



LENT

FAST

GIVE

PRAY

# Daily Reflections for the Season of Lent

Part Two

19th March to 9th April 2023



DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

# Lenten Reflections 2023

## An Introduction

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Welcome to these Lent resources, and grateful thanks to those around our Diocese who have contributed so generously to them.

This Lent, we walk the path of temptation, suffering and pain with Jesus, struggling with past events and reports in the Diocese which have left us unsettled, and seeking answers. Archbishop McMahon reminded us in his recent pastoral letter that 'Our Church was born out of suffering, delivering a message of hope for doing better in this life to be more able to enjoy the rewards of the next life.'

This Lent, we pray and reflect on the Synod pilgrimage, and open ourselves and our parishes to be servants of the Suffering Servant, Jesus, who poured out his life for us. Lent is when our heavenly Father invites us to return to him with all our heart; an opportunity to seek healing and to know the transforming mercy of God.

We walk these forty Lent days with Jesus on a pilgrimage of grace, and look to Him for new direction, for healing and for hope. We must recognise our pain, confusion and distress and hand them over to Him, while also giving witness to the pain and suffering of others. Those outside the Church can also help us as they can point out our failings and show us how to make matters right.

Our sharing in Jesus' way of the cross is walked in weakness and need, and paced by the patient love He shows us on the road. As you walk the path ahead, lean on these resources for support, guidance and inspiration. Worry less about the pace you set for yourself and be open to the stirrings of the Holy Spirit in the silence this holy season gives to our suffering and search for healing.

May God's mercy flow like mountain streams, falling like the morning dew. May the healing balm of forgiveness wash away our iniquity, cleanse us from our sin and lead us to a joyful celebration of the Risen Lord on Easter Sunday and the days ahead.

**Monsignor Andrew Faley**  
**Episcopal Vicar for the Vicariate for Faith & Mission**

## Fourth Sunday of Lent

# Sunday 19th March 2023

First Reading: 1 Samuel 16:1, 6-7, 10-13; Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 22;

Second Reading: Ephesians 5:8-14; Gospel: John 9:1-41

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The sightless, sinful man, ignorant of the Law of Moses, shows all the requirements for entering the Kingdom of God. The 'wise and learned' Pharisees do not. Here, it is the Pharisees who are blind to the Light and try to extinguish it. Jesus recalls the first creation (Genesis 2:7) where God fashioned the human from dust and then breathed life into him. Jesus makes a paste out of spittle and clay, rubs it onto the man's eyes and orders him to wash in the Pool of Siloam, a name that means 'one who is sent', which is Jesus' own designation for himself. The man does what he is told, and he sees for the very first time. His neighbours react and question him on his identity and in replying he uses Jesus' own words, 'Ego Eimi', 'I Am'. John wants us to grasp that we, too, will be 'sent' into the world on a mission to bring the Light. Jesus makes of us beloved children and beloved disciples.

In the Pharisees' interrogation that follows, the healed man grows in deeper knowledge of Jesus whereas the Pharisees are stuck in their narrow, dark understanding of the Law. They can't see that Jesus does exactly what God does on the Sabbath, give life. They accuse the Light, the true Ego Eimi of darkness.



**Reflection written by: Mia Fox, University Chaplain, Newcastle**

## Fourth Week of Lent

# Monday 20th March 2023

First Reading: Isaiah 65:17-21; Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 29:2, 4-6, 11-13;

Gospel: John 4:43-54

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I have heard this passage many times and, of course, when we have heard things many times we tend to gloss over their meaning and don't truly think about the characters. We have Jesus returning to Galilee, a place that he is familiar with and where he grew up. It could be interpreted that he is nervous about going back to Galilee because he does not think that he'll be received well. On the contrary though, he is received very well. How readily do we welcome Jesus back into our hearts when we have not let him in for a very long time?

We then, of course, read about the encounter with the official who had travelled from Capernaum, a great distance indeed, around 20 miles if you look on Google Maps today. Looking up this simple fact opened my eyes to appreciate just how far the official had travelled. We don't get too much information about him in the Gospel but in finding out that he travelled the best part of 20 miles to reach Jesus shows him for what he really is at his core, a desperate father seeking help for his son.

The interaction between Jesus and the official is over fairly quickly. The official gets on his knees in front of Jesus and begs him to cure him. When reading the passage, it could be argued that Jesus easily dismisses the man accusing him of 'not believing unless you see signs'. The official is persistent though and urges Jesus to come with him before the child dies. At this point, we witness a shift in Jesus. He simply tells the official to go home, 'your son will live.'

Jesus realised that this is not someone trying to test him or make him prove himself but a genuine cry for help. Indeed, the official heads home and on the journey back is told that his son is recovering. He, in fact, did not need any signs or wonders to believe in Jesus. He took his word to be true and trusted in it. Reflecting on the story, perhaps this Lent, we can be like those Galileans and welcome Jesus into our space more readily and build on our own faith so that we can trust in Jesus as the official did.

**Reflection written by: Rebecca Leighton,  
Lay Catholic Chaplain at the University of Sunderland**



## Fourth Week of Lent

# Tuesday 21st March 2023

First Reading: Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12; Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 45:2-3, 5-6, 8-9;

Gospel: John 5:1-3, 5-16

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In crowds of sick people, all hoping for a miracle, Jesus chooses one person. This event is not so much about inclusivity but about the Lord of the Sabbath who chooses one person. John doesn't tell us if he was the sickest, but he had been waiting for a long time. Thirty-eight long years of suffering, apparently no one to help. Jesus saw him there, and asks a question extending to everyone who ponders this Gospel: "Do you want to be well again?" It sounds terribly obvious, but the Master must reawaken this person's dormant desire. Do you want to be well? "Kyrie," he replies, "who will help me?" And at Jesus' command, this person obeys. And that is that. He is redeemed. It was not without effort on his own part though. For many years he had tried to be patient, and then, the final test of obeying the Master's seemingly unachievable command to just "Get up." The person did not even know His name.

John the Evangelist pushes his account forward, past Jesus' opponents, to a curious second encounter with the Lord. As if Jesus wasn't finished with him, he finds him again, now in the Temple, probably giving thanks in the Father's house of prayer. "Sin no more, so that worse may not befall you." The audacity. Only God Himself can read souls like this. We cannot judge a poor sick person as having committed some great sin. But Jesus came in search of sinners, not the virtuous, and, if we want to be well again, we can include ourselves in the former camp. The warning to sin no more is no less than what we were told when we received our ashes, "Repent and believe in the Gospel." The Lenten call to repentance is a mercy, not a condemnation. It is so that worse may never befall us, and that our misdeeds may do no harm to others. In crowds of sick people, all hoping for a miracle, Jesus chooses one person who is waiting, one person who wishes to be well again. He chooses you.

**Reflection written by: Fr Trevor Tibbertsma, Archdiocese of Melbourne/Durham University, St Cuthbert's Catholic Church**

Fourth Week of Lent

## Wednesday 22nd March 2023

First Reading: Isaiah 49:8-15; Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 144:8-9, 13-14, 17-18;

Gospel: John 5:17-30

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This reading continues the story following Jesus decision to heal a man on the Sabbath. This action was against the Jewish Laws which forbade work on a Sabbath. As a result, the Pharisees were angry at Jesus: "They tried all the more to kill him." They were angry with him for not only working on the Sabbath but making himself equal to God.

The Pharisees' relationship with God is different to that of Jesus. Law was central to how they understood the world. This was the most important thing. Their God wanted these laws upheld. For Jesus God was the God who gives life, and therefore love and kindness were the most important.

We are asked to think about how we choose to be a true disciple? What decisions do we make when faced with the challenge to show compassion in adversity? We are all made in the image of God. Do you see God in others? How would it change how you spoke to people if you were speaking to God through them? How do we honour God as Jesus has honoured God by showing love to others?

In the reading Jesus tells us to listen to his word, and in doing this we honour the Father, God.

What opportunities do we give ourselves to truly listen, to hear God's voice? The world can be very busy, with many voices shouting over each other to be heard. The radio, TV, computers, iPad, phones. The growth of social media has, for some, created a continual narrative to their lives of notifications, of likes and scrolling through short videos for instant gratification. It is sometimes difficult to drown out this noise. We need to find time to clear our minds to build a closer relationship with God. When we listen intently we grow to recognise His voice and get to know Him and ourselves better. How do you listen to God?

**Reflection written by: Suzanne Lewis-Dale, St Mary's, Cullercoats**

Fourth Week of Lent  
Thursday 23rd March 2023

First Reading: Exodus 32:7-14; Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 105:19-23;

Gospel: John 5:31-47

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In today's Gospel, John helps us reflect on the condition of our own hearts.

We see Jesus explaining what was blocking the belief of those Pharisees who could not accept his message. They had not allowed God to enter their hearts for, if they had, they would have known God and then been able to recognise Jesus as God's Son.

We see in the life of Jesus his humble, gentle submission to God's will.

Jesus tells us: "What I do, that is, the deeds my Father gave me to do, these speak on my behalf and show that the Father has sent Me."

Jesus, in the simplicity of his kindness, gave the example showing God's love for His people.

God was testifying on behalf of Jesus through Him, drawing His people to know what is at the centre of Him: love.

Jesus then explains to them how the lack of love for God impacts their outlook. They begin to focus upon their own status wanting praise from one another, taking their attention from God looking inwardly at themselves, rendering them unable to see Jesus when He came as their Saviour. They were so wrapped up in themselves.

Jesus ends by, again, drawing our attention to our belief in Him. Had the Pharisees believed that in Jesus they were witnessing Moses' own words fulfilled, they would have believed Him. Therefore, Moses would be the one to accuse them of their pride in their own understanding and lack of trust, even though he was their leader sent by God.

So, for us today, we look to our own messengers who have delivered that message of God's Love for us. We examine our own hearts to see if we have indeed accepted that knowledge sent by God through Jesus of HIS overwhelming Love for us.

Let us not be inward looking but look to Him who Loves us.

**Reflection written by: Gillian Kendall, St Oswald's, South Shields**

Fourth Week of Lent  
Friday 24th March 2023

First Reading: Wisdom 2:1, 12-22; Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 33:16, 18, 19-21, 23;

Gospel: John 7:1-2, 10, 25-30

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***Can this be the Christ?***

There is a sense of both excitement and confusion in today's reading. Jesus has gone up to Jerusalem for the festival. Some people think he is the Christ, some not. Some have noted that the authorities want to get rid of him and are puzzled by why they are not acting. Do they know something we don't, they are wondering? Nothing is clear. Isn't that a bit like our situation now? Like the people in today's Gospel, we are still asking ourselves, 'Can this be the Christ?' Some people find faith incredible, for other people it's the centre of their existence. Many of us are somewhere in the middle.

For the people of Jerusalem 2000 years ago seeing was not believing. One group says the Christ couldn't do more signs than this man but others aren't so sure. The same is true for us, there just isn't the kind of proof we want. It's all confusion, which way do we turn?

It is noticeable that the people in today's Gospel don't talk to Jesus, they talk about him. So, it's no wonder they are confused. Talking about people behind their backs leaves us only with rumour. Instead, perhaps we start by talking to Jesus and telling him how we feel. If we are confused - tell him. If we have doubts - tell him. Like all relationships, honesty is a good place to start. St Teresa of Avila tells us this is the way to pray: to chat to Jesus like we would to a friend. We tell him how we feel then we sit quietly and listen - see how he responds. Maybe if we did this every day, we would start to share our lives with him at a deeper level and, in that way, perhaps our doubts and confusion would begin to drift away and in their place would be a firm and quiet faith.

**Reflection written by: Deacon Gareth Rowe**  
**St Oswin, Tynemouth & St Mary, Cullercoats**



# The Annunciation of the Lord

## Saturday 25th March 2023

First Reading: Isaiah 7:10-14; Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 40:7-8, 8-9, 10, 11;

Second Reading: Hebrews 10:4-10; Gospel: Luke 1:26-38

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I am writing this reflection for the wonderful feast day of the Annunciation on behalf of the Diocesan Justice and Peace Co-ordinating Council. So, my focus is how this feast day relates to the rich body of Catholic Social Teaching, which is ultimately an expression of Christ's call to 'love one another as I have loved you', through a profound and deep sense of solidarity with all of humanity and creation, while promoting the common good and the dignity of every human person.

I have learned from a dialogue of reflection and practice, the great importance of attentive encounters with others. It is through such encounters that despite the difference of the person before you, I appreciate the true worth and beauty of that person. I also discover that despite the differences that can range from: belief, background, sexuality, gender, vocation, age, nationality, experiences, or not everyone has a great appreciation of the progressive and jazz rock of the seventies 😊, there is still a shared reality of experiences with hopes, dreams, fears, and concerns. This enables us to discover that despite our differences, we can still work together for the transformation of our world. Faced with so much suffering and injustice and a strong desire to make a difference, it may seem a distraction and displacement activity to, first of all, sit with others and in gentle conversations have these attentive encounters. But they are transformative and the springboard for justice.

At the heart of today's feast day, we have such an attentive encounter of two different participants, with little in common; a non-human, non-physical divine messenger and a teenage young woman! This a coming together of utter 'otherness'. But in their dialogue of invitation, bewilderment, truth-seeking, affirmation, and trusting consent, their differences are completely transcended. They are able to work in utter co-operation in fulfilling their shared but distinctive roles, in ensuring that the great drama of salvation, which seeks the total transformation of our broken and fallen world, can still proceed.

What attentive encounters can you have to transform such a world?

**Reflection written by: Fr Chris Hughes parish priest of St Cuthbert's and St Joseph's, North Shields and member of the Hexham and Newcastle Diocesan Justice and Peace Co-ordinating Council**



# COMING SOON...

## A DAY FOR CATECHISTS

A day for exploring catechesis, accompaniment, and evangelisation.

*To be a catechist is to echo the love God has for each one of us to those in our parishes, our communities, our society. It is to pass this love on in sharing our faith to others. This can be daunting. We are not alone. Through our baptism, we are united in our calling to support one another, to come together and nurture the calling of being able to better witness to the joy of the Gospel.*

**Are you involved with Baptismal Preparation, First Holy Communions, Confirmations, Marriage Preparation, RCIA, Children's Liturgy or other faith sharing initiatives?**

- + Has the global pandemic accelerated the need for a new approach in your parish?
- + Are you passionate about your Catholic faith and committed to sharing it with others?
- + Would you like to be involved in sharing the faith but lack confidence or don't think you have the skills?

**If you answered 'yes' to any of the above, then come and join us for our upcoming Day for Catechists, where you can deepen your knowledge and connect with other Catechists in our diocese.**

If you would like to receive an invitation to this event, or for more information, please sign up to our event mailing list at [bit.ly/DHNDFCMailList](https://bit.ly/DHNDFCMailList) or email [adminfaith.mission@diocesehn.org.uk](mailto:adminfaith.mission@diocesehn.org.uk).

## Fifth Sunday of Lent

# Sunday 26th March 2023

First Reading: Ezekiel 37:12-14; Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 129;

Second Reading: Romans 8:8-11; Gospel: John 11:1-45

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We've probably all met Martha's and Mary's. There are many like them - perhaps including ourselves.

Here we have the fussy one, talkative and speaking her mind, contrasted with the quieter, deeper, reflective sister who's more of an attractive introvert. Maybe they're a good balance together. A tag match pair. Between them they'll miss nothing. They have a serious job - they are caring for their brother.

Did Lazarus have special needs? It's the sisters who seem to own the house - unusual at that time, the men were in charge. Lazarus never speaks. Jesus used to visit them at Bethany. Who did he go mainly to see? We can speculate. Clearly, he loved them all. But the message the sisters sent to him tugs at the heartstrings, 'Lord, the man you love is ill.'

But Jesus chooses not to go, of set purpose. This is a sensitive one. Love has expectations. Martha and Mary both clearly think that a visit from the Lord would heal their sick brother. The decision Jesus makes would hurt and confuse. It appears out of character. The women can't disguise their disappointment. They're somewhere between annoyance and quiet anger, grieving about more than the death of Lazarus. They're wounded by Jesus' delay. It doesn't make sense.

When he arrives, they speak their pain. It hurts him too and he gives way to tears. He also asks for a greater trust. It's true he's far from being heartless - there has to be something else going on. Can this arrival and the sight of him kindle a hope even yet that love can make something happen? Their assent to believing beyond death and loss that their friend will not let them down is rewarded by the stunning raising of Lazarus.

When we make requests of the Lord, serious and sensible ones and he doesn't respond, can we learn from Martha and Mary? Perhaps a trust we've not experienced before is being called for. Unlike the raising of Lazarus, it may be ourselves who may need to be unbound and let go free, released from our way of thinking. God isn't required to adopt our plans. It's never easy. Talk to Martha and Mary.

**Reflection written by: Dennis Tindall, St Mary's and St Wilfrid,  
Bishop Auckland**

Fifth Week of Lent  
Monday 27th March 2023

First Reading: Daniel 13:1-9, 15-17, 19-30, 33-62; Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 22;

Gospel: John 8:1-11

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Most times when we sin and go astray, it can be very easy to isolate ourselves and run away from God. We feel like God will condemn us; even if that is not the case, we tend to condemn ourselves! The lady on trial in our Bible passage must have felt the same way. She must have felt so ashamed and wanted to hide her face from Jesus but, in the end, she didn't even try to run away or defend her actions. She knew she had sinned, so she was ready for any sort of punishment.

As long as we continue to feel this way, there is hope for us to make heaven. The Holy Spirit allows us to feel godly sorrow (or shame) for our sins, but this is not to drive us to death or depression, in fact, it is the opposite; it is so that we can seek life through Him. The Bible tells us that ALL have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). The problem is not that you have sinned, it is that you sin and do not repent of those sins. God is telling you today, that you should "Go now and LEAVE your life of sin."

In this time of Lent, we should be able to look back on our life of sin and those things that make us ashamed and as we feel remorse, we should run back to God. Go to confession. God loves us and has no intention of condemning us, however, when we live in sin, we separate ourselves from Him. Likewise, there are those around us who are sinners and have lost their way, all they need is for someone to give them a second chance just like Jesus did. Let us not be quick to judge others or point out their faults. I'm sure everyone is more than aware of their shortcomings, rather we should look for reasons to lift each other up and show love to those who need it the most.

**Reflection written by: Sarah Dilla, St Joseph's Catholic Church,  
Coxhoe**

Fifth Week of Lent  
Tuesday 28th March 2023

First Reading: Numbers 21:4-9; Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 101:2-3, 16-21;

Gospel: John 8:21-30

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*'Jesus said, "You're tied down to the mundane; I'm in touch with what is beyond your horizons. You live in terms of what you see and touch. I'm living on other terms. I told you that you were missing God in all this.'" (John 8:23 The Message)*

I wonder how many times we miss the point and fail to see what is beyond the immediate? It is so easy to get caught up in the mundanity of life and to miss the higher purpose. To forget why we do what we do and to miss that God is in the centre of it all.

This Gospel is asking us to remember that Lent is a time for remembering that we came from dust and will return to dust but that our souls will live on. What we do here on the earth matters and we need to be conscious of our higher calling and purpose.

There is a beautiful reflection I once heard that asked we imagine a normal day, your Tuesday perhaps. Instead of you carrying out your daily tasks on this Tuesday, you imagine that it is Christ in your shoes. The reflection asks us to consider whether the interactions would be different if Jesus went about your normal routine. What would it really be like to put God at the centre of all that you did on that average day? The truth of our faith is that Christ is at the centre of all that we do and working in all that we meet. We are reminded not to miss God at work in the mundanity of life.



**Reflection written by: Amy Cameron, Coordinator  
for the Vicariate for Faith & Mission**



## Fifth Week of Lent

# Wednesday 29th March 2023

First Reading: Daniel 3:14-20, 24-25, 28; Responsorial Psalm: Daniel 3:52-56;

Gospel: John 8:31-42

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It must have been hard to listen to Jesus, especially if you were comfortable in your rigid interpretation of tradition. Jesus invited his hearers to enter the home that is his word. There they would find truth and be made free by the son of the house. The opponents point out that as descendants of Abraham, 'We have never been slaves.' Jesus says that racial descent is not enough. They are, in fact, slaves of sin because they do not follow their ancestor. They have shut their ears to God's voice, whereas Abraham listened to God and offered up his son Isaac. As is common in uncomfortable arguments the opponents denigrate the speaker: 'We are not the sons of prostitutes.' There were, no doubt, salacious rumours about Jesus's family, so his enemies could easily say 'Why should we listen to someone who does not really belong?'

In the Synodal process we are being asked at present to listen to one another: 'listening to understand'. We are one family in the same house and have been set free by the Son. In practice people easily become opponents. Argument replaces discussion. What is sinful is not one's firm point of view but to be enslaved in our own rightness. The determination to win can leave us slaves of the views we were defending. If we refuse to allow that our opponents might have insights from the Holy Spirit which could help us to move from entrenched positions, we remain as enslaved as we imagine our opponents to be.



**Reflection written by: Margaret Harvey, St Cuthbert's Parish, Durham**

Fifth Week of Lent  
Thursday 30th March 2023

First Reading: Genesis 17:3-9; Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 104:4-9;

Gospel: John 8:51-59

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"In this world, nothing is certain except death and taxes."

At least, that's what Benjamin Franklin said back in 1789. It would seem that the Scribes and the Pharisees shared something of that point of view, judging by the arguments they picked with Jesus over paying taxes to Caesar and, in today's Gospel, over the inevitability of death for each one of us.

Looking for a way to trip him up, they are quick to interpret Jesus' words literally and so fail to hear the message of eternal hope that he brings. Death is indeed inevitable but it cannot be the end, for the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob never desires the destruction of anything that He has so lovingly created.

We know, though, how hard it can be to believe in that promise of eternal life, especially when the loss of those whom we love and the fear of our own mortality weigh so heavily upon us. To set against that, however, we have the explicit promise made by Jesus in today's Gospel, that whoever keeps his word will never see death.

These words echo the assurance given to his friends Martha and Mary and which we heard proclaimed in last Sunday's Gospel. Jesus is the resurrection and those who die with faith in his promise will enjoy life without end.

We believe that the events of Holy Week and Easter show that these are not empty words. The suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus fully vindicate the complete trust that he has in his Father's goodness. They also offer us the perfect example of how to live our lives in this world as we wait in joyful and confident hope for the fullness of life in God's presence.

**Reflection written by: Deacon Vincent Purcell,  
Parish of St Edmund Duke, Coxhoe, Trimdon and Sedgfield**

Fifth Week of Lent  
Friday 31st March 2023

First Reading: Jeremiah 20:10-13; Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 17:2-7;

Gospel: John 10:31-42

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I felt so sad when reading today's readings. Jesus and Jeremiah felt the pressure of being judged no matter how much good work they did. Their words were going to be judged and lead to suffering. I felt fear when I imagined how Jesus was escaping across the Jordan. His situation was becoming tougher every day. I would have been shaken following the same conversation he had with the Jews. However, he continued with his Father's work.

Why?

Firstly, I thought, maybe Jesus knew he was going to rise from the dead from the very beginning. I imagined this to be like Aslan's scene in the book and film *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*.

Did Jesus know he would rise from the dead?

I spend days talking to Jesus in prayer about this issue. I asked people around me what their opinion was until finally, after a long search, I concluded that Jesus loved his Father so much, he knew whatever happened God would always be with him. Jesus, man, and God had so much faith and trust in his Father, more than I can comprehend. I felt truly overwhelmed by that discovery. Jesus made a total leap toward offering his life to God. We have had many saints who did exactly the same, gave everything they had, and followed God: St Francis of Assisi; St Anthony, Abbot, founder of monasticism.

Do I leave everything I have and follow God? I decided to learn to listen to God more attentively.

Every day I ask this question, 'What are we doing together today God?'

And whatever it is, I do my Father's work who is with me no matter what happens.

Spend time with God this Lent asking Him what work should the two of you do together. Do it with trust.

**Reflection written by: Kasia Szczepanska, School Chaplain,  
St Aidan's Catholic Academy, Sunderland**

Fifth Week of Lent  
Saturday 1st April 2023

First Reading: Ezekiel 37:21-28; Responsorial Psalm: Jeremiah 31:10-13;

Gospel: John 11:45-56

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***'This Jesus must die.'***

Josephus, a 1st century Jewish/Roman historian, reckoned that the population of Jerusalem increased 6-fold at the time of the Passover from 25,000 to 150,000 people. That is a big crowd. The Romans occupied Jerusalem, so a huge crowd is a threat to the civic, religious and military leaders of the city. In the memorable lines from Jesus Christ Superstar, Annas asks: 'What shall we do about Jesus of Nazareth?' A priest asks: 'What shall we do about this Jesus mania?' And Caiaphas, the high priest answers: 'We need a more permanent solution to the problem...This Jesus must die.' So, they determine to kill him.

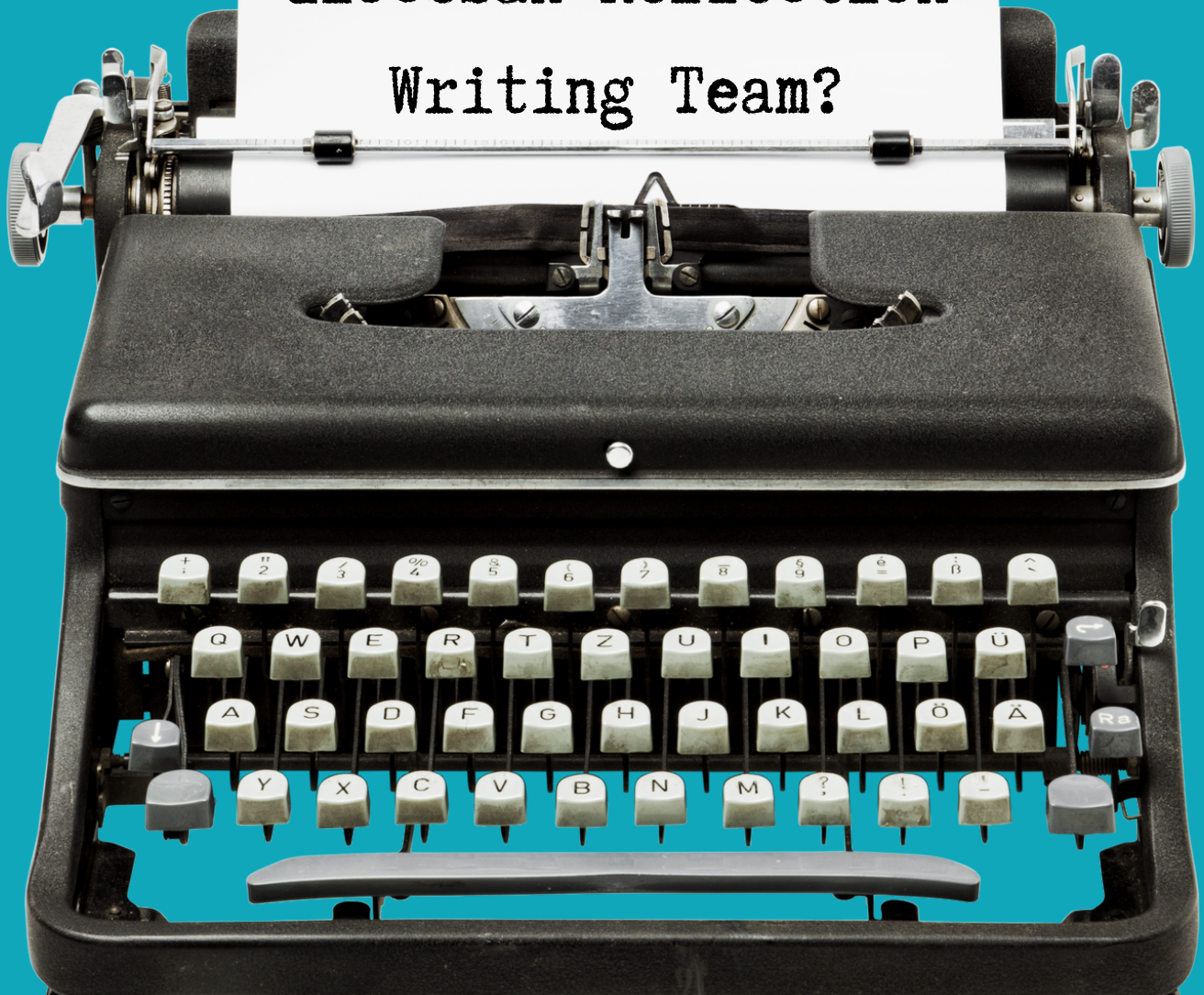
The leaders were driven by their desire to protect their own positions of power. Jesus was driven by his desire to live the love of the Father. There wasn't a scintilla of desire in him to overthrow the Romans, or become a high priest, or seize power in any shape or form. He wanted everyone to learn compassion, forgiveness, inclusion, love. We've already heard twice this week that on two separate occasions, the people picked up stones to throw at him - so not all the people were attracted by his healing and preaching. Not everyone wanted to follow his Way towards the fullness of life. As we will learn this week, the vast majority of people, urged on by the frightened religious leaders, conspired to demand his crucifixion.

Today we are on the edge of the most dramatic week in human history, culminating with the Resurrection of Jesus, his triumph over all conspiracies. We might be enlightened if we took today's Gospel, sat with it and joined that Council meeting. Imagine these powerful men, terrified and determined. Whose side are you on in the midst of it all? How much courage would it take to speak out? Whose side are we on today - how much courage does it take to speak out on behalf of truth and justice in our world?

**Reflection written by: Jim O'Keefe, Moderator of St John XXIII,  
Washington and Penshaw and St Joseph's, Birtley**



Would you be  
interested  
in joining the  
diocesan Reflection  
Writing Team?



We are blessed in the Diocese of Hexham & Newcastle to have many talented writers who regularly contribute to our Advent and Lenten Reflection booklets as well as other themed publications.

**We are actively looking for new writers to join the team.**

If this is something that captures your interest do get in touch with the Vicariate for Faith & Mission Administration Team at [adminfaith.mission@diocesehn.org.uk](mailto:adminfaith.mission@diocesehn.org.uk) for further information. You will need to provide the name of your parish priest and church for reference purposes.



## Passion Sunday (Palm Sunday)

Sunday 2nd April 2023

First Reading: Isaiah 50:4-7; Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 21:8-9, 17-20, 23-24;

Second Reading: Philippians 2:6-11; Gospel: Matthew 27:11-54 (or Matthew 26:14-27: 66)

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The reading today is not just long, but immense. Sometimes words alone are too much to take in. Of all the many images of the crucifixion the Spanish Gallery, in Bishop Auckland, has a painting which is remarkable, if not unique. A pair of curtains frames the cross. It looks strangely and alarmingly domestic. They could be anyone's living room curtains, yet they are seemingly drawn to view this scene of horror and injustice.

An innocent man condemned not only for what he did not do, but worst, mostly for what he did do in his earthly life, in manifesting his simplicity, his love, his remarkable gifts of healing and prophesy, his extraordinary miracles.

And yet despite all of this, he was rejected. They even chose to reprieve a brigand, rather than Our Lord, as someone they could relate to. Of course, we are all sometimes guilty of that in our little ways.

He did not fit the bill for the long hoped for Messiah. He wasn't going to call up armies of angels and destroying powers to fight a war to solve all of the temporal problems of that particular day, two thousand years ago; nor perhaps, as we sometimes expect him to, on any other day since.

Yet the power of the cross is enduring; it has never and will never be forgotten. It has and will continue to inspire others to acts of self-giving love: even to martyrdom.

And so, in Lent should we not consider how we prefer to keep our own curtains closed? To live a life that is in our own private space, as if withdrawn from all others. We can feel superior to it all in that there is nothing more that we should do. We can feel inferior, as though incapable of doing more.

The earthquake shook them all out of their collective failings on that day. But before that we are simply told of the rent curtains in God's Holy Temple. The curtains formerly separated us from God. Not only is the curtain rent, God now stands amongst us!

**Reflection written by: Carl Watson, St Osmund's, Gainford**

# Holy Week

## Monday 3rd April 2023

First Reading: Isaiah 42:1-7; Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 26:1-3, 13-14;

Gospel: John 12:1-11

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Hello, dear readers of this short reflection. Have you been finding Lent, especially last week's selected Gospel extracts, rather heavy-going? Do you feel that this coming Holy Week is going to be more of the same: sombre and serious? Are you gritting your teeth to get to the end of this six weeks' marathon that we call Lent? Well, take heart! Today's Gospel Reading is telling us to relax and have a break!

That very first Holy Week WAS indeed a severe six days for Jesus, leading inexorably to his terrible death on the cross. He had a lot on his mind, and in his heart, and so it would have been understandable if he had gone around tight-lipped and unsmiling. But he didn't! Against all the odds, after our hearing of yesterday's solemn entry into Jerusalem, today's Gospel sees our Lord in the thick of a party! He is clearly relishing the lovely food, served by Martha, and the happy companionship of his beloved friends. And this is his message to us:

"Chill out! Just rest awhile and appreciate all God's gifts to you. Tomorrow will be time enough to pick up the reins again. Wet blankets, like Judas, are not to be listened to. Instead, do something wild and extravagant out of love for the Lord, or for your neighbour, like Mary, who truly did something beautiful for me. So, let your hair down and put a smile on your face!"

Let us pray: Lord, even if just for today, let us take delight in "wasting" time with you. Let us sit down and simply enjoy your company. Let us laugh and joke with you, and, together, let's have a good time.

Amen, Lord, Amen!



**Reflection written by: Sr M. Francis, Convent of Mercy, Sunderland**

## Holy Week

# Tuesday 4th April 2023

First Reading: Isaiah 49:1-6; Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 70:1-6, 15, 17;

Gospel: John 13:21-33, 36-38

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Did Jesus choose the apostles carelessly? Did he make bad choices? Today's Gospel seems to suggest just that since we read of two treacheries carried out by those closest to Jesus: Judas' betrayal and the disownment of Jesus by Peter.

Judas leaves Jesus, the true light whom darkness cannot overcome, to enter the night, a stark image of sin and rejection. Judas' betrayal is the ultimate let-down. In Holy Week, we enter into the betrayal of Jesus and, as best we can, offer ourselves as companions and partners in his suffering and death. Satan prowls like a lion looking to devour souls. It happened to Judas. What can we do to prevent Satan from entering us? Perhaps the answer is to be found in the two verses (v. 34 & 35) omitted from today's Gospel when Jesus gives us a new commandment, to love one another just as he loved us. By doing this, everyone will know that we are true followers of Christ.

Just like Peter, our good intentions are not always carried out. Marvelling at the quality of Jesus' mercy, we are thankful that Peter's failure was not the end of his mission, only the beginning. Reading again Peter's brave words, we can reflect on our own fickleness and on those occasions when our actions do not reflect our grand declarations and boasts. Like Peter, let us ask for the strength to start again and again and again, listening to the word of God, and not just relying on our own will.

Jesus, although greatly troubled in spirit, was obedient to the will of his Father and made his suffering and death into instruments of love and reconciliation. In turn, the Father glorifies the Son by accepting his fidelity and crowning him with glory and honour. Jesus did not choose his apostles badly. The apostles, in their failures and weaknesses, are just like us. But in their repentance, they also act as our role-models. Because, for the Lord, it is repentance rather than perfection which causes him joy.

**Reflection written by: Jem Wynne, Holy Name, Jesmond**

## Holy Week

# Wednesday 5th April 2023

First Reading: Isaiah 50:4-9; Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 68:8-10, 21-22, 31, 33-34;

Gospel: Matthew 26:14-25

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In contemplating this passage several ideas come to mind. The first is that Judas is present at the supper with Jesus. It is comforting that he is there at the meal which is the root of the Eucharist. Jesus still treats him as a friend although he knows what Judas is about to do. So, I am encouraged to think that Jesus will associate with me in my confusion, and that he will come into my darkness to let in the light.

I allow my imagination to set me in the room where I feel the uncertainty, the tension and the fear. The word betrayal occurs several times and my mind strays to times in my life when I have felt the pain of betrayal. I try to remember not only what I felt but what I did. Did I become nasty and retaliate with bitterness or did I try to forgive and move on? Jesus does not forcibly prevent Judas from carrying out his plan, and his friendship remains because of the depths of his love. Jesus is not deflected from the course his life must take through fear of what is to come.

I think how easily I judge Judas, but then ask myself when I have taken my thirty pieces of silver and acted in such a way as to avoid bearing witness to the Lord. How often have I betrayed my principles or my friends in the interests of my own comfort?

I learn through this passage the difference between guilt and remorse. Peter will betray and deny Jesus in public very soon, but his subsequent remorse allows him to become the rock on which the church is built. He feels he is forgiven, whereas Judas is consumed with a killing guilt because of his inability to believe he could be forgiven. I try to discern in my own life how stifling and negative guilt is, and on the other hand how liberating is the belief that one is forgiven.

## Maundy Thursday

### Thursday 6th April 2023

First Reading: Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14; Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 115:12-13, 15-18;

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Gospel: John 13:1-15

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The feet of a new-born baby are tiny, but their toes are constantly wriggling. Tiny feet that look so alive and active. Then, as we grow, our feet become so versatile that we can walk, run, dance, climb ladders, climb a rock face, kick a ball, and pedal a bike. It's quite amazing. And yet, for all that, as we become older, we can start to feel embarrassed by our naked feet. They may have become mis-shapen by our footwear over the years, or by rheumatism or arthritis, and so our feet are no longer terribly attractive. Our feet are also incredibly sensitive. After we have seen the podiatrist, they may feel wonderful, but even the idea of someone else touching our feet...? No way! Allowing anyone to touch our feet is actually quite personal. Intimate even. Allowing someone to touch our feet is letting them get beyond our normal boundaries, permitting them some access that we usually prefer to keep guarded or hidden.

I can understand the reaction of Simon Peter as Jesus approached, armed with his basin of water and a towel. "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Shock, horror. Too personal. Yet Jesus was doing something personal to Peter. Intimate even. Jesus was reaching out to who Peter really was, on the inside: into his embarrassment, and also into his hopes and his fears. Jesus was reaching out to the real Simon Peter. And Peter trusted Jesus and allowed him.

"Do you understand what I have done to you?" asked Jesus. "If I have washed your feet then you should wash one another's feet. I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you."

It is not just the 'washing' that is significant, but the gentleness, the tenderness, and the delicacy with which we dare to approach the sensitivities of other people's lives.



## Good Friday

### Friday 7th April 2023

First Reading: Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 30:2, 6, 12-13, 15-17, 25;

Second Reading: Hebrews 4:14-16, 5:7-9; Gospel: John 18:1-19:42

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On reading this passage, you may be struck by a number of things. Firstly, the number of people who are involved in the night's events – Jesus, a crowd, Judas, other disciples, Caiaphas, Pilate, women, Nicodemus, and Joseph of Arimathea. Some have a larger role than others and yet, each of them make a difference.

Secondly, things seem to come in threes. The guards and crowd bring, "lantern, torches and weapons". Jesus on identifying himself uses the words, "I am he." Peter is questioned three times if he knew Jesus and denies that he does three times. Jesus is "scourged, given a crown and a robe". If you look closely, you can also see that three verses have been given to the death of Jesus. The pattern of three led me to immediately think of the trinity and how the trinity is involved in these events. The regular pattern of the three things brings comfort and a rhythm to the reading of the passage. In a strange way, on reading the passage, I felt closer to God through the trinity. I was also struck by the brokenness of the events and yet how, at the same time, there is unity within. All these people have come together through the one Jesus. All these people are trying to do what they believe to be right. At the heart of the events, are the soldiers dividing Jesus' clothing and yet the robe remains in one piece. It remains united, one and whole.

Once Jesus has died practicalities move into place. The Sabbath will be starting soon and so Jesus' body is laid in a tomb which has never been used. The tomb is new and so is it pointing to something that has never happened before? Also, the day before the Sabbath is called the Day of Preparation. Everyone thinks they are preparing for another day where nothing changes but, this day, they are preparing for something where everything changes and will do forever.

**Reflection written by: Rachael Blackburn,  
Assistant Head at St Mary's Catholic School, Newcastle**

# Holy Saturday

## Saturday 8th April 2023

First Reading: Romans 6:3-11; Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 117:1-2, 16-17, 22-23;

Gospel: Matthew 28:1-10

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Holy Saturday is a still day, a silent day before the Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday. After the drama of Good Friday and Jesus' death and burial, we are silent and empty, listening to the silence of the dead. In today's Prayer of the Church, an ancient nameless writer tells us that 'the King is asleep', that 'God has died in the flesh and hell trembles with fear'.

In the silence between death and resurrection, Jesus is still at work. In the Apostles' Creed we profess that 'he descended into hell' where he seeks Adam and Eve, our first parents, to draw them and all held in sin's darkness into light, and from death into life. The writer tells us that just as Adam and Eve lost their garden paradise because of their sin, Jesus chooses to be betrayed in a garden, and crucified and buried in a garden to save us from our sins.

Jesus was spat upon by the soldiers to restore the life once breathed into us; he received the soldiers' blows to refashion our warped nature in his image; he was scourged to remove the sin that weighed us down; his hands nailed to the tree for those who once stole the fruit from a tree in the garden of Eden.

Just as the devil led us out of the earthly paradise, now Jesus enthrones us in heaven. Through sin we were forbidden the tree of life, but now Jesus who is life itself, is one with us. The kingdom of heaven has been prepared for us from all eternity.

Today, the Church calls on us to wait in silence for Jesus who invites us into new life through his resurrection. In these still hours before Easter Sunday we rest a little, gather ourselves together and wait for the new light to dawn.

**Reflection written by: Mgr Andrew Faley,  
St Edward's Church, Whitley Bay**

# Easter Sunday

## Sunday 9th April 2023

First Reading: Acts 10:34, 37-43; Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 117:1-2, 16-17, 22-23;

Second Reading: Colossians 3:1-5 (or 1 Corinthians 5:6-8); Gospel: John 20:1-9

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### ***He must rise from the dead***

I remember many years ago now, when I was a young priest in my first appointment, having a conversation with one of the parishioners about the two great celebrations of the Christian Liturgical Calendar, Christmas and Easter. Acknowledging that this might be a moot point, we concluded that if Christmas is considered to be mainly for the children, then Easter is certainly for the grown-ups. Having journeyed through the penitential season of Lent and celebrated the unique liturgies of the Triduum, we come to the wonderful and fulfilling climax of Easter Day.

We know from the post-Resurrection narratives in the Gospels, that the disciples struggled to understand what the Resurrection was all about, and in today's Gospel from St John, it is Mary of Magdala who is the first to experience that struggle. Her shock at finding the empty tomb and then her wondering where Jesus' body had gone was the beginning of the gradual realisation of the truth of those words 'He must rise from the dead.' We know that Jesus had tried to prepare his disciples for his passion, death and resurrection knowing that they would only eventually comprehend what we call the Paschal Mystery.

Interestingly, we are told in today's Gospel that it was 'the other disciple', not Peter or Mary, who, on entering the tomb, saw and believed. Whoever this 'other disciple' may be, he is a model for all of us who claim to be disciples of the Lord. We do not have the privilege of having seen the empty tomb nor of being with Jesus in those days after his Resurrection and before his Ascension. Still, we are his disciples, privileged and grateful believers in the greatest story ever told.

'That Christ is truly risen from the dead we know. Victorious king, thy mercy show!' (from The Sequence of Easter Day Mass)

**Reflection written by: Canon Peter Leighton,  
Parish of Our Lady and St Philip Neri, Gateshead**

# Weekend Liturgy Resources



**Bidding Prayers**



**Reflections on  
Sunday Readings**



**Church Music**



**Children's Liturgy  
of the Word**



**Cycle of Prayer**



Resources and signposts to the coming weekend's liturgy resources, kindly provided by people within our Diocese, will be available to view and access on the diocesan website from Thursday 13th April for Sunday 16th April's Liturgy.\*

\*Resources and signposts will be updated every Thursday for the coming Sunday.



DIOCESE OF **Hexham & Newcastle**  
— VICARIATE FOR FAITH & MISSION —

*With sincere thanks to everyone who has contributed to these wonderful Reflections throughout the Season of Lent.*

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