus:

- Am I among the crowd welcoming Jesus to my town, my home, my life?

- Am I scared of being seen as a follower of Jesus, and so, like Peter, do I deny knowing him?
- Am I like Judas, half following, but about to betray Jesus by my words and actions during the week ahead?
- Am I like Pilate, when I judge and condemn others?
- Am I like Veronica or Simon when I do something to help Jesus? (maybe by helping others in need).
- Am I like his mother and closest friends: present with him through all difficulties, through grief and sadness, through rejection and insult from others?

Allow for a period of five to ten minutes' silence

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

R. Lord, graciously hear us

- As we begin this most holy of weeks in our Church year, may Jesus be our constant companion. May we enter into the mystery of Jesus' life, death and resurrection with faith and hope. Lord, hear us
- May we use this week to reflect on the kind of companions we are for Christ in our daily lives. May we be courageous enough to hold onto our faith in times of persecution from others or from society, and, through our words and actions, may we always show the love of God to others. Lord, hear us
- For Pope Francis and all Church leaders, that they may have the courage to be faithful witnesses to the Gospel of Christ, despite increasing challenges from many angles.

Lord, hear us

- As we journey through Holy Week, may we remember also anyone who is suffering persecution either in their homes, workplace, social media, or the wider world. May all victims of bullying, intimidation or abuse find help in their hour of need – through the love, care and guidance of others. Lord, hear us

As Jesus taught us, we pray, **Our Father ...**

FINAL THOUGHT

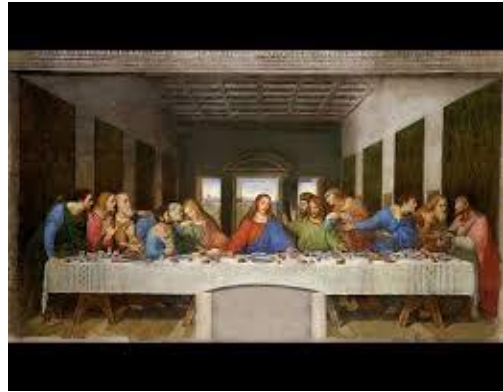
Life is full of ups and downs.

Glorify God during the ups and fully trust him during the downs.



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

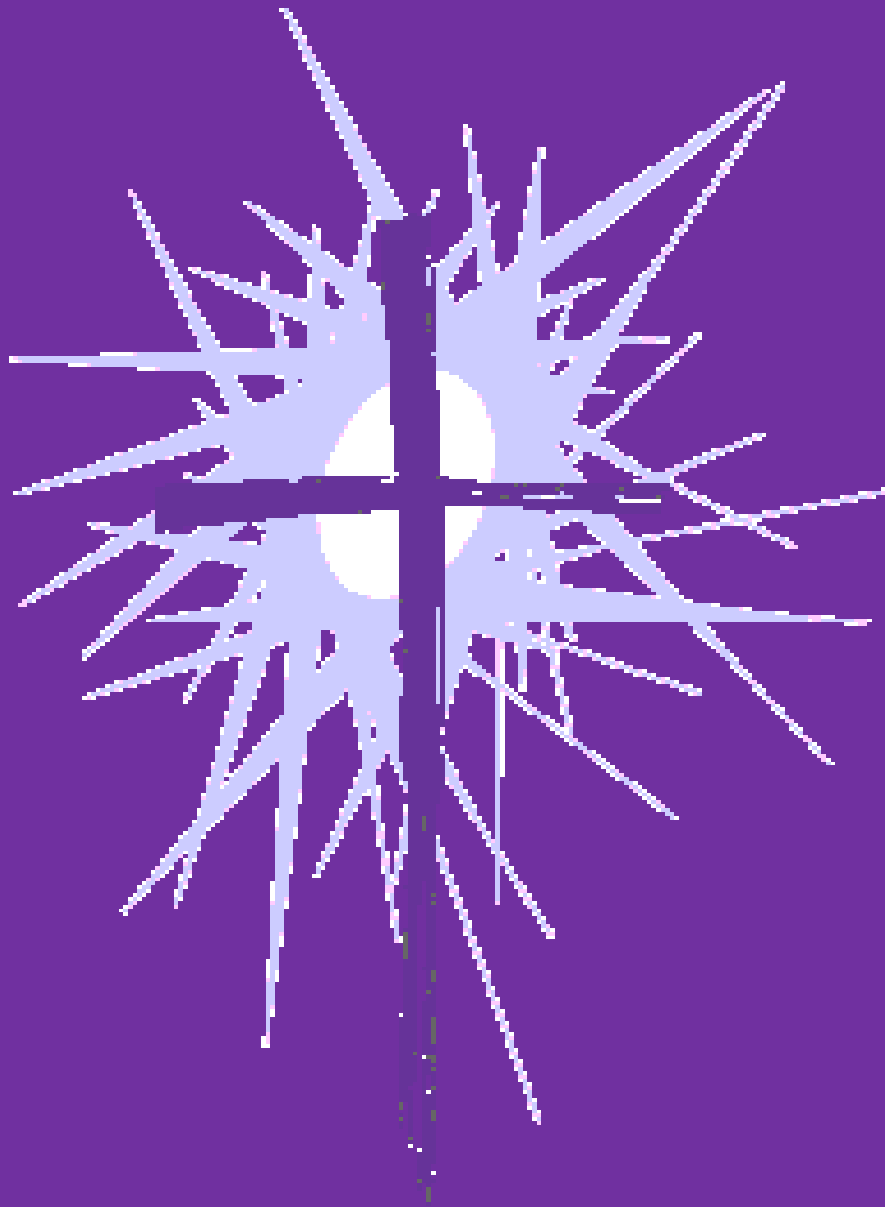
It is cold on the Hill of Calvary, Lord.
Mary knew it, she was a mother whose heart broke to see her son die.
John knew it; he was faithful and felt the blows rain down on his friend.
Mary Magdalene knew it; she had loved too much and that was her crime and her pain.
Others know it in our world:
Those 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 ...





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