

SCRIPTURE SHARING



LENT 2024

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.

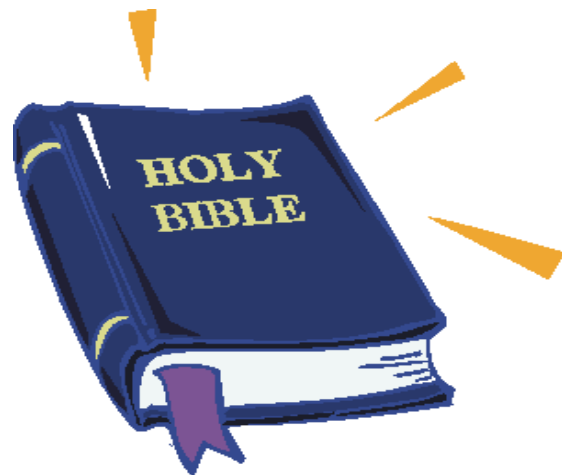
We know that there are many well-established groups both in Kildare & Leighlin and outside who may wish to use these booklets ... thanks for your faithfulness!

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 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 reflections and prayers inspire us all as we make our Lenten journey.



1ST SUNDAY OF LENT

PRAYER

We come here to listen to your Word my God.

We keep vigil in these days with Christ, our brother.

Help us to have his openness to the fragility of our lives here on earth.

Bring us a new sense of our own dependence on you.

The time has come once more.

Help us to open our hearts, to turn around and hear the Good News.

With Mary, 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: Gen. 9:8-15

Second Reading: 1 Pet. 3:18-22

Read the Text

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Mark 1:12-15

The Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness, and he remained there for forty days, and was tempted by Satan. He was with the wild beasts, and the angels looked after him.

After John had been arrested, Jesus went into Galilee. There he proclaimed the Good News from God. *'The time has come' he said, 'and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News.'*

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

How is Lent going for you so far? It's early days, but some of us mightn't have started to do anything, others might have fallen at the first hurdle and some hopefully are going strong. I often think it takes a little while for us each year to work out what this Lent might be about for us. Christ calls us to repent, and to believe the Good News. That was his message as he started his public ministry, and it underpins everything that he taught: the time has come; the Kingdom of God is near at hand; turn away from sin and wrong-doing and believe in the Gospel. Lent is that time when we work at renewal. We start afresh; we look at how we are as followers of Christ, do a bit of stock-taking, as it were, and see where we need to grow, what we need to tackle. We begin with our eye on where we're going - we're on this journey to Easter, to the celebration of Christ's victory over sin and death and so the image of a Lenten battle is often used, as we engage in our struggle with selfishness and sin. Lent is not about tokens - the practices we take on are not tokens of something, but something real. We might be tackling a bad habit, or trying to establish a good one, but that kind of thing should be done with the intention of making it permanent. Hopefully you don't give up smoking for Lent to start again when Lent is over.

But Christ also recommended three tools which we use to help us grow in our lives as Christians: prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Prayer is about the time we spend with God. It can be a great source of peace in lives, particularly when we're facing challenges or problems. It can also be a source of energy, a place where the

divine energy of God finds space in our lives to work and bear fruit. It's about fostering our friendship with the Lord, getting to know him, letting ourselves be filled with his presence.

Fasting is something temporary, a sacrifice of some kind, a kind of pruning. It can be about giving up a particular food or something else. I met someone the other day who is giving up television for Lent. Making a sacrifice can help build our character and can also break a dependence on a particular substance that we like. It provides a spiritual energy that can help us in other ways.

Almsgiving is the third of the traditional practices. That's about acts of kindness and mercy. It can be about giving money to someone in need; in Ireland, we think particularly of the Trócaire box, which is traditionally part of Lent for us. Trócaire was founded by the Irish bishops to work on our behalf in the developing world; it's our agency, representing us, to alleviate the plight of people in desperate situations in places that we cannot go to ourselves. But almsgiving is also about the kindness and love we show to others, visiting the sick or old, caring for those in need.

The beauty of Lent is that you can always start again if things don't work out; and please do, because you gain so much from it. I see Lent as a real opportunity for us as a community to do some work on ourselves, as individuals, as families and as parish community. It might be a time for tackling a problem with alcohol; it might be an opportunity to get help with a drug addiction. It might be a time to look for counselling for whatever has been weighing you down and burdening you. It might be time to share a problem and look for help. It might be a time to consider the relationships in our lives and the time and quality of our commitment to the people who are close to us, as parents, as children, as husband and wife, as family, with God. This a great chance to do something significant, to make a real change; keep Lent real.

How is Lent going for me so far? Where, as a follower of Christ, do I need to grow? How does my life proclaim the Good News of God?

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

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

God calls us every day. We have a choice. We can respond to the call or choose to ignore it. Today let us ask God to open our hearts and minds to the call of God.

- We pray for those who have lost their way in recent times. In particular those who feel a sense of hopelessness. We ask God to restore in them the sense that they are children of a God who loves them and can bring them hope.
Lord, hear us.
- Christ entered into ministry after his forty days in the wilderness. Let us realise that in the wilderness of our world today, God gives meaning to our daily lives.
Lord, hear us.
- We remember our own prayers, spoken and unspoken. We pray for those special intentions which are close to our hearts.
Lord, hear us.

Together we pray to the Father in the words our Saviour gave us.

Our Father

FINAL THOUGHT

May, today, there be peace within you.
May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be.
May you not forget the infinite possibilities, that are born of faith.
May you use those gifts that you have received and pass on the love that has been given to you.
May you be content knowing that you are a child of God.

Let his presence settle into your bones, and
allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance,
and to bask in the sun.
It is there for each and every one of you.

**Saint Teresa of Calcutta.
Prayer for contentment.**





2ND SUNDAY OF LENT

PRAYER

God our Father, we gather once more in your name. In these unstable times we are encouraged by the assurance of the promise of eternal life glimpsed by Peter, James, and John, during the Transfiguration.

We are also on a climb to the mountain top to find you in your glory. Most of our journey to you is shrouded in cloud and mystery. We earnestly pray for the hope and the resilience needed to continue our climb.

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. 22:1-2, 9-13, 15-18

Second Reading: Rom. 8:31-34

Read the Text

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Mark 9:2-10

Jesus took with him Peter and James and John and led them up a high mountain where they could be alone by themselves. There in their presence he was transfigured; his clothes became dazzlingly white, whiter than any earthly bleacher could make them. Elijah appeared to them with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus. Then Peter spoke to Jesus. *'Rabbi,'* he said, *'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 to say; they were so frightened. And a cloud came, covering them in shadow; and there came a voice from the cloud. *'This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him.'* Then suddenly, when they looked round, they saw no one with them anymore but only Jesus. As they came down the mountain, he warned them to tell no one what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They observed the warning faithfully, though among themselves they discussed what *'rising from the dead'* could mean.

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

Have you ever witnessed a night-time lightning storm, not the occasional flashes of lightening we see here in Ireland, but a real lightning storm where everything for miles around is lit up by the light of a single bolt, that is strong and powerful and dazzlingly bright. I saw something like it once while travelling on a plane and the storm was going on a few miles away. Half the people in the plane were in awe, fascinated by the beauty of the storm; the others were praying that we wouldn't be hit. Such light is dazzling, powerful, frightening even - it lights up the whole landscape and offers a glimpse of the world in a new and completely different perspective. I wonder if that vision resembles in any sense the experience that the apostles had on the mountain of the Transfiguration, when the glory of God was revealed in Jesus as light - brilliant, white, shining light, brighter than anything they had ever seen before. St John, the same St. John who was present with Jesus

as he was transfigured, tells us in his first letter that God is light; in him, there is no darkness.

This dazzling brightness appears today on the second Sunday of Lent. It acts like a beacon for us, showing us the glory of Easter, which lies in the distant future, still a good number of weeks away.

But it's more than just a sign that Easter is coming; it also asks us to remember the bigger picture, the bigger journey that we're on. It's not just about Lent and our little sacrifices or observances; it's about life and the hardships and struggles and crosses that are part of it, the darkness that is part of our lives and our world. Our world is often cruel and ugly. It's filled with war and conflict, and there are many people who are filled with hate. Looking at our society, with its conflicting values and its struggles with morality and knowing what is right and wrong, you wonder sometimes what it's all about, and if we've lost our way completely. The light of the Transfiguration was given to a group of confused disciples who were struggling with the knowledge that their leader was going to suffer grievously and to die, and goodness knows what the consequences for themselves might be. Here they see him in his true reality; his transfiguration gives meaning to the darkness that they will all face, for here the truth of his identity is proclaimed: he is the beloved Son of the Father.

That revelation is given to us too. Jesus is God's Son, the true light of the world. Most of the time, we struggle to see him, his light may not always be clear to us. But that light is given to us, to encourage us as we face darkness of various kinds in our lives. In God there is no darkness, only light. The light of Easter is anticipated here in the Transfiguration; the divinity of Christ is glimpsed, in all its brilliance. Today we're invited to remember those moments of revelation that we have experienced in our lives, moments of dazzling brightness and utter clarity, moments when God's love appeared to us

more real and more desirable than anything else and we know that Christ is with us. These are the glimpses we get, that keep us going - sometimes in our prayer, sometimes in the beauty of our world, sometimes in the love and tenderness of another person, sometimes just suddenly appearing out of nowhere. May we always keep our eyes fixed on the Lord who is always with us, our light in the darkness, our strength when we are weak, our rock in times of doubt or uncertainty.

Allow for a period of five to ten minutes' silence

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

- We pray for honesty in our relationship with God as we look at our lives. God said we should listen to his Son. Some of us will choose not to listen. Some are unable to hear the call through the noise and rumble of life around us. We pray that modern life does not drown out the voice calling to us.
Lord, hear us.
- Christians believe that there is more to life than what we can see and what we can know here on earth. We believe that our God promises a new life with him if we listen to his Son. We pray that we do not lose sight of that promise
Lord, hear us.
- Let us never forget the three-thousand-year legacy left to us by the prophets Moses and Elijah and the Messiah Jesus, which outshines the short-term glory and short term wisdom of the world around us.
Lord, hear us.
- Many people struggle with addictions. We pray that God will grant them resilience and courage in their fight for a new way of

living. We pray for strength for their family members, friends and professionals who give them great support.

Lord, hear us.

Together we pray to the Father in the words our Saviour gave us.
Our Father

FINAL THOUGHT

The meaning of things and their purpose is in part now hidden but shall in the end become clear. The choice is between the mystery and the absurd. To embrace the mystery is to discover the real. It is no more than a flicker of light through the cloud of unknowing. A fitful ray of light that is a messenger from the sun that is hidden from your gaze. You see the light but not the sun.

When you set yourself to look more closely, you will begin to see some sense in the darkness that surrounds you. Your eyes will begin to pick out the shape of things and persons around you. You will begin to see in them the presence of the One who gives them meaning and purpose and that it is he who is the explanation of them all.

Mystery

(From the writings of Cardinal Basil Hume)





3RD SUNDAY OF LENT

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we come here today to touch the reality of your presence in our world, to renew ourselves in our understanding of your presence in our lives. Routine and habit can sometimes rob us of our zeal and enthusiasm. As we listen to your Word here today, renew within us the sense of urgency and enthusiasm for your Word. Each of us is a Temple, wherein your glory dwells, help us to clear ourselves of clutter and false joys that we might know true hope and faith.

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 several 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: Ex. 20:1-17

Second Reading: 1 Cor. 1:22-25

Read the Text

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to John 2:13-25

Just before the Jewish Passover Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and in the Temple he found people selling cattle and sheep and pigeons, and the money changers sitting at their counters there. Making a whip out of some cord, he drove them all out of the Temple, cattle and sheep as well, scattering the money changers' coins, knocked their tables over and said to the pigeon-sellers, *'Take all this out of here and stop turning my Father's house into a market'*. Then his disciples

remembered the words of scripture: zeal for your house will devour me. The Jews intervened and said, *'What sign can you show us to justify what you have done?'* Jesus answered, *'Destroy this sanctuary, and in three days I will raise it up'*. The Jews replied, *'It has taken forty-six years to build this sanctuary: are you going to raise it up in three days?'*

But he was speaking of the sanctuary that was his body, and when Jesus rose from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and the words he had said. During his stay in Jerusalem for the Passover many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he gave, but Jesus knew them all and did not trust himself to them; he never needed evidence about any man; he could tell what a man had 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

We're not used to seeing Jesus in such a state - upset, angry, zealous. The Temple in Jerusalem was the most sacred place in the world for Jews. This is the place where the presence of God dwelt. It rested on the ark of the covenant, which was like a seat with no back, a stool, which the Jews called the Mercy Seat, this was where the presence of God was said to rest. To be close to the Temple was to be close to God. The Temple was the place where sacrifices were offered, sheep, doves and pigeons. And so, in the courtyards of the Temple, they were offered for sale, so that you could buy the bird or animal you wished and offer it to the Temple priests for sacrifice. But to complicate matters, a special type of coin was used in the Temple; it wasn't used anywhere else. So, to buy an animal or bird, you had first to

change your money, hence the presence of the moneychangers. All of this was normal for those who came to the Temple; they didn't notice anything wrong. It was convenient; it was efficient, and it worked. But Jesus was horrified. The Temple was the most sacred place in the world, the resting place of God on the earth. It should have been a place of prayer and worship and praise; instead, it was a place of business and commerce, a market and trading place, at least in the outer courtyards. Jesus couldn't contain himself; the thing that was closest to him, most precious, most sacred was being defiled. We lose the sense of the sacred when sacred things and places are put to ordinary use. We regard our churches as sacred places, and so we respect them. We reverence them. The church is the place where we celebrate the life, death and resurrection of Christ in the sacraments; the altar is the sacred table where bread and wine become the body and blood of the Lord. The tabernacle is where the Body of Christ is reserved. All of these things are ordinary enough in their own way; the church is just a building; the altar is just a table; the tabernacle is just a press or safe. But because they are reserved for a sacred use; because they are used for a purpose that is holy; because these are where the most sacred events of our faith are celebrated, where God's presence is among us, this building, this table, this press are not ordinary and can never be ordinary. We treat them with respect and reverence, fully aware that it is because they are associated with the Lord God that this sacredness comes, not from themselves or from any beauty they have. Jesus' attitude to the Temple and his anger might spur us to look at our own behaviours, attitudes to the sacred. What is the appropriate way to behave in church? It's easy to recognise what is not appropriate - anything that is not respectful, anything that does not take full account of the presence of the Lord - eating, chewing gum, being on the phone,

reading or playing games. It's easy to know what we shouldn't do. But what should we do? I think that the most significant thing we can do to honour the presence of the Lord is simply to be aware of that presence, to stop and to know that God is here, that what happens here is sacred. This is a dwelling place of the Lord, his Temple.

But the Lord has another Temple too, another place where he lives - us. To live with a sense of the sacredness of our own bodies, our lives, our whole being, not just because we are created in the image and likeness of God, but because he makes his home in us. All the more so, when we welcome his Word into our hearts and when we receive the Body of Christ in the Eucharist; Christ lives in us, and we are holy. Our bodies are holy. And because we ourselves are a dwelling place of God, a tabernacle of the Most High, created in God's image and likeness, we honour and reverence the human person, from the beginning of life in the womb to its natural end. And so human life and the human body and the human person are respected, revered and held to be holy. We have certain obligations stemming from that - obligations that mean living healthily and respectfully, caring for our own bodies and those of others, not abusing them or misusing them, eating properly, getting exercise and so forth. But it means too that we maintain a deep consciousness of God's presence within us, an awareness of the sacred, an awareness that God is near, so that our spirit and our soul are healthy. The awareness of God's presence is the first stage in prayer - being conscious of the presence of the Other. It's amazing how often we say the words of our prayers without any real awareness of the Sacred Presence of God.

On this Lenten day when Christ drove the merchants and traders from the Temple, let the presence of God be among us, and let us be aware that no matter where we are or what we are doing or who we are with, we

are the Temple of the Lord, the dwelling of the Holy One who makes his home in us.
Allow for a period of five to ten minutes' silence

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Today we pray that we may experience the presence of God in our lives through the witness of others.

- For all who are affected by illness or isolation or anxiety, that they may find relief and recovery.
How great is your name, O Lord our God, through all the earth!
- For those who are guiding our nation at this time, and shaping national policies, that they may make wise decisions.
How great is your name, O Lord our God, through all the earth!
- For all doctors, nurses and medical researchers, that through their skill, insights and care many will be restored to health.
How great is your name, O Lord our God, through all the earth!
- For the vulnerable and the fearful, for the gravely ill and the dying, that they may know your comfort and peace.
How great is your name, O Lord our God, through all the earth!
- For our own personal intentions.
How great is your name, O Lord our God, through all the earth!

We commend ourselves, and all for whom we pray, to the mercy and protection of God, as we pray:
Our Father

FINAL THOUGHT

I am convinced that all human beings have an inborn desire for God . . . this desire is our deepest longing. and our most precious treasure.

Gerald May

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4TH SUNDAY OF LENT

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, you have sent Jesus Christ among us to be the light of the world. At this time of year, the light returns. The days stretch bit by bit. Our world sees new life and growth. Help us to look to your Word and recognize Jesus your Son as the Light of the World, the light that overcomes our darkness.

With Mary, we pray:

Hail Mary

READING

The reading today is deceptively short, but every word is loaded with meaning. It would be best to read it at least two or three times. Allow a silent pause between each reading for personal reflection.

First Reading: 2 Chr. 36:14-16, 19-23

Second Reading: Eph. 2:4-21

Read the Text

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to John 3:14-21

Jesus said to Nicodemus:

'The Son of Man must be lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him. Yes, God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life. For God sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world, but so that through him the world might be saved.

No one who believes in him will be condemned; but whoever refuses to believe is condemned already, because he has refused to believe in the name of God's only Son.

On these grounds is sentence pronounced: that though the light has come into the world people have shown they prefer

darkness to the light because their deeds were evil. And indeed, everybody who does wrong hates the light and avoids it, for fear his actions should be exposed; but the person who lives by the truth comes out into the light, so that it may be plainly seen that what they do is done in God'

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

I've always been intrigued by the image of the serpent - it's one of the more ambiguous symbols in our tradition, going back to the book of Genesis with its serpent-villain, the tempter of Eve and Adam. Here in Ireland - a land without snakes (thanks to St. Patrick) - serpent lore is embedded in our ancient culture, with images of coiling serpents on Celtic manuscripts and high crosses. The emblem of my native Co. Kildare is a serpent, associated in particular with the town of Naas. We're familiar with the image of the serpent coiled around the standard as the sign of pharmacies and medicine; it owes its origin to the bronze serpent that Moses had fashioned and raised up on a pole so that all who saw it might be healed. Christ recalls this story in the Gospel today, and thus reclaims, in the tradition of Moses, the image of the serpent as an image of healing. He will be the new sign of healing, raised up on a standard, a cross, so that all who come before his cross might be healed. Christ comes as the antidote to the poison of sin introduced to creation by the serpent of the book of Genesis; he comes to bring healing for a suffering world. Just as the serpent of Genesis was the symbol of rebellion against God, Christ will be the symbol of faithfulness and love - a sign of God's love and forgiveness for the world. It's not that Christ comes

simply to repair or restore the damage done by the original serpent; he reclaims even the symbol itself, so that the serpent itself becomes a sign of healing.

All of this comes about because of the immense love of God for his creation. Even though humanity may have turned away from him, as described in the first Reading, this is not God's last word for us. God wants only what is good for us, that which leads to our wellbeing and our flourishing. We may have turned from his love, but God does not abandon us. We are God's work of art, the pinnacle of his creation. We are called to live with an integrity which corresponds to the dignity of our calling. Thus, we are called out of darkness into the light of day, out of lies into the truth of God's word, out of fear into faith in his presence, out of evil into the goodness of God's love, and ultimately, out of death and into eternal life.

How ever we might be called to respond to God's extraordinary love for us, the emphasis today is on the work of Christ and the initiative of the Father. 'God loved the world so much that he sent his only Son so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life.' It seems hard to believe that we are loved as much as we are, that our lives have so much meaning, so much purpose. We are wanted; we are remembered; we are loved. The origin of all of this is the God whose nature is love.

At times we might be tempted to despair of our world, with its multitude of problems; its millions of refugees and victims of war and aggression; families living in poverty; people struggling with addictions and darkness of all sorts. In these moments, the love of God is our rock, our refuge, and the source of our hope. God does not give up on this world; he does not give up on us. His love transforms even the serpents, changing them into signs of healing and forgiveness. His love is a purifying love, whose strength lies in its power to cleanse and

renew. His light does not shirk the darkness but offers to all who live in darkness the possibility of a new way of living. Nothing is forced, nothing is demanded. An invitation is given – 'come into the light; come and be healed; come and have life; come and be saved. Come - your God loves you.'

Allow for a period of five to ten minutes' silence

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

- Gathered in the light of faith, in the light of Jesus Christ, we pray for ourselves and the world around us; we pray for the blind and for those whose sight is impaired.
Jesus, light of the world, we believe!
- We pray for ourselves. We leave with God all the areas of our life that are in darkness.
Jesus, light of the world, we believe!
- We ask God to give us a renewed sense of the wonder of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, that place where our darkness can come into the light of God's mercy.
Jesus, light of the world, we believe!
- We leave with God all the many prayers of our hearts (short pause).
Jesus, light of the world, we believe!

With confidence and hope, we pray,
Our Father

FINAL THOUGHT

Some people will be familiar with the book by J.R.R. Tolkien 'The Two Towers'. At the end of the book, there is a siege. The heroes are driven into the very last refuge of the fortress. They have held

out for almost three days. Now the dawn is breaking; they hear the enemy battering at the door. They are too few and too badly wounded to defeat themselves. Their situation seems utterly hopeless. It seems inevitable that they shall simply skulk in the darkness until their doom falls upon them.

A few rays of light fall into the darkened room. They begin to take courage. No, they will not sit and wait for the inevitable! They will ride out and face the rising sun rather than sit and wait in misery. In a flurry of excitement, they mount their horses and ride out to face their enemy, riding towards the morning sun.

What happens next? Before such bravery, enemies flee. Also, from the East, illuminated by the Rising Sun, reinforcements arrive. Their decision to ride out into the light rather than skulk in the darkness has made all the difference. Christ challenges us to do the same in the Gospel today, to move out of our darkness of self-doubt and discouragement to face the rising sun that comes from God.





5TH SUNDAY OF LENT

PRAYER

Loving Father grant us the wisdom to understand your will for our lives. Help us to detach from the mundane and to seek to produce much fruit from the single grain that we are, which we choose to nourish and ripen through your Word. Enable us to always feel your presence during difficult times and to place our trust in you, that when we feel entombed, that is when we are about to see the fruits of our labour. With Mary, we pray:
Hail Mary

READING

Once again, in the reading today, we are brought to a sense of the drama of living and dying. Please spend some time on reading this text, even if it seems long!!

First Reading: Jer. 31:31-34

Second Reading: Heb. 5:7-9

Read the Text

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to John 12:20-30

Among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. These approached Philip, who came from Bethsaida in Galilee, and put this request to him, *'Sir, we should like to see Jesus.'* Philip went to tell Andrew, and Andrew and Philip together went to tell Jesus. Jesus replied to them: *'Now the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you, most solemnly, unless a wheat grain falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest. Anyone who loves his life loses it; anyone who hates his life in this world will keep it for the eternal life. If a person serves me, they must follow me, wherever I am, my servant will be there too. If anyone serves me, my*

Father will honour them. Now my soul is troubled. What shall I say: Father, save me from this hour? But it was for this very reason that I have come to this hour.

Father, glorify your name!'

A voice came from heaven, *'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.'* People standing by, who heard this, said it was a clap of thunder; others said, *'It was an angel speaking to him.'* Jesus answered, *'It was not for my sake that this voice came, but for yours. Now sentence is being passed on this world; now the prince of this world is to be overthrown. And when I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all people to myself.'*

By these words he indicated the kind of death he would die.

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

There are many great mysteries in life; suffering is one of them; evil is another; death is a third. Like all other humans, Jesus came face to face with all of these in his life on earth. He didn't shirk them; he didn't run or avoid them. But he didn't give us any explanations either; there are no easy answers to these mysteries. Instead, he faced them, and he conquered them. We live in the confidence that evil and sin, pain and suffering, death and mortality have all lost their power, all conquered by the love of Christ who gave himself up to death for us.

Today in the Gospel we see Christ face to face with the enormity of what lies ahead. He knows that the ordeal will lead to God's glory being revealed, but, nonetheless, to be face to face with the trials that he would suffer would be enough to shake anyone. We see a very human side of Jesus, the man who says,

‘My soul is troubled’, and calls out ‘What shall I say: Father, save me from this hour?’ This is someone we can identify with, someone we know well, for we know that life is hard and sometimes places us in situations where we would rather not be, where there’s no escape from the darkness that surrounds us. The image of the wheat grain shows the pattern that life must follow, unless it dies, ‘it remains only a single grain, but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest.’ The pain of dying - dying to self, dying to sin, the pain of the physical death of those close to us and eventually our own - all of this is part of our experience of life.

The call that is given to follow Christ is not simply a call to follow him in the glorious days of the preaching and signs worked in Galilee. It’s not just about being there in the good times; that’s easy. Those who follow Christ, whether 2000 years ago in Israel or today in Ireland, are called to follow him in suffering, to climb Calvary with him, to know that we too must lose our lives, give them up to follow him.

None of this seems like Good News, as Christ prepares his disciples and us to accept the reality of his death and its impact for our lives. Yet it is Good News, because this is the way to new life; this is the path to the new life of the Resurrection. It is Good News because it does not skirt the issues of suffering, evil and death, which make life miserable for so many. It doesn’t deny them, instead it faces them, acknowledges them, as the tyrants that they are, and then it conquers them and opens the path to redemption. The suffering of Christ has no meaning unless we experience it as part of our journey to Easter. When we encounter suffering, we too are confident that it is part of our journey to new life, eternal life, part of Christ’s victory and his revelation of the Resurrection.

All of this might seem a bit difficult, maybe a bit heavy for us. But as we prepare to celebrate Easter, let us remember that what we celebrate at Easter

has cosmic significance - it is Good News for all humanity and for all creation. Here we face the mysteries of life and death, good and evil, as they affect us and all people that ever lived or will live. The victory of Christ is a victory won for all humanity and for all time.

Allow for a period of five to ten minutes silence

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Father, we open our hearts to you in prayer, bringing our needs and the needs of the whole world to you in confidence of your loving response.

- May we become like the grain of wheat that falls into the ground and dies so that it might bear much fruit. May we leave behind the sinful parts of our lives. This is where we come to fruition in Jesus; in the letting go, the emptying, and the dying, to make space for new life to arise.

We pray to the Lord

- May we experience new growth in our care for one another, fostering a community spirit and a genuine care for the world in which we live

We pray to the Lord

- In the same way that Jesus taught his disciples in today’s Gospel reading, grant us the wisdom to understand that God has much bigger plans than we can imagine, and a much different way of bringing about spiritual fruit than we can ever contemplate.

We pray to the Lord

- In our lives, we also have moments like Jesus, when we know we need to make a journey that will be difficult and painful. Help us to

surrender ourselves into God's hands. Make us trust God to be with us. Set within us the firm belief that God will also strengthen and console us.

We pray to the Lord

From the depth of our heart we pray:
Our Father

FINAL THOUGHT

Often it seems that God does not exist as all around us we see persistent injustice, evil, indifference and cruelty. But it is also true that in the midst of darkness something new always springs to life and sooner or later produces fruit. On razed land life breaks through, stubbornly yet invincibly. However dark things are, goodness always re-emerges and spreads. Each day in our world beauty is born anew, it rises transformed through the storms of history. Values always tend to reappear under new guises, and human beings have arisen time after time from situations that seemed doomed. Such is the power of the Resurrection, and all who evangelize are instruments of that power.

Pope Francis (Evangeli Gaudium #276)



PALM SUNDAY



PRAYER

Whenever the time for change comes, and things become hard to do, and we feel lost or hesitant, Lord, help us to remember the final journey that your Son made with his disciples. Give us the strength to journey into the unknown and to feel your presence by our side. May our journey be one of peace and allow us to see the things you see, so we can follow you in your path.

With Mary, we pray:

Hail Mary

READING

Instead of the Passion, we suggest reading the text of the Gospel for the Procession with Palm branches. As it is read may it allow people to concentrate on the coming of Christ into their lives at the end of this time of Lent as our Lenten journey brings us deeper into the mystery of the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus. Read the text several times, allowing due time for quiet reflection.

First Reading: Isaiah 50:4-7

Second Reading: Phil. 2:6-11

Gospel: Matt. 14:1-15, 47

Read the Text

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Mk. 11:1-10

When they were approaching Jerusalem, in sight of Bethphage and Bethany, close by the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples and said to them, *'Go off to the village facing you, and as soon 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

There's something very powerful about telling a story; it brings past events into our present reality and allows us to enter them and engage with them. Palm Sunday is about telling the story of our faith and how Christ gave himself up for us. Physically, we enter that story in ritual form, as we process into the church waving our palms and welcoming Christ as our king, as the Jews did long ago on that first Palm Sunday.

In the proclamation of the Passion, we are invited to walk with Christ through the days of suffering, leading to his resurrection, which we will celebrate this coming week in the Easter Triduum.

We tell this story because it is fundamental to our faith; this is the story that our faith is based on, and it really happened. There might be differences in the detail, but all four gospels tell the same

story about Jesus Christ and the days before he died. The second reading very briefly outlines how the Son of God emptied himself of all glory, became human and died the most inglorious death imaginable. Having descended to the lowest levels, he rose to the heights and, with him, all humanity. What is stated in brief by Paul is described in the Passion, as we see Jesus in his suffering. Hanging on the cross, he journeys as far from God as it is possible to go, journeys into the desperate sense of abandonment by the One who is closer to him than life itself. Here, Jesus no longer experiences that extraordinary intimacy that led him to call God “Abba.” Now in the most outstanding solidarity, he stands with all of those who live in darkness, and struggle to know God; he stands with those who feel alone, isolated, their lives deprived of meaning or of love. Here he stands at the cusp of atheism “where is God?” God has disappeared, invisible, intangible. In entering this place, Jesus identifies with all of those people who also experience apparent desertion by God - those who cry out and find no response.

In telling the story of the dying of Christ, we may well be tempted to lose all hope. The story today closes with the placing of the stone at the entrance to the tomb, as if to proclaim the finality of death and the futility of looking for anything in the tomb. This week we walk the path of Christ and remember how this path is well worn by human beings in every century, in every place, in every religion or culture. We walk it with Christ because it leads us to a new part of the story, the Easter story of the resurrection, a path not yet walked by humanity. We stop today at the tomb, because in our life here on earth, that is as far as we go. We stop to be with Christ at this moment and in this week to reflect on the mystery of his suffering. We pause out of respect for all those whose story ends with a stone rolled over the entrance of their tomb, cold, heavy, silent and final. This week is truly a holy week for we walk

the path of Christ on Calvary. May it lead us to discover in our stories of suffering the presence of Christ walking with us.

Allow for a period of five to ten minutes’ silence

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

- As we enter into the holiest week of the liturgical year, let us consider our call to bring the power of Christ’s redeeming love to those who suffer crucifixion in our own times: to refugees who make perilous journeys only to be turned away; to those of minority ethnic cultures who are not given a voice; to those who campaign so hard for climate change policy; to those who suffer religious persecution throughout the world.

We pray to the Lord

- We pray for all world leaders, that they may aspire to journey in humility and peace in their work to bring unity to all nations.

We pray to the Lord

- Bless all nations, Lord, with your mercy, and allow justice to prevail through them all. Let your triumph roam free in all lands as we strive for peace and freedom. Have compassion as you judge us when we stand before you.

We pray to the Lord

- Lord, open our eyes to see the importance of what seems insignificant in our lives. Let us see what you want us to see. Help us all to have the confidence not to waver in our faith but to be steadfast in our hearts.

We pray to the Lord

Jesus was always focused on the Father and on God’s kingdom.... we pray that our

lives may be focused on God as we pray for the coming of the Kingdom.
Our Father

FINAL THOUGHT

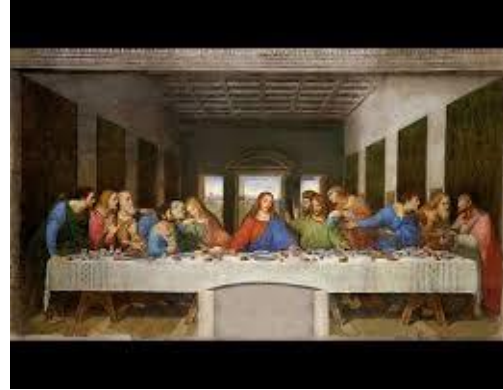
Heavenly Father keep us reminded to live our lives to the fullest, despite the troubles that may lie ahead for us. For the road may go uphill all the way 'til the end, and the journey takes a long time, and those who accompany us may fall away before the journey's end, but once we affirm our trust in you, we can face the challenges life gives us with unwavering bravery.

Lead us to always trust you and to place ourselves in your hands. Help us to stand firm wherever we go. Grant us the fortitude to bring love where hatred lies and to heal and pardon the injustices against us.



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

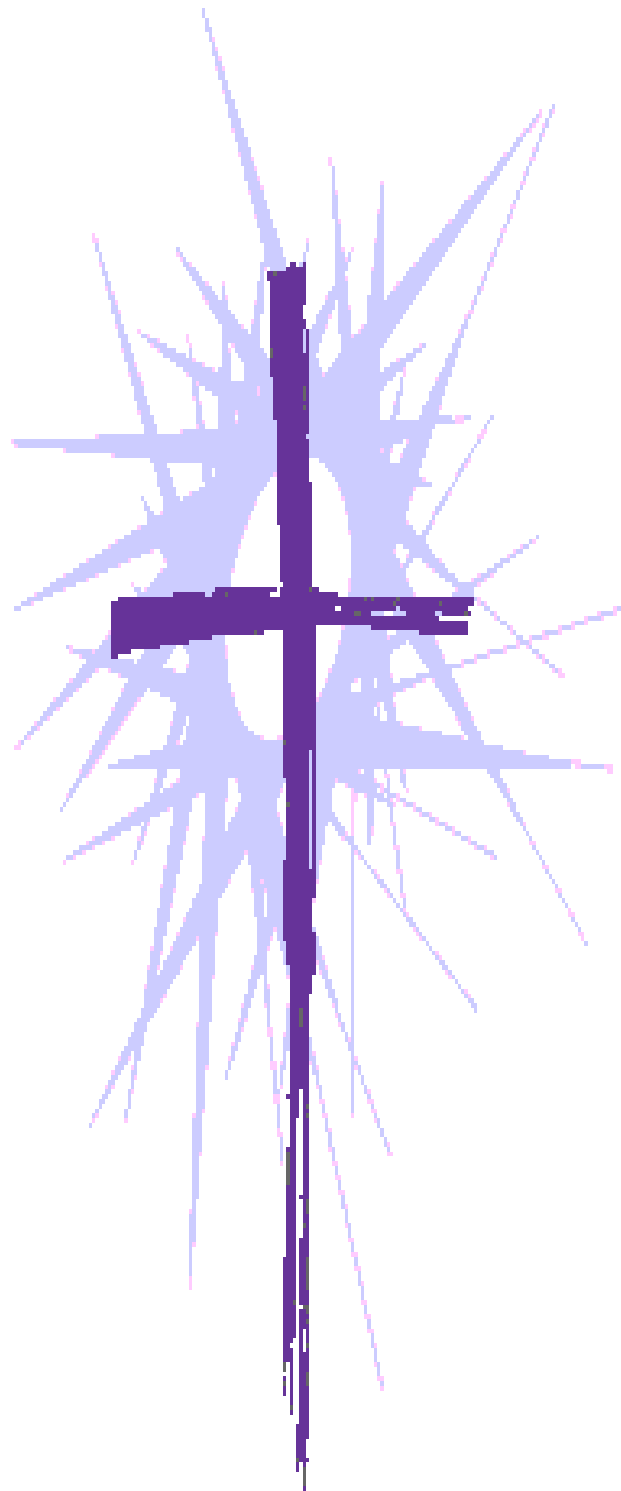
It is cold on the Hill of Calvary Lord.
Mary knew it; she was a mother whose
heart broke to see her son die.
John knew it; he was faithful and felt the
blows rain down on his friend.
Mary Magdalene knew it; she had loved
too much and that was her crime and her
pain.
Others know it in our world,
those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