



LENT

Faith Conversations

Week of March 9 - 15

SUNDAY READINGS: Deuteronomy 26: 4-10, Psalm 91, Romans 10: 8-13, Luke 4: 1-13

ADULT REFLECTION

In the first reading we hear of the Jewish custom of offering their first fruits of farming to God. This act recognizes that the very land that sustains them is a gift from God. The Gospel tells of Jesus, before starting his public ministry, going first to the desert to fast and pray for forty days.

These two readings highlight what we hear in the sung verse before the Gospel is proclaimed: "One does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes forth from the mouth of God." God has beautifully made us, body-and-soul. According to the Creator's natural order, our spirit is to guide and be expressed in and through our body. To sustain and lead our spirits, God gives us Jesus. Jesus is for us both the Word-made-Flesh and in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, our Food-for-the-Journey.

Daily life can be so busy it can feel like caring for our spiritual self is a luxury we don't have time for. Kids need to be driven here and there, work has deadlines, and daily to-do lists rarely get all done. Does our spirit lead us through all of this with a certain presence of mind? Lent is a great time for taking stock of who we are, how we live, and who we want to be

Reflection Questions:

- Does your spirituality impact your broader life?
- How do you feed your spirit? (Prayerful reading of the Bible, God's Word; a walk in nature, uplifting music, a good book, a playful hobby, a heart to heart conversation, receiving Jesus in the Eucharist?)

FAMILY CONVERSATION STARTERS

Let's make a list of what we need (rather than want) to be healthy and whole people. What items on our list take care of our bodies? What items take care of our deeper self which transcends our bodies? Is there an order of importance?

"One does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes forth from the mouth of God" (Mt. 4:4). What do you think this means? How does what God has to say help us be more fully alive? How can we hear him? Might Jesus be encouraging us to take quiet time each day to hear (or feed on) his Word? What does it mean that Jesus is sometimes called the Word of God?

How can we, as a family and as individuals, be more attentive to hearing God and being sure our full selves are healthy this Lent?



PRAYER

Be with us, Jesus, as we enter our own 40-day journey this Lent. Help us to know your unconditional love for us so that we may have the courage to love others more like you. Amen.



FASTING

Give up one evening of TV, or whatever your usual entertainment, to spend some quiet time prayerfully creating your family's plan for this Lent.



ALMSGIVING

Jesus went to the desert to prepare for his mission. This week, spend some time considering as a family how God is inviting you to participate in Jesus' mission to the marginalized this Lent.





LENT

Faith Conversations

Week of March 16-22

SUNDAY READINGS: *Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18; Psalm 27, Philippians 3:17- 4:1; Luke 9:28-36*

ADULT REFLECTION

Our First Reading at Mass tells of the covenant (agreed upon relationship) God makes with Abram. While in a trance-like state, Abram is promised numerous descendants and land to be their home. It was years before Abram's "barren" wife did have a single son, and the dispersions from and struggles to retain the Holy Land continue to this day.

In the Gospel, in a similarly mysterious encounter, a handful of Jesus' closest friends see his glory. God the Father speaks, "This is my chosen Son; listen to him." Jesus then returned to his normal state and soon died an un-glorious death (of course to be followed by his victorious rising from the dead).

It seems God's promises are mysteriously real already now, but also not yet fully revealed. God reveals himself and his love to us now, we can know him now. Yet there is always more to experience. We can strive to build the Kingdom of God now, yet we pray fervently as Jesus taught us: "Thy Kingdom Come!"

Reflection Questions:

- Ponder this truth. In what ways have God's promises of presence, relationship, provision, salvation, glory already been real and fulfilled in your life now? In what ways are they not yet fully fulfilled or not what you expected?
- What is the wisdom and beauty of this "now and not yet" reality in our life with God? What is the challenge? What light does this shed on our observance of Lent? How can listening to Jesus, as the Gospel reminds us, help us in this dynamic unfolding?

FAMILY CONVERSATION STARTERS

In Sunday's First Reading, God makes a promise to Abram (later Abraham.) What does God promise him? What has God promised us? How have you experienced God keeping these promises to you in the past?

Is there a condition for us to receive God's promises? How can we turn to God this Lent, and become more open to receiving his promises in our lives?



PRAYER

Be with us, Jesus, as we try to listen to you and trust completely in your plan for our lives. Open the "ears" of our hearts. Strengthen us to pour ourselves out in love, for we believe that you, yourself, will fill us. Amen.



FASTING

Give up listening to music or your usual podcast one or two days this week so as to better listen to Jesus, and one another.



ALMSGIVING

Practice *seeing* the difficulties and needs of others this week. Talk together about this exercise of empathy and choose one situation where you can actively ease the hardships of another.





LENT

Faith Conversations

Week of March 23-29

SUNDAY READINGS: Exodus 3: 1-8, 13-15; Psalm 103; I Corinthians 10: 1-6, 10-12; Luke 13: 1-9

ADULT REFLECTION

In this week's readings we hear about the mercy of God. In the first reading, God sees the suffering of his people enslaved in Egypt, and comes to rescue them through Moses. The Psalm repeats, "The Lord is kind and merciful." In the Gospel, Jesus explains that God does not kill off the unjust but rather, like the hopeful gardener, gives people every opportunity to choose what is right.

A gardener can cultivate and fertilize and prune. But he cannot make a tree bear fruit. Similarly, God makes himself known, shows us the way to live in Jesus, and displays his love in countless ways. He cannot, however, make our choices for us. God wants to be in a loving relationship with each of us. And that requires our free response. If we choose to respond to his love with love, if we remain in him as a branch grafted to the vine (see John 15), then his very own life, love – the Holy Spirit, will dwell within us. The Spirit will give our lives purpose and direction, and make us fully alive and fruitful.

Reflection Questions:

- *Such mercy gently holds us. Will we reach out our roots and branches and let our loving God bear fruit in and through us? How do we do this?*
- *Many Catholics feel a certain uneasiness with God the Holy Spirit. How is your understanding of the Spirit helped by thinking of the Spirit as merciful Love, or as God's own life/breath/power flowing in you?*

FAMILY CONVERSATION STARTERS

Our Sunday readings teach us about God's mercy. Do you know what mercy is? How would you define it? How have you experienced mercy in your life? What was that like?

How do we experience God's mercy toward us?

How can we show mercy to each other here at home? How can we show it to others beyond our family?



PRAYER

Jesus, you share our humanity. Open our eyes this Lent to see where we tend to push God aside. In flame our hearts with the strength of feeling that will help us rearrange our lives in order to put God first. Amen.



FASTING

What can you take away from your life this week to help put (and keep) God first?



ALMSGIVING

Jesus was angered by injustice. What injustice do you see around you? Choose one action this week that will contribute to making your home, your school/work-place, or community more just.





LENT

Faith Conversations

Week of March 30 - April 5

SUNDAY READINGS: *Joshua 5:9-12; Psalm 34; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Luke 15: 1-3, 11-32*

ADULT REFLECTION

This week's readings are bursting with the goodness of God. A God who not only provides his people with food for the journey (manna), but restores them to their own fruitful land. A God who delivers from fear and shame all those who look to him. A God who reconciles and makes new. A God who considers all that he has as belonging also to us, his children, and celebrates each time we return to him.

Life can be hard. We may wonder where the goodness of God is for us, or feel we've long since lost that "privilege." And yet Jesus brings the truth of The Prodigal Son into even the toughest of human realities. All is gift. The Heavenly Father desires goodness and fullness of life for all of us, his children. He forgives, already holding out all he has to his wayward children, if only they seek reunion. The love we experience for our own children is a mere reflection of the love God has for each of us.

Reflection Questions:

- *Christian life is a process of ongoing conversion. In what areas of your life are you like the Prodigal Son: unappreciative and self-absorbed?*
- *How are you like the "good son:" self-righteous and dissatisfied?*
- *Lay your brokenness before our good God. Do not fear, but trust. God will not condemn, but rather embrace and heal us!*

FAMILY CONVERSATION STARTERS

When you think of goodness, who or what do you think of? Is God good? How do we know?

When someone is truly good, we can trust them. Did the two sons in the story of the Prodigal Son trust that their father was good? How did they show this?

How can we show our trust in our good God this week? But a response of trust is still lacking something. How can we show our love for God?



PRAYER

Lord, we praise you for your goodness! Stir up within us all the goodness and richness of your Spirit, already dwelling within us. Help us trust that we can always come back to you after failing. Make us ambassadors of your goodness to others. Amen.



FASTING

Hungry enough for pig food, the prodigal son was finally able to see his relationship with his father clearly. Pick one favorite food or past-time you'll give up this week. When you feel the emptiness, ask God to speak to your heart.



ALMSGIVING

Jesus was accused of "welcoming sinners and eating with them." Who might you invite to your home for a meal this week (or soon) – to be ministers of God's love and goodness?





LENT

Faith Conversations

Week of April 6-12

SUNDAY READINGS: *Isaiah 43: 16-21; Psalm 126; Philippians 3:8-14; John 8:1-11*

ADULT REFLECTION

In our first reading, the prophet Isaiah relays God’s message, “see, I am doing something new!” The Psalm heralds the great and joyful things God has and will do for us. St. Paul writes of “forgetting what lies behind” and “straining forward toward the prize of God’s upward calling, in Christ Jesus.” The Gospel has Jesus setting aside the old traditional punishment for adultery under Mosaic law, and uttering words of healing and empowerment – staggering in their newness. “Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin any more.”

We can fall into thinking that this religion of ours is old and tired, stodgy and out-of-touch. But the truth is that the unconditional love of our God, revealed in Scripture, is always fresh and relevant. God reveals his name to Moses as “I AM.” Transcendent of time and space, our God is living and attentive, constantly working to bring about something new and beautiful, and never out of touch. He is the Author of Life, the Risen One, and his Word is relevant for you, for me, for the world. Now. Staggering in its newness!

Reflection Questions:

- *Have you fallen into some degree of despair/ hopelessness in the face of your own challenges or those of the world around us?*
- *Have you thrown in the towel, or are you planting seeds of the Kingdom and participating in the newness of our God and what he’s doing?*
- *What is moving /shifting in you these days?*
- *What new thing might God be wanting to do in you?*

FAMILY CONVERSATION STARTERS

Does faith in God and going to church seem a little old-fashioned and not very up-to-date and cool? How so? And if not to you, what about to others around you?

Faith in Jesus and the Catholic Church have been around a very long time. But does that make it less true or good or beautiful? What is something “old” that you value? Why?

Our God is living and personally invested in loving us unconditionally. Our Church is called to help us see how the Good News of Jesus is relevant in every place and in every age. Have you experienced God, alive in your own life? What new things is he calling you to do for him? How might you help someone else see the relevance of Jesus’ Good News?



PRAYER

Jesus, renew us! Renew our Church. Renew our world. Give us new perspective and hope. Give us new energy and courage to share this hopeful vision with others. We trust in you and surrender ourselves to you. Amen.



FASTING

What old habit can you replace with a new pattern of thinking, acting, or speaking that better reflects our living God? What good, valuable old habit have you fallen out of that you can renew this week?



ALMSGIVING

Who can you actively share hope with this week? How? Write it in your calendar for the week





LENT

Faith Conversations

Week of April 13-19

SUNDAY READINGS: Luke 19:28-40 (before procession); Isaiah 50:4-7; Psalm 22; Philippians 2:6-11; Luke 22:14 - 23:56

ADULT REFLECTION

At the start of Palm Sunday Mass, we hear of people greeting Jesus with palm branches and praise. Later, we read the whole story of how Jesus died. It starts with Jesus giving us himself in the Eucharist (which we celebrate on Holy Thursday). Then we hear about Jesus' suffering and death on the cross (Good Friday). Finally we hear of Jesus' body being laid in a tomb (kept in mind Holy Saturday). The final part of the story is revealed on Easter when God definitively defeats sin and death!

This is the week to pause and let all of this sink in, until it becomes personal. To listen as if we're hearing it for the first time. To see with our imagination, all the actions, words, gestures, and happenings surrounding the death of Jesus the One who surrenders to death so to defeat it.

Reflection Questions:

- Perhaps you want to re-read this Gospel passage outside of Mass, on your own, when you can sit in silence somewhere. Let the Word of God itself speak to you. Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you.
- What do you hear?
- What is your connection to Jesus?
- How do you feel?
- What action is God calling you to?

FAMILY CONVERSATION STARTERS

Why do you think it was so important to Jesus to leave us himself in the Eucharist before he died?

It's been said that even if you were the only person who needed saving, Jesus would have died just for you. How does that make you feel? Does it call you to action in your life?

Jesus prayed for Peter that his faith would not fail. How can we pray for each other this week? What can we do as a family this Holy Week to walk closely with Jesus, remembering his love for us?



PRAYER

Lord Jesus! Thank you for your tender, personal, transforming love for each one of us. Thank you for your cross. Holy Spirit, help us quiet our hearts this Holy Week so that we can truly hear you. Move us to respond to your love with love. Amen.



FASTING

Along with fasting on Good Friday, what routine can we fast from this Holy Week to make space for extra reflection, spiritual reading, and prayer?



ALMSGIVING

At the Last Supper, Jesus emphasized that a true leader is like him, "one who serves." What is one service or chore we can do for each other with greater love this week? What is one specific service we can do for someone outside our family?

