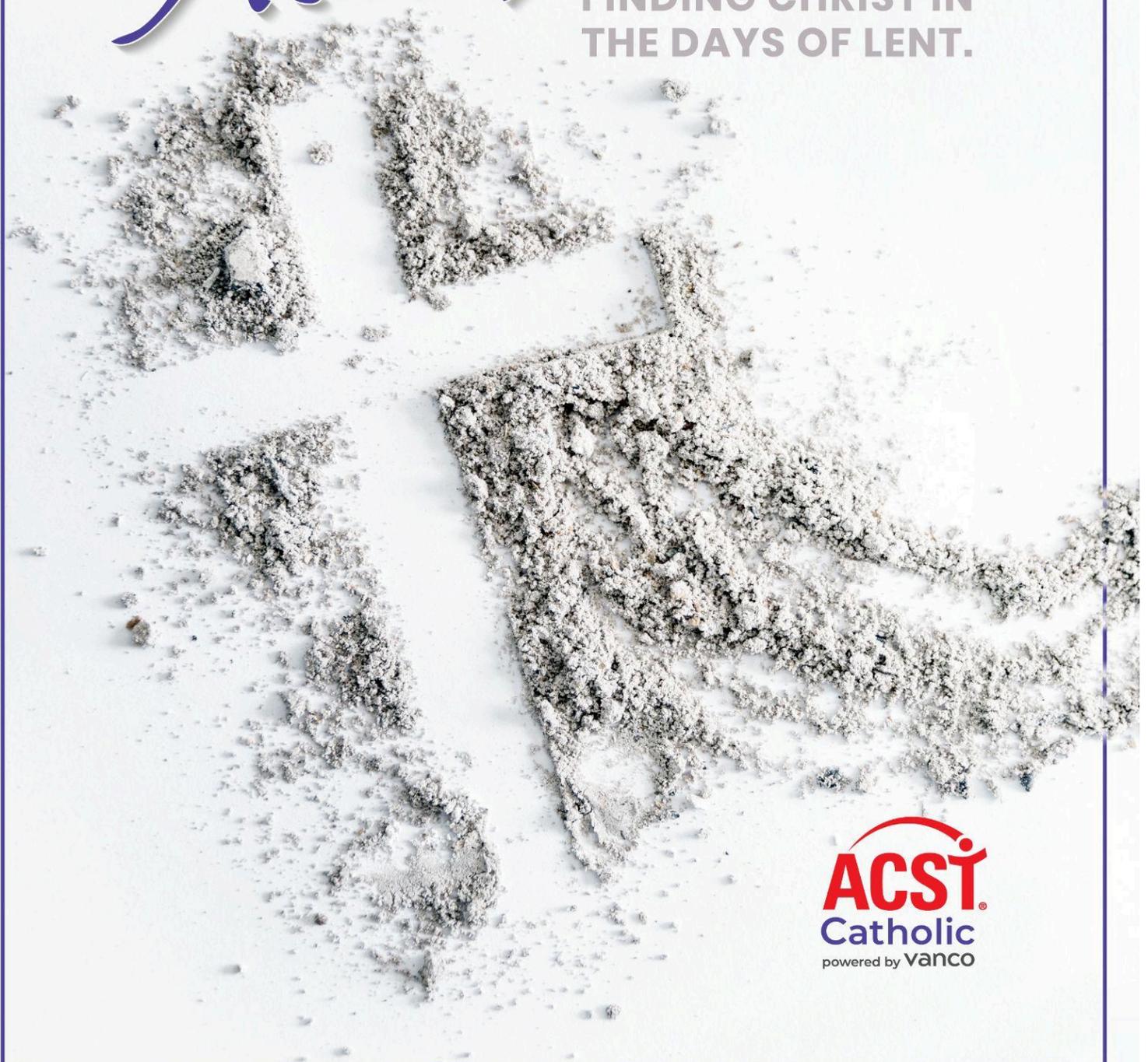


He Speaks

FINDING CHRIST IN
THE DAYS OF LENT.



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He Speaks: Finding Christ in the Days of Lent

Lent is not simply a journey toward Easter—it is a journey with Jesus. In these weekly reflections, *He Speaks* invites you to pause and listen to the voice of Christ in the Sunday Gospels, and to consider how he may be speaking into your own life. May these days be a time of gentle guidance, deeper trust, and a renewed sense of walking with the One who loves you.

Ash Wednesday

Readings: Joel 2:12-18, Psalm 51:3-4, 5-6ab, 12-13, 14, and 17, 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2, Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

"And your Father who sees in secret will repay you."

This might sound very charming and quaint on paper, but hey, Jesus, get with the program! Scroll, stream, or tune in, and you will see that the loudest voice wins. But that's not just a today thing, that's apparently a human thing. In today's Gospel for Ash Wednesday, we see that those loud voices were also prominent in Jesus' day. "When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you..."

The question is: why does Jesus care if we blow the trumpet or pray in public, or make our fasting a show? We're still giving, praying, and fasting, right?

The short answer is: it's what's happening inside that counts. As Joel tells us in today's first reading, we are called to "rend your hearts, not your garments." If it's not from the heart, all we have to show for our fasting, giving, or prayer is a ripped-up garment. This is Jesus' point to his disciples: the reward comes from God, not from being seen.

If our gift, prayer, or fast is all about us, we miss the point. No amount of likes, follows, or shares can compare to the quiet reward God gives in secret.

Consider

Ash Wednesday is a day of fasting and abstinence. How can today's practice set the tone for your Lent? How might fasting be more than a "church rule," and instead a way to draw closer to your Father?

Whisper Prayer

Father, soften my heart this Lent.

Listening with the Church — Ash Wednesday

Lantern Out of Doors

Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889)

Sometimes a lantern moves along the night,
That interests our eyes. And who goes there?
I think: where from and bound, I wonder, where,
With, all down darkness wide, his wading light?

Men go by me whom either beauty bright
In mould or mind or what not else makes rare:
They rain against our much-thick and massed air
Rich beams, till death or distance buys them quite.

Death or distance soon consumes them: wind
What most I may eye after, be in at the end
I cannot; and out of sight is out of mind.

Christ minds: Christ's interest, what to avow or amend
There, eyes them, heart wants, care haunts, foot follows kind,
Their ransom, their rescue, and first, fast, last friend.

Ash Wednesday is a somber reminder of our mortality (“remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return”). The ashes mark that truth. Hopkins’ poem acknowledges that life and relationships can be fleeting, like a light that disappears. But it also reminds us that Christ alone is steadfast—his friendship, care, and love for us endure, from first to last, in every moment of our journey.

First Sunday of Lent

Readings: Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7, Psalm 51:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 17, Romans 5:12-19 or 5:12, 17-19, Matthew 4:1-11

"It is written"

Each Lent we hear the story of Jesus' forty days in the desert, his fasting, his temptation by the devil, and his subsequent victory over the tempter. It's a scene we have perhaps imagined, or even seen treated in movies or on television. We might think about Jesus' human nature – his hunger. We might consider his divine nature – the tempter acknowledges it when he calls him the Son of God. But we already know the end of this story. Jesus wins. The devil left him. And

Jesus was ministered to by angels. It's easy to hear this and assume there isn't much here for us beyond admiration.

But then we could just pause on these few words of Jesus: It is written.

The devil was hitting Jesus with temptations hand-picked for him. He had just been baptized in the Jordan, and had the voice from heaven say, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." So it would make sense for the tempter to try to make Jesus question the Father's love for him, especially after forty days alone and hungry. Can't your Father even take care of your physical needs? Does the Father really love you enough to save you? Has the Father given you all you really desire? For each of these temptations, Jesus said, "It is written."

Now wait, you say, Jesus was "the Word made flesh." He is the author of it all, so of course, under duress, he would be able to call to mind those specific Scriptures that would put the devil in his place. But I'm not Jesus.

No, we're not Jesus. But we can imitate him, and he called us to! Temptations come to us when we are weak or feeling exposed, just like Jesus was. Tired and spent after a long day, we might be tempted to snap at our spouse or children. Hearing a juicy piece of gossip, we might be tempted to whisper it to someone else. Under pressure at work, we might be tempted to take credit for something we didn't do. You know what your own temptations are; they're unique to each of us, as Jesus' were to him. But we have what we need to put it down. "It is written."

You don't have to be a Scripture scholar or a theologian to do this. You have all you need. Here are just a few promises we can lean on when we're tempted or discouraged—words that remind us who God is and who we are to him:

I will never forsake you or abandon you. (Heb 13:5)

My grace is sufficient for you. (2 Cor 12:9)

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. (John 14:27)

Sometimes even these short verses might be hard to call to mind, especially if you're bearing up under a heavy load. And that's okay. You can just whisper, "It is written:" God will never leave me. God's grace is enough. Jesus gives me peace.

Lent is not about proving our strength, but about learning where we turn when we are weak. Jesus shows us that the words of Scripture are not distant or theoretical—they are meant to be lived, trusted, and leaned on. When temptation comes, we don't face it alone. We respond as children who know their Father's voice.

Consider

Temptations come. It's our response to them that sets us on a path to a deeper relationship with Christ. Rather than trying to rely on willpower alone, Lent invites us to practice turning to God.

What is one word, phrase, or line—from Scripture, the Mass, or a saint—that you could keep close and return to when temptation comes?

Whisper Prayer

Jesus, be with me.

Listening with the Church — First Sunday of Lent

A Response to the Devil

In his Angelus for the First Sunday of Lent, 2019, Pope Francis discussed the three temptations Jesus endured at the hand of the devil, "greed for possession..., human vainglory, and the exploitation of God." Each of these, he said, is a path that "will lead us to ruin." The Holy Father said that Jesus showed us in concrete terms how to respond to the tempter: "Jesus does not enter a discussion, but responds to the three challenges with only the Word of God. This shows us that one does not dialogue with the devil; one must not discuss, one only responds to him with the Word of God." In practice, this might look like rejecting the little compromises or "work-arounds" that try to justify what we know isn't right. Lent is an ideal time to notice when we are tempted to start "dialoguing" with the tempter instead of answering with God's Word.

Second Sunday of Lent

Readings: Genesis 12:1-4a, Psalm 33:4-5, 18-19, 20, 22, 2 Timothy 1:8b-10, Matthew 17:1-9

"Rise, and do not be afraid."

The Transfiguration of Jesus is one of the most unusual scenes in Scripture (aside from a few wild Old Testament moments). Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up a mountain, his entire appearance changes, and he's suddenly talking with Moses and Elijah. Then a voice from heaven breaks in, telling the disciples who Jesus is and commanding them to listen to Him. Suffice it to say: this was not a typical day in the lives of these three.

We are a tough bunch in our times, so it can be hard for us to relate to the overwhelming fear this struck into the hearts of John, James, and Peter. We tend to read this as a lovely scene—Jesus' face shining like the sun, dazzling white clothing, an extraordinary meeting on a mountaintop. But Scripture tells us that when the voice boomed, those disciples dropped to the ground, terrified.

But then something even more extraordinary happened. Jesus touched them and said, "Rise, and do not be afraid." And when they looked up, they saw his face.

The Transfiguration showed the disciples exactly who Jesus was. His divinity was no longer in question. And to be in the presence of that revelation would have been intense. We're given this

story every year in Lent to remind us of the same truth. Jesus is the Son of God. His word is truth, and we need to listen.

We know this—at least we think we do. But how do we internalize it? How do we move from awareness to deep understanding, acceptance, and ultimately a deeper relationship with Him?

While we might not experience a booming voice from the heavens that scares the dickens out of us, in our time, there is plenty that causes us fear—enough sometimes to drop us to the ground. What if I mess up at work and lose my job? What if my children don't come back to the Church? What if the blood tests bring bad news? How will we pay the bills this month? Yes, these are the things that can lay us out. But in his love for us, Jesus comes and touches us and says, "Rise, do not be afraid." And like the disciples, when we look up again, we see him.

The Transfiguration invites us to see Jesus as He truly is, to let him meet us in the mess of our daily lives. When fear makes us fall, He meets us on the ground. When His touch lifts us, we lift our eyes and find Him again. This Lent, we can practice rising at His voice.

Consider:

Fear and anxiety can be a daily struggle for many people. Scripture, the saints, and indeed Jesus himself, often tell us, "do not be afraid." In the face of real-world struggles, how do you hear this call? Do you dismiss it as impractical—or as something meant for holier people than you? What might change if you began to "rise" and look up for the face of Jesus when you feel anxious, afraid, or alone?

Whisper Prayer:

Jesus, help me to rise.

Listening with the Church — Second Sunday of Lent

The Luminous Mystery of the Transfiguration

This Sunday's Gospel is the Transfiguration, which also appears among the Luminous Mysteries of the Rosary. In 2002, Pope Saint John Paul II introduced us to the Luminous Mysteries of the Rosary, which are traditionally prayed on Thursdays. Pope John Paul II called the Rosary his favorite prayer, "Marvelous in its simplicity and depth." In his Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, he wrote, "The Gospel scene of Christ's transfiguration, in which the three Apostles Peter, James and John appear entranced by the beauty of the Redeemer, can be seen as *an icon of Christian contemplation*. To look upon the face of Christ, to recognize its mystery amid the daily events and the sufferings of his human life, and then to grasp the divine splendour definitively revealed in the Risen Lord, seated in glory at the right hand of the Father: this is the task of every follower of Christ

and therefore the task of each one of us." Praying this mystery helps us see that glory and suffering are never far apart in a life of discipleship. We look to Jesus' transfigured face not to escape our trials, but for his strength in facing them.

Third Sunday of Lent

Readings: Exodus 17:3-7, Psalm 95:102, 6-7, 8-9, Romans 5:1-2, 5-8, John 4:5-42

"I am he, the one speaking with you."

The third Sunday of Lent is a familiar story of what seems to be a chance meeting between Jesus and "the woman at the well." It's a surprising moment in many ways: Jesus spoke at length with a Samaritan, held a deep conversation with a woman, and conversed with a Gentile about salvation. But leave it to Jesus to cross boundaries and raise eyebrows (looking at you, disciples).

Jesus and the disciples had been walking all morning, and around noon, they stopped at a popular well to regroup. The disciples headed into town for supplies, and Jesus, worn out and thirsty, sat down at the well. Enter the Samaritan woman, coming to draw water. The Gospel doesn't mention a crowd, or even another person, so we read that it's just the two of them. "Give me a drink," Jesus said. This woman would not have been expecting that, given the fact that Jesus was a Jewish man, so she shot back something along the lines of, "Really? Don't you see who I am?"

The fact that she engaged with Jesus opened the door to a more extended conversation. Living water? That sounded far better than a jar dragged up from seventy-five feet below. No more repeated trips in the heat, that sounds good, too. "Go call your husband and come back." That stopped her cold.

Jesus then shocked the woman by telling her her life. And she recognized him then as a prophet. But he revealed himself as much more. "I know that the Messiah is coming, the one called the Christ; when he comes he will tell us everything."

Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one speaking with you."

And she went and told everybody.

This is another Scripture story that we might skim over, attaching to it some valuable but surface meaning. Often, the Samaritan woman is seen as a model of someone who has led a scandalous life. After all, five husbands. So we might wag our heads and think: *It's a good thing Jesus came along when he did, to save her and get her on the right track. But that's not me.*

But the story is far more layered than the reputation that's often attached to her. Like our own stories, it's rarely cut and dried.

So notice what Jesus did *not* do. He didn't interrogate her about her past. He didn't guilt-trip her. He didn't pull the superior card. He saw her. And her eyes were opened. And her life was changed.

The woman's transformation didn't begin with her confession — it began with His revelation. Jesus didn't say, *try harder*. He said, *I am he*. He entered the quiet truth of her story, addressed it with clarity and mercy, and offered her living water. Lent is our invitation to stand at that same well, to hear Him say to us, in whatever our own truth is, "I am he, the one speaking with you."

Consider:

Being seen — acknowledged, understood, and known — is something we all long for. It goes far beyond being noticed; it's about real connection. Do you believe this kind of connection is possible with Jesus? Why or why not? What might change if you allowed yourself to be truly "seen" by Him?

Whisper Prayer:

Jesus, speak to my heart.

Listening with the Church — Third Sunday of Lent

Christ Speaks to Women

It can be difficult for modern readers to grasp the role of women in biblical times. Many were dependent on male relatives for their livelihood. A few notable exceptions show remarkable independence and skill—like Lydia, the dealer in purple cloth in Acts 16, who supported her household and welcomed Paul into her home. Women also experienced vulnerability in deeply personal ways. Consider the woman with the hemorrhage (Mark 5:25-34), who suffered physically, socially, and economically for years before Jesus healed her. Even in these circumstances, women often had limited access to teaching or leadership roles.

Into this world stepped Jesus, who spoke and acted in ways that always affirmed and defended the dignity of women. He spoke with them, healed them, and counted them among his disciples. Mary and Martha, Mary Magdalene, and the woman with the hemorrhage are just a few examples of women who shared in his teaching and ministry, often in ways that broke cultural expectations.

The Samaritan woman at the well illustrates this most profoundly. As John Paul II observes in *Mulieris Dignitatem*: "Christ's way of acting, the Gospel of his words and deeds, is a consistent protest against whatever offends the dignity of women...Even when this truth concerns their 'sinfulness,' they feel liberated...restored to themselves...with a love which finds direct expression in Christ himself." In speaking with her, Jesus reveals the mysteries of God, offers her living water, and discloses that he is the Messiah.

As John Paul II emphasizes: “If you knew the gift of God,’ Jesus says, showing his great esteem for the dignity of women and for the vocation which enables them to share in his messianic mission.” The woman at the well becomes, for us, a model of openness, attentiveness, and courage in encountering Christ. Jesus’ actions invite us not only to see and honor the dignity of women, but also to stand against whatever diminishes the humanity of any person.

Fourth Sunday of Lent

Readings: 1 Samuel 16:1b, 607, 10-13a, Psalm 23:103a, 3b-4, 5, 6, Ephesians 5:8-14, John 9:1-41

“You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.”

The story of the man born blind stands in contrast to last Sunday's Gospel story. They were just passing by the man. He didn't call out. He wasn't seeing Jesus. He wasn't asking for healing. He was just there.

And yet Jesus, looking at him, said, "We have to do the works of the one who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

Then, curiously, Jesus spat, made mud, and wiped it on the man's eyes. He told him to go rinse, and when he did, he could see. And that could have been the end of the story. Another successful, but maybe weird, healing.

But you know—that wasn't the end of the story.

Neighbors thought it was a case of mistaken identity and dragged him to the Pharisees. They interrogated him, which led to mass confusion and dissension. The parents were called in. They identified him, but then washed their hands of it. All along, the man born blind kept repeating the facts: I don't know who it was or why he did it, but I do know that I was blind and now I see, and oh yes, by the way, I'm pretty sure the guy was devout and doing God's will. And with that, they sent him away.

And this is where it gets interesting. Jesus heard that the Pharisees had thrown the guy out, so he found him and asked, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" And the man born blind replied, "Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" He wasn't getting any answers from the Pharisees, after all.

"You have seen him, the one speaking with you is he."

Jesus' healing of the man born blind reminds us that the work of Jesus often goes unseen until we fully recognize him— indeed, true sight goes beyond physical vision. Lent invites us to open our eyes *and our hearts*, to look for Jesus even when it's unexpected, and to allow ourselves to

be fully transformed by encountering Him. Like the man born blind, our faith deepens when we see Him clearly—and worship is the natural response.

Consider:

When the man washed the mud off his eyes, he could see—after all, he "came back able to see" so he clearly saw Jesus. But it wasn't until his encounter with the Lord after his testimony to the Pharisees that he really knew who had healed him and who was speaking with him. Have there been times in your life when Jesus was working but you didn't realize it until later? What was your response when you knew?

Whisper Prayer:

Jesus, open my eyes to you.

Listening with the Church — Fourth Sunday of Lent

Laetare Sunday

Today is Laetare Sunday, from the Latin *laetare*, meaning "rejoice!" The theme comes from the entrance antiphon: "Rejoice, Jerusalem, and all who love her. Be joyful all who were in mourning; exult and be satisfied at her consoling breast." (Isaiah 66:10-11)

It is a day to be strengthened in hope, preparing for Good Friday and Holy Saturday, and to look forward to the joy that awaits us at Easter.

During Lent, the church does not allow flowers on the altar as a sign of the penitential season, but this rule is suspended on Laetare Sunday—so you may see rose colored flowers on the altar, in addition to the rose vestments of your priest.

In the midst of your Lent sacrifices, fasts, and penances, it is a day to remember that the Easter celebration is coming. Take a moment—alone or with family—to reflect on five (or more) things that bring you joy, and thank God for them.

Fifth Sunday of Lent

Readings: Ezekiel 37:12-14, Psalm 130:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8, Romans 8:8-11, John 11:1-45

"Lazarus, come out!"

If there is a biblical story that is brimming with genuine, raw, and heartfelt human emotion, today's Gospel is it. It's the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. This has it all: sadness, anger, fear, dread, connection, empathy, and then awe, joy, and astonishment.

There are, however, some moments in this story that are confusing. After hearing Lazarus was sick, Jesus stayed two days longer. When he heard Lazarus had died, he said he was going to go wake him up. Naturally, the disciples were confused and concerned. Jesus was walking right back into a potential trap—the Jews had just tried to stone him in Judea. If Lazarus was dead, it was too late anyway; why go back and risk it? When it was clear that Jesus' mind was made up, Thomas said, essentially, Well, where he goes, we go, even if it means death, not realizing yet how close to the truth he was.

So if all this wasn't gut-wrenching enough, by the time Jesus made it to the outskirts of town, everyone was still in shock and mourning Lazarus' death, and Jesus joined right in, weeping himself. He was surrounded by people who KNEW what Jesus could do. Jesus could have saved him... Lazarus wouldn't be dead right now if Jesus had only been here.

When Jesus got to the tomb, it was probably expected that he would mourn with the others, not ask for the grave to be opened. By this time, it had been four days. And "dead is dead," so Martha said what anyone would have: this is going to stink. But Jesus was unstoppable. After he prayed, he "cried out in a loud voice,"

"Lazarus, come out!"

Imagine gasps. The clamor. The shocked expressions. And then, Lazarus came out of the grave. Alive.

We read this story in Lent to acknowledge that it is the pivotal moment in Jesus' ministry. This is the event that would lead directly to his arrest and eventual execution. This was a miracle that couldn't be swept under the rug, minimized, or explained away. Lazarus was dead—four days dead—and yet came out of the tomb alive when Jesus called him. It was more than the Jewish leaders could handle.

For us, this moment can be emotional, meaningful, and deeply personal. Jesus calls Lazarus his friend—and he calls us friends, too. And he is calling each of us back to life. To step out of whatever keeps us separated from him: fear, anger, jealousy, illusions, distrust, defensiveness, old habits, or emotional blind spots. As we near Holy Week, can we listen for his voice? Can we hear him calling us, too, to come out?

Consider:

This long Scripture passage unfolds in several movements—each one mirroring a movement of our own hearts. Take a moment to sit with these movements and notice where they echo your own experience:

- Naming the Loss (Lord, if you had been here, this might not have happened.)
- Sitting in the Delay (I am waiting for you, and I don't yet understand why.)
- Bringing the Grief to Jesus (You see and receive my pain for what it is.)
- Hearing the Truth Again ("I am the resurrection and the life.")
- He Weeps With Me (I am not alone in what hurts.)

- Standing at the Tomb (I face what feels absolutely final, and you ask me to trust you here.)
- Rising When He Calls (Nothing is stronger than your voice.)

Whisper Prayer:

Yes, Lord. I have come to believe.

Listening with the Church — Fifth Sunday of Lent

Unbound Together

After Jesus calls Lazarus out of the tomb, he says to those gathered, “Untie him and let him go” (John 11:44). The miracle isn’t just in rising—it’s in being set free and guided back into life with the support of others. In the same way, our faith isn’t meant to be lived in isolation. The Catechism reminds us that the parish is the “community of the faithful” and a “visible center of unity” where the Church is present in daily life (CCC 2179). We are strengthened, encouraged, and sometimes unbound through the support, prayer, and example of our fellow believers.

This week, consider: What binds you in fear, habit, or doubt? Who in your parish, family, or circle of friends helps you walk into the freedom Jesus offers? And how might you be a source of that same support for someone else?

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion

At the Procession with Psalms—Gospel Matthew 21:1-11

Readings: Isaiah 50: 4-7, Psalm 22:8-9, 17-18, 19-20, 23-34, Philippians 2:6-11, Matthew 26:14–27:66

But he did not answer him one word...

Palm Sunday marks the beginning of Holy Week and is familiar to us as the Sunday of the Great Paradox. The triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem before Mass, then the Passion narrative as the Gospel reading at Mass. Yes, yes—now where are the instructions for folding my palm leaf into a cross again? Oh, I think I saved it on my phone, just a moment.

Today, we are invited to hear this all again. For the fourteenth time, or the hundredth time, the Church is trying to help us prepare for Easter. And there are a handful of very striking moments in all this that can be easily overlooked.

And one of the big ones is: Jesus is not who anyone expected, or daresay, wanted.

In his homily for Palm Sunday, 2021, Pope Francis said, "From the start, Jesus leaves us amazed. His people give him a solemn welcome, yet he enters Jerusalem on a lowly colt. His people expect a powerful liberator at Passover, yet he comes to bring the Passover to fulfillment by sacrificing himself. His people are hoping to triumph over the Romans by the sword, but Jesus comes to celebrate God's triumph through the cross. What happened to those people who in a few days' time went from shouting "Hosanna" to crying out "Crucify him"? What happened? They were following an *idea* of the Messiah rather than *the* Messiah."

How often do we, too, follow our ideas of God, rather than the God who actually shows up?

So it isn't just the paradox of the joyfulness of his entry into Jerusalem contrasted with the agony of his death on the cross. It's the paradox of Jesus himself. The God-Man. He said Blessed are the meek, turn the other cheek, whoever loses his life will find it, the first shall be last, strength in weakness, and all the rest. We are accustomed to hearing these words, and while we like the sound of them, we typically file them away under "nice but not very helpful."

"Do you not hear how many things they are testifying against you?" Pilate asked Jesus.

But he did not answer him one word.

Here is where we might have wanted someone to speak up, to defend himself, to put Pilate in his place—to stop this madness and win the day. But instead, Jesus keeps his mouth shut. And he let it all happen.

In his silence, he proved that every single word he preached... he also lived.

And so, by the time we kneel down at Mass, when Jesus gives up his spirit, we know that this has really happened. He really went to his death to save us. His silence shouts and screams at us from then to now, every Palm Sunday. It is his love that cries out. And like the stunned centurion at the foot of the cross, we fearfully, tearfully say, "Truly, this was the Son of God!"

Throughout Lent, Jesus has been speaking to us. Gently but firmly inviting us to a conversion of heart, to trust him to see us as we really are, to heal our physical and emotional wounds, and to free us from what keeps us from him. Today, his silence is also speaking. How will we respond?

Consider:

Jesus' teachings call for a different perspective on the world. One of the most challenging parts of discipleship is seeing suffering as a path to spiritual growth and a deeper relationship with him. When our suffering is united with Christ's, it can give meaning to those events that go far beyond the moment. What is one particular area of suffering you can offer to Christ this week?

Whisper Prayer:

Jesus, lead me.

Listening with the Church — Holy Week

The Living Tree

From *The Way of the Cross*, Caryl Houselander

Look at this cross, so much bigger than the man whose body will be stretched to fit it. So much higher than the height of the man who will be lifted up above the earth on it and who, being lifted up will draw all men to Himself. Christ receives it with joy because he knows that this is the dead weight that must have crushed mankind had He not lifted it from their backs. This is the dead wood which at His touch is transformed into a living tree. At His touch the hewn tree takes root again and the roots thrust down into the earth, and the tree breaks into flower.

Already in Bethlehem, when the newborn child lay in the manger, a secret bud shone on the tree of life. Now it is going to break into flower for ever, and that flower will sow the seeds of life that never die, for Christ is the flower and the seed.

Because Christ is to be stretched to the size of the cross, all those who love Him will grow to the size of it, not only to the size of man's suffering, which is bigger than man, but to the size of Christ's love that is bigger than all suffering.

The Resurrection of the Lord

Readings: Acts 10:34a, 37-43, Psalm 118:1-2, 16-17, 22-23, Colossians 3:1-4 Or 1 Corinthians 5:6b-8, John 20:1-9 or Matthew 28:1-10

"Do not be afraid."

In Matthew's Gospel for Easter Sunday, there are quite a few *actually frightening* things that happen when Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to Jesus' tomb—first, an earthquake. Then, an angel descends from heaven. Then, this heavenly being just rolls away the stone... and sits on it. His appearance alone is enough to terrify a group of tough-guy guards, who were too scared to move.

Then, he told the women, "Do not be afraid."

Don't be afraid. This doesn't usually work. In fact, in psychological circles, it is often said that it backfires. But, this is an angel sent with a message, "I know that you are seeking Jesus the crucified. He is not here, for he has been raised just as he said." Now he had their attention.

Fear was replaced by a shaky, hesitant joy. That "is it too good to be true" feeling we have all had. But then, as they walked away, there he was. Jesus himself. We can only imagine their stunned disbelief, shock, hope, and awe at seeing him.

And he said, "Do not be afraid."

And like the angel, once they really saw him, and were paying attention. He went on. "Go tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me."

Today's Gospel reading leaves it right there. They have seen him. They have the news, they have his instructions. It's extraordinary, but it's all true.

We've spent the last six weeks of Lent learning about who Jesus is, what He came for, and how to begin or deepen our relationship with Him. He has encouraged us to dig deeply, live authentically. He taught us the value of his Word in times of struggle and temptation. He has met us at the well where we learned we could be our true selves with him and experience his love. He taught us that our eyes only really open to the possibility of life with him when we really see him. And he spoke to us in the silence of his Passion, when his love for us was proven, irrevocably. This is who we saw die for our sake—and who we now see alive, also for our sake, to show us the way forward.

Everything Jesus taught us through Lent has been leading to this moment—not only to the triumph of the Resurrection, but to our encounter with the Risen Lord.

Easter is indeed the story of Christ's victory over death—the act that opens the way to our salvation.

But it is also the moment when the Risen Jesus turns toward those who loved him and speaks the words that echo through every age:

"Do not be afraid."

Because he lives, we can walk without fear.

Because he lives, we are free to follow him into new life.

Because he lives, everything has changed.

He goes before us.

He calls us.

And he invites us now to live in the light of his Resurrection.

Listening with the Church — Easter

Regina Caeli – Queen of Heaven*

V. Queen of Heaven, rejoice, alleluia.

R. For He whom you did merit to bear, alleluia.

V. Has risen, as he said, alleluia.

R. Pray for us to God, alleluia.

V. Rejoice and be glad, O Virgin Mary, alleluia.

R. For the Lord has truly risen, alleluia.

Let us pray. O God, who gave joy to the world through the resurrection of Thy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, grant we beseech Thee, that through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, His Mother, we may obtain the joys of everlasting life. Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Said in place of the Angelus during Eastertide.

Blessing of Easter Eggs

We beseech Thee, O Lord, to bestow Thy benign blessing upon these eggs, to make them a wholesome food for Thy faithful, who gratefully partake of them in honor of the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ.