

# Something Different For



## LENT 2023

### 'My Lenten Pause'

*Our Focus this Lent is to –*

***Be the Love you want to see in our World!***

Costing you nothing but your time. You follow your daily routine but do things in a more thoughtful & reflective way.

This is a 'DIY' experience to aid you prepare for Easter.

There are prayers, reflections and suggestions based on the Sunday Gospel, for each of the weeks of Lent

**LENT 2023**

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*The reflections and suggestions on these pages are meant as a guide.*

*You can do some of them or all of them. Take your time, be gentle with yourself – you have a full week.*

**MAKE A  
DIFFERENCE**

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## ...to 'My Lenten Pause' for 2023

This a Lenten retreat with a difference – You are the retreat leader, you set your own pace and work around your own lifestyle and schedule.

Lent is traditionally a time when we take stock, notice, set right and prepare for Easter.

All this retreat asks of you is that you pause and gift yourself a bit of time each day to reflect, prepare and pray.

For each of the weeks of Lent there is a series of prayers reflections and suggestions based on the Sunday Gospel that offers you starting ideas and practical suggestions for the week.

Take your time, use what is useful for you. The reflections and suggestions on these pages are meant as a guide. You can do some of them or all of them. Be open to what this Lent will bring and gentle with yourself.

*Our Focus this Lent is to –*

***Be the Love you want to see in our World!***

We are repeatedly told throughout the gospel that...

*We are Truly loved*

*We are Truly loveable*

*We can share that love with others*

Therefore, as you begin this retreat be sure of the promises that God makes you ...

I will give you rest.  
I will strengthen you.  
I will answer you.  
I believe in you.  
I will bless you.  
I am for you.  
I will not fail you.  
I will provide for you.  
I will be with you  
I love you.

And...

*enjoy!*

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# My Lenten Pause - 2023

First Sunday of Lent ~ 26<sup>th</sup> Feb 2023

“Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness”.

Welcome to the first week of our Lenten retreat. Each week these reflection sheets will be a guide for you to spend some more time in prayer and reflection throughout Lent. It is an opportunity to take some ‘time out’ each day.

*Our Focus this Lent is to - **Be the Love you want to see in our World!***

We begin our Lenten retreat by allowing ourselves to be led into the ‘wilderness’. We need to remove ourselves from our hectic world for a few minutes each day to give ourselves space and time. In the Gospels we are told that Jesus frequently goes away to a quiet place to pray, to escape the crowds, to spend time with God. This is a good place to start.



## Tasks for this week:

**Firstly** you are invited to create a **simple sacred space** in your home. This could be in the corner of your bedroom or sitting room. It should be somewhere that you can go for some quiet time each day. Use some symbols in your space – such as a cross, candles, a bible, or some significant symbol for you. You can add to it as the weeks go by with significant prayers, events, people, symbols, etc. The colour for Lent is **Violet** so you may like to use that colour in your sacred space. You could even create your own *mini desert* using some sand and stones. *Be creative yet keep it simple.* Let it be your little oasis, sanctuary.

**Secondly**, some people like to carry something with them in their pocket during the weeks of Lent, like a **small stone or pebble**. As you do so, pray and reflect on where in your life you are in need of God’s mercy. It can be a reminder of the things that weigh you down, or a worry or concern that prevents you from living as freely and as fully as you can. Take your stone out once every day and hold it in your hand. By the end of the five weeks you will know every part of it as well as you know your inner self. Some also carry the stone in their pocket to remind them, whenever they touch it, to look for something to be grateful for, to say thank you for, and even to remind themselves to do something merciful – a small act of kindness ... you might want to try it. At night leave your pebble in your sacred space as you leave all the worries & works of that day in God’s hands.



**Thirdly**, in Lent most try to give something up. This year, for this retreat (*and hopefully beyond*) make a commitment to yourself to **consciously** do at least **1** thing each day to help another – without looking for anything in return. It doesn’t have to be anything huge (*of course it could be if you’re that way inclined*).

**Lastly**, get yourself a small notebook that you can carry around with you. Make a diary of your retreat & your journey through this Lent. Keep a record of thoughts, prayers, things that you have noticed, words that have brought comfort – Try and write at least two or three lines at least each day and don’t be too critical. Just whatever comes to your mind.



## Prayer suggestions for the week:

1. **Breathing exercise:** Try to do this once a day. Gift yourself 5 minutes each day for prayer. When you come to prayer, **Be still**. Take three deep slow breaths. Then, focus on your normal breathing. On the in-breath be aware that it is life-giving, nurturing, a gift from God. On the out-breath be aware that you are feeding the plants and trees around you; you are blessing the world around you. Stay with that for a while: The in-breath as a gift from God; the out-breath as your gift to the world.

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## 2. Read **Sunday's Gospel**, two or three times: **Matthew 4: 1-11**

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.



- Sit with the text and pick a word or phrase that stands out to you. Repeat that word or phrase in your mind several times. Then, in silence, let it sink into your heart. Why is that word or phrase relevant to you at this moment?
- There are many times in our lives that we can feel 'In the wilderness' – Why? What caused this for you?
- There are many people driven into the wilderness because of fear, exclusion, difference, or neglect – can you bring these people to mind?
- God never left Jesus alone, is always there comforting, caring, loving, and protecting. Even when we do not realise. Look back & thank God for the moments in your life when God was there for you, even when you did not realise it!

### **Something to think about:**

*G. K. Chesterton, a master of the pithy saying, once wrote: "The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and left untried." Indeed, to truly follow Christ in any age has never been easy; it requires sacrifice and struggle, truths we'd rather not embrace. While most of us will never become desert saints, nor will we go toe-to-toe with the devil, we do have our own places of struggle. These are real places involving real people in real lives. But our struggles are also about confronting the enemy within, a more intangible foe we attempt to hush in our pursuit of the superlatives. What is needed is what is always been available, the desert—a place of quiet where we are stripped down to only the essentials, laid bare before God, and challenged to the core of our being to remain faithful. Solitude or quiet can be sought even in the midst of activity; what's important is not how one gets there but that one does go. So for those willing, and as the Spirit leads, bring on the desert!*

- Watch & reflect on the short video – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P-6a25Yo2wE> - "Jesus in the Wilderness".

### **Thought for the Week:**

'The question is not "How am I to find God?" but "How am I to let myself be found by Him?"

The question is not "How am I to know God?" but "How am I to let myself be known by God?"

And finally, the question is not "How am I to love God?" but "How am I to let myself be loved by God?"

God is looking into the distance for me, trying to find me, and longing to bring me home.' (Henri J. Nouwen)

#### **Prayer:**

Thank you for this season of Lent which gives us all the opportunity to be still and to take in the wonders of creation and be thankful for all you have done for us.

Forgive us for the times we did not appreciate all the gifts you have given to us. We often waste the wonderful gift of water which we so much take for granted. Help us to realise that it is often in our darkness that we can be strengthened and find new clarity to our purpose in life. God often leads us to places we fear most to realise that with him we have nothing to fear.

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## Second Sunday of Lent ~ 5<sup>th</sup> March 2023

*“Get up and do not be afraid.”*

Welcome to week 2 of our DIY Lenten Retreat. How are you doing? Did you manage to create a sacred space for yourself last week? If not, don't worry, you can still do it with some candles, symbols, the colour violet for Lent! Are you keeping thoughts, your prayers in your notepad?

This week's **task** is to find some space and time for yourself. Jesus is calling us to do that this week - to join him on the mountain. You don't have to go up a high mountain to be alone. Decide what is best for you – 10 or 15 minutes in the morning or evening? While out walking? Gift this time to yourself, turn off phones, computers, social networks, ... schedule it in your diary and let friends and family know that you won't be available for this 10 to 15 minutes every day. *Keep it as precious.* Jesus takes the disciples up a mountain this week, is with them on this journey and dispels their fears ~ He walks with you!

*Maybe write or print out your favourite prayer and put it in your prayer space.*



### Prayer Suggestions for this week:

**Breathing exercise: *Be still.*** Take three deep slow breaths. Then, focus on your normal breathing. Do this for as long as you like. This is the breath of life. Thank God for this gift of breath and life. Repeat the following: *“Lord, you are closer to me than my own breathing”* (St. Teresa).

### Gospel reflection:

**Read Matt 17:1-9 ‘The Transfiguration’ two-three times. Revisit it a few times during the week**

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!” When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Get up and do not be afraid.” And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, “Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead”.



**Is there a word, phrase, an idea that strikes you? Stay with this for a few moments.**

### Consider the following:

- The transfiguration experience was one that clarified Jesus' relationship with his Father. What have been the experiences, the moments of insight that have clarified your relationship with God?
- Jesus says, “Do not be afraid” numerous times in the Gospel. Our encounter with Jesus dispels fear. Are there fears in your own life, worries? Can you allow Jesus to dispel that fear?
- The encounter was a journey that involved the climbing and descending of a mountain, a moment of fear, awe, anxiety; a touch and comfort from a loved one and a mission – Who has comforted you in moments of uncertainty and anxiety on your journey? Bring them to mind. As you look back can you recognise the loving presence of Jesus who was close to you, dispelling fear, even when you felt far from him? Give thanks.
- God wants to share his glory with us! We get a glimpse of this in today's gospel. God is constantly reaching out, giving us many glimpses love at work throughout our lives, our relationships... throughout our day!



Radiant God, fill us with light, love and courage to carry good news into all the corners of the world and to bring back the joy of your presence. Amen

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## Something to think about:

*“We all have mountains to climb” – a phrase we say very often. But Jesus says, “Do not be afraid”. First, welcome the peace of God, believing that God welcomes us without any preconditions. It is not only that God accepts us as we are, but God loves each and every one of us deeply, madly, one might even say, and for all time. Jesus came to reveal this love of God. Do we understand that he bears our burdens and our sins and that with him we find peace of heart, inner reconciliation? Christ accomplishes his work of transfiguration within us and in our neighbours. He converts the deepest resistances which oppose reconciliation. With his light he enters, little by little, into the darkest of our shadows, and illuminates our deepest fears. The glimpse of God’s glory, God’s loving presence is there right before us and within us.*



*C.S. Lewis referred to this transfiguration of the everyday as being burdened with the weight of the glory of others, in the world around us. If we were truly at tune to it we would be overwhelmed, he wrote, to see that the world is populated with those whom we might refer to as gods and goddesses if we were to see the full glory of God that is in them and in creation. To carry the burden of upholding the image of God in our neighbour, to see in them the transfigured Jesus, is our daily task of discipleship. Recognise that God loves you, brings you peace, touches your life and the lives of others & this inner peace leads us to transform our world!!*

- Watch & reflect for a few moments to a look at Rob Bell’s short video “**The Lump**” – <https://youtu.be/-gf40Jli0i8> – Can you relate to the story being told? Reconciliation is like our “letting the covers be pulled back!” Maybe you can think of an example in your own?

## Suggestions for the week:

When you wake up in the morning: Stay in the silence of that moment without radio, mobile phone or T.V. Become aware of your breathing. Be still. Take three deep, slow breaths, and then focus on your normal breathing. Tune in to the sounds in your house; listen to the ‘dawn chorus’ of the birds. Notice the glory of God around you.

***I thank you, God, for the gift of life and creation. What can I do this Lent to show that I am a steward of God’s creation? Do I recycle? Could I walk/cycle instead of drive sometimes?***

When travelling on your own in the car, on the road, or on your bicycle: Open yourself to your environment and other pilgrims on the way; Look out for spring flowers; notice the colour and shape of buildings; be aware of the people who cross your path and come into your life today. Notice the glory of God around you.

***I thank you, God, for your presence in every person, moment and place.***

When going to sleep at night: Begin your preparations for bed earlier than usual and think of all the situations you met today; Give thanks for all the blessings of the day; Let go of all hurts that have accumulated through the day ~ name them and give them to God. Notice the glory of God around you.

***“I thank you, God, for the gift of your companionship this day.”***

***Remember to place your pebble in your sacred space – hand all the burdens of each day to God...***

## Thoughts for the Week:

“There are three essential elements of the work of reconciliation... We must recognise and understand accurately what has gone wrong... Secondly, we must love others and work to benefit them. For if we truly love people and try to improve our world & relationships, then we become agents of Christ’s reconciliation... Finally, being seeds of God’s creation, of course, requires that we remain in constant fellowship with Christ.”

~Joel R. White

Remember that vision on the Mount of Transfiguration; and let it be ours, even in the glare of earthly joys and brightnesses, to lift up our eyes, like those wondering three, and see no man any more, save Jesus only.

Alexander MacLaren

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## Third Sunday of Lent ~ 15th March 2023

**John 4:15 "Give me this water so that I may not be thirsty".**

*'Thirst' is something everybody experiences. Water quenches physical thirst. The soul can suffer thirst also and our relationships with God can become dry. A strange irony exists in our world: people in one part of the world suffer drought and famine; they are spiritually alive; conscious of their neighbour; dependent and grateful to God. In another part of the world, those who want for nothing in material terms, live with a spiritual drought; the Creator is made redundant. Let us relieve the thirsts of the world.* (Trocaire)

Welcome to week 3 of our Lenten Retreat. How did last week go for you? Did you find anything particularly difficult? Why? Are you more aware of God at work in your life, in the world around you? Have you gifted yourself a little space each day to pray? Keep it up!

**Breathing exercises:** As you have been doing for the past two weeks, focusing on your breathing: take three deep slow breaths, then focus on your normal breathing. Do this for as long as you can. Build up the time each day to reach 5 mins (*or more*). This is the breath of life. Thank God for this gift. Repeat the following slowly: "Be. Be Still. Be still and know. Be still and know that I am God" (*Psalm 46:10*)



**Gospel reflection:** Read John 4:5-30. "*The Woman at the Well*". It is a long Gospel (*so forgive us that we have not put included the text this week*) but a beautiful encounter between Jesus and the woman. Read it a few times – come back to it again during the week. **Is there a word, phrase, idea that strikes you? Stay with this for a few moments.**

**Consider the following:**

- This is a very personal encounter with Jesus.
- Jesus meets her where she is at. Not where she would like to be, not with expectations. He shouldn't even have acknowledged her as she is clearly an outcast, a Samaritan woman with a reputation. Where are you really at? Can you let Jesus touch your story?
- Jesus' innocent request for water sparks a conversation that is soon going in several directions at once: Jesus leads the woman on a wonderful journey. When have you or someone you know, made a similar journey in your relationship with God, with others, with your own self?
- What do you truly thirst for?

Today's Gospel is a beautiful story of Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well. It is full of metaphor, and you can approach it from many positions: the woman having an encounter, a spiritual experience, direction from God. Or Jesus, a spiritual guide, a teacher, a comforter, challenging. Notice how patient he is with her, but he also challenges her to grow to what she is capable of. This woman experiences conversion and growth at this well, not just physical quenching of thirst, but a spiritual one.



The story of this 'nameless' woman at the well gently screams to us that God loves us despite our tainted values or outlook. God values us enough to actively seek us, to welcome us to intimacy, and to rejoice in our company and worship. As a result of Jesus' conversation, only a person like the Samaritan woman, an outcast from her own people, could understand what this means. To be wanted, to be cared for when no one, not even herself, could see anything of value in her. Do you truly know yourself as loved? Do we truly see others as loved, even wanted at times?

The woman returns to her village bubbling over with joy. What gifts from your prayer do you bring back to your life? Where are the places in your life, (*relationships, activities, practices, environments*) where your joy naturally wells up like a spring of living water? How can you visit this spring more often? How might you share the gift of life-giving water with others?

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## Something to think about:

Timing, honesty, and willingness to see a different reality can lead to dramatic change

**Encounter the divine in the ordinary** - The woman has a face-to-face, one-to-one interaction with Jesus while she collects water at the well. This meeting is not a chance encounter and is unusual for a variety of reasons. Typically, people come to the well early in the morning. But this woman arrives in the heat of the day. She may want to avoid other women as she may be shunned because of her promiscuity (she has had many husbands and the man she lives with now is not her husband). So, she ventures out when it's unlikely that she'll see anyone else. True transformation involves an encounter with God. We may not expect this interaction, but it happens in the course of our daily routines.



**Be upfront with God** - The woman was upfront with Jesus about her beliefs and her doubts. She questions him and his motives. She continues to challenge him, even daring to ask if he is greater than "our father Jacob, who gave us this well" ... Her directness and honesty are a great example of how we can be straightforward with Jesus, as long as we are open to hearing the truth. I believe Jesus prefers honest questioning over human holiness or false respect. Don't be afraid to confront God with your concerns and confusion. He welcomes the opportunity to speak with us, even in unconventional conversations.

**Be willing to change your worldview** - The woman at the well articulates and defends her worldview to Jesus. What is most notable about this encounter is that the woman changes her view of the world based on her conversation with Jesus. She exchanges past suppositions for new truths. Changing the lens through which you view the world is perhaps the hardest thing that you can do. For me, abandoning a long-term belief is difficult, upsetting and painful. But being able to toss out wrong ideas and replace them with more accurate, loving and compassionate views of reality is a turning point, sparking transformation.

**Recognize truth and accept grace** - We are told what the woman said in her conversation with Jesus. But we aren't really sure how she is feeling about the exchange until the very end of the story. When Jesus confronts her sin in a matter-of-fact way, she acknowledges the truth but doesn't ask for forgiveness or rationalize her actions. Interestingly, she doesn't seem to feel condemned (perhaps she couldn't feel more like an outcast than she already did) but rather excited about Jesus's words, the grace that is extended to her. Again, we don't know exactly how she felt but we do know that many people believed because of her testimony. She experiences grace, acceptance and forgiveness, which compels her to share her story freely.

"GOD DOES NOT BEGIN BY ASKING US ABOUT OUR  
**ABILITY**  
BUT ONLY ABOUT OUR  
**AVAILABILITY**  
AND IF WE THEN PROVE OUR  
**DEPENDABILITY**  
HE WILL INCREASE OUR  
**CAPABILITY**"  
-NEAL A MAXWELL

**Share your story** - The transformation is evident when the woman tells her story to the people in her town. Her words must have been convincing because she now has credibility in her community. Being able to triumphantly emerge from a difficult situation and articulate how you have changed is both a sign of transformation and a transformative experience itself. When you are able to understand, describe, and tell your story, you can see how you have been changed.

Like her, we may think that our mistakes have doomed us. But we see how an uncomfortable situation helps redeem this woman and beautifully transform her relationship with God and other people. And so it can be with each of us.....?

Adapted from - *The Woman at the Well: How Personal Transformation Happens* by Julie Rains

## Suggestions for the week:

- **Have a look at and reflect on** the short video by iEmanuella, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hgwSbYazftg>
- **Place a bowl of water in your prayer space.** This week recall all the different things you use water for on a daily basis. Give thanks to God for this wonderful gift of water.
- **Drink at least one glass of water each day in a mindful way:** Take the water slowly to your lips, Notice the coolness of the water, Feel the heating effect of your mouth on the water, Sense the water on your tongue and its flow at the back of your throat, become aware of your body absorbing water, Be aware of your thirst abating. Give thanks to God for this wonderful gift of water.



## Thought for the Week

A person desperately searching for God is like a fish desperately searching for water. Today, many people feel uncomfortable with silence, and will do anything to fill it! Yet it is in silence that we can discover ourselves and meet God. St. Teresa of Avila says: "It is not with many words that God hears us, but in the silence of our longing".

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# Fourth Sunday of Lent ~ 19<sup>th</sup> March 2023

*'I was blind and now I See' (Jn 9:26)*

We are now on **Week 4** of our Lenten Retreat. How has it been going for you? Do you still have the pebble in your pocket? Are your writing thoughts, prayers down in your journal? How has your prayer space changed over the last few weeks?

This week we are going to take a bit of time to **notice**. There is much happening in our world, in our community, in our lives... we can be bombarded with images, causes but never notice. We can be blind in many ways through our refusal to believe that we can contribute to positive change in the world. Too often we dismiss these realities by thinking we can do nothing about situations such as the global water crisis. This is blindness. We sometimes hide from the evidence before us and take refuge in prayer. **Prayer is important but we must also be open to action.** (Trocaire). How attentive are we to the needs of those around us? Do we notice those who have no voice? Are we aware of our connectedness to others?



## Prayer suggestions for the week:

Try to spend at least 5-10 minutes in prayer each day this week. It can be in your room, as you walk, in the car... wherever you feel comfortable. Your **Task** this week is to try and take at least one 30-minute walk through an area you know well. It could be your estate, your area, a park ... But walk it as if you are walking it for the first time. Notice colours, plants, faces, signs, voices, sounds ... that you may not have noticed before. Be open to be surprised!

**Breathing exercise:** As you have been doing for the past three weeks, when you come to prayer, focus on your breathing: take three deep slow breaths, then focus on your normal breathing. On the inhale we say "the power of God is within me," and on the exhale say "the grace of God surrounds me." Do this for as long as you can. This is the breath of life. Thank God for this gift.

**Gospel reflection:** Read **John 9:1-41** - "**The Man born blind**" - Again this is a long Gospel (so sorry that the text is not included) one full of healing & challenge. **Read it a few times – come back to it again during the week.** Is there a word, phrase, idea that stands out for you? **Stay with it for a few moments asking why it does.**

## Consider the following:

- The gospel begins with Jesus *seeing* the man born blind. To be seen is more than to be acknowledged - it is to be known, to be loved. Do I really believe Jesus *sees* me? Can I see Jesus in others?
- The man born blind washed the mud from his eyes in the pool called Siloam, which means "the one who is sent." How is Jesus a pool to wash the mud from my eyes so that I might see?
- As soon as the man could see, his life became very difficult. People wondered whether he was the same man. Have you had moments that have so changed you that others are surprised or have not accepted the transformation? Can you accept others when they change?
- Under pressure, the blind man, and the community he stands for are obliged to reflect again and again on what they really believe. What has happened to my faith in times of pressure? How does what I believe influence my actions?



The story is rich in symbolism: Light and darkness, sight and blindness, enlightenment, baptism. Each healing story that we hear in the Gospels is an answer to the questions: "How do you meet Jesus? How do you respond to him?" Benedict XVI wrote: "Being a Christian is the encounter with an event, a person, who gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction." *What encounters have you had today?*

## Something to think about:

When you truly see Jesus and allow Jesus to truly see you (*warts and all*) you can feel vulnerable and maybe fearful for there may be things you choose not to see yourself! What fears do you have about seeing clearly who Jesus is and what choices this calls you to make? The grace will come when you acknowledge that your eyes have been opened, that you have been forgiven and you live out of forgiveness. Others may not want to believe you can see, but know you can only keep repeating it, to yourself and to them, not just in words but also in actions. You may experience rejection by some for claiming a new vision, but in the Light, you can see clearly the one who has healed you - give him thanks and praise through the works you do.

## Suggestions for the week:

Take a few moments to try and recognise Jesus at work in your life each day.

- Who is the Jesus you are looking for?
- Do you recognise Jesus in your actions, in your discussions, in your meetings and dealings with others?
- Are you aware that you are loved, and of your ability to share that love?
- Do you appreciate your own gifts? What are they?
- Are you generous in seeing the good points in others?

God Hides in  
Plain Sight

## Your 30-minute walk through an area you know well.

- **As you begin**, say a prayer for the journey ahead.
- **Bring to mind** those who do not have the luxury of taking time. Say a prayer for those for whom free movement is not a given. Thank God for gifting you this time.
- **Take time to walk mindfully**, aware of being fully alive in the present moment.
- **Travel slowly through landscape** that is familiar, taking the opportunity to look through different eyes – *eyes made aware of God's glory in creation, of God who walks with you always* – to the extraordinary range of people and places through which we pass, often blindly, each day.
- **As you journey and pass gathering places** pray for those who work there and the people who visit them: the school, the pub, the shops, the post office.
- **At the council buildings or offices**, pray for those involved in local government. As you pass a car park, pray for drivers.
- **If you pass a hospital or health centre**, pray for the sick and those who care for them.
- **At a cemetery** take a moment say a prayer for the dead and those who mourn their passing.
- **Walking through a park**, maybe sit for a moment, resting in God and saying 'Thanks' for the gift of relaxation and leisure. Spend time simply being in God's presence.
- **As you travel** recall the journeys that Jesus made in his lifetime, from that first journey to the stable in Bethlehem, his journey as a child as a refugee to Egypt, through the teaching and healing in the villages around Jerusalem to that last bitter walk to the Cross and afterwards along the road to Emmaus.

These journeys will bring us back to where we started but we may no longer be the same people.

With open eyes and hearts, we may have discovered God where God has always been...

Right in the midst of the everyday.

Take a moment to listen/watch and look at this little message for Lent from the Franciscan Sisters

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D41o4Kdtq64>

## Thoughts for the Week:

*"We cannot do everything and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.  
This enables us to do something, and to do it very well." Oscar Romero*

*"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world.  
Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." – Margaret Mead*

LENT 2023

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MAKE A  
DIFFERENCE



## Fifth Sunday of Lent ~ 26<sup>th</sup> March 2023

John 11: 39, 44 - *Jesus said; 'Take the stone away' ... 'Unbind him, let him go free'.*

It's now the 5<sup>th</sup> week of your Lenten retreat. Your journey is almost coming to an end. How have you been doing so far? How did your walk go last week? Make a special effort this week to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

God's unconditional forgiveness liberates us from sin. Liberation literally means "to set free from slavery or imprisonment" – literally to *unbind*. We too are sometimes like Lazarus in the tomb when we assume that we can do nothing about a situation. We can dismiss our own light and remain in the darkness. When we feel helpless where situations of injustice are concerned, we must remember that we are full of light and are being called out of a culture of death. **We are powerful beyond measure.** Never forget that. We can do small things; we can help to remove the restraints of injustice instead of sitting in the darkness. (*Trocaire*).



**Sacred Space:** If you have carried the stone with you from week one of our Lenten retreat *it is time to let it go*. If not then maybe put a stone in your prayer space that symbolises this week's gospel. *We all throw stones from time to time*. Hold the stone in your hand during prayer this week. Let it be a symbol of all that weighs you down, all that oppresses and hurts. Whenever you are ready, take and place the stone into the Lenten space in the Church, as a sign that you are ready to welcome God's mercy into your life, that you are letting this burden go and that you are willing to share this mercy with others. If your church has created a **Lenten/Easter Garden** maybe leave your stone back into this! Give all that weighs you down or holds you back, to God and trust in God's *unconditional love, forgiveness, mercy and compassion*.

**Breathing exercise:** Hopefully by this stage you have worked up to 5 minutes or maybe 10 minutes with the breathing exercise. Continue this week to take some time each day to be still.

- Take three deep slow breaths and then focus on your normal breathing. This is the breath of life. Thank God for this gift.
- When you breathe in you are bringing energy and life to your body. When you breathe out, you are giving a gift to the world, feeding the plants and the trees, playing your part in nature. Stay with these thoughts as you breathe.
- Repeat "**Lord, you are closer to me than my own breathing**" (St. Teresa). Continue this exercise for as long as you can.

**Gospel Reflection:** Read John 11:1-45 two or three times. (*This seems to be the Lent of long Gospels!*). It is a story that we know well but this familiarity can make us miss things. Read it as if reading it for the first time. **Firstly** sit with the text, and pick a word or phrase that stands out to you. Repeat that word or phrase in your mind. Why is that word or phrase relevant to you at this moment? What is it saying to you today? **Secondly**, focus on the characters in the story – Mary, Martha, The Jews, Lazarus, The Disciples, Jesus... Try and put yourself in their place. What are they feeling, what is their mood, what is going on behind the story/as the story unfolds for each of them? Which character do you identify most with at this moment and why? **Come back to this a few times during the week.**



### Consider the following:

- Martha speaks profound sorrow at the death of Lazarus, but it is tinged with blaming Jesus: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." *Where do I resent the losses in my life and somehow blame God for them?*
- Even when Jesus tells Martha, "I am the one who raises the dead to life!" she finds it hard to believe. *Where/when do I doubt that Jesus can bring life?*
- Jesus stands before the tomb weeping. He places no barriers to his feelings about death. Can I be with him there? *Can I stand before and face the tombs in my daily life?*
- Jesus shouts the liberating words of life, "Lazarus, come forth!" *How is he shouting that to me today?*

LENT 2023

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MAKE A  
DIFFERENCE

## Something to think about:

**'Come out, ...Unbind him, and let him go...'** The raising of Lazarus is one of the most important stories in our Faith. It is a call to acceptance, empowerment and justice. It is the greatest of the 'signs' and the turning point of the Gospel of John. In our times, Jesus' demand **'Come Out'** is a powerful challenge to us. Come out of death, shame, destruction, come out of being a 'luke warm' Christian: this is the call of God. For as Jesus says to Lazarus, *you matter*. You are a child of God, you are special. God cares and loves you just the way you are, and always has time for you. *You do have respect. You do have a place. This is your time.* Don't be afraid to come out and be who you are. Accept that you are accepted. Nelson Mandela put it beautifully:

*'We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to manifest the glory of God that is within us. It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.'*

Be proud of your identity, of who you are. The demand to, **'Unbind him, and let him go...'** is a call to be strong; *go for your dream; God believes in you; live out your resurrection life beyond the walls of the past for you are not alone – God walks with you always.* And we are called to be this for others. The *Lazarus story demands and compels* us to the liberation of ourselves and others through love. It is not enough, says Jesus, for the Word of God to be proclaimed and for Lazarus to respond alone. Forgiveness, love is a dynamic call. It is not for an individual alone, but for the renewing of the whole community. It is a demand that involves human action and human compassion. It calls for new relationships, involving rights, respect and reconciliation. It does not ask for change but compels it!

## Prayer for this week: Before placing your stone in the Lenten/Easter Garden.

Take your stone in your hand and say these words aloud,

'Let the one without sin cast the first stone'

**Lord, help me to be compassionate as I would like others to be towards me**

'The stone which the builder rejected has become the corner stone'

**Lord, give me the strength to face opposition with courage**

'They picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple'

**Lord, be with me when I am in trouble**

'I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh'

**Lord, be with me and help me to change**

'Lest you strike your foot against a stone'

**Lord, assist me when I shoot myself in the foot by my own stubbornness**

'Take the stone away' ... 'Unbind him, let him go free'.

**Lord, I leave all that binds me and holds me back at your feet that I may be free**

'They found that the stone had been rolled away from the tomb'

**Lord, encourage me to embrace the freedom you offer through the grace of forgiveness and may it transform me**

**How can I make a difference?** We all have a part to play in Our Church, in our community of faith. We are all called to ministry through our baptism. And if one of us is missing the rest are lessened by their absence. Is there a group, a ministry, an outreach in your local parish that you could be involved in? Is there a group responding to those in need within your community? *If not, why not start one?* This week make a commitment to see if you could play a more active role, no matter how small you think that may be, in your local parish.

***Be the inspiration for others! Make A Difference, BE the difference ...***

**Listen and reflect** on the words of the song – "What about Now" by Daughtry <https://youtu.be/roDXSHSEuoo>

## Thoughts for the Week:

*'Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us.'* - Marianne Williamson

*'You would rather throw stones at a mirror? I am your mirror and here are the stones.'* – Rumi

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DIFFERENCE**

## A Few thoughts for Palm Sunday & Holy Week



This is the last instalment of 'My Lenten Pause' for 2023. I hope it has been a worthwhile journey for you. We pray that this DIY retreat has helped you to find some space during your day for yourself; that it has helped you to pray & reflect; that it has made you aware of God who walks with you and helped you realise that you can and do make a difference. Well done for staying with it!! Your Lenten journey is coming to an end as we approach Easter. During Easter week it would be good to finish your retreat by participation as fully as you can in the Holy Week services in your own local parish community. We hope these reflections have been helpful in your Lenten preparation & your fuller involvement in this Easter Mystery.

Please keep us in your prayers and if you have any thoughts, comments by all means drop me an email!  
*Thank you & God bless*

Was there any part, aspect of this retreat that you found more difficult than others? Is there anything that challenged or was new for you? What is the one reflection, thought, memory... that you will take with you onwards?

Can you continue this during Holy Week and beyond?

### Prayer suggestions for the week:

You may have created a sacred space in your home for prayer during this Lenten retreat.

Consider that space now:

- Can you continue to use it as part of daily prayer, especially during Holy Week but also after Easter?
- Has it changed over the course of this Lenten journey? What have you added/taken out?
- Is there a symbol, a reflection, prayer, a word/phrase that has stood out for you over the past 6 weeks? What is it? Why is it significant for you?
- Perhaps you can place a palm branch in that space to symbolise the beginning of our journey into Holy Week.

**Palm branches** are a symbol of rejoicing, solidarity, welcoming and community. In Pre-Christian times, Palms were a symbol of triumph and in Roman times the word '*palma*' could even be substituted for the word for *victory*. Jesus' entry into Jerusalem this Palm Sunday reminds us of the humility of Jesus 'earthly life, from beginning to end.



### Gospel Reflection: Matthew 26:14-27:66

This Sunday's Gospel is often known as 'the long Gospel'. Don't let that put you off otherwise you miss the drama of the journey that this week offers you. It is a story that most know and reveals the drama of the week ahead. Try to read the Gospel, or part of it, this week. Read it as if hearing the story for the first time!

- We hold up our palms singing "*Hosanna, Hosanna*" as we prepare to follow Jesus into Holy Week. How can we enable this to be a personal 'moment of opportunity' for us too?
- What does it actually mean to be a follower of Jesus? What does this self-emptying on the cross challenge us to do? (Amanda Dillon ~ Intercom)
- What parts of the story are uncomfortable? What parts are easier to read? Why?
- The cross looks shameful, not glorious. It is scandalous and a stumbling block for many. It does not seem to make sense to us. But Jesus' cross displays the glory of his love - love for you personally. Think about the fact that Jesus' love, his love shown on the cross is the ultimate sign of his love, mercy and his glory. Remember that suffering is never the will of God, but the cross shows us that God is *with us* in our suffering – we are never alone. What will the love of God, the mercy of God, as revealed by the cross, empower you to do?



If you haven't already, make a *promise* to yourself to go to the **Sacrament of Reconciliation** this week. Whether it has been 2 weeks, 2 months, 2, 20, 40 years remember that God is there with open arms for you. Holy Week is *not* an event but a profound journey. It encompasses all our human and spiritual feelings, emotions and longings. It is a journey that ebbs through darkness and light, from lows to highs, from suffering to joy, from devastation to glory. Our natural reaction may be to move quickly to the resurrection and skip past the rest. But try, this Holy Week, to stay a moment with the story of each day as it is unfolding. Allow it to speak to your own story.

### For Holy Week

**Monday** ~ Reflect on the story of the Passion. There are so many characters in this story, disciples, friends, and betrayers. We can recognise bits of ourselves in each of them. Place yourself in the story as it unfolds each day. Be honest with yourself and think about what you would have done as one of Jesus' followers.

**Tuesday** ~ Wear or carry a small cross in your pocket today as a reminder of God's great love for you.

**Wednesday** ~ Make a small sacrifice for someone today. Make a special effort to be respectful to those you encounter today.

**Holy Thursday** ~ What did you hope to achieve and experience this Lenten season? What steps can you take today to bring yourself closer to that goal? Do one thing of service today for another – joyfully!

**Good Friday** ~ When you make the sign of the cross today, remember that God is with us in our suffering with endless mercy & love. As you walk through today look around your community – can you see 'the Crucified One & the crucified ones in your community?' – Notice those who are outcast & suffering.

**Holy Saturday** ~ Tonight, light a candle as a symbol of Christ's light in your life, a light that dispels darkness. If possible light this candle during your prayer time in the Easter season.

**Easter Sunday** ~ New life! Is there a change you want to make in your life? The joy of the resurrection is to be shared – so smile! How can you share this Good News? Write a brief note to yourself on this day of transformation. And, enjoy the chocolate!!

**Reflections for the week:** "On the Sunday before the feast known now as Palm Sunday, the Roman Governor, Pilate, rode into Jerusalem seated on his magnificent horse, along with a large garrison of cavalry and foot soldiers. People would have come out to witness the pageantry of it: thousands of soldiers with weapons, the beating of drums... On Palm Sunday, Jesus also entered Jerusalem, from the other side of the city, seated on a donkey. This was not a coincidence; this procession was planned in advance and carefully thought out. The reign of Jesus was to be a reign of peace that would banish chariots...Jesus intended his procession – which today would be called a 'counter-demonstration' – to contrast the two reigns, the Reign of God and the reign of Caesar, two very different visions of life on earth." **Peter McVerry, SJ**

'Each of us are called to be a witness before the world to the resurrection and life of the Lord Jesus, and a sign of the living God.' **Vatican II, Lumen Gentium, 38**

### A Prayer for Holy Week

Lord Jesus Christ,  
in this sacred and solemn week  
when I see again the depth and mystery  
of your redeeming love & Mercy  
help me to have the courage;  
to follow where you go,  
to stop where you stumble,  
to listen when you cry,  
to hurt as you suffer,  
to bow my head in sorrow as you die,  
That I may share in and mirror the  
endless love and boundless joy, mercy &  
compassion of your resurrection. **Amen**  
*Adapted from "Celebrating God's Presence"*



**Go... Be the Love you want to see in our World!**

**LENT 2023**

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**MAKE A  
DIFFERENCE**

# My Lenten Retreat Prayer



## My World, My Church, My Community

is made up of people like **ME**.

**I** help make it what it is.

It will be friendly, if **I** am.

Its pews will be filled, if **I** help fill them.

It will do great work, if **I** work.

It will make generous gifts to many causes,  
if **I** am a generous giver.

It will be an open, hospitable and inclusive place,  
If **I** embody this welcome.

It will bring other people into its worship and fellowship,  
if **I** invite & bring them.

It will be a Church of loyalty & love, of mercy & compassion, of  
fearlessness & faith, and a community with an inspiring spirit,  
if **I**, who make it what it is, am filled with these same things.

Therefore, with God's help, **I** dedicate myself to the task of being all  
the things that **I** want

MY World, MY Church & MY Community to be.

**Amen**

*Lord, by your example and with your help  
Give me the courage to be the  
love I want to see in the World.*

*Help me not to wait, may I have no excuses  
Let me be the difference I want to see in my World. Amen*